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A Defense of the Eternal Sonship of Christ

The nonnegotiable doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ has come under subtle and disturbing opposition in recent years. Surprisingly, a growing number of Charismatic and Baptist church leaders are leading this charge. Yet this controversy is not new, nor is it merely theological semantics; this error is both fundamental and serious. Nearly 100 years ago F.E. Raven, a teacher among early brethren, declared his denial of the eternal Sonship of Christ when he wrote, "Now, 'Son of God' I understand to be the title of Christ incarnate; I should hardly use 'Son of God' as referring to His eternal person."(1)

Nevertheless, the majority of Bible teachers and scholars throughout the history of the church have defended this doctrine and resisted its fiercest opponents. Veteran Bible teacher and missionary T. E. Wilson has warned, "The eternal Sonship of Christ is one of the most vital and basic doctrines of the word of God. It is denied by many heretical cults, but held and valued by all those who know and love our Lord Jesus Christ. We must be on guard against those who say that He only became the Son of God at His incarnation and who deny His eternal Sonship."(2)

Most of those who espouse this false doctrine today teach that the Lord Jesus Christ became the Son of God at His incarnation. One such Christian leader is Dr. John MacArthur, who though sound in much of his teaching, yet in his writings and in public ministry has set aside this fundamental doctrine. MacArthur, a radio Bible

teacher and pastor at Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California writes, "Christ was not Son until His incarnation. He had not always had the title of Son. That is His incarnational title. He is no 'eternal son' always subservient to God, always less than God, always under God." (3) The late Walter Martin, the author of The Kingdom of the Cults, has written, "The scripture nowhere calls Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God, and He is never called the Son at all prior to the incarnation... there cannot be any such thing as eternal Sonship... the word 'Son' definitely suggests inferiority."(4) No subject in the word of God needs to be approached with as much care and reverence as the subject of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor is there any subject that is so important to the heart of every serious Christian. J. G. Bellett unfolding the heart of the matter, explains that Christ's sonship is not linked to time but existed in past eternity.

"Matthew and Mark first notice His sonship of God at His baptism, Luke goes farther back, and notices it at His birth. But John goes back farther still, even to the immeasurable, unspeakable distance of eternity, and declares His Sonship 'in the bosom of the Father' (John 1:18). (5)

Despite their doctrinal position, it must be noted that these teachers do not deny the deity of Christ, nor do they deny the eternal existence of Christ, nor the Trinity.

However, according to their teaching, only at the birth of Christ did He take on the role, title, and function of Son. Thereby, they deny that Christ is essentially and eternally the Son of God. The error of this unorthodox position is fourfold:

1. The view that the Scriptures do not teach that Jesus is the Eternal Son

2. The view that He became the Son at the incarnation. (Ps. 2:7, Lk. 1:32, 35)

3. The view that Sonship involves merely taking on a new function, title, and role.

4. The view that the title "Son" conveys the idea of submission and inferiority.

What saith the Scriptures? God's word must be the final authority for all we teach and believe. In regard to these errors, do the scriptures teach that the Lord Jesus Christ was the eternal Son of God before the incarnation? The answer must be resounding YES. The Old Testament is full of statements which verify His Sonship. Isaiah states, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given..." (Isa. 9:6). In another place Agur writes, "Who has gathered the wind into his fists? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if thou canst tell" (Prov.

30:4).

The Scriptures teach that it was not at the incarnation that Christ became the Son, but that He was always the Son of God. Scripture provides five strands of truth by which this divine tapestry is woven.

o The Son created the world. Both Colossians 1:13-19 and Hebrews 1:2 state that the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son, before His incarnation, when He created the worlds.

o The Father sent the Son - Time and again the scriptures state that the Father sent the Son. Since the Father sent the Son, it must follow that the Lord Jesus

Christ was the eternal Son before He came into the world. (Isa. 9:6; John 3:17)

o The Sonship is revealed in parable form. "Having therefore one Son, his well-beloved, he sent Him last unto them, saying they will reverence Him..." (Mk.

12:6)

o The Son had a relationship with the Father from eternity past. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world ... and go to the Father" (Jn. 16:28).

o Christ is compared to Melchizedek as the Eternal Son- "Neither having beginning of days but made like unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3).

Further, the Scriptures teach that "Son" is not a title but a divine name. The term "Son" is the name of Christ from all eternity. The name reflects what Christ is in His essence and nature. A title refers to His offices. Some of His titles He received when he came into the world. The New Testament reveals that He was "called of God...to be a priest" (Heb. 5:4); He "gave Him to be Head over the church" (Eph. 1:22); and "Him hath He exalted ... to be a prince and Saviour" (Acts 5:31). Willem Ouweneel, the Dutch Bible teacher clarifies this, when he writes, "The distinction between a name and a title is this: a name belongs to a person, but a title belongs to an office (King, Priest, Head). A name gives expression of who a person is (Son), but a title expresses what he is. The first is a personal matter and the second is an official one. It is therefore definitely objectionable to refer to the expression 'Son' as a title, as has been done in the past. (6)

Is the Lord Jesus inferior to the Father as the Son of God? The biblical usage of the term "Son" does not indicate inferiority or subservience but equality and oneness of nature. When the Lord Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God (Jn. 5:18), the Jews did not say, "You are making yourself to be inferior to God." No, they said, "You are making yourself equal to God!" No, even in human terms, a son is not merely a submissive servant but an heir (Gal. 4:7). Subjection and inferiority are characteristics found in a servant. But in a son these qualities are voluntary and not binding. A son may stoop to be a servant but a servant may never elevate himself to become a son. The scriptures are clear-inferiority and subservience are never linked to the biblical doctrine of Sonship. Christ as Son is the Father's heir, not His servant.

Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son from all eternity. The scriptures provide ample proof in support of this fundamental doctrine. All who love the Lord and His word will earnestly teach and defend this important biblical doctrine. May we join our hearts and minds with the charge of John N. Darby, who wrote, "The eternal Sonship is a vital truth, or else, we lose the Father sending the Son, and the Son creating, and if we have not the Father then we have no Son. I hold it vital to hold the Sonship before the world.

It is the truth. (7)

Endnotes

1- R.A. Huebner, F.E. Raven's Evil Doctrines, Present Truth, Morganville, NJ, 1980, p.26 2 -T. E. Wilson, Messianic Psalms, Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, NJ, 1978, p.16-17 3 -John MacArthur, Hebrews, Moody

Press, Chicago, IL 1983, p.28 4- Walter Martin, Kingdom of the Cults, Bethany House, Minneapolis, MN, 1985, p. 117-118 5- J. G. Bellett, Son of God, Bible Truth Publishers, Addison, IL, 1978, p. 11- 12 6- W. J. Ouweneel, What is the Sonship of Christt, Believers Bookshelf, Sunbury, PA 1976, p. 16 7- J. N. Darby, "Son of Man," Notes and Comments, vol.2, p.423

Biblical Tithing

What we do with that which God has entrusted to our use is of the utmost importance to God. The concern of the Lord regarding our financial giving is demonstrated by the sheer weight of scriptural references. One out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke has to do with money. Of the 38 parables in the New Testament, twelve have to do with the use of money. We must take seriously God's plan for giving in the Bible, for God is serious about it. However, some have concluded that since the word "tithe" appears first in Genesis, and that it is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, it must be God's plan for giving today. The Hebrew word "maaser", which is translated "tithe", means simply "a tenth part". In the New Testament the Greek word "dekate" again means "a tenth part." In both languages, this word is not taken from the religious world, but rather from the world of mathematics or finance. What does the Word of God teach about the "tithe"? Many from the Reformed tradition, resisting dispensational distinctions, stress that the Hebrew practice of tithing is God's method of giving for the church. Representative of this tradition is Reformed pastor R. T. Kendall of Westminster Chapel in London, England, who writes, "I do believe tithing must be preached. We ministers do our people no favor when we do not tell them what is right and true. Tithing must be preached." (1) However, a closer look at the Scriptures reveals a unique and very different picture. The Word of God sets forth the dispensational importance of both required giving and free-will giving. A sound biblical perspective concerning these two aspects of giving will strengthen a proper

understanding of biblical stewardship. Clear biblical thinking is the Christian's guardrail for stewardship's many pitfalls. Jake Barnett, the author of Wisdom and Wealth, charges us concerning one its greatest dangers, that is, legalism. He writes, "Our proclivity to teach tithing is just one aspect of our tendency to prefer rules to freedom. But the New Testament concept of giving is so beautiful that it is difficult to understand why we resort to legalism. It appears that we feel that God made a mistake in this area, and fear that our churches would suffer financial difficulty if we followed the Biblical pattern." (2) What, then, does the Old Testament teach about tithing? The Bible does not command tithing in Genesis. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and others were not commanded to tithe, but all brought free-will thank offerings to the Lord. "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock" (Gen. 4:3-4). This was a free-will offering; there was no command to offer, nor is there a command concerning the percentage of giving, nor were there requirements, amounts, stipulations, and frequency commanded concerning this offering. In Genesis 8:15-20, after the flood subsides, Noah immediately makes plans to offer a sacrifice unto the Lord. "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar" (Gen. 8:20). Noah offered a voluntary, spontaneous, free-will offering from out of the overflow of his heart. Again there is no standard, command, or percentage required by God. From the beginning of biblical history, free-will sacrifice appears to be the pattern of giving for the people of God.

However, the case of Abraham in Genesis chapter 14 is seen by some to be irrefutable evidence for teaching tithing in the church today. To many in the Reformed tradition, Abraham is the best example for tithing in the Bible. Reformed pastor R. T. Kendall writes, “We may not know until we get to heaven who the first tither was, but apparently it was Abraham…it is striking that Abraham, who was Paul’s example for justification by faith, should be the chief example of tithing in the Bible.” (3) Reformed writers argue that since Abraham tithed, Christians are obliged to give ten percent of their income to the Lord on a weekly basis as well. However, upon careful examination, we must question, whether Abraham is a true example of tithing at all. “The king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer…and Melchizedek, king of Salem brought forth bread and wine…and he (Abraham) gave him tithes of all” (Gen. 14:20). This is the first mention of the word “tithes” in the Bible. Indeed, Abraham gave at least ten percent of the spoils to Melchizedek. However, this act of giving was not commanded by God, but was an expression of unconstrained worship from Abraham to God. When Abraham saw that this man, Melchizedek, as priest represented God, Abraham wanted to express his thanks to God for the victory. In a sacrificial act of worship, Abraham gave tithes to the priest of the Most High God, the King of Salem. But there are a number of points that should be noticed concerning Abraham’s tithing. Firstly, Abraham, as far as we know, did not tithe his own wealth, but rather only the spoils of battle in the “king’s dale” (Gen. 14:20). Furthermore, Abraham did not tithe

all of the spoils of war, but rather he gave a tenth of the most valuable spoils. Hebrews chapter 7 sheds further light on this unique giving of Abraham. "...even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils" (Heb. 7:4b). The Greek word used here for "spoils" is "akrothinion", which means "the top of the heap, or the best of the spoils" W. E. Vine commenting on this Greek word "akrothinion" writes, "Primarily the top of the heap (akros, top and this, a heap), hence first fruit offering, and in war the choicest of the spoils." (4) It could be successfully argued that Abraham did not truly tithe, but did much more than tithe – he gave of the best, the choicest of the spoils of the battle. This event in Abraham's life seems to be a unique one, which was never repeated. As far as Scripture reveals, Abraham tithed only once in his life of 160 years, and Abraham did not teach Issac to tithe. It is only in the law of Moses that we find the command to tithe enjoined upon the people of God.

The Purpose of Tithing

The law of Moses sets forth the divine purpose of God concerning tithing. Tithing revealed God's way of providing for the material needs of the Levites and the poor within Israel. It was a complex and detailed taxation program designed to give aid and support to the priestly class, the poor, aliens, and the widows. The Levites had no earthly inheritance, therefore the other tribes gave toward their needs. Old Testament scholar R. E. O. White clarifies the purpose of the tithe, commenting, "The tithe represented a charge upon produce or labor levied for the maintenance of mainly religious activities." (5) Dr. Eugene Merrill, a former professor of Semitics and the Old Testament at Dallas

Theological Seminary, joins him in his view stating, “The tithe was given to the Levites as their source of income and compensation for their service at the tabernacle.” (6) A thoughtful examination of tithing, reveals that the Israelites were not required to give merely ten percent of their income, but rather, nearly twice that amount or more. There were three major components to the tithing statute alone, and then there were additional laws which required their income. Firstly, there was the Levitical tithe (Lev. 27:30-33, Num. 18:21-24, 26-28) which set aside produce, income, and livestock for the maintenance of the priesthood. Secondly, upon coming into the Promised Land a second tenth of all produce was to be taken to Jerusalem, or if the distance was too great, it could be sold, and this income would be brought (Deut. 12:6-7, 17-18, 14:22-27). Thirdly, on every third year, called the “year of tithing”, another tenth of all the produce was to be set aside to be used by the Levites who dwelled in the country, the poor, the aliens, and the widows (Deut. 14:28-29). In addition, “At harvest time …thou shall leave the corners of the field for the sojourner and the poor” Lev. 19:9-10); and Israelites were required to pay a Temple tax of one-third shekel to buy showbread, grain, and sacrifices (Neh. 10:32-33); also the Jews were commanded to rest the land every seventh year and the land was to lay fallow for a period of one year (Exodus 23:10-11); additionally on the seventh year it was commanded to forgive debts of fellow Israelites (Deut 15:1-2). The total required giving to fund national religious and civic structures was nearly 25-30% of an Israelite’s annual income. Tithing was taxation for the Israelite theocracy in the Old Testament. This taxation system was instituted by God for the support of the

government and those in need within that ancient theocratic society. Today, a theocratic society no longer exists; in its place are the governments of individual nations, which now have taxation laws to provide for the civic and governmental structures.

The New Testament and the Tithe

New Testament is strangely silent concerning the tithe. The practice of tithing is not commanded nor is it taught by the Lord or the other New Testament writers. This fact has given greater weight to the idea that the tithe was linked to the Mosaic system and was the visible means of support for the Levities, the poor, and the sojourner. Many leading scholars have, therefore, concluded that the tithe is not incumbent upon the Christian today. Author Wick Broomall writes, “The silence of the New Testament writers, particularly Paul, regarding the present validity of the tithe can be explained only on the ground that the dispensation of grace has no more place for the law on tithing than it has for a law on circumcison.” (7) However, God desires us to give and to give graciously. The financial needs of the poor, those who serve Christ, and the widow should still be our concern. Generosity should certainly distinguish the New Testament church. G. Campbell Morgan, while taking into account the New Testament perspective on tithing and the desire of God, wisely counsels believers who have questioned the role of tithing. He writes, “I do not personally believe that tithing is incumbent upon us. It was a Jewish provision and has passed away, in common with all ceremonial law. That does not mean we are to be careless about giving…for this reason I have never been able to tell

people that if they are led to tithe let them tithe, but that tithing ought not to limit their giving." (8)

The Purpose of Free-Will Giving

In addition to the required tithe, the godly Israelite gave "free-will" or "first- fruit" offerings. The emphasis of this offering was not the percentage, but the attitude of the giver and the quality of the offering. These offerings were primarily for the support of the work of God and the worship of God. "All of the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first-fruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord" (Num. 18:12). When it came to giving to the tabernacle or the temple, it was not a tithe, but a free-will offering that was the desire of the heart of God. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that gives it willingly with his heart shall you take my offering" (Ex. 25:2). When the Temple was to be built, we find the same principle again: free-will offerings from willing-hearted worshippers is what the Lord desired. "Then the people rejoiced; for they offered willingly, because with a perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord…" (1 Chron. 29:9). The free-will offering differed from the tithe in many respects: the tithe was taxation and required, the free will offering was the overflow of a worshipper's heart; the tithe was for the maintenance of the priesthood, the poor, and the widow, while the free-will offering was for God Himself and His work; lastly, the free-will offering was not restricted by percentages, but was limited only by the ability of the offerer.

God's Plan For Giving Today

Generosity has been said to be the grace of kings. In a former day only kings could extend such a grace, yet today generosity and a willing heart is God's plan for giving. Under grace God has not asked the Christian to merely give a tenth of his income. If a Christian wanted to follow the example of Israel, he would not be required to give merely a tenth of his income, but rather 25 % of his income. The Israelite tithing-taxation system is not God's design of giving for today. Yet God desires the Christian to give generously to the poor, the needy, and the work of God. Indeed, many Christians do give abundantly and sacrificially to the work of God; in some cases, well above the standard of Old Testament Israel. William MacDonald has rightly said, "...the Christian should give liberally. The tithe was the minimum given by an Israelite. He brought tithes and offerings. No Christian should be content to give, under grace, what was the minimum requirement under the law." (9) Today the principles of giving are not burdensome, complex, and rigid. Funds need not be solicited, but are to be voluntarily and generously supplied by committed Christians. The Christian is one who is to give: regularly, "Upon the first day of the week"; individually, "let every one of you"; proportionately, "As God has prospered him"; bountifully, "He that sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully"; and finally, cheerfully, "God loves a cheerful giver". Today, our free-will offerings, from grateful hearts, are God's plan to advance the cause of Christ and His church. May the Spirit of God liberate our hearts to give unto Him abundantly.

Endnotes

1. R. T. Kendall, Tithing, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. 8 2. Jake Barnett,Wealth and

Wisdom, (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1987), p. 192 3. R. T. Kendall, Tithing, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. 39 4. W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of NT Words, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981), p. 66

5. R. E. O. White, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 2, Tithe, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), p. 2071

6. Eugene Merrill, The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Numbers, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), p. 237 7. Wick Broomall, WycliffeDictionary of Theology; Tithe, (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1999), p. 525 8. G. Campbell Morgan, Letters of G. Campbell Morgan, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1977), p.296

9. William MacDonald, Christ Loved the Church, (Kansas City, KS: Walterick, 1956), p.98

Biblical Typology

The method by which Christians interpret the Bible will immeasurably determine the richness with which we understand the Scriptures. Entrance to the vast storehouses of the Word of God will be thrown open to us by our approach to Scripture. Our method of interpretation will dictate our theology, and our theology will mold our hearts and minds for God. This spiritual principle is no more true than in the area of Biblical typology. Typology is the practice, by writers of Scripture, of using a truth found in the Old Testament and applying it to persons, places, and things in the New Testament in order to teach rich spiritual lessons concerning God's grace and power. However, typical interpretation must not be mistaken for allegorical interpretation. Typology is based upon the clear teaching of Scripture, whereas allegorical interpretation is subject to the imaginative whim and fancy of the interpreter to supply any meaning he wishes. For example, Pope Gregory the Great (540-604AD), in his exposition on the book of Job entitled Moralia, set forth that the talkative friends of Job represented heretics; Job's seven sons represented the twelve Apostles; his seven thousand sheep represented God's faithful people; and the three thousand hump-backed camels the depraved Gentiles. This vividly illustrates the inherent dangers in the allegorical method of interpretation.

A Reasoned Defense of Biblical Typology

Some have taught that typology is the forcing of a particular view of theology upon the plain teaching of Scripture. Some have suggested that Biblical typology is

an excessive, fanciful, and uncritical approach to Bible study. Representative of this view is former Professor of Theology at the University of Manchester, Samuel Arthur Peake(1865-1929), the textual critic and commentator, who wrote, “What value for spiritual life can we find in the minute liturgical and ceremonial details of the Tabernacle and its service?” (1) In regard to the views of those who oppose the use of balanced typology, we must submit that we humbly differ. The study of types is essential in understanding crucial portions of the Word of God. Without the careful and balanced use of typical interpretation portions of the New and Old Testaments would be an immensely rich but unopened spiritual treasure. Many good Bible students have ably and forcibly defended the validity of the study of types. A respected authority on the subject of Bible interpretation, Bernard Ramm, in his classic work Protestant Biblical Interpretation, writes, “It has been the contention of critics that typology is forced exegesis rather than an interpretation rising naturally out of the Scriptures. However, excesses—past and present—do not destroy the Christian contention that the typological method of interpretation is valid.” (2) To state that the study of types is simply a permissible and valid approach to Bible study is to understate the issue. More than merely a valid approach, the study of typology is essential and foundational to the right understanding of Holy Scripture. The careful and trusted Bible expositor, J. Sidlow Baxter, is very helpful at this point as he writes, “Nothing in the Old Testament literature is more wonderful than its latent typical content. To deny its presence there is to repudiate the clear sanction of the New Testament. Romans 5:14 expressly declares that Adam was a type (tupos) of

Christ…This inhering type-content makes the Old Testament endlessly fascinating, and is proof demonstrable of divine inspiration. All genuine prediction of future events is exclusively divine…yet however arresting may be prediction by word, the most astounding is prediction by type." (3)

Guardrails for Balanced Typology

Some have pressed typological study so far that they, in the process, have trivialized this valued aspect of biblical interpretation. The balanced and careful study of typology will prove to be spiritually fruitful and immensely satisfying to the serious Christian. However, there are a number of pitfalls that must be ardently avoided in the balanced study of types. Firstly, we must not prohibit a type, and fall into the danger of not using a type at all. Secondly, we must not overstate a type, and slip into the error overusing it. Thirdly, we must not imagine a type and therefore commit the mistakeof abusing a type. We must guard against the notion that every mention of wood in the Old Testament is a type of the cross and every pool of water is a type of baptism. Godly men of the Book have given us some sound guidelines to help us avoid these pitfalls. Firstly, a type should have correspondence. That is, an Old Testament example must have a New Testament counterpart. Secondly, a type should be historical. That is, an Old Testament type and the New Testament counterpart should both be found in the record of Scripture. Otherwise, typology study ceases to be typology and enters the realm of allegory. Thirdly, a type must be predictive. That is, an Old Testament type looks forward to the New Testament for its fulfillment or "anti-type". A type is frequently Christ-centered. That is, it looks

forward for its fulfillment to an aspect of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally in typology, the anti-type is spiritually greater than and superior to the type. There is an increase, a heightening, an elevation of spiritual truth in the fulfillment. Christ is superior to Melchizedek. Christ, in His redemptive work as the Lamb of God, is greater than the Old Testament type of the Passover lamb. Moreover, the study of typology is crucial to our understanding of the full counsel of God. Without the use of typological interpretation, weighty portions of the Word of God would be closed to us. This is no more true than in the study of the offerings in the early chapters of the book of Leviticus. The type of the sin offering is of great importance, for it unfolds God's method of judging sin. Moses tells us that a sin offering could be brought if "a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord" (4:2). The sin offering, in type, looks forward to its antitype, the greater Sin Offering—the Lord Jesus Christ. The Levitical sin offering provided forgiveness for some sin; the greater Sin Offering provided the infinite payment price for all sin. If the sin that was committed was a wilful sin, a presumptuous sin, there was no recourse according to the law, for there was no provision in the law for such a sin. In Numbers we read, "…the soul that does anything presumptuously…that soul shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him" (15:30). The law did not make provision for wilful sin. This point becomes crucial when we come to Psalm 19:12-13 where we read again of sins of ignorance and wilful sins. The Psalmist writes, "Who can understand his errors?" (19:12). The Hebrew word for "errors " (Shegogoh) here is the same word used in Leviticus 4:2, meaning a sin of ignorance. Then, he prays, "Keep back thy servant also from

presumptuous sins" (19:13). King David, in baring his soul, speaks of the mystery and crushing burden of sins of ignorance; but when he speaks of wilful sins, his language becomes more urgent, as he pleads, "Keep thy servant from presumptuous sin". The King knew there was no provision in the law for wilful sin, so the avoidance of wilful sin was of great concern. Would one understand Psalm 19 fully if he did not understand the Levitical offerings? If a Christian is not familiar with the Levitical offerings, the great conclusion of Psalm 19 unfortunately would be a closed portion of the Scriptures.

Biblical Typology and the Grace of God

Further in the Psalms, David takes up this wonderful theme again. David continues the subject of ignorant and wilful sin in Psalm 32. In this "Maschil" psalm, a psalm of instruction about sin, the Psalmist-King clarifies a crucial truth about wilful sin. He writes, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven…" (32:1). F. W. Grant, in his commentary on the Psalms, explains that the meaning of the word translated "transgression" has the force of "willful rebellion". (4) We now come to a crossroad in interpretation: how is it possible for the sin of wilful rebellion to be forgiven? The law made no provision for wilful sin, yet David's wilful sin was forgiven. The solution is found in the infinite and unequaled grace of God. David did not look at the limited provisions in the law, but rather to the unlimited provisions found in the mercy and grace of a Sovereign God. He traces this grace of God, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (32:5 NKJV). The stress and source of forgiveness is upon the "Lord" and His forgiveness; "and

You forgave…". The law made no provision for wilful sin, but with God there is full provision for the forgiveness of sin. The true Sin Offering, in His finished work on the cross displayed the all-sufficient grace of God for all men. Again, without a knowledge of the typology of the Levitical offerings, this crucial part of Psalm 32 would be a closed book. The Spirit of God, it seems, loves to make use of this Levitical type again and again. We find it yet again, but this time in the New Testament book of Acts, where it is used to unveil yet another truth about wilful and ignorant sin. We read, "...killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead…and now brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it" (Acts 3:15, 17). Here, the emphasis is not on wilful sin, but upon a sin of ignorance. If the Lord Jesus Christ had been killed with forethought and purpose, there was no provision in the law for forgiveness. However, the divine Author of Scripture states the verdict of heaven: the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified in ignorance. Now, the typology of the Levitical sin offering becomes exceedingly important. If a soul sinned in ignorance, there was provision for him in the sin offering. The intelligent Jew clearly understood the subtle nuance of this statement. They had sinned in a grievous way, but it was a sin of ignorance. The door of forgiveness now was thrown wide open by God Himself. Forgiveness was being graciously extended by a God of infinite grace to those who had committed a grievous offense. Beloved Bible teacher H. A. Ironside states its importance, "There was no offering for wilful sin under the law. It was only for sins of ignorance. You remember Peter's words to guilty Israel as bringing home to them their dreadful sin in crucifying the Lord of Glory. He says, 'I know that it was through ignorance ye did it.' What wonderful grace is

displayed here! The very worst sin that has ever been committed in the history of the world is classed as a sin of ignorance! He opens the door of infinite mercy to one who has sinned ignorantly." (5)

The Challenge of Biblical Typology

The unity of the Old and New Testaments is beautifully set forth with types and antitypes, shadows and fulfillments. The typological nature of the Scriptures is a great proof of divine inspiration. The New Testament is a deep well teeming with words which speak of its typological nature: "Example" (Hypoeigma); "Type" (Tupos); "Shadow" (Skia); "Placing side by side" (Parabole); "Figure" (Eikon); "Antitype" (Antitupon). These words establish the typical nature of the Bible. Additionally, the stress of the entire book of Hebrews is that Christ is the "better" fulfillment of types in the Old Testament. The great wealth of types in the Old Testament, the invitation of our Lord Jesus Christ to find Him in the Old Testament, and the typical language of the New Testament provides abundant justification for the importance of typological Bible study. May we take seriously the admonition of the Lord Jesus Christ, "...search the Scriptures...these are they which testify of Me."

Endnotes (1) Samuel A. Peake, Commentary on the Whole Bible, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 5 (2) Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, (Boston, MA: W. A. Wilde Co., 1956), p. 196 (3) J. Sidlow Baxter, The Strategic Grasp of the Bible, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1991), p. 131-132 (4) F. W. Grant, Numerical Bible, Psalms, (New York, NY: Loizeaux, 1897), p. 140

(5) H. A. Ironside, Levitical Offerings, (New York, NY: Loizeaux, 1979), p. 55

Christ Alone - The Central Attraction of the Church

The very essence and purpose of the New Testament church has been to gather unto the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The center and focus of the church has been Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ taught, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst” (Matt. 18:20). Clearly, Christ must remain forever at the heart and soul of the New Testament church. Unfortunately, as is often the case, moral causes, social issues, and religious pursuits have distracted the church from her purpose and focus. As generations have passed, sincere believers have often unknowingly replaced the doctrine of gathering unto the Lord alone with gathering unto the doctrines and traditions of the church. The doctrines about worship have taken priority over the sole object of worship. Forms of church government, controversial doctrines, and popular preachers have become the rallying points, instead of Christ. Sadly, sincere believers, even after many years of meeting together in simplicity, betray an uncertainty concerning this life-blood of the church. For so many, the church is a place where one goes to attend a service. The building and the kind of services offered in the building become all-important. Church leaders take pride in advertising to the public their variety of special services, such as “traditional Sunday services” or “contemporary Sunday services”. The church has become so much like the rest of the world—a complex well-oiled machine—where everything is humanly controlled and ordered. Yet the Bible paints a much

different portrait of the church. The biblical church is wherever believers with purpose and passion are gathered unto Christ. It is His presence in our midst which is of utmost importance. All other activities and church “traditions”, new and old, pale in significance to Christ. This all-important aspect of church life must be pursued with new vigor. May the Lord raise up a new breed of believers who will resolve to esteem the Lord Jesus Christ alone at the forefront of all else in the church.

The Word “Gathering” Defined

At the heart of our examination of the church must be an interpretation of the meaning of the word “gathered”. The verb and noun forms of this word are used eight or nine times in the New Testament. In the New Testament the phrase “gathered together unto” is given for what is one word in Greek manuscripts. The verb form, “episunago”, is a compound word, composed of three parts: first, “epi”, which means “to or unto”; then, “sun”, which means “together”; and thirdly, “ago”, which means “to bring or gather”; thus the meaning “gathered together unto”. (1) A study of the various references in the New Testament is very instructive. It is noteworthy that through all of these references runs the common theme of an unyielding and undistracted focus upon Christ. The words of the Saviour in Matthew chapter 23, capture Christ’s heart desire for the Jewish nation. Christ pours out His heart as He cries, “O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together (unto Myself), even as a hen gathers chickens under her wings, and ye would not” (Matt.23:37)! When Christ desires to gather the

Jewish nation, as a hen gathers her chicks, notice where He calls them—He calls them unto Himself. We discover His beauty when we come apart from the hustle and bustle of life and enter into solitary and sweet communion with the Saviour of our souls. Those who spend time near to the heart of Christ cannot help but be transformed by His presence.

The Debate Over Matthew 18:20

This verse is the very foundation and charter of the Church. Christ, the glorified, exalted, and risen Lord, is in the midst of every believing band of two or three gathered in His name. We must not miss the grandeur, wonder, and majesty of the nature of the church. Although this verse and its teaching is precious to every Christian, yet it is not without controversy. Some reject that this verse even relates to the nature of the church at all. Popular author John MacArthur writes, “This verse is frequently misinterpreted, though not with such serious error as in the previous verses. To use this statement to claim the Lord’s presence at a small worship service or a prayer meeting does not fit the context and is superfluous… the context demands that the two or three are witnesses in the process of discipline.” (2) Clearly verses 15-18 contain Christ’s teaching in regard to discipline within the yet-to-be established local church. However, to narrowly interpret Matthew 18:20 as to be confined solely to the subject of church discipline would do great disservice to the meaning of Scripture. Fortunately, Matthew 18:20 has been widely interpreted by a majority of Bible scholars to refer to the nature and constitution of the local church. Representative of this view is respected Bible teacher and author G. Campbell Morgan. He writes,

“These are some of the most remarkable things that our Lord said about His Church. They have a much wider application than the application Jesus made of them at this point. We are perfectly justified in lifting them out of their setting, and using them over a wider area of thought. This is the whole ground of truth concerning the constitution and power of the Christian Church. ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst.’ That is the charter of the Church. How spacious and gracious, and wonderful it is! We have gained a temple everywhere by losing a temple in a locality. Mark the magnificence of it. It is not the temple that makes the place of worship, but the gathering ‘in My name’. There are worshiping souls in the great cathedrals, but they are not all there. On the mountain height, in some shepherd’s hut, far away from church or chapel, two shepherds are gathered in the name of the Lord. There is the church. All that is necessary is that two or three should be gathered in His name.” (3) The essence of the church is here wonderfully defined. Yet there is more to the church than simply understanding theological definitions. There is a responsibility incumbent upon each believer to work to insure that Christ never loses His rightful place in the local church.

The Fact of His Presence

In Matthew 18:20 Jesus instructed His disciples, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst.” The purpose of God, in gathering His people together, is that they would gather around His Son. God’s great desire was to dwell in the midst of His people. From the very beginning this was God’s purpose. In the prophecy of Jacob, the desires of God’s

heart were revealed, “Unto Him shall the gathering of His people be” (Gen. 49:10). It is His presence which stamps upon the assembly its unique spiritual character. Christ becomes the sole attraction to every believer. Peter expresses it this way, “To whom coming as a living stone…chosen of God and precious” (1 Pet. 2:4). It was unto the Lord Jesus Christ that every New Testament church was to come. It was not to come unto a doctrine, however important; it was not to come to a godly preacher, though he may possess wonderful spiritual gifts; but it was to come unto an exalted, risen Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

The Discernment of His Presence

It is unfortunate, and yet true, that a Christian may concede that Christ is personally present in a gathering of believers, and yet fail to discern that He is present. Yet this discernment is the very source of spiritual transformation and divine blessing. The discernment of God’s presence once gripped men and women of God with a holy fear and hushed reverence. Moses discerned that he was in the presence of God when the bush burned and was not consumed. “And Moses hid his face and was afraid to look upon God” (Ex. 3:6). Nevertheless, it is still possible to be in His presence and to remain untouched by the majesty and wonder of His person. A post-resurrection account of Christ serves as a reminder of this distressing principle. As the two disciples traveled to Emmaus, the Lord Himself walked along and talked with them. Yet they did not know that it was the Lord. “Their eyes were holden that they should not recognize Him” (Lk. 24:16). Just as a discernment of His presence powerfully impacts godly men and women, so conversely, a lack of discernment produces a

spiritually negative effect. Notice what the Scriptures tell us concerning the spiritual state of these disciples. In this chapter the disciples reveal a deep “sadness” (v. 17) and a dashed “hope” (v. 21) concerning the death and resurrection of Christ. However, later when their eyes were opened and they discerned that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who was in their midst, “They said one to another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us along the way…?’ ” (v. 32). To discern the Lord personally present in our meetings is essential to gathering unto Him. The spiritual state of our meetings and our own spiritual condition will to a great degree be determined by our practice to discern the exalted, risen Saviour in our midst. After His resurrection, the disciples cowered behind closed doors for fear of the Jews; but as the Lord came into their midst and they recognized Him, they brightened with joy. “They were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). Gladness, hearts moved by God, rejoicing, praise, and worship are inseparably linked with the discernment of Christ’s presence. What effect does the discernment of Christ produce in your life and mine? How our meetings together might be wonderfully transformed if we were to make greater efforts to discern Christ’s presence in our midst! To discern His presence is of first importance, but a failure to embrace Christ alone as the sole attraction of the church is a great mistake.

The Embracing of His Presence

For many Christians, the act of simply attending church is of utmost importance. A meeting is never missed, careful attention is paid to the most mundane details, yet sadly, Christ is never truly worshiped in spirit and truth. Eloquent prayers of praise and worship ring

hollow. The stirring hymns of the faith are still sung, but rarely with passion and conviction. The significance of Christ as the center and only object of all our gatherings fails to attract the attention of many. Hearts full of Christ have given way to hearts full of rival pursuits. Many may acknowledge that He is present in our midst but if we fail to embrace Christ with spiritual passion, then we will fail to gather unto Christ as He desires. The Lord alone must attract our hearts, souls, and minds in sincere worship. All that thrills my soul is Jesus" should be the anthem of our heart. Unfortunately, there is much that diverts our focus from Christ. Today the religious trappings of professional music, drama, and entertainment are in great demand by the evangelical church. However, Christ has always been able to guard the hearts of those who love Him. When Mary came with her pound of precious spikenard to anoint her Savior, Judas said, "Why was not this ointment sold?" (John 12:5). Yet she was not distracted from focusing her worship and sacrifice upon Christ. She embraced Christ alone with her worship and devotion. Nothing else was necessary. The effect of embracing Christ alone in our gatherings will result in a rich spiritual atmosphere. God's challenge and charge is clear, but not easy. There is much in the religious world to usurp His place. Sadly, this is no more than man's attempt to put gaudy tinsel upon fine gold. However, may all who are Christians purpose in their hearts to put all else aside and gather unto the Lord Jesus Christ alone, the centerpiece of the Church.

Endnotes (1) W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of NT Words, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981), 142 (2) John MacArthur, New Testament Commentary:Matthew,

(Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 139 (3) G. Campbell Morgan, Gospel of Matthew, (London, GB: Oliphants Co., 1956), 233

Demon Possession : Are Believers at Risk?

The theme of the Bible from beginning to end is the conflict between good and evil, between God and the devil. It begins with the serpent in Eden in Genesis 3 and concludes with the devil being cast into the lake of fire in Revelation 20. So it is not surprising that today Christians are becoming more aware of their battle against demonic forces. Many see that satanic worship is on the rise around us, increasing numbers of teenagers are experimenting with witchcraft, and “new-age” bookstores are becoming the resource center for those interested in the dark world of the occult. The Christian church is also experiencing a growing interest in combating demonic forces. Teaching on spiritual warfare is in great demand today. A proliferation of books, with titles such as Bondage Breaker and Victory Over the Darkness, spill over the shelves in Christian bookstores. The doctrine that Christians can be inhabited by demons is popularly taught by respected teachers across diverse theological lines, from the charismatic movement to fundamental dispensational teachers. Non-charismatic Bible teachers such as Neil Anderson, formerly of Talbot Theological Seminary, CA, Timothy Warner of Trinity Evangelical Seminary, and C. Fred Dickason of Moody Bible Institute have stepped forward to lead this area with popular books, magazine articles and “Spiritual Warfare” seminars in local churches. The question remains, can a Christian have a demon? This question is not merely academic; the answer will determine our views on the sovereignty of

God, the authority of the Word of God, and whether personal experience will supersede Bible doctrine.

Demonic Experience as Evidence

For many who teach that Christians can be possessed by a demon, the repeated experience of the demonic phenomenon is held up as the most significant factor. Numerous cases are cited of people, who by all appearances, seem to be genuinely manifesting characteristics of demon possession. Merrill F. Unger writes, “In Biblical Demonology I stated, ‘to demon possession, only unbelievers are exposed’. Later I wrote, ‘Since the first publication of Biblical Demonology in 1952, I have received many letters from missionaries from all over the world who question the theory that true believers cannot be demon-possessed…The claims of these missionaries appear to be valid.’ ” (1). However, personal experience must submit to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Where the Word of God clearly speaks, experience, irrespective of its persuasiveness, must remain silent. Many of these occurrences may be attributed to mental illness and also to the power of suggestion. In other occurrences, it may be that the individuals in question were not truly regenerate. How can one determine with 100% accuracy those who are genuine believers (2 Tim 2:19)? We must conclude that to base biblical doctrine on personal experience subjects a believer to spiritual harm. Counsel should be given to others to proceed cautiously in basing their belief on the condition of Christians who seem to be demon possessed, when the weight of biblical doctrine leans against that view.

Re-Defining Demon Possession

How is demon possession of a Christian defended in light of the teaching of Scripture? Within recent years it has become popular for many to begin to translate “Daimonizomai” the Greek verb meaning “to be possessed by a demon” with the phrase “to be demonized” (2). Opponents of this new term contend that this subtle change has crept in due to the fact that the word “demonization” is unfamiliar to many Christians and less emotionally charged than the older and more biblical term “demon possession”. Proponents argue that this is a proper translation because it is based upon the verb’s etymology. Etymology is the study of the root components of a word. However, to base the doctrine of demon possession solely upon a word’s root meaning is to wrest the Scriptures of their true meaning. Many Greek authorities warn against this danger. D. A. Carson, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Seminary writes, “One of the most enduring of errors is the etymology fallacy that supposes that every word actually has a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. All this is linguistic nonsense....Any specification of the meaning of a word on the sole basis of etymology can never be more than an educated guess.” (3). Nevertheless, it is obvious that this is a more attractive translation to those who believe a demon can enter and inhabit the body of a believer. This term avoids the controversy associated with demon-possession. This terminology also blurs the biblical distinction between “demon-possession” and “demonic-influence”. There is a two-fold reason to understand and translate “Daimonizomai”, the Greek verb, as “to be possessed by a demon”. Firstly, the translation of “to be possessed by a demon” fits the context better in the passages where this verb is found. In each of the 13

occurrences of this participle, all in the gospels, it refers to the action of becoming possessed with a demon; or, when it refers to the person rather than the condition of being possessed, the person is called a “demoniac”. Secondly, this word is commonly translated in most lexicons and dictionaries as “to be possessed by a demon”. In one example, the Greek scholar W. E. Vine, translates this word as follows, “DAIMONIZOMAI signifies to be possessed of a demon, to act under the control of a demon. Those who were thus afflicted expressed the mind and consciousness of the demon or demons indwelling them.” (4). The scriptures warn the believer about the danger of demonic activity. As we shall see, demons can influence and attack Christians from without, but they are not able enter, control and inhabit the believer from within.

Biblical Reasons Against Demon Possession of Believers

A comprehensive study of the Scriptures should lead us to the belief that a true believer cannot be possessed by a demon. The Word of God lays down certain truths and principles which support this teaching. What are these biblical truths and principles? Firstly, the Scriptures teach that a believer is kept by the power of God, “The Lord is faithful and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thess. 3:3); also “He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him” (1 Jn. 5:18). One commentator writes, “The word rendered haptomai ‘toucheth’, here signifies ‘to lay hold of.’ The evil one assaults, but he cannot sever the vital connection between the believer and Christ.” (5). Although a believer is subject to the attacks of Satan, his status as a child of God and a possession of God sets limits as to what the world of demonic forces can do.

Secondly, a believer is called the “temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16). At conversion the Holy Spirit indwells a believer and makes him a temple of the living God. In this temple, light has no agreement with darkness, and there is no concord between Christ and Belial. The apostle John further adds, “Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4). How then would God, who is greater than Satan, allow a demon to reside along with Him in this sanctified temple?

Theological Arguments Advanced

Although many proponents of “demonization”, on the one hand, reject the idea of “demon possession” of believers, nevertheless they bring forth specious theological arguments in defense of demons inhabiting and controlling believers. One argument says that demons can reside within a believer’s soul, but not within the spirit where the Holy Spirit dwells. (6). A close scrutiny of the Scriptures reveals that, while there is a fundamental distinction between the soul and spirit, it is noteworthy that many times these terms are used interchangeably (Matt. 20:28/27:50, John 12:27/13:21). Therefore, the careful Bible student should not base his interpretation solely upon this distinction. However, the heart of the issue does not concern itself with the soul or the spirit, but rather, whether or not Satan and God can coexist in the believer’s body. Another argument that has been advanced states that God allows demons to enter the bodies of believers as a form of discipline. Proponents explain, in the case of continued sin in the life of a believer, that God will use demons as agents of divine chastisement. (7). Matthew 18:34-35 is marshalled forth to buttress this theory. In this parable

of the unjust debtor, v. 34 states that because of unforgiveness, “he was delivered to the tormentors”. The “tormentors”, it is asserted, are a picture of demons. Then v. 35 follows, “So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not everyone his brother.” (8) Are these “tormentors” truly a picture of demons or simply a reference to keepers of the prison(v.30)? Concerning the the identification of the “tormentors”, one commentator writes, “The jailers, here called the ‘tormentors’, have instructions not merely to keep him safe in prison but to make his life as miserable as possible, by the place of imprisonment, instruments of pain, diet, sleep, etc.” (9). By such an interpretation of Matthew 18:34-35, the proponents of demon possession clearly appear to be stretching and twisting the Holy Scriptures to fit their point of view. Moreover, the majority of biblical commentators agree that there is nothing in this passage that even remotely suggests demonic activity or demon possession.

The True Focus in Spiritual Warfare

Increasingly, Christians today seem to be getting caught up in preoccupation with Satan and demonic forces. Sensationalistic teachings are replacing sound biblical doctrine concerning the Christian’s spiritual battle. True spiritual warfare is primarily focused on the world and the flesh, and not on a preoccupation with Satan. The spiritual battle emphasizes the preaching of the cross, the believer’s victory through growth in sanctification, and the irresistible power of God in protecting every child of God against Satan. The clarion call today should be to allow the Scriptures to direct our battle plan. As spiritual soldiers we must be submissive to the Lord

Jesus Christ and His Word. We have seen that the Bible teaches that a believer cannot be inhabited by a demon. Furthermore, we should not trust in undiscerning teachings for deliverance, but rather we should rest completely upon God's resources in our warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Endnotes:

(1). Merrill F. Unger, Demons in the World Today, (Wheaton, IL:Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 117 (2). C. Fred Dickason, Demon Possession and the Christian: A New Perspective, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), 38-39 Neil T. Anderson, The Bondage Breaker, (Eugene, OR:Harvest House, 1990), 174 Merrill F. Unger, Demons in the World Today, (Wheaton, IL:Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 101 (3). D.A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, (Grand Rapids, MI:Baker Book House, 1989), 26,32 (4). W.E Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, (Old Tappan:NJ Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981),. 291 (5). W.E. Vine, The Epistles of John, (Grand Rapids, MI:Zondervan Publishing House, ND), 107-108 (6). Mark I. Bubeck, The Adversary, (Chicago, IL:Moody Press, 1975), 88-89 (7). Timothy M. Warner, Spiritual Warfare, (Wheaton, IL:Crossway Books, 1991), 104-105 C. Fred Dickason, Demon Possession and the Christian: A New Perspective, (Chicago, IL:Moody Press, 1987), 140-142 (8). W. L. McLeod, Demonism Among Evangelicals, (Saskatoon, Sask.:Western Tract Mission, 1975), 106 (9). A. B. Bruce, Expositor's Greek N. T.: Matthew, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Co, 1967), 244

Distinguishing Between Israel and the Church

Distinguishing things that differ is essential in the interpretation of Scripture and failure to do so results in doctrinal and practical consequences. This is true in all of Scripture. Church history will show that those who were cavilier concerning subtle and important theological differences have brought great harm to the Church. The failure to distinguish between justification and sanctification damages the doctrine of grace. The failure to distinguish between law and grace muddies our understanding of salvation by grace through faith alone. So too, the failure to distinguish Israel from the Church will lead to grave consequences. Reluctance to distinguish Israel from the Church has caused some to return to barren liturgical ritual, the unbiblical separation of the clergy and the laity, and the use of military might to accomplish the will of God. Oliver Cromwell(1599-1658) serves as an illustration of the necessity of right thinking in this area. Oliver Cromwell was a soldier and Puritan statesman, and later as Lord Protector, ruled Great Britain with an iron fist. His army, called “Ironsides”, never lost a battle and was greatly feared. They fought like no other army since the days of King David in Israel. They would enter battle singing psalms of David and reciting the Westminister Confession. As a father Cromwell was gentle with his children, but on the battlefield he was a ruthless warrior. In August, 1649, Cromwell and 12,000 soldiers arrived in Ireland. During the next ten years of bloodshed, it is estimated that about a third of the

population was either killed or died of starvation. The majority of Roman Catholics who owned land had it taken away from them, and they were removed to the barren province of Connacht. Catholic boys and girls were shipped to Barbados and sold to the planters as slaves. The land taken from the Catholics by Cromwell was given to the Protestant soldiers who had taken part in the campaign. Before the rebellion in 1641, Catholics owned 59% of the land in Ireland. By the time Cromwell left in 1650, the proportion had shrunk to 22%. Many have wondered how Cromwell, as a Christian, could be so devoted to Christ on one hand, and at the same time be so cruel, violent, and ruthless in battle.

Concerning this paradox Christian Historian J. H. Merle D'Aubigne writes:

"The great man shared in the error which the Papacy had held during the Middle ages, and which most of the Reformers entertained during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He did not make a sufficient distinction between the old and the new covenant, between the Old and New Testament. The terrible judgments inflicted by God's command on the unbelieving nations in the times of the judges and kings of Israel, appeared to him not only to authorize but to necessitate, similar judgments. He thought that, like Moses and Joshua, he might slay Balaam with the sword. It may be that he did not follow this out explicitly; but it was with this prejudice and under this impulse that he usually acted. This was wrong. The Jewish theocracy existed no longer; and its rules of conduct had been abolished with it. The precepts which ought to direct the life of a Christian are contained in our Savior's Sermon on the Mount and in other discourses, as well as in the

writings of the Apostles." (1) Oliver Cromwell acted as he did because he failed to see vital distinctions between Israel and the Church. He was the Church's King David, vanquishing the kingdom of its enemies. He was England's Joshua fighting the adversaries of God. There are enormous practical consequences at stake when we fail to distinguish the differences between Israel of old and the New Testament Church.

The Reformed View of Israel and the Church

There are Christians today who resist broad distinctions between Israel and the Church. Today, as with its Puritan forefathers, Reformed theology teaches that Israel and the Church are not to be distinguished. Rather Israel and the Church, the two peoples of God, are both an organic, unified body under the headship of Christ. According to this view, to separate them is to do great theological harm to the teaching of the covenants, the unity of the Church and Israel, and the importance of the law. Reformed theology argues that the term Israel does not represent a national people, but the spiritual people of God. Therefore, the members of the Church are considered to be New Israel. Spiritual Israel of the Old Testament has now entered a new phase of her history and lives on as the Church. The prophecies concerning the nation of Israel are, for the most part, now applied to the Church. How do Reformed teachers justify their position from the Scriptures? Reformed writers will indeed agree that there are some differences between Israel and the Church, but they would counter that there are many unifying links between these two peoples of God. Scriptures such as "But he is a Jew which is one inwardly" (Rom. 2:29); and "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom.

9:6) are used as support of this position. Reformed writers teach that natural, national Israel has been set aside by God and does not receive the promises of God. However, believing Israel, the faithful remnant of the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham, was the initial phase of what would eventually be called the “Church”. It is spiritual, or true Israel, and not National Israel, that is to be identified with the Church.

Reformed author Keith Mathison explains,

“We must first note that if “Israel” is defined as natural, national, or unbelieving Israel, then obviously “Israel” is not the church… If, however, we define “Israel” as true Israel or Old Testament believers, we discover a different relationship. There is an organic, living relationship between Old Testament believers and New Testament believers. They are one body joined together under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2)

An Examination of the Reformed View

Is it, indeed, true that Scripture considers only believing Israel to be true Israel? Does Scripture teach that only believing Israel is the true possessor of the covenant promises? Is this true Israel of the Old Testament the beginning of what is now the New Testament Church? Let us examine this Reformed view in light of the Word of God. All sincere students of Scripture will admit that there are similarities between Israel and the Church. But at the same time, they will also agree that there are great differences. The careful study of Scripture reveals that God has a plan for Israel, and this plan involves both the believing and unbelieving parts of the nation. Yes, God has always had a remnant of believers in Israel throughout history, but it must also be said that He has

not cast away the unbelieving in Israel. How does Scripture define the composition of what is called Israel? Notice what Peter states while preaching to the Jews near Solomon's porch in Jerusalem in Acts chapter three. "I know that ye through ignorance did it…Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, 'And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed'" (Acts 3:17,25). Peter's begins by saying you— the unbelieving Jewish people— although through ignorance, are responsible for the death of Christ. He then turns to the subject of who are the possessors of the promises of the covenant. Who are the "seed" through which all the nations would be blessed? Peter unequivocally states that it is those who crucified Christ, the unbelieving Israel, who are possessors of the covenant, who are "Israel". This leads us to another consideration: who among the Jewish people are "elect Israel", national Israel or believing Israel? Paul writes and explains to the Romans that it is unbelieving Israel, the "enemies of the gospel" who are elect. Paul writes, "As concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom.11:28-29). God has not cast off the unbelieving in Israel. They are an integral part God's divine plan for Israel. So it again is both the believing and unbelieving who are considered elect Israel. Finally, to whom does the term "Israel" apply? Is it the unbelieving Israel, national Israel, or "New Israel" — the Church? Paul answers this very question in Romans nine: "My brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the

giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises,...” (Rom. 9:3-5). In these verses Paul answers two questions: firstly, who is Israel, and secondly to whom belong the promises of God? Although the book of Romans was written many years after the formation of the church, yet Paul states that the adoption, the covenants, the promise still are the possession of Israel. Paul uses the present tense throughout this verse to first define an “Israelite”, and later to show who possesses the promises of God. He writes, “Who are Israelites….adoption, service to God… whose are the fathers…”. If the promises of God to Israel are now applied to the Church, one would expect that after 60 years New Testament writers would clearly set forth this fact in the Word of God. It seems, however, that the promises to Israel still apply to Israel and the definiton of “Israel” has not changed. Let none misunderstand. Scripture does not teach that literal, national Israel comes into rich blessing from God simply because they are Jews. Jesus said to the Jews, “Think not to say within yourselves we have Abraham to our father: For I say unto you God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham”...”If you were Abraham’s children you would do the works of Abraham” (Matt. 3:9, John 8:39). God has never given His promises to Israel merely because they were Israelites after the flesh. The fulfillment of the promises of God in the coming Kingdom are only for those who, through faith, have come to Christ. When and how will this take place? National Israel and believing Israel will both enter into the millennial promises of God at the appearing of Christ, when in the words of Paul, “So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, there shall come a Deliverer and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:26).

German theologian Erich Sauer explains,

Through the conversion of the Jews at the appearing of Messiah, the faith of the little remnant extends to the whole body. The literal Israel has thus become spiritual Israel. Abraham's descendants according to the flesh have by conversion and regeneration become true sons of the patriarch, and thus at the same time, Israel according to the spirit (Gal.3:9). Thenceforth, the national is identical with the spiritual. The remnant has become the whole people, and the saved national people are at the same time both literal descendants of Abraham and also his spiritual seed. (3)

This is God's divine program for Israel. As it was set forth in prophecy so will it be fulfilled in history. This plan is distinct from His program with the Church. Both programs find an important place in biblical history. May we never confuse Israel's program with that of the Church, but instead lift our hearts in praise to God for them both.

Endnotes (1) J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, The Protector: A Vindication, (New York, NY: Robert Carter, 1947), p. 106-107 (2) Keith Mathison, Dispensationalism: Wrongly Dividing the People of God, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1995), p. 38, 39 (3) Erich Sauer, Eternity to Eternity, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979,)p. 160-161

Doctrinal Preaching

The doctrinal preaching of the word of God is a vital necessity. The proclamation of the scriptures with clarity and precision is God's method of transforming the lives of men and women. It is the authoritative link between the heart of God and the souls of men. The modern world has had enough of theories, conjecture and rationale—it hungers for the truth of God plainly spoken. It longs for the "thus saith the Lord". It is waiting for men of God, like Jonah of old to whom God spoke, saying, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:1). Unfortunately, the preaching of the word of God has fallen out of favor with many evangelical church leaders. Today there is a growing opposition toward doctrinal preaching of the word of God. Social action is more appealing to many Christian leaders. They question the use of mere words, when the lost of this world are looking for deeds. In addition, Church growth experts contend that biblical preaching is old-fashioned; therefore, videos, panel forums, discussions, music, and multimedia presentations are now filling the place once occupied by preaching. Evangelical leaders defend their views by stating that the churches are filled, para-church ministries are in demand, and Christians are busier than ever. But what is the spiritual condition of the church? Are these new methods in agreement with the word of God? Let us examine these issues more closely.

Dangerous Trends in Evangelical Churches

Those who continue to value preaching are calling for radical changes in the traditional methods. A growing number of church leaders throughout North America maintain that the faithful preaching of the word of God is no longer an effective means of reaching the lost and developing mature believers. The cry now is for preaching that addresses “relevancy” and the “felt-needs” of the audience. This technique is now being espoused by many church growth institutes and ministries throughout the U.S. and Canada. However, under closer investigation one discovers that this technique was examined and rejected by Bible-based Christians 70 years ago, when the modernist preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick urged its use in Christian churches. In 1928, he scolded godly men of the Book, writing, “Preachers who pick out texts from the Bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in the theology of the writer, are grossly misusing the Bible. Let them not end but start with thinking of the audience’s vital needs, and then let the whole sermon be organized around their endeavor to meet those needs. This is all good sense and good psychology.” (1)

Sadly today, a growing number of evangelical leaders are urging the use of this same technique, albeit redressed in evangelical terminology. In his book on reaching out to “Baby Boomers”, Doug Murren, the pastor of a large charismatic congregation in the Pacific northwest, provides readers with the following seven suggestions for preparing messages:

1. Visit the “how-to” sections in your local bookstores 2. Regularly have a small group submit a list of their greatest challenges at home and on the job. 3. Similarly,

acquire inventories of needs from several secular (unsaved) people in your community. 4. Periodically, examine issues of Time, Newsweek, and USA Today, as these publications are on the cutting edge of the felt needs and fears people are facing. 5. Apply practical aims to every study, message or program in your church. 6. Practice composing practical, catching titles for your messages. 7. Limit your time to 20 minutes. And don't forget to keep your messages light and informal, liberally sprinkling them with humor and personal anecdotes. (2)

It is remarkable that all of these suggestions are adapted to meet man's social, emotional and material needs; furthermore, not one refers to the word of God or to meeting man's most important need—spiritual separation from God. These new methods are not resting upon the bedrock of the word of God, but rather upon the shifting sand of psychological and humanistic principles.

The Need for Doctrinal Preaching

This raises several new questions: What negative consequences will these new methods bring? Is this new preaching method harmless? Is it merely an evangelistic fad and nothing more? Furthermore, should Bible-believing Christians embrace it as an effective evangelistic tool? A closer investigation may serve to help us answer these and other questions. Professor James Davidson Hunter, a researcher from the University of Virginia, has studied the views of evangelicals at 16 leading seminaries and Bible colleges, and reported his findings in 1987 in his book entitled "Evangelicalism: the Coming Generation." Hunter

argues convincingly that seminaries are moving away from doctrinal orthodoxy.

Among the students he interviewed, over 50% said that the Bible should not be taken literally in matters of science and history. There were 33% who disagreed with the statement, “The only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus Christ”; 46% felt preaching to unbelievers “about hell” is in poor taste.3 Jay Kesler, the president of Taylor University, a Christian college in the Midwest, stated, “I agree with Hunter’s observations of the changes taking place not only at Christian colleges and seminaries, but in evangelical culture generally.” (3)

Moreover, in 1994 Josh McDowell Ministries conducted an extensive study on the Christian character of evangelical young people in the U.S. In the study 3,795 young people between the ages of 11-18 were asked 193 questions concerning their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although 86% stated that they had trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior, the results of the survey uncovered an array of troubling statistics. The study revealed that 45% watched MTV at least once a week; 57% said that the Bible was not a reliable standard of truth. The study also revealed that many young people are cheating, smoking, gambling, watching X-rated movies and engaging in premarital sex. (4)

Further research has shown that many Christians do not possess a satisfactory understanding of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity; such as justification, the deity of Christ, inerrancy, imminency and sanctification. Why are evangelical young people engaging in such harmful activities? Why is there so little understanding of biblical

doctrine? One reason must be—the failure of the evangelical churches to preach and teach the great doctrines of the faith. When the Holy Scriptures are taught with conviction, lives and lifestyles will be transformed to the glory of God (Isa. 66:2).

The New Testament Model of Preaching

The New Testament models this practice of doctrinal preaching and demonstrates the blessing that will follow. The preaching of doctrine characterized the teaching ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles. As Christ was teaching His disciples, it was said of Him, “He taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in His doctrine” (Mark 4:2); as others heard His teaching it was said, “…the people were astonished at His doctrine” (Mt. 7:24); the early New Testament Church “continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine” (Acts 2:42); and they were exhorted to “Preach the word…exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2); they were entreated to refute the false teachers with doctrine, “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus1:9). Doctrinal preaching was the charge, challenge, and resource to all who sought to serve and honor the Lord Jesus Christ. Another crucial factor in favor of doctrinal preaching is its ability to preserve the church from false teaching. Doctrinal preaching by definition involves doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction (2 Tim. 3:15). Corrective preaching, therefore should address doctrinal error and also the false teachers who are bringing the error. Paul charges the New Testament believers, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and

offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17). The failure to do so will open the door to false teachers and cause many sincere believers to be spiritually imperiled. A sad account is given by Henry Theissen, a former professor of theology at Wheaton College, who points out that in the absence of passionate doctrinal preaching, doctrinal error found fertile soil in which to flourish, leading to the formation of the Jehovah's Witnesses. He writes, "Oratorical preaching may bind the congregation to the preacher; but when the preacher leaves, the people leave also. It has been often demonstrated that only when people are thoroughly taught the word of God do they become strong Christians and effective workers for Christ. There is a definite connection between doctrinal preaching and mature spiritual growth. Thomas DeWitt Talmadge may be cited as a man of great oratorical powers who built up a large congregation by his ability. However soon after Talmadge's death, the Brooklyn Tabernacle(which seated 4,000 persons) fell into the hands of Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society(known to us today as the Jehovah's Witnesses)." (5)

Today, the total number of Jehovah's Witnesses world-wide is estimated to be 11.5 million strong making the Jehovah's Witnesses the largest religious cult in the world. However, this sad situation may have been averted through vigorous doctrinal preaching. May this illustration serve as a warning and wake-up call to all serious believers. New Testament churches must put aside the current popular fads, the glitter and sparkle of the newest trends, and return to the rock-solid foundation of doctrinal preaching and the unchanging

power of the word of God. Then the church will be strong, believers vigorous for Christ, and the world attentive to the life-changing power of the gospel.

Endnotes (1) Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What is the Matter with Preaching”, Harpers Magazine, July, 1928, p135 (2) Doug Murren, The Baby Boomerang, (Regal Books, Glendale, CA, 1990), p. 227-228 (3) James Davison Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1987), p. 198 (4) Josh McDowell, “Help Your Teen Make The Right Choice”, Focus on the Family Magazine, Nov. 1994, p. 4 (5) Henry Thiessen Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology, (Eerdmans Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 194), p. 30

Door to Door Evangelism

In 1960, D. James Kennedy graduated from seminary and began preaching at the Coral Ridge Church in Fort Lauderdale, FL. After just eight months of ministry there, the congregation dwindled from 45 to 17 believers. Although he was very discouraged about what was happening, he would not give up. He realized the problem was that he lacked courage to confront unbelievers with the truth of the gospel. To his surprise, he was invited to Decatur, GA to conduct a gospel campaign for ten days. He preached each evening, but during the mornings and afternoons, he received training and visited homes, presenting the gospel door-to-door. Those experiences at the doorways of the unsaved would transform his ministry completely. After the evangelistic campaign he returned to the Coral Ridge Church, where he implemented the principles he had learned in Georgia—he called these principles "Evangelism Explosion". By presenting unsaved men and women with the claims of the gospel on their doorsteps, the Coral Ridge Church grew from 17 individuals to over 2,000 in nine years. These simple door-to-door evangelistic principles would be the means of winning thousands to Christ in the United States and in 93 other lands throughout the world. (1).

Door to Door Evangelism Answers It's Critics

Door-to-door evangelism is one of the few ways that each family in a city can be reached with the gospel. The Lord has effectively used this method throughout the history of the church, from the time of the early church (Acts 20:20) to the modern day. Today, church leaders

are calling for renewed efforts in teaching and training Christians how to use door-to-door evangelism, proving the timelessness of this evangelistic method. In a study of the fastest growing 576 Southern Baptist churches in the U.S., Southern Baptist researcher Dr. Thomas Rainer concluded that traditional door-to-door evangelism was still a very useful evangelistic method. In the churches surveyed, 50.2% of these churches ranked weekly door-to-door evangelism as one of their most effective evangelistic tools. Bill Hohenstreet, of Post Falls Baptist Church in Post Falls, Idaho states that door-to-door visitation was critical to their evangelistic outreach. He explained that their primary outreach efforts were door-to-door, cold-call visitation, and Tuesday evening visitation using a prospect list. This church of two hundred saw forty-eight individuals come to faith in Jesus Christ and baptized in 1996. “Churches that rated door-to-door evangelism highly did not believe that it was any less effective or resistance to visits was any greater than in years past.” (2). Churches throughout the United States are beginning to find that consistent evangelistic visitation, when followed up with literature, Bible study, and hospitality are effective means in winning the lost to Christ. Nevertheless, door-to-door evangelism is not without its critics. Since 1973 church growth experts have unwisely labeled this method as old-fashioned and ineffective in modern society. However, recent studies have challenged the validity of these widely-held convictions of church growth researchers. Thomas Rainer, who conducted a survey of the fastest growing churches, speaks of this issue when he writes, “But what about the studies of growing churches which made the conclusion that traditional door-to-door evangelism was on the decline? The

research of those studies was based on growing churches, not necessarily churches that were increasing in size by conversion growth. In fact, many of the churches were hardly growing at all through new converts, but by Christians who were leaving one church to join another. Additionally, the other studies rarely looked at more than forty to fifty churches; our research is based upon a study of over 500 churches." (3). The results of this recent study have soundly contradicted the tenaciously-held beliefs of church growth experts. This fact has caused concern among many church leaders, and has led them to re-examine their evangelistic methods. Many are beginning to see that traditional methods are indeed Biblical, important, and effective means for producing conversion growth in churches.

Door to Door Evangelism Works!

Evangelism is not a special activity for special people at special times. It is the normal activity of all Christians as the Lord gives opportunity. A church's evangelistic effort should be a blend of youth and children's ministries, evangelistic Bible studies, prayer, regular gospel campaigns, and individual witnessing. But church leaders are coming to the conclusion that door-to-door evangelism is an essential if a church is serious about contacting an entire community for Christ. Some churches have been content to arrange a series of meetings for the gospel and to send out newspaper announcements inviting the unsaved to attend. In many cases, the result has been the glorious salvation of souls. Yet prior to the gospel meetings, many in a community were never contacted about the meetings, they were never spoken to in person, and an announcement was

never personally delivered after a brief presentation of the gospel. Some of the most effective evangelistic organizations have used door-to-door visitation in presenting the gospel. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, since its inception, has placed a high premium on the need for door-to-door visitation prior to the nightly preaching of the gospel. The Billy Graham Team in each of its gospel crusades, mobilizes thousands of workers to contact the unsaved door-to-door. In October, 1998 in Tampa, FL, the Billy Graham Crusade Team organized 3,000 workers from 100 churches to visit 300,000 homes over a three-day period one week prior to the Crusade. The Tampa Crusade chairman Peter Lowe said, “The promotional campaign is important, but we think this personalized approach is the most effective of all.” (4). There is a great need not only to invite the unsaved to hear the gospel, but to take the gospel to the unsaved. Presenting Christ door-to-door puts the “go” back into evangelism and emphasizes the “woe” of personal responsibility. George Verwer, the founder of the international missionary organization Operation Mobilization, writes, “Without a doubt the most effective means of getting the gospel message to the unsaved is by taking it to them. That is where the bottleneck lies. The evangelistic method of the Apostle Paul was not so much a ‘You come hear me’ evangelism, as it was an ‘I’ll bring it to you’ evangelism. Paul was a great officer in the army of the Lord, a man of intellect and influence, but he never stopped knocking on doors to witness for His Lord. Yet today it is very difficult to find Christian men and women who are willing to go from house to house witnessing and distributing literature to the unconverted. Satan is a master strategist; he will do everything to keep us from eye-to-

eye contact with the unconverted." (5). Assembly workers and evangelists have carried the gospel door-to-door effectively for many years. This type of labor in the gospel is spiritually demanding, yet profitable and effective. John Martin has labored for many years in Ontario, and through his efforts as many as 10 assemblies have been established. His efforts in the gospel and the blessing which followed attest to the fruitfulness, and also sacrifice, inherent in door-to-door evangelism. In the book Saved to Serve he writes, "All of these assemblies referred to represent a great deal of hard work. Much visitation was done in all of these areas. The attendance at the Bible studies was sometimes discouraging, but perseverance and patient, persistent plodding brought its reward." (6). Evangelist August Van Ryn, recounting the way God used his efforts in speaking to the unsaved door-to-door, writes, "I shall never forget our first season in the city of Owosso, Michigan. Another young brother and myself covered the town with tracts and printed invitations, going from door to door. It took several weeks to do this. I shall never forget the sight that met our eyeswhen we came to the tent for the first evening meeting. We were amazed to see its 500 capacity crowded to the doors and hundreds more standing on the outside. And how wonderfully God blessed His word in the salvation of many precious souls." (7).

The "How" of Door to Door Evangelism

How can we see blessing in our own evangelistic efforts? How can assemblies today reach their communities for Christ? How does one go about presenting Christ door-to-door? Many who have labored in this work have found the following principles very useful: 1. When you go—

have a specific goal in mind. Some go with the general purpose of distributing tracts or giving a word of witness. But many have found that it is more effective to have an announcement to a gospel meeting, Vacation Bible School, Awana club, or home Bible study to offer one who is responsive to the gospel. 2. Use literature wisely. Many have effectively used tracts, Bible portions, and gospel booklets. The booklet “Ultimate Questions” has been very effective. Some find it very fruitful to offer a card with which one could order an Emmaus Correspondence course, which the chapel can provide. A New Jersey assembly used this method in their community and 32 persons responded to the offer. 3. Follow up contacts. Many opportunities have been lost due to a failure to follow up effectively. Those who show interest should be revisited and offered suitable literature, such as a book, cassette tape of a gospel message, or a fitting Emmaus course. Contacts should receive a follow-up phone call and an invitation to a home Bible study or to a one-to-one study. A lunch or dinner invitation should be extended, as many have come to Christ over the dinner table. 4. Read helpful books concerning door-to-door evangelism. Two of the most helpful are “The ABC’s of Door to Door Visitation” by Ron Smith, STL Books, PO Box 28, Waynesboro, GA. And “Evangelism Explosion” by D. James Kennedy, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL. 5. Organize a Gospel team in your area. Gospel teams laboring for Christ in tract distribution, open-air preaching, and door-to-door evangelism have been used very effectively. These teams have covered cities, such as Little Rock, AK, or smaller communities, such as Key West, FL and Citrus Park, FL. These efforts can be limited to a Saturday, a weekend or an entire week. The training in

the gospel, witnessing for Christ, laboring in prayer, the joy of souls saved is a life-transforming experience. After a weekend outreach in Florida a worker wrote, “The outreach was such a blessing to me and I will never forget it…the times of prayer and the fellowship together were fantastic…I wish we could do this more often.” May God mightily use all your efforts in the gospel to reach the lost, spiritually transform the saints, and most importantly, to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Endnotes:

(1). D. James Kennedy, Evangelism Explosion, Wheaton, IL, Tyndale House Publishers, 1977, p. 6 (2). Thomas Rainer, Effective Evangelistic Churches, Nashville, TN, Broadman, 1996, p. 20 (3). Thomas Rainer, Effective Evangelistic Churches, Nashville, TN, Broadman, 1996, p. 19, 41 (4). Crusaders Raise Profile, Tampa Tribune, October 17, 1998 (5). George Verwer, Literature Evangelism, Send The Light Books, Bromley, England, 1977, p. 11 (6). John Martin, Saved to Serve, Gospel Folio Press, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 54 (7). August Van Ryn, 60 Years in His Service, Truth for Today, Hialeah, FL, 1996, p. 23

Elders and Spiritual Vision

“Where there is no vision the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” Proverbs 29:18 The Lord has placed stringent demands on those that are called to be elders. He has called them to a spiritual work and rigorous labor for the Lord. Paul charges the Thessalonian assembly that the elders were to be recognized on the basis of their “labor” in the assembly. The word translated “labor” in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 is the Greek word “kopiao”. This is a strong word, which means to toil to the point of weariness and exhaustion. Regarding this word, author G. Campbell Morgan writes, “Paul has in mind the kind of toil that has in it the red blood of sacrifice, that kind of toil that wears and weakens by the way.” (1)

The “Labor” of Eldership

An elder in the local assembly must realize that eldership is not merely an important title, but rather an indispensable work. The work of the Lord in the church of God must not be neglected. Sadly, this is often not the case in many New Testament churches. The shepherding of the flock is left unattended, the ministry of the Word is mishandled, and outreach to the lost is frequently forgotten. True elders set the spiritual tone in a church. Where there are elders who are godly men, who put the Lord first in there lives, who radiate the grace of the Lord Jesus, one can expect to find a healthy, spiritual church; on the other hand, where elders are taken up in the affairs of the world, overly occupied with outside interests, too busy to read the Word of God or to pray, one can expect to find coldness and deadness among the

flock. Such men are not true elders. Yet, when the Word of God speaks of the work of an elder, it describes men who “watch over your souls” (Hebrews 13:17), “rule over you, who have spoken the word of God” (Hebrews 13:7), “labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17), and “desire a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1). Indeed, many are carrying on this strenuous work; yet how desperately our assemblies need more committed men to labor sacrificially among the Lord’s people. Biblical eldership necessitates weariness, loneliness, criticism, sleepless nights, and tears. May we realize that the work of the Lord requires our sacrifice, time and hard work. An assembly cannot flourish without the arduous work and commitment of the elders. If the elders fail, people may resort to unbiblical methods, bringing spiritual harm to many. However, in all areas of the work of oversight in the local assembly, there is one indispensable aspect which must not be neglected, and that is: spiritual vision.

What is Spiritual Vision?

Spiritual vision might be defined as that which God puts in our hearts to do when the spiritual need is great and our hearts are filled with the concerns of God. A few years ago an elder gave verbal expression to spiritual vision when he prayed, “Lord, break my heart with the concerns that break the heart of God.” A leader with vision does not see with mere human eyes, but with transformed vision. As he passes by a hotel that is for sale, he sees the potential for a missionary training center; when he sees a store front for rent, he envisions a future Christian bookstore; when he sees new neighborhoods, he sees thriving home Bible studies; when he see new growth in a town, he longs to see a

new assembly established in that area. This was the burden of church leaders in the New Testament. The apostle Paul wrote, “I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: to whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand” (Romans 15:21).

Spiritual Vision in Antioch

After the stoning of Steven, a few disciples of Cyprus and Cyrene entered the city of Antioch in Syria to make Christ known in the preaching of the gospel. At that time, Antioch, situated on the Orontes River, was a cosmopolitan city of 500,000 people, the third largest city of the ancient world. Antioch was a city renown for its immorality and idolatry. Juvenal, the Roman writer, rebuked the morals of Antioch by saying:

“The sewage of the Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber.” (2)

His point, which would not be missed on his readers, was that the immorality of Antioch was so great that it was even polluting the depraved morals of Rome, more than 1,300 miles away!

Yet these few disciples would not be deterred from preaching the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord (Acts. 11:20-21). These men were men of God with vision. These disciples, who were armed with the gospel of God and equipped with the commandment to go into all the world, preached and served Christ valiantly. However, not only did these few disciples have vision to see cities won for Christ, but the persecuted assembly at Jerusalem also shared this vision. “Then news of these

things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch" (Acts 11:22). The assembly at Jerusalem sent one of their best men to help establish the new work in Antioch. Barnabas was sent to Antioch and labored there as a teacher, exhorting the believers that "with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (Acts 11:23). As the work in Antioch grew mightily, there was now a need for another worker. Barnabas went to Tarsus to encourage Paul to come help in the work at Antioch. Barnabas sought out a man of God—this man of vision sought a man who likewise possessed a vision for establishing New Testament churches throughout Asia Minor, Syria, and Galatia. "When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

The Cost of Spiritual Vision

Those who have most powerfully impacted the world for Christ were men of vision. Spiritual vision and commitment are strands of a cord used to raise high the banner of the cross. These men of God laboring at Antioch were men of vision and were men of tireless zeal and unflagging committment. Their charge was the Word of God and their commission was that it must go forth at all costs. The work of God and the assembly of God must not suffer loss. Personal loss, financial expense, physical persecution, stonings, and the whipping post were all part of the high cost of spiritual vision. New Testament leadership always exacts a heavy toll on men and women of God. Amy Carmichael, who

labored and sacrificed greatly to reach the lost masses of India wrote, ” No wound, no scar.

Yes, as the master shall the servant be,

And pierced are the feet that follow Me;

But thine are whole.

Can he have followed far—who has no wound? No scar? ”

H. A. Ironside was once told by a man, “I would give my all to have the knowledge and ability to preach the Scriptures as you do.” Ironside replied, “That is exactly what it has cost me.” The Lord Himself knew much of self-sacrifice in service. Christ, when speaking of the humble character of his labors for the Father, said, “Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:44-45). John writes, “He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

Spiritual Vision and Spiritual Focus

Men of vision are also those who see with the eyes of faith and with eyes fixed upon the power and glory of God. These men have usually seen more clearly the importance of the work of God and have seen farther concerning the glory of God than most others. This was true of many of God’s choicest servants in the Word of God. The Scriptures tell us regarding Moses, one of the great servants of God, that he “endured as seeing Him who was invisible”. Moses was able to see what the crowds could not see. He saw more fully, more deeply, more powerfully than many around him the ways and

desires of God. But spiritual vision encompasses not only insight, but also godly foresight. Spiritual vision is the spiritual ability to sense and anticipate what lies ahead. These godly leaders can envision the results of inappropriate methods or the rash decisions of others. These men see far out on the horizons the dire consequences and the withering effects of unwise personal choices, petty theological squabbles, and ill-advised assembly decisions, and seek to avoid them. A leader of spiritual vision sees difficulties ahead, but also possibilities, potential, and opportunities that lie in the future. Faith, boldness, and wisdom are all ready weapons in his arsenal. The bold vision of godly elders and spiritual leaders within the local assembly is the great need of today. The church needs men of God who possess wisdom, insight, foresight, and a heart for the glory of God; men who work hard and esteem the work of Christ in the local church worth the cost; men who step out in faith, seeing firstly God, and also that which God desires to accomplish through the church. May there be more like the "children of Issachar, who were men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do…" (1 Chron. 12:32). Harry Ironside sets forth the necessity of vision writing, "By vision is meant spiritual enlightenment and insight into divine things…when this ministry is lacking among the people of God and the assemblies of His saints, they soon become lawless, substituting for the Spirit's energy the mere busy meddling of nature, and the opening the door to what is simply of man in the flesh…but the anointed eye is needed to discern what has been therein revealed… lack of vision will be manifested in a cold, dry, theological, or philosophical, treatment of the

Scriptures, as though given to exercise the intellect, rather than the heart and the conscience.” (3)

Endnotes (1) G. Campbell Morgan, The Corinthian Letters, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1946), p. 207 (2) F. F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 141 (3) Harry Ironside, Proverbs, (New York: NY: Loizeaux Brothers, 1977) p. 425-426

Eternity of God

On a warm summer evening in London, lines of curiosity-seekers formed, eager to find a seat in the auditorium in order to hear the much-anticipated debate between the well-known atheist Robert Ingersoll and the British preacher Dr. Joseph Parker. During the course of the debate, Ingersoll ruthlessly attacked the truthfulness of the Holy Scriptures, and in the most blasphemous of terms, denied the deity and the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. After some time, as was his manner, he paused—and gazing heavenward he threw out a challenge to the Eternal God, saying, “I have just vilified, assailed and profaned the name of Almighty God; I challenge You, if You exist at all, I call you to strike me dead upon this very spot”. With every fixed eye upon him, he then paused and casually walked to a chair and sat down; and pulling out a stop watch from his pocket he added, “I will give you five minutes”. As each minute slowly ticked off, he confidently announced to the crowd …four minutes left…three minutes…two minutes…one minute. Then he triumphantly stood up, and returning to the podium, he made his closing remarks to the audience. After speaking, he motioned to the front row of the vast lecture hall, where Dr. Joseph Parker was sitting, and invited him to respond to his dramatic rebuke of God. Joseph Parker slowly took his place behind the podium, and addressing the audience, he soundly refuted each of his opponent’s arguments. As he concluded, he turned to the learned atheist and graciously inquired, “And did the good gentleman think he could exhaust the patience, frustrate the grace, and

thwart the infinite mercy of the eternal God in just five minutes?"

The Blessing of the Doctrine of the Eternity of God

If Robert Ingersoll would have known more of the eternity of God, he doubtless would have been humbled in His holy presence. And so is it also with us—those who have made the most progress in the spiritual life are those who have given greatly of themselves to know God. Those who have tasted of His infinite richness are those who have labored long in the school of the Attributes of God. Moreover, the God of the Scriptures loves to reveal Himself in terms of His divine attributes. To miss the importance of the divine attributes is to miss the revelation of God in all His glory. The Scriptures lay great weight upon the doctrine of the eternity of God. When God called Abram out of the ancient city of Ur and led him to a land from which would rise a great nation, it was there that God would reveal Himself to Abram. Near a well in the city of Beersheba God revealed Himself to Abram by the name "El Olam", which means "the eternal God." Some years later when Moses, dwelling in the backside of the desert, was commanded to return to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel from bondage, he asked, "Who shall I say sent me?" "And God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM; and He said, Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you" (Ex. 3:14). By this statement He expressed the self-sufficient, independent, and eternal existence of God. In the last book of the Bible, when the exalted Lord Jesus Christ gave the revelation of the "things which are and the things which shall be hereafter" to the apostle John on the isle of Patmos, He revealed himself by saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last…which

is and was and is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). Again, great emphasis is laid on the eternity of God.

The Importance of the Eternity of God

Have you ever taken the time to consider the importance of the truth that God is eternal? God is in control of every event of this life, despite the instability in this world, and the tragedies and trials that lie on every hand; and He has existed in eternity past and will exist in eternity to come. The Bible never tries to prove the existence of God or His origin, it simply assumes that He is and that He has always existed. As we open the Bible, we find these words simply stated, "In the beginning God…" (Gen. 1:1). He just is. And then it invites us to look at what He has done and what He will do. He existed before all else, and it was He that brought all things into existence. He is independent of any other being or cause. He is uncreated, unoriginated and without beginning or end. God is not bound by time, whether it be the successive unfolding of events, or time measured in minutes, hours, or days. There is no such thing as past, present, or future with God. He established time and can work within its framework, but He exists over and above it. He dwells in the eternal "present". Isaiah counsels us to, "Remember the former things long past, for I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done" (Isa. 46:9-10). Words depict, but cannot define, the immeasurable grandeur of the eternal God. A. W.Tozer describes the lofty nature of this divine attribute when he writes, "The mind looks backward in time till the dim past vanishes, then turns and looks into the future till thought and imagination collapse from

exhaustion; and God is at both points, unaffected by either." (1) The very thought of the eternity of God bows our hearts in humble worship. As the human mind seeks to grasp the endless existence of God against the backdrop of the vapor-like existence of man, one stands in awe and falls before Him in adoration. The hymn writer Charles Wesley has well written, "Glad thine attributes confess, glorious all and numberless".

The Divine Attribute of the Eternity of God

To this discussion of the attributes of God we must add the self-sufficiency of God. Since God existed before time and space and before any created thing, He therefore is independent of all and sufficient in Himself alone. The proof for this fact is simply that He existed before anything else was in existence. This is not true of any other living thing. Every other thing is dependent upon other resources, such as water, food, and air for his very existence. This is not true of God. Indeed, if God was dependent upon anyone or thing, He would not be God. The apostle Paul used this very idea when proving the uniqueness of Christ above the idols of Athens, saying, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life, breath, and all things" (Acts. 17:24-25). God does not need us, nor does He need our worship, our fellowship, or our service. He is complete in Himself without all of these. Yet in His love He has graciously planned to use us and to allow us to be part of His eternal plan. God does not need us, but we need Him. We are incomplete and unfulfilled apart from a personal relationship with Him. We find true significance

and meaning in life only when we allow God to have the proper place in our lives. Since God possesses all things and desires to come into our lives and share all things with us, then it is in Him that we find all things that are needed to richly enjoy life. Paul stresses the richness of this truth when he writes, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete” (Col. 2:9). How foolish we are when we look to material things to satisfy the soul or this world’s entertainment to bring joy to the heart, when we can have all we need in Him, in whom we have been made complete. The Puritan sages have pointed out the importance of this truth in saying, “He who has everything in this world and Christ, has nothing more than he who has Christ alone.”

The Eternity of God and the Christian Life

The biblical truth of the eternity of God is a very practical doctrine when we grasp that we have been created for eternity, formed and framed to enjoy eternal blessings from the hand of the eternal One. When the Lord of glory breathed into the first parents the very breath of God, man was separated from animal, and the time-bound creature became an eternal soul. Do not misunderstand. We all will die, but we will not cease to exist. It is a solemn truth to consider; indeed, everyone who has ever lived will exist eternally, whether it be in heaven or in hell. Therefore, only that which we build into people’s souls, our own and others, will endure for eternity. Man strives to be remembered: politicians seek to have their names inscribed upon a bridge or building, athletes by the records they have broken, and businessmen by the financial empire they have established. But it is futile to live for things of this

world. The Scriptures warn us that the world and all the works that are in it will be consumed by fire (2 Pet. 3:10). We, who are Christians, have something far better to live for than the temporal things of this world.

Living With Eternity in View

Therefore, the Christian must live his life with eternity in view. The moments we spend in the presence of “the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity”, are an investment toward “an entrance that shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). Earnest seasons of prayer spent before the throne of grace, crying out to God for the salvation of the souls of men, will yield an abundant eternal reward. Laboring in the gospel and pointing lost souls to the Saviour is a rich investment made upon earth which will only be fully realized in eternity. C. H. Mackintosh writes, “The only real life is to live in the light of eternity—to use all we possess for the promotion of God’s glory and with an eye to the everlasting mansions. This, and only this is life in earnest.” (2) Because God is eternal, then no endeavor on earth has higher priority than knowing Him and loving him, worshiping Him, and serving Him. The earnest follower of Christ would do well to keep the Christian maxim before him, “Only one life will soon be past; only what is done for Christ will last.” For the Scriptures declare: “The only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (1 Tim. 6:16). “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisable, the

only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim. 1:17).

Endnotes

1. A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, (New York, Harpers and Row, 1971), p. 45 2. As quoted in William MacDonald, True Discipleship, (Kansas City, KS, Walterick, 1975), p. 112

Expository Preaching

The faithful exposition of the Word of God powerfully transforms lives. This was never more true than in the ministry of the Scripture by the so-called "Plymouth Brethren" 150 years ago. Men of God with such names as J. N. Darby, William Kelly, C. H. Macintosh, R. C. Chapman and others were noted and exceptionally gifted expositors of the Bible. C. H. Spurgeon commented that R. C. Chapman, was one of the most godly and gifted expositors in England. J. N. Darby visited the United States and preached to eager audiences in the largest churches in North America. He preached on a number of occasions at Moody's Farwell Hall in Chicago and at the Walnut Street Presbyterian church in St. Louis at which James H. Brooke was the minister. "Brethren" Bible conferences in North America and in Great Britain attracted overflowing crowds of serious Christians. Many of the leading evangelical church leaders of that time attended these conferences. Gratton Guiness, Henry Varley, and D. L. Moody visited the Mildmay conference in Dublin in 1872. C. I. Scofield and Arno Gaebelein frequently attended Bible conferences in the U. S. The Bible teaching among the "brethren" was considered to be the richest and most spiritual available in that day. Dwight L. Moody wrote concerning the teaching of C. H. Macintosh, "I had my attention called to C. H. M.'s notes, and was so much pleased and at the same time profited by the way they opened up Scripture truth, that I secured at once all the writings of the same author, and if they could not be replaced, would rather part with my entire library,

excepting my Bible, than with these writings. They have been to me a very key to the Scriptures". (1)

The Legacy of Expository Preaching

In consideration of all the contributions of the so-called "Plymouth Brethren" movement to the evangelical church, it may be that expository preaching is its most enduring legacy. Expository preaching had fallen into disfavor at this time in the history of the church. Most ministers preached topically or textually; that is, using one text or verse and then building a sermon around the theme of the verse. The Plymouth Brethren did not follow this method, but introduced a verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, consecutive exposition of the Scriptures. Moreover, they preached the Bible as one unified book. They demonstrated that the prophecies of the Old Testament and New Testament teaching could not be isolated from one another, but rather both were essential to the proper understanding of the Bible. They took seriously the historical- grammatic method of interpretation of Scripture, and labored in the exposition of types, dispensations, and prophecies of Scripture. They were recognized authorities on the original languages of the Scriptures, trends within theology, and biblical history and culture. This spoken teaching of these Brethren was in due course recorded using shorthand, and these notes were soon edited and published. These published works soon gained wide acceptance as sound commentaries on the books of Scripture. This style of preaching was a refreshing change, stimulating spiritual growth and stirring great interest in the Scriptures. This unique approach virtually transformed the method in which the Bible was

proclaimed and has influenced expository preaching well into our present day. Church historian Dr. C. Norman Kraus describes how the Plymouth Brethren's expository preaching remarkably transformed evangelicalism of the late 1800's: "The striking feature of their ministry was their simple exposition of Bible passages. They did not preach a series of sermons on different topics or hold series of evangelistic meetings, as Moody did. Rather, they held Bible study meetings. The ministry of Malachi Taylor, who died in 1897 and was succeeded for two years by A. C. Gaebelein, is a good example of how they worked. For a period of about twelve years he held a daily Bible study meeting in Temple Court in New York City. Darby himself gave a series of studies at Farwell Hall at D. L. Moody's invitation. It was this method, taken no doubt from the Brethren's example, that was expanded and used so effectively by James H. Brookes and his associates in Bible conferences all over the country." (2) The efforts of these Brethren expositors had a significant impact on L. S. Chafer, H. A. Ironside, and the founders at Dallas Theological Seminary and at Moody Bible Institute, influencing the expository preaching of a whole new generation.

The Importance of Expository Preaching

As expository preaching was given great emphasis by the early "Plymouth Brethren", leading evangelical preachers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean were quick to see its great importance. As expository preaching began to gain acceptance, the spiritual lives of many Christians were revitalized. This expository preaching movement may have contributed in part to the deep interest in the Scofield Reference Bible, the

surge in missionary interest, and the Bible Prophecy Conference Movement of the late 1800's and early 1900's. How does expository preaching transform lives? Why is expository preaching so important? Alfred P. Gibbs explains vividly the importance of expository preaching when he writes, "Expository preaching puts the supreme emphasis on the Word of God. It magnifies the Word of God, and gives it the place of supreme authority...this type of preaching serves the far better purpose of edifying the people of God as the Scriptures are applied to their everyday lives. It provides an opportunity for speaking on many passages that would otherwise be neglected. By means of this method of preaching, little known truths will be given their rightful place, and it will be demonstrated that all Scripture is essential to furnish the man of God." (3) The well-placed emphasis on expository preaching is a great tool in the hand of God for spiritual renewal.

Henry Moorhouse and D. L. Moody

The faithful exposition of the Scriptures was the passion of the early Plymouth Brethren and they were tireless in passing on this deeply-held conviction. When Moody visited Dublin in 1867, he was told of the preaching of a zealous young Brethren evangelist named Harry Moorhouse. By this time, Moorhouse had established the reputation of being one of the leading evangelists in England. Initially, Moody was not very impressed with young Moorhouse. To Moody, Moorhouse appeared to be so young and frail. However, a few months later, while back in Chicago, Moody sent a note to Moorhouse telling him that if he was ever in Chicago, he was welcome to preach at Farwell Hall--not expecting him to

ever come. When Moody was in Dublin, he took notice of the expository method of preaching used by the Plymouth Brethren during meetings at the Mildmay Conference and at Merrion Hall. Henry Moorhouse's ministry was also greatly influenced by the very men Moody heard preach in Dublin. Young Henry Moorhouse had been schooled in the art of preaching by Brethren pulpit giants like John Hambleton, F. C. Bland, and Richard Weaver. Their preaching was so much different than his usual sermons. Henry Moorhouse was a preacher of the Scriptures; every point was backed up with Scripture. Moody's wife, Emma, upon hearing Moorhouse, once commented, "I like Moorhouse's preaching very, very much. He is very different from you. He backs everything up he says by the Bible." Moody's approach to preaching, at that time, was to string together in a sermon a number of detached thoughts and texts from the Bible. Moody saw that there was something missing in his preaching. He longed for a more biblical ministry. On one occasion, young Moorhouse challenged Moody, "You are sailing on the wrong tack. If you will change your course, and learn to preach God's words instead of your own, He will make you a great power." The Spirit gave him no rest. As a result Moody now saw more clearly than ever that he needed to preach Scripture-based messages. The Lord had plans to use Henry Moorhouse in Moody's life in an even greater way. When Moorhouse first arrived in Chicago, Moody was unexpectedly called out of town. He asked Moorhouse if he would preach for him at Farwell Hall. Moorhouse began preaching on the subject of the love of God. Moorhouse preached nightly for one solid week using the text of John 3:16. When Moody returned, he was greatly surprised to find Moorhouse

still preaching. As he listened to Moorhouse, he discovered that Moorhouse was still preaching on the same text, and that souls were being wonderfully saved. Moody confided to a friend, "I never knew up to that time that God loved us so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out; I could not keep back the tears. I just drank it in. So did the crowded congregation. I tell you there is one thing that draws above everything else in the world and that is love." (4)

The Challenge Of Expository Preaching

Early Plymouth Brethren expositors evidenced a deep love for Christ, a faithfulness to the Scriptures, and godly diligence in the exposition of the Word. These human messengers of the oracles of God were powerfully gripped by the realization that they were handling divine truth. Therefore, faithfulness and spiritual care were essential in setting forth the truth of the Scriptures. Many hours of careful study were devoted to understanding the truth of God. These expositors, armed with the Word of God in their hearts and skilled with gift from above, brought untold blessing to many. Many were challenged by the godliness of their character, the breadth of their knowledge of the holy Word, and their commitment to the truth of God at all costs. Many who heard their ministry were changed forever. Harold St. John writes of his personal experience as he listened to one of these expositors, "I remember in my youth how the late William Kelly used to come up to London and deliver his annual series of lectures. He would take up perhaps seven lectures on Isaiah, or on the captivity books, and each year he would lecture on some broad portion of Scripture. He spent

months preparing his lectures and there would be queues outside the largest hall they could get, and the good man would speak in a very studied English for over an hour, simply opening the Word of God." (5) As Harry Moorhouse challenged D. L. Moody to the art of expository preaching, and William Kelly challenged his hearers to excellency in the ministry, likewise this same charge is needed today. Preaching is the appointed way to bring men and women face to face with the truth of God's Word. It is God's method of faithfully proclaiming the whole counsel of God and to fully furnish men and women of God for service. The apostle Paul exhorts Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2); "...manifested His Word through preaching, which is committed to me according to the commandment of God, our Saviour" (Titus 1:3). May we take up this important challenge to passionately preach the Word of God, to proclaim it expositionally, faithfully making the truth of God known to a new generation.

Endnotes

1. Ernest Sandeen, Roots of Fundamentalism, (Grand Rapids, MI,: Baker Books, 1978), p. 166 2. C. Norman Kraus, Dispensationalism in America, (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1958), p. 47 3. A. P. Gibbs, The Preacher and His Preaching, (Kansas City: Walterick Publishers, 1964), p. 243 4. Richard E. Day, Bush Aglow: Life of Moody, (Philadelphia, PA: Judson, 1945), p. 145 5. Patricia St. John, Harold St. John: A Portrait by his Daughter (London:Pickering and Inglis, 1959) p. 141

Imminent Return of Christ

“Behold, I come quickly…” Revelation 22:7

The soon coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His bride, the church, occupies a large and important position in the word of God. The Old and New Testaments in type and teaching fully expound this doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. In the writings of the Gospels, the Epistles, and Revelation the Lord Himself and the Apostles affirm, exhort and instruct concerning it in exact detail. This doctrine has long stirred the church to separation from the world and holy living, and has been used to thrust out missionaries into the far corners of the globe. Yet the scope of this doctrine extends further than a powerful challenge to holy living and service; it is also a tender comfort to the soul amid the sorrows and anguish of life. Christ’s words to His disciples have long been a balm for many in sorrow. “Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; so that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-2). Seasoned saints in the twilight of life have often testified to the transforming power of the “Blessed Hope” and “Trump of God”. In emphasizing the practical effect of this doctrine in the life of a believer, theologian Dr. Alva McClain writes, “To the churches on earth Christ gives a thrice-repeated reminder of something which must never be forgotten; for it will give courage in the hour of battle, strength in our weakness, and hope in the hour of despair. Let us

hear Him as He speaks: ‘Behold I come quickly’(Rev. 22:7); ‘Behold, I come quickly’ (Rev. 22:12); ‘Surely, I come quickly’ (Rev. 22:21).” (1)

However, the doctrine of imminency is not merely a great comfort and motivation to the Christian, but it is essential in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. A true understanding of the offices of Christ, the nature of the Church, the divine purposes of the Great Tribulation, the Millennium and the eternal state hinge upon the careful interpretation of biblical prophecy. It is the very key which unlocks portions of the Bible that have long remained hidden by medieval theology. A one-time professor of Systematic Theology at Wheaton College, Dr. Henry Thiessen, writes passionately about the doctrines crucial importance to Bible interpretation, “The recognition of the fundamental character of the doctrine of the Lord’s return is the key to the Scriptures. Many Bible doctrines, ordinances, promises, and types cannot be fully understood except in the light of the doctrine of the Lord’s return.” (2)

Unfortunately, down through the centuries the importance of the imminent return of Christ for the church has eluded many Christians. Frequently, in theological works on the study of “Last Things”, especially during the Middle Ages and Reformation period, the subject of the personal return of Christ for the church was completely omitted. It is only within the last 170 years that this truth has been clearly expounded. Bible teachers from among the so-called Plymouth Brethren have been recognized as leaders in recovering this important truth. Referring to this recovery of the truths of the Lord’s return, respected Bible teacher Dr. Renald Showers writes, “During the

19th century the Plymouth Brethren including one of their key leaders, John Nelson Darby, played a very significant role in developing, systematizing and spreading Dispensational Theology." (3)

However, respected teachers and preachers from Reformed and Baptist denominations have developed untenable teachings through a misinterpretation of the words of Christ. These interpretations have produced more heat than light, and thereby many sincere believers have been robbed of their joy and motivation for Christian service. Although the number of these prophetic interpretations has been many, some have been more widespread than others.

1. The Misinterpretation of the Coming—The Holy Spirit at Pentecost., It has been taught by some that the return of Christ is the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Early church fathers Hilary, Chrysostom, Euthymus and Theophylact taught that Matthew 16:28 pertained not to the coming of the Son of man in His Kingdom, but to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Bible teacher Albert Barnes, well-known author of "Barnes' Notes of the Bible", believes that this verse has a partial fulfillment on the day of Pentecost. However, did not the Lord Himself say, "A little while, and ye behold Me no more and again a little while, ye shall see Me" (John 16:16)?

2. The Misinterpretation of the Coming—The Death of a Believer Well-known expositor Matthew Henry wrote that the phrase "ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:42) refers to the day of a believer's death. He writes, "We know not the day of our death, we cannot know how long we have to live nor how little

time we have to live. Concerning both, we are kept in uncertainty, that we may every day expect that which may come any day." (4) Was this our Lord's intended meaning when He uttered those words? A careful examination reveals that, biblically, the difference between death and the Lord's coming is great. Death in the scriptures is referred to as an "enemy"; but the Lord's return is said to be a "Blessed Hope". At death we dig a grave; at the Lord's return we leave the grave behind. Thankfully, today most Bible students have set aside this ill-reasoned prophetic interpretation. Despite the fact that many have set forth unsound theories concerning the scriptural evidence for the Lord's return and that today quaint theories and wild speculations continue to assault us regularly through popular Christian radio and the printed page, the serious Christian need not despair. The biblical proof in the New Testament for the Lord's return is extensive. The New Testament Christian lived in watchful expectancy of Jesus Christ's imminent return. The "twinkling eye", the "shout" and the "Father's house" have all served to stir the heart to joyful anticipation. The apostle Paul writes, "...from whence (heaven) we look for the Saviour" (Phil. 3:20); "Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7); "Ye turned to God...to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9, 10); "Looking for...the glorious appearing of...our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13); "unto them that look for him shall He appear" (Heb. 9:28). Not only was the expectation of His imminent return clearly taught by Christ and His apostles, but it was also taught that to expect otherwise was characteristic of an unfaithful servant. "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming..." (Matthew 24:48) "...be ye therefore ready

also, for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" Luke 12:40). Moreover, the belief in the imminent return of Christ constrains Christians and churches to develop a worldwide missionary vision of reaching the lost for Christ. Our burden for the lost should be even greater, considering the nearness of the Lord's return. Since we have more reason to believe that Christ will come to receive us to Himself in our lifetime than in any other time in church history, with eagerness we ought to seek to reach the lost with the good news of Christ. Dr. Timothy Weber, a church historian at Yale University, has noted that the doctrine of imminency has been a great incentive in world missions since the rise of premillennial teaching in the 1840's. He writes, "By the 1920's (dispensational) premillennialists were claiming that they made up 'an overwhelming majority' of the missions movement. Others estimated that believers in the imminent second coming made up from 75 to 80 percent of the missionary force world-wide…American premillennialists were better represented on the mission fields than in the home churches…Instead of cutting missionary involvement, premillennialism increased it." (5) Therefore, we suggest that the best cure for spiritual apathy and lethargy among Christians is an aggressive prophetic Bible teaching program in the local church stressing the imminent return of Christ. The greatest incentive for holy living is for able ministers of the word to boldly assert that the glorified, holy Son of God may at any moment leave the glories of the Father's house and re-enter the closing days of world history to call the church, the body of Christ, to be with Him forever.

The imminent return of Christ should have a tremendous and profound effect upon the values, priorities and activities of every serious Christian. This doctrine provides every Christian with a great hope for the future, a comfort in sorrow and a steadfast purpose for today. Dear Christian, the Lord's coming is near—perhaps today? Are you ready to meet Him?

Endnotes (1) Alva McClain, Greatness of the Kingdom, (Moody Press, Chicago, MI 1968), p. 515 (2) Henry Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), p. 442 (3) Renald Showers, There Really is a Difference, (Friends of Israel, Bellmawr, NJ, 1990), p. 28 (4) Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary, (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1991), p. 294 (5) Timothy Weber, Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming, 1875-1982, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI,1983), p. 81

Is There a New Testament Church Blueprint?

On April 13, 1970 the astronauts of the Apollo 13 lifted off on a journey to explore the surface of the moon. Although the mission began with all the expectation and excitement of Apollo 12, all hopes were soon dashed when an explosion blew a gaping hole in the spacecraft's #2 oxygen tank. In abrupt fashion, the Apollo 13 mission was scrubbed, as 205,000 miles of space separated the men from earth. If that was not enough, the unit which filtered the carbon dioxide in the lunar module was insufficient to support three astronauts; a make-shift air purifier would be needed. Orders came from mission control in Houston for the men to create two air purification units, using spare materials from within the command module, dubbed the "Odyssey." They were ordered to explicitly follow the verbal directions. As the astronauts listened to scientists in Houston and worked according to their instructions, they were able to build the needed units. (1). They followed a unique design and it saved their lives.

This incident demonstrates the importance of structural design in the realm of science and also serves to illustrate for us the significance of the unique design of the church. Since intelligent design was crucial in a technologically advanced spacecraft, how much more then, on a higher level, should the principle of unique design be needful in the New Testament church? The consideration of this question is essential for those serious about establishing churches according to the biblical mandate. For the church of God is a divine

institution, framed in the eternal counsels of God, established by the Lord Jesus Christ, and indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament apostles and prophets were divinely called to lay its foundations, and their inspired writings form its only standard and rule. When God created the vast universe in all its raw beauty and majesty, He simply spoke and the world came into being; through the power of resurrection, God brought life out of death by His word; in giving sight to the blind and speech to the dumb, He reached out in compassion and touched, and it was so. However, in establishing the church, the cost was greater, God sent forth His Son to give His life for it! (Eph. 5:25)

The Blueprint's Importance

Unfortunately, many evangelicals today are arguing that the form and structure of the church are unimportant. They contend that the debate itself distracts the church from more crucial issues of spiritual life and the evangelistic mission to the lost. Although there is a seed of truth in these arguments, it would be a serious mistake to render the structure of the local church trivial and insignificant. It would be an even greater mistake to introduce a new and more modern structure to replace the New Testament pattern. Highlighting this danger, respected Bible teacher and author, G. H. Lang, writes, "Nor is there need, nor can there be a hope, of improving upon the Lord's ordering. He knew perfectly the purposes which His church is to serve on earth, and knew fully the conditions of human affairs amidst which the church must work; and He instituted through His apostles the very best arrangements and methods for

doing the intended work under the given conditions. To assume otherwise is to impute folly unto God." (2). A careful study of the New Testament will convince us that we cannot, and must not, treat the church pattern as merely cosmetic or irrelevant.

The great weight of biblical teaching shows that it is of the utmost importance that a the church be governed after the principles and patterns of the New Testament. At the very outset of the New Testament, it is striking that the Lord Jesus Christ through the apostles labored to establish only one institution, and this was the His church. Although important, they did not seek to establish Bible colleges, evangelistic organizations, or social welfare organizations; but rather, they labored tirelessly to establish churches. The Apostle Paul stated, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon" (1 Cor. 3:10). This indicates that the local church lies at the very heart of God's program for the church today. Indifference to the role and doctrine of the church is certainly indifference to the plan and counsels of God. The local church matters to God, and it ought to matter to us. Undeniably, the church was intended to be a relentless lightbearer of God's truth. To this end the word of God states that an assembly of Christians is "...the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Therefore an assembly must be on guard that absolutely nothing take place which will hide or diminish the shining forth of the truth of God. The Lord would not leave the church to her own devices to accomplish this mission. The divinely-given blueprint would be used. The language of the New

Testament indicates that there was but one divine pattern, and that it was unwaveringly followed.

The Blueprint and 1 Corinthians

The calling and ministry of the apostle Paul was unique. He was singularly gifted to expound with keen insight the principle of an enduring church pattern. In 1 Corinthians, he writes concerning such a principle, which is applicable to all churches in all regions and all cultural backgrounds in every time period. * 1 Cor. 4:17 – "...my ways which are in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." * 1 Cor 7:17 – "... hath called every one, so let him walk....so ordain I in all churches." * 1 Cor. 11:16 – "...if any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." * 1 Cor. 14:33 – "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." * 1 Cor. 14:34 – "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak..." It is noteworthy that the apostle drew out instruction from the well of one divine blueprint for all that he taught and ordained and commanded in the churches. In 1 Cor. 4:17 he states, that these things "I teach everywhere in every church". That must be understood to mean the churches in every geographical region, in every linguistically diverse region, and in every culture. The New Testament indicates that Paul was directly or indirectly involved in the establishment and development of at least 18 different local churches in 12 geographic and culturally diverse areas. This would indicate that one divine, cross-cultural, trans-geographical church blueprint was usedby the apostle, and therefore, by necessity, should be used and valued by all Christians.

One may question if there is sufficient internal biblical evidence that would make the New Testament pattern incumbent churches today. A careful review of God's word will reveal five principles which attest to the timeless constitution of the New Testament church.

THE BLUEPRINT WAS PRESCRIBED

The qualifications for elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7), the order of worship and ministry of the word (1 Cor. 11-14, 1 Tim 4), and assembly discipline (1 Cor. 5:9-13), are all prescribed in orderly detail (not just described, as if adherence was merely optional). Notice Paul's language in listing the requirements of an elder. He writes, "a bishop must be blameless…" (1 Tim 3:2); likewise in Titus, "For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God." (Titus 1:7). Similarly, concerning financial giving, Paul writes, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches…" (1 Cor. 16:1). Further, concerning discipline within the local church, Paul writes, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother thatwalketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thess. 3:6). Therefore, the divine blueprint of the New Testament church, which was received through revelation by the apostles, is obligatory, and does not consist of optional principles for the followers of Jesus Christ.

THE BLUEPRINT WAS COMMANDED

Paul makes known the spiritual challenge and responsibility of the divine blueprint when he commands Timothy, "These things I write…that you may know how

you must conduct yourself in the house of God." (1 Tim. 3:14-15). In the Greek text the verb "must" (Gk. dei) is in the imperative mood, which indicates a command. It is the manner of the apostles not simply to suggest but to command. It then follows that only when the divine blueprint is followed can the church be all that God intends. Therefore to Titus, Paul writes, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority" (Titus 2:15). The teaching of the New Testament was not simply to recommend, but to command.

THE BLUEPRINT WAS OBEYED

Time and again assemblies of Christians in the New Testament are seen practicing the biblical principles taught to them by the apostles. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." (Acts 2:42). Moreover, their obedience surpassed established cultural and geographical boundaries. Concerning this principle the apostle writes, "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2). The last phrase of this verse, "as I delivered them to you," is noteworthy. The Corinthians did not comprehend fully the meaning of the apostle's teaching, for he goes on to say, "I would have you know" (1 Cor. 11:3). But they "held fast" the teaching of the apostle according to the letter and spirit in which it was given. For this response the apostle extends to them the warmest of commendations when he writes, "Now I praise you." It might also be added, how commendable it is today for an entire assembly or individuals to labor to obey the Word of God, not because all understand every theological implication, but because it is a commandment of God!

THE BLUEPRINT WAS ENFORCED

In the New Testament, assemblies were corrected when they deviated from the order commanded to them by the apostles. The epistles of Paul are full of vivid examples. In Galatians the correction comes concerning the controversy between law and grace that sought to splinter the church; in 1 and 2 Timothy there are warnings concerning false teachers in the church; in 1 Corinthians there is correction concerning unbridled personalities and moral and doctrinal decay in the church. Concerning the Corinthian situation, Paul sums up the principle that would serve as a rudder to steer the church through the theological tempests of the day. Once again drawing truth from the blueprint he had received, he writes in 1 Cor. 14:37, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord’s commandment.

THE BLUEPRINT IS CHRIST-CENTERED

Assembly order is not bound by culture or time because its source is Christ, the living Head and Builder of the church. He is the focus and attraction of all who belong to the New Testament church. Hearts full of competing interests must give way to hearts devoted to Christ. Thus, the pattern Christ has established best enables the assembly to faithfully respond to the will and guidance of the living Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is so much in the religious world that desires to usurp Christ from His rightful place. Sadly, this is no more than man’s attempt to put gaudy tinsel upon fine gold. A voice from the past offers a warning to the church of today concerning this timeless pattern. C. H.

Mackintosh writes, “We are too prone to regard the Word of God as insufficient for the most minute details connected with His worship and service. This is a great mistake—a mistake which has proved the fruitful source of evils and errors in the professing church. The Word of God is amply sufficient for everything as regards the order and rule of the assembly. And, further, be it remembered, that the divine glory cannot connect itself with aught that is not according to the divine pattern.” (3). Consequently those who would follow this truth will find that they must also bear scorn and reproach for their obedience. However, biblical orthodoxy will lead to spiritual blessing and reverent worship. A proper understanding of Christ’s desire His redeemed people will result in obedience to His word and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head and gathering Center of the assembly.

Endnotes (1). Andrew Chaikin, A Man on the Moon, (NY, NY: Viking Books, 1993), p.320 (2). G.H.Lang, The Churches of God, (London: C. J. Thynne & Jarvis, 1934), p.9 (3). C. H. Mackintosh, Notes on Exodus, (NY: Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), p.271

One Naturism

Reformed theology differs greatly from Dispensational theology in many respects, not the least of which is whether the believer possesses a sin nature. Holy Scripture speaks carefully and in great detail about the conflict between our sinful nature and the new nature. Some theological traditions have not always fully acknowledged the biblical distinction between the new nature and the sinful nature in the believer. When an unbeliever trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, God imparts His very life and moral nature within that individual. Despite a corrupt sin nature, Christians are enabled to experience a dynamic life for Christ through the indwelling new nature. This new nature cannot sin because it is born of God (1 Jn. 3:9). However, current Reformed theology argues vigorously that the believer cannot have both a new nature and the sin nature simultaneously. This, it is assumed, introduces an untenable spiritual contradiction within the believer, which causes confusion in the Christian life. This view, called “One-Naturism”, is rapidly gaining adherents in Reformed circles and is also making inroads among those in other theological traditions. Two of the most notable non-reformed teachers to espouse this view are David C. Needham, of Multnomah School of the Bible, and popular author Neil Anderson.

The One-Nature View Defined

Among Reformed Bible teachers, the view that a Christian does not possess an old nature has rapidly become the majority view. During the last fifty years, Reformed teachers have stepped forward, ardently

stressing that believers do not possess an old sinful nature. They teach that the “old self”, or “old nature”, or the “flesh” at regeneration ceases to be present in the body of the believer. The believer does not possess two natures, the old sinful nature and the new divine nature, but rather one nature received at conversion. Reformed Baptist author and preacher John MacArthur, from Panorama City, CA, writes, “I believe it is a serious misunderstanding to think of the believer as having both an old and new nature. Believers do not have dual personalities…there is no such thing as an old nature in the believer.” (1) In another place he explains, “At new birth a person becomes a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Cor. 5:17). It is not simply that he receives something new, but that he becomes someone new …The new nature is not added to the old nature, but replaces it. The transformed person is a completely new “I”. Biblical terminology, then, does not say that a Christian has two different natures. He has but one nature, the new nature in Christ. The old self dies and the new self lives; they do not coexist.” (2) This unorthodox view has been embraced by most current Reformed teachers and theologians. However, it must be noted that this view is of recent origin, and was not the view of the majority of Reformers from the time of the 1500’s to our present century. In our present era Reformed professor Robert Dabney taught this view in the late 1800’s and Reformed theologian B. B. Warfield espoused this view in his work Christ is Lord. Many observers trace this view’s rise in popularity back to the 1940’s to the teaching and writings of Professor John Murray (1898-1975), who was associated for many years with Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Yet we must reiterate that this

view is a new view, a view that was not held by the majority of the early Reformers, nor is it held by leading Dispensational theologians. Anthony Hoekema, a respected Calvinist theologian, who holds the one-nature view, candidly concedes that this view is new and was not held by the Reformers. He writes, “On the question of these two selves, Reformed theologians differ. Most of them, particularly those who taught and wrote some years ago, hold that the old self and the new self are distinguishable aspects of the believer. Before conversion believers had an old self; at the time of conversion, however, they put on the new self—without totally losing the old self. Older Reformed teachers, such as John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, Charles Hodge, and William Hendriksen, held the dual nature view.” (3) This issue is not merely an academic exercise, but one in which clear, biblical thinking is needed. Right thinking in this issue will help to establish the believer concerning the doctrines of sin, sanctification of the believer, and the appropriation of our rich spiritual resources in Christ.

The Reformed Defense of the One-Nature View

Current Reformed writers are convinced that this new view is rooted in New Testament teaching. The much-debated chapter six of Romans, verses 1 through 12, are set forth as the foundation for “one-naturism”. Again Anthony Hoekema, a leading proponent of this view, explains, “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him, so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”(Rom. 6:6 NASB). What does Paul mean here by the “old self”? John Murray suggests that this expression designates “the person in his unity as talking about a

totality: the total person enslaved by sin—what we all are by nature". That "person enslaved by sin," he is saying, was crucified with Christ. When Christ died on the cross, He dealt a death blow to the old self we once were. Given the meaning of "crucified," Romans 6:6 states with unmistakable clarity that we who are in Christ, who are one with Him in His death, are no longer the old selves we once were." (4) This view raises an important question. Does the Bible teach that our old self, that is, our old nature, has been dealt such a death blow that this nature no longer exists? Or, on the other hand, should we understand our crucifixion with Christ to be a legal judgment upon our old manner of life? These and other questions need to be asked and thoughtfully considered as we look into this important issue. Able Bible teachers have understood this "old self" that was put to death to be our old manner of life, that is, all we were before we came to Christ by faith. Bible teachers have expressed that this is the suitable view when all aspects of Bible interpretation are taken into account. Dispensationalist Dr. John Walvoord, the former President of Dallas Seminary, explaining the traditional meaning of the phrase "that our old man is crucified", writes, "There is some confusion with the terms "old man" and "new man". This problem can be resolved if it is understood that "old man" and "new " man are references not to the old or new nature, or self, but rather to the old manner of life, which is an expression of the old nature, and the new manner of life, which is an expression of the new nature." (5)

Why Do Believers Sin?

Why do believers sin? This is the most difficult question for proponents of the "one-nature" view. However, for

opponents of this One-naturism, it is one of their strongest arguments. If, as Reformed writers tell us, the old sinful nature no longer exists in a Christian and if believers have only one nature, our new nature in Christ which is not subject to sin and can't sin—then the logical question arises in our minds: why does a believer sin? Reformed teachers explain that, although the old sinful nature no longer exists in the Christian, the ingrained patterns and habits of the old life are, nonetheless, deeply imbedded into our minds; and it is these sinful patterns which cause sin in our lives. One writer explains, "Where does sin mount its attack to keep me from doing what I really want to do? Your flesh, that part of you which was trained to live independently of God… memories, habits, conditioned responses, and thought patterns ingrained in you. It is your responsibility to crucify the flesh by repatterning your old thoughts by allowing your mind to be renewed (Rom. 12:2)." (6) With all due respect, we must differ and suggest that this novel view as to why a Christian sins strains logic and more importantly, is at odds with Holy Scripture. Firstly, allow us to consider the unreasonableness of this view. The ingrained patterns, habits, and responses of sin that are formed in a believer may account for sin in the lives of those who come to Christ at an older age, adults who have had time for sin to form deep-seated patterns in their lives. But how do we explain the sin in the lives of those who come to faith in Christ as young children. Certainly, they have not had the same deeply ingrained sin patterns as older adults. Yet, by their own admisssion, they sin just as often, and in the same ways, as believers who come to Christ at a much older age. Furthermore, how does it explain new sins in the life of a believer as he becomes older? A person who has come

to Christ at age ten, for example, does not have the ingrained patterns of drug abuse, adultery, fornication, and sexual immorality; yet in the lives of many believers who come to Christ at a young age, these sins do appear in their lives as adults. This view fails to logically explain the cause of sin in believers. This view also contradicts the testimony of Holy Scripture. What does the Bible say concerning why a believer sins? In addressing this very point, the Bible sets forth vividly the source of sin. Paul, the apostle, confesses the reason for his sin, "...sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing" (Rom. 7:17-18). Paul further explains, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21). What is the biblical reason for the cause of sin? We must conclude that our sinful disposition, that is our sin nature, is the reason for our sin. We sin because we are sinners possessing a sin nature.We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that sinful living is the result of mere habits and ingrained thought patterns.

Our Sin Nature Will Become Progressively Weaker

Reformed theology teaches that although the sin nature is no longer present within the believer, the "remnants of original sin" are present. These remnants are the former patterns of thinking and old sinful habits. Therefore, it is taught that as the Christian matures in Christ, the grip of these fleshly habits will become less and less. Reformed theologian John Gerstner explains, "The Spirit of God continues to work faith in the regenerate and they therein persevere in good works, always struggling against the remnants of their original sin whose guilt is pardoned but whose power is decreasingly felt until destroyed at death." (7) In like

manner, Robert L. Dabney, the reformed theologian and former professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton, writes, "...And if the old nature never loses any of its strength until death...if then any professed believer finds the "old man" in undiminished strength, this is proof that he has never put on the new man." (8) Is this true? One of the best ways to examine this teaching is to examine the life of the Apostle Paul. All Christians would agree that the Apostle Paul should be held up as an example of a mature believer, one who has certainly progressed in the faith. If this doctrine of a lessening of the pull of the flesh in the experience of mature believers were true, then we would see it evident in the life of the apostle. However, the very opposite is seen, for we read in Romans, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not... I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:18-19). The Apostle Paul clearly expresses the working of the flesh as an integral part of his Christian experience; and instead of a lessening and diminishing of the power of the sinful nature, it is seen in all its evil strength. It is pulling, tearing at the apostle in its attempts to bring him to sin. Instead of language that would indicate the simple workings of the "remnants of original sin", old habits, and thought patterns that are lessening in this mature saint of God. We see that as a Christian progresses in maturity and spiritual growth, his old nature continues to assail him with sinful desires. The old nature can never be reformed. However, by yielding to the indwelling Spirit of God, and taking up the weapons of prayer and the Word of God, the urges of the old nature can and will be resisted. This is the true path to victory.

Endnotes (1) John MacArthur, Freedom from Sin—Rom. 6-7, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), pp. 31-32 (2) John MacArthur, Ephesians, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987) p. 164 (3) Anthony Hoekema, Five Views on Sanctification, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), p. 78. (4) Anthony Hoekema, Five Views on Sanctification, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), p.79 (5) John Walvoord, Five Views on Sanctification, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), p.100-101 (6) Neil Anderson, Victory over Darkness, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), p. 83-84, 75, 45-46 (7) John Gerstner, Dispensationalism,Wrongly Dividing theWord of Truth, (Wolgemuth & Wyatt, Brentwood, TN, 1991), p. 147 (8) Robert L. Dabney, quoted in John MacArthur,Vanishing Conscience, (Waco, TX, Word, 1995), p. 219

Our Home Bible Study Heritage

For over 150 years those known as “Plymouth Brethren” were renown for their command of the Scriptures. This movement exerted great influence over their generation, and their impact continues to be felt in the church. They were held in high esteem by leaders of many denominations. A. T. Pierson, a Baptist minister and author, wrote concerning the spiritual stature of the brethren, “and in those days there were giants in the land.” He was referring to men such as John Nelson Darby, C. H. Macintosh, William Kelly and others. The spiritual power of the early brethren was unmistakable. The movement bore the marks of a mighty work of God. Powerful Bible teaching by deeply spiritual men, earnest prayer, and evangelistic zeal characterized this movement. God’s hand of blessing was evident. One writer reported that by the year 1878, 50 years after the first assembly was established, there were 1,388 gatherings of believers in 29 different lands.1 Many have speculated as to the reasons behind this remarkable spiritual growth. On a human level much must be attributed to the unique manner in which these believers met together. These meetings were often called “cottage meetings” or “reading meetings”. The purpose of these meetings could be for teaching or evangelism. These meetings contributed greatly to the growth of the assemblies. Andrew Miller, an evangelist and author explains from first-hand knowledge on the use of these meetings. “Reading meetings have been the principle means employed by the ‘brethren’ for introducing and spreading truth. Beyond question, they have been greatly used of the Lord for giving both an

accurate and extensive knowledge of the divine word. No other kind of meeting so stimulates the Christian to study constantly his Bible."2 These meetings attracted scores of people from all walks of life. J. N. Darby wrote to a friend, "We have set up weekly scripture reading meetings, two of them in the most worldly homes in Limerick. Our only present difficulty is to keep the people out."3 It wasn't uncommon for 25-30 people to gather in a home for a Bible reading. The atmosphere in the home was warm and friendly. Visitors who came felt at once welcome and comfortable. Often British "tea" or a small meal was served to all before the meeting. A time of conversation followed the meal, in which the hosts and leaders would talk to the newcomers and others. This was an opportunity to discern whether guests were unbelievers, and with others, to discover their spiritual needs and problems. Andrew Miller writes about his first visit to a home meeting around the year 1860. "Being invited by a friend to meet a few Christians for a Bible reading, we accordingly went on the evening named. In observing the friends as they assembled, to the number about 30. The subjects of conversation before "tea" seemed to concern the Lord's work in different meetings. As for general news nothing was said, and the mention of politics would have seemed sheer profanity."4 These meetings were held on any day of the week and could be held at any hour. There was full liberty to meet together as the Lord led. Meetings might be held at the noon hour in a shipyard or in the early morning or, as was most common, in the evening. Napoleon Noel writes of a meeting that began early Lord's day morning in London. "A Bible reading was begun in the year 1845 at Mr. G.V. Wigram's suggestion, on Lord's day mornings, and they continued successfully

for many years with great blessing. Someone would go at about 6:30 A.M. and put the kettle on the stove and cut the bread and butter. Bread, butter, milk and other items already being provided on the previous night by the caretaker. At 7:30 there was a prayer meeting, then breakfast was served at 8:15. Then the Bible reading was held at 9:00; attendance varied from 15 to 25 or more, and occasionally J.N. Darby would come and teach. At 10:30 everyone went for a walk and came back at 11:00 for the Lord's supper. After 11:00 it would be difficult to find an empty seat for the meeting was much valued and greatly enjoyed."5 The success of these meetings did not rest merely on its method. There was an overwhelming conviction that spiritual blessing came from hearing God speak through the scriptures. It was the "thus saith the Lord" that they hungered to hear, not the "what does this verse mean to you?" style of Bible study as we often hear in our present day. Godly men spent hours pouring over the scriptures in preparation for the reading meeting. It was evident in those who spoke that deep spiritual learning came not from casual reading, but from long hours of earnest prayerful study. A university professor of our day writes of William Kelly, "It is the manifest mastery of Greek usage which make his commentaries, especially those on Paul's epistles so valuable. It was his wide and accurate acquaintance with Greek usage that made problem texts plain to him. It is not knowledge gained by a grammar book or dictionary but an acquaintance with Greek usage which is the fruit of long and patient study."6 The meetings were also marked by prepared leadership. Able and godly men led the meetings and it was soon apparent that they had spent considerable time in the "place of the Most High." The meetings were usually conducted in

one of two ways: either the most knowledgeable man in the scriptures expounded from the Bible, or discussion and questions were directed to him, which he then addressed in the course of the study. A friend writes of a cottage meeting led by Robert Chapman, “In the evening we went to a cottage meeting and for the first time I heard Robert Chapman expound the scriptures. Deep called unto deep as he warmed to his subject. The impression made on my mind is all I can remember, as his bible closed I felt like an infant in the knowledge of God.”7 In that day there was a deep hunger and enjoyment in the preaching of God’s word. Regarding the details of the discussion-question study, Andrew Miller explains, “At about 7:00 P.M., a chapter was named and all turned to it. There was a free interchange of thought as to its meaning, connection and importance and it was apparent who was the most richly instructed in the word, as the questions in time were addressed to him. After a hymn and prayer the company dispersed; it was about 10:00 P.M. 8 The teaching at these meetings was conducted in a manner that is in striking contrast with our day. Today when one gathers in a home for a Bible study the leader asks questions of the learners and the learners teach each other. Ofttimes these studies digress into sharing experiences and feelings from the workplace or the home, comments far removed from the scripture being studied. The sad result is a scarcity of real understanding of God’s word. It is the distinct and unclouded proclamation of the scriptures that challenges the hearts and instructs the minds of the people of God in every age.

Within a short period of time the ministry of the leading teachers came to be in great demand. Soon their spoken

ministry was reproduced upon the printed page and distributed abroad. The rich ministry known to many in the sitting rooms of England was now transported into the reading rooms of many lands. The world shall never know of all the lives that have been touched and the rich blessing that these numerous volumes have had. Evangelist Billy Graham recounts how the writings of the “brethren” touched his life, stating, “When I was in my teens my mother and father were attending a “brethren” Bible class in Charlotte, N.C. and they fervently studied their Scofield Bibles. My mother began to order Christian books from a New York mail order house and becoming an avid reader, there were always good books lying around the house to read.”9 As tracts and books were read, the ministry became a rich source of blessing to many. Some traveled the seas to be under the teaching first hand. Many of the leading teachers ventured out into larger arenas to accommodate the growing numbers. Harold St. John writes of a visit to one of the larger meetings, “I remember in my youth how the late William Kelly used to come up to London and deliver his annual series of lectures. He would take up perhaps seven lectures on Isaiah, or on the captivity books, and each year he would lecture on some broad portion of scripture. He spent months preparing his lectures and there would be queues outside the largest hall they could get, and the good man would speak in a very studied English for over an hour, simply opening the word of God.”10 The “brethren” were fast becoming leaders among evangelicals throughout the world. Their books and periodicals had now crossed denominational lines. The pulpits of many churches and conferences were now open to them. Many evangelical leaders began to look to them for instruction and guidance. In 1867 an

American evangelist traveled to England for the first time; his name was D.L. Moody. This visit would not be to hold a city-wide crusade or to preach in one of the land's great churches, but to humbly learn. Doubts and heaviness of spirit burdened his heart. The power and passion he once knew in preaching was now gone. A biographer writes concerning Moody's first visit to England, "Emma encouraged D.L. to go to England for a visit; there were such giants of God's word there; it would be a great blessing to D.L.; the Plymouth Brethren in Chicago had gotten their priceless secrets from the spirit-filled English Christians. There were men in England like C.H. Mackintosh and J.N. Darby whose books had so blessed him. The motivation for this trip was to cure his own spiritual asthma by contact with British men of the book. The sum total result of this trip was transforming."11 For the last 160 years, devout men fitly armed with the word of God, prayer, and godly character transformed the landscape of evangelicalism. Convincing exegesis challenged accepted theology. Godly witness inspired worldwide missionary efforts. Faithful ministry spurred the established church to rethink its very foundations and purpose. May it be so again among the "brethren" in our day.

Endnotes

1. Andrew Miller, "The Brethren: Their Origin, Progress and Testimony". (Hong Kong: Christian Book Room, 1878) p. 51 This estimate comprises only the so called "exclusive brethren".

2. Ibid, p. 36

3. Napoleon Noel, "The History of the Brethren". (Denver: W.F. Knapp, 1936) p. 22.

4. Miller, “The Brethren”, p. 42

5. Noel, “The History of the Brethren”, p. 16

6. F. F. Bruce, “In Retrospect Remembrance of Things Past”. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p.293

7. Frank Holmes, “Brother Indeed”. (Kilmarnock: John Ritchie LTD.,1988) p. 98

8. Miller, “The Brethren”, p.43

9. Billy Graham, “Facing Death and the Life After” (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987) p. 179

10. Patricia St. John, “Harold St. John: A Portrait by his Daughter”. (London: Pickering and Inglis,1959) p. 141

11. Richard Day, “Bush Aglow: The Life of Dwight Lyman Moody”. (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1945) p. 12

Our Standing in Christ

There can be no greater joy for a believer than to know that through the work of Christ his standing with God is settled. Once an enemy of God, he is now a child of God. He who at one time was at war with God now has peace with God. The apostle explains, “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom. 5:1-2).

Our immutable standing with God is the position in which God now views us because of the finished work of Christ. We are justified, holy, children of God, kings and priests of God. We have unfettered access to Him—all this and more is ours because of our standing in Christ. Victory over sin does not enhance our standing in Christ. And our standing in Christ should never be used in such a way as to excuse sin. Our standing is what we are in Christ, secured by the very power of God; therefore it can never suffer damage nor loss.

This standing, however, must be seen as distinct from our state, which changes day by day. Our state is the practical side our Christian life; it is the “living out” of the Christian life. Our standing is perfect, but our state is imperfect; this state is what we are in ourselves. Spiritual failure, sin, and disobedience are all common to our state. We must not be satisfied with our state, but should seek to rise to the level of our standing in Christ. Yet at the same time, we should not condemn ourselves and engage in self-flagellation because of guilt of sin. Our salvation is never in doubt; we are eternally secure because of our standing in Christ.

This truth is extremely important in striking the proper balance in our spiritual life. Careless thinking in regard to this truth will have far-reaching spiritual consequences. Throughout the history of the Church there have been those who have not fully appreciated the truth of the believer's state and standing.

Reformed Theology And Spiritual Consequence

Reformed theology has never clearly acknowledged the biblical truth of a believer's standing in Christ. Respected Reformed scholar and author John Gerstner illustrates this position: "The classic dispensational distinction is evidence of a persistent misunderstanding of the doctrines of justification and sanctification." Elsewhere he writes, "A man's standing is perfect before God, though his state may not be. This might seem to be the only traditional distinction between justification and sanctification, but it is not. In Reformed teaching this difference is one of fact…that is, according to the Reformed view, the justified person is not perfectly (positionally) sanctified.1 Instead of affirming that a believer in Christ has an unshakable standing, Reformers sought to attain this standing through fasting, asceticism, and a rigorous discipline of the flesh. They soon discovered, however, that the flesh is incorrigible; it can never be improved. Leaders of this doctrinal perspective from the 1700's down to the present day have suffered spiritually because of this misunderstanding. This suffering arose out the guilt from indwelling sin, which, in turn, cast doubt on one's eternal salvation. This resulted, in some cases, in heart-wrenching despair, and the unnatural desire for death, as a means of deliverance from the corruption of the sin nature.

Listen to the voices of spiritual anguish, the result of setting aside the importance of our standing in Christ. One year before his death, in 1769, George Whitefield, the renown eighteenth century evangelist, wrote concerning an earlier time of difficulty in his life, “I began to fast twice a week for thirty-six hours together, pray many times a day and received the sacrament every Lord’s Day. I fasted myself almost to death all the forty days of Lent, during which I made it a point of duty never to go less than three times a day to public worship, besides seven times a day to my private prayers. Yet I knew no more that I was to be born a new creature in Christ Jesus than if I had never been born at all.”

On another occasion he writes, “The searcher of hearts alone knows what agonies my poor soul has undergone…the Lord has withdrawn Himself from me…I have sunk into deep despair, and like Elijah, I wish for death.2 Some Reformed leaders have laid such stress on the elimination of all sin that it became the determining factor in whether one was a Christian at all. The clear distinction between standing and state, law and grace became hopelessly blurred. Representative of this perspective is William Law, the famed author of A Call to a Devout and Holy Life. He writes, “Unless our heart and passions are eagerly bent upon the work of our salvation; unless holy fears lead our endeavors, and keep our consciences strict and tender about every part of our duty, constantly examining how we live, and how fit are we to die, we shall in all probability fall into a state of negligence, and sit down in such a course of life as will never carry us to the rewards of heaven.”3 This practice of excessive introspection often led to self-

condemnation for the guilt of sin. Instead of a focus on Christ and His finished work, the focus was directed toward self, sin, and personal failure. In time this practice became the source of a incurable spiritual plague withering the souls and spirits of men in the front lines for the cause of Christ. David Brainerd, a missionary to the Indians in New Jersey, wrote of this plague in his journal. He mourns, “My heart seemed like a nest of vipers, or a cage of unclean and hateful birds; and therefore I wanted to be cleansed of all sin…my sinfulness, the plague of my own heart…which often drove me to an impatient desire of death, a despair of doing any good in life: I would rather choose death than a life spent for nothing.4 Reformed theology seeks to establish the believer’s standing in grace by the progress he has made in his state. The result in the lives of the most illustrative saints is misery, guilt, and despair. The word of God is clear that we grow in grace, not into grace (Rom. 5:1-2).

C. H. Macintosh carefully sets forth the inherent dangers regarding this point of view, when he writes, “We must not measure our standing by our state, but ever judge our state by our standing. Many err in reference to this, and their error leads to disastrous results. Hence, if a Christian set about measuring his standing by his state, he must be miserable, and his mental misery must be commensurate with his honesty and intelligence…there must be mental anguish if the standing is measured by the state.5 The Adversary of our souls longs to turn our eyes from all that Christ has wrought to that which we are in the flesh, from an immovable standing in Christ to a standing of shifting sand.

The believer's standing in Christ was first clearly taught by early dispensationalists as an important pillar in the foundation of biblical truth. Leaders of the so-called Plymouth Brethren were among the first to provide clarity in this area. Many were pleased to see biblical balance struck in this area at a time when Reformed Theology was the dominant. Leaders among the Church of England, Presbyterians, Baptists, and other denominations expressed their appreciation of this teaching.

Watchman Nee, the Chinese church leader, looking back to this time in Church history, sums up the theological impact of this teaching when he writes, "They showed us how the blood of Christ satisfies the righteousness of God, our standing in Christ, the assurance of salvation… Since church history began, there never was a period when the gospel was clearer than in that time."6 However, leaders from the Puritan and Reformed churches began to circulate papers largely critical of this teaching. Criticism came from such notable Reformed leaders as C. H. Spurgeon, and later from Dr. A. H. Strong and B. B. Warfield. It continues from Reformed leaders in our own day. Much of this criticism rises from a commendable zeal to stem the rising tide of Antinomianism in the churches. The critics charge that Dispensational theology fosters and advances Antinomianism. They point to dispensationalism as the primary reason for a growing permissiveness in the carnal living among Christians today.

Leading dispensationalists such and D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, Louis Sperry Chafer and J. N. Darby spent much of their lives vigorously fighting against every inroad of Antinomianism. Those who knew them well would testify

that they would never condone sin nor promote a worldly Christianity. Moreover, how can the work of Christ, which affords the believer a righteous position, ever be the cause of unrighteousness? Clearly, disobedience in Christians must never be ascribed to the work of Christ, but rather to the failure of the believer to avail himself of his rich spiritual resources in Christ. Is our emphasis on the believer's standing in Christ a case of aberrant dispensationalism carried too far? Or is it a gracious provision as taught in the Word of God?

The Believer's Standing And The Flesh

The Word of God tells us that the moment one trusts in the finished work of Christ, he is a child of God, a new creature in Christ. The moment one places his trust in Christ, his standing is secure. Even as the moment a child is born into the family of a king, he becomes a prince; he may not yet behave in a princely manner, yet his standing is never in doubt because of his royal birth. In the same way, the Christian's standing in Christ is secure through regal birth. At his new birth, the Christian receives a new nature, a new relationship, a new power. The new nature enables him to enter fully into his new relationship with Christ. Out of this vital, living relationship comes the strength to live a godly life.

Our standing is not based on a process of improving the flesh. It will never do to take the material of the "old man" and, through fastings, vigils, and religious discipline, attempt to make the corrupt flesh acceptable to God. Consider, for a moment, the example of a homeowner who negotiates with a builder about some work that needs to be done, and then he inquires how much it will cost. "Oh, it won't cost very much at all,"

the builder explains, “because we can use all the old material.” Similarly, in the things of God, that just will not do. There must be a new start with altogether new material. The apostle explains further the purpose of God, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

The flesh was disqualified and set aside as unusable, worthless for the purpose of God. Our standing is founded upon our new life in Christ and that standing in Christ is based on grace. The true estimate of a believer is not what we are in the flesh, but rather what we are in Christ by virtue of His grace. It is not what we are doing now, but rather what Christ has done on Calvary’s cross. It is not what we think of ourselves, but what Christ thinks of us, that is of eternal consequence.

The apostle John counsels believers that the condemnation of our heart is a faulty compass and it is not to be trusted. He writes, “Beloved, if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things” (1 Jn. 3:20).

We may be like the thief on the cross, sentenced to be unfit to live on earth, but through His boundless grace, we are accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6). All our attempts to live righteously in Christ, when viewed in the light of eternity, may be no more than soiled rags; yet our true standing in Christ is that we are justified, declared righteous (Rom. 5:2). We may be clothed in this world with rags of poverty, but in Christ we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16-17).

Reformed teachers have so stressed the guilt, the horror and plague of sin that they have inadequately emphasized the believer's standing in Christ. This is one of the great shortcomings of Reformed theology. However, it is one thing for a non-Calvinist to make such a statement but it is a powerful indictment for one from their own camp to pointedly address this issue.

J. Sidlow Baxter, the Reformed Baptist pastor and author writes, "Also, the more I reflect upon it, the surer I become that we cannot have a true disposition toward the New Testament teaching on holiness unless we have a discerning appreciation of our standing and privilege in Christ. Nobody thanks God more than I for the Protestant Reformation. Nobody glories more than I in its triumphal arch of the 'doctrines of grace,' with it shining keystone, 'justification by faith.' Nobody marches more positively than I under the aegis of Luther and Calvin. Yet just because I march beneath the same banner I claim the same right to differ…the 'miserable sinner' emphasis of the Reformers may be overdone to the point where it actually incapacitates our response… All the New Testament epistles were written to Christian recipients, and they all alike assume that the new Christian standing has fundamentally changed all the relationships of those who are 'in Christ.' The standpoint is not that we are seeking forgiveness but that we are already forgiven…we are not just seeking peace with God but we 'have peace with God'."7 A proper understanding of our standing in Christ will on one hand preserve us from legalism, and on the other from spiritual laxity. Christ, in His infinite grace, came and died in our place, paying the eternal punishment for our sins, and thereby satisfying perfectly the righteous

demands of a holy God. Now God sees every believer in Christ; He has accepted them all because of the Beloved One; no one and nothing can ever touch this high and glorious position, which is ours through and because of Christ.

Endnotes:

1. John Gerstner, Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth, Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991, pp. 213, 240

2. Arnold Dallimore, George Whitefield, London, Banner of Truth, 1970, pp. 60, 401

3. William Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdman, 1977, p. 21

4. Jonathan Edwards, Life of David Brainerd, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1978, p. 117

5. C. H. Macintosh, Treasury: The True Workman, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1976, p. 490

6. Dana Roberts, Understanding Watchman Nee, Plainfield, NJ, Haven Books, 1980, pp. 16-17

7. J. Sidlow Baxter, A New Call to Holiness, London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1967, pp. 35-36

Postmodernism and the "Emergent" Churches

Today the church faces a threat far greater than the anti-supernaturalism of the 18th century rationalists and deists, potentially more damaging than the persecution under Islam or Communism, and more cunning in its inroads into the life of the church than mysticism and emotionalism. I am referring to postmodernism. To many sincere Christians, this rather new tool of the Enemy will be relatively unknown. However, among university students and those in government and the media, the concept and influence of postmodernist thinking is vigorous and pervasive. Postmodernism is a danger to every Christian tradition, whether it be Reformed, Dispensational, Arminian, or Charismatic. The postmodern threat is deadly to biblical truth and the Christian world view.

What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a philosophic viewpoint that rejects the concept that there is absolute truth. Postmodernists believe that truth is an illusion; they see it as a veiled disguise to gain political and financial power and to oppress the less informed. They cynically dismiss all the claims of objective truth as worthless and empty promises. They reject philosophic, scientific, political truths, but most of all they reject objective Christian truth as revealed in the Scriptures. Postmodernists teach that the Modern Age began in 1500 A. D. and came to an end in 2000 A. D. The Modern Age was characterized by reason, objectivity, scientific study, and truth, as they flowed out of the Protestant Reformation

and later the European Enlightenment period. Postmodernism interprets expansionist capitalism, Communism, anti-environmental attitudes, and the destruction of native peoples all as outgrowths of modernism. The new Postmodern Age, it is said, has rejected many of the values that have come to us from the so-called "Modern Age". It is intolerant of absolute truth; in fact, it is more fashionable to make no claims to truth at all. Postmodernism places the individual first and foremost, setting aside traditional institutions that have been championed over the past five hundred years, namely, the church, marriage, and the family. However, the church has not done a very good job of defending itself from the attacks of postmodernism. Many believe that postmodernism has so infiltrated the church that it is transforming the very doctrines and practices that have set the church apart from the world. George Barna, in his book What Americans Believe: an Annual Survey of Values and Religious Views in the United States, effectively argues that postmodernism has so influenced the church that in many segments of the United States the church is essentially a postmodern church. (1) Moreover, in the United States a new fast-growing movement of churches has arisen, called the "Emergent Church" that unashamedly claims to be postmodern in its approach.

Postmodernism and the Mega-Church Movement

The Australian L'Abri leader Frank Stootman has stated, "Postmodernists are so focused on I, me, myself that they have trouble focusing on anything beyond themselves." (2) Postmodernism is consumed with what the individual feels, thinks, wants, and dislikes. This aspect of postmodernism is especially evident in the

modern mega-church. Today, the secular unbeliever has the greatest influence in the church. The music, preaching, and outreach of the postmodern church are not designed primarily to exalt Christ or even build up the believer, but rather to attract the unbeliever. Does this new approach bring with it negative consequences? How will it affect future generations? In his book The Prevailing Church, Randy Pope, a church leader and author asks the modern Church Growth Movement to re-examine its postmodern principles and its impact on future generations. He says:

It is common to have a potential church-planter call me to talk about starting a new church. I typically ask him to describe the church he plans to plant. Quite often I hear, "It's going to be a Willow Creek type of church." I usually follow up with another question: "What is the down side of such a strategy?" Unfortunately, the usual response is a blank stare and the admission that he has not considered any downsides. I ask him to consider the following: When will believers worship together? How will you train leaders? When will there be the expository preaching of a book of the Bible? Where, for instance, will people receive teaching on the book of Isaiah?...I fear the impact of the modern church-growth movement on future generations. (3)

The postmodern church’s message and doctrinal content has been altered to meet secular unbelievers’ needs and insure that they feel comfortable. Fundamental doctrines of the Bible that seem offensive to the unbeliever have been quietly removed from the church. Popular themes of personal improvement, a doctrinal de-emphasis, and a light preaching style are all brought into the church for the purpose of filling the church. In

the process, the church of Jesus Christ has been transformed into the church of secular values. The purposes and standards that God has for His church have been replaced with the purposes and standards of the world. Mega-church leader Mark Mittelberg writes:

I also tend to talk in terms of receiving Jesus as "Forgiver and Leader" rather than "Savior and Lord." This is an attempt to convey biblical concepts while avoiding misleading connotations in some people's mind of medieval "lords" who were rulers over castles. I also avoid the word "master", which for some people might evoke images of slavery and oppressive taskmasters. You may not like the way I translate some of these concepts. That's okay. (4)

Postmodernism has removed Christ from His central place within the church and replaced Him with secularism. The sad result is that the Lord Jesus Christ has been reduced to an indistinct and undefined blur. Some will rise in defense and say, "Isn't this simply a question of different methods?" "What harm is there in a new approach to outreach?" There have been different approaches to evangelism in every age of the church. All Christians rejoice when the gospel is proclaimed and souls are won for Christ. There have been different music styles in every age and the church has been blessed by their richness, however, there is something different going on here. This postmodern emphasis upon the individual has sent the message that the individual is more important than truth and New Testament doctrine. The postmodern church has set aside the corporate worship of Christ, the expository teaching of the Scriptures, and the preaching of the gospel because these practices are "too spiritual" for the secular man

and may turn him off to the church. The postmodern message has been clearly passed on: All obstacles that stand in the way of reaching the secular individual must be removed, even if the obstacle is church doctrine. This leads us to the next phase in the postmodern attack on the church.

Postmodernism, the "Emergent" Church, and Biblical Doctrine This postmodern perspective has so infiltrated the modern evangelical church that essential biblical truths are being compromised. "Emergent" church leaders are now arguing that the teaching of "propositional truth"(that is biblical doctrines such as hell, inerrancy, and even salvation by faith in Christ) is arrogant, intolerant, and ultimately harmful to the cause of Christ. They argue that the Bible is not the only revelation of truth. Moreover, they suggest, how can we be sure of what the Bible teaches, considering that there are so many doctrinal differences among Christians. Many wonder about the orgin and background of the "Emergent" movement and why it developed? Young people who have been raised in the slick packaging of "seekerfriendly" fellowships and the materialism of contemporary mega-churches are finding that these churches are leaving them spiritually empty. More and more, younger Christians are looking for simple gatherings of Christians that can feed their souls with heartfelt worship and fellowship. Clint Rainey, a journalism student interning at the Dallas Morning News, writes that his generation is put off by the "seeker-friendly" approach that fills churches but leaves many spiritually empty. He writes, "These churches attract middle-age adults like iron fillings but my generation isn’t in much awe." Rainey contends that

megachurches are much too materialistic and impersonal. Young people aren't impressed with the technology, commercialism, and over emphasis on "stuff" in the modern church. Today's young adults crave real religion. (5) Many of these young people are drifting into churches that follow the "Emergent" church approach. Emergent church thinking has made inroads into many segments of the Evangelical church. Leading churches such as Solomon's Porch in Seattle, WA, and Mars Hill Church in Grand Rapids, MI, are growing. Bookstore shelves are stocked with books espousing the "Emergent" gospel. Brian McLaren, a leader in the Emergent movement, has been called by Time magazine (Feb. 7, 2005) one of the 25 most influential Evangelical leaders in the U. S., and his book A New Kind of Christian received an Award of Merit from Christianity Today in 2002. "Emergent" churches and their leaders have rejected the structure and message of the current contemporary mega-churches and traditional churches. While the "Emergent" church embraces more simplicity in church meetings, true fellowship, and reality in worship, it decries the professionalism, materialism, and commercialism of the mega-church. However, it is also unashamedly secular, postmodern, and liberal in much of its theology.

Postmodernism, Emergent Church, and the Teaching of Brian McLaren The mega-church's limited embrace of postmodern thinking has paved the way for the Emergent church's almost full-fledged endorsement of secular postmodern ideology and liberal theology. The Emergent church's stress on feminism, environmentalism, pluralism, and the teaching of Darwinian evolutionary theory, while down-playing

biblical doctrines of eternal punishment, inerrancy, and salvation by faith in Christ causes many concern. Respected evangelical leaders are calling the church to examine more carefully the teachings of the "Emergent" church and especially the writings of Brian McLaren. Dr. Douglas Groothuis, professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, has written a review of Brian McLaren's book, A New Kind of Christian. In his review entitled "A New Kind of Postmodern", he writes:

There are many objectionable items in this small but dangerous book, including its flippant endorsement of evolution, its unorthodox speculations on heaven and hell as not being separate places...there is enough truth mixed to make the errors seem more attractive. (6)

Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in his review of Brian McLaren's book Generous Orthodoxy, writes:

The Bible, McLaren argues, is intended to equip God's people for good works. He rejects words such as authority, inerrancy, and infallibility as unnecessary and distracting. In a previous work, McLaren had argued that the Bible is "a unique collection of literary artifacts that together support the telling of an amazing and essential story." The Emergent movement represents a significant challenge to biblical Christianity. (7)

The accommodation of church to popular culture has been a subtle deception that usually leads to the weakening of the church rather than to the winning of the lost. Whenever the church has met the challenges of culture with biblical preaching, strong evangelism, and spiritual worship then Christ is exalted and souls are led to salvation. May the church resist the sophistry of

evangelical postmodernism and return to the sure foundation of Scripture.

Endnotes (1) George Barna, What Americans Believe: An Annual Survey of Values and Religious Views in the United States, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991) (2) Gene Edward Vieth, "Taking the Roof Off", World Magazine, March 26, 2005, p. 34 (3) Randy Pope, The Prevailing Church, (Chicago: IL: Moody Press, 2002), p. 189-190,197 (4) Mark Mittleberg, Building A Contagious Church, (Grand Rapids,MI:Zondervan,2001),52 (5) Clint Rainey, "Mega Burnout", Dallas Morning News, July 25, 2005 (6) D. Groothuis, New Kind of Postmodernist,vol. 25, 03, Christian Research Journal, p. 58 (7) Albert Mohler, Generous Orthodoxy-Is it Orthodox, Crosswalk.com, Feb. 16, 2005

Progressive Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is renown for its masterful defense of its sincerely-held theological convictions. In the past, its loyal detractors and critics usually lay outside its theological camp. Now, however, one of the strongest and most concerted challenges to traditional dispensationalism has come from within. An increasing number of former traditional dispensationalists are now proposing substantial changes, this new view being called “Progressive Dispenationalism”. Progressive dispensationalism began on November 20, 1986 in the Dispensational Study Group in connection with the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta, Georgia. Since that time, this revisionist view of dispensationalism has made a profound impact upon leading dispensational theological seminaries and Bible colleges.

What is Progressive Dispensationalism?

This new form of dispensationalism purports to be “a return to the roots of American dispensationalism” (Bock, Christianity Today, Sept. 12, 1994, p. 27). However, is this worthy goal truly the motivation of Progressive Dispensationalism? How is this view different than traditional dispensationalism? What has Progressive Dispensationalism sought to accomplish? It appears, based on the writings of its own proponents, that Progressive Dispensationalism has sought to gently push into the background those features of traditional dispensationalism that are most disagreeable to current Amillennial scholars. In the process, these new dispensationalists have incorporated

elements from Amillennialism and historic pre-millennialism (ie., George Elton Ladd, modernist C. H. Dodd), while de-emphasizing distinctive features of traditional dispensationalism, such as the rapture of the church, the literal millennial reign of Jesus Christ, and marked distinctions between Israel and the church. This view has been, at times, so stridently promoted that, in some cases, churches have been split over this issue. At the forefront of this movement are leaders such as Darrell L. Bock, of Dallas Theological Seminary, Craig A. Blaising, of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Robert Saucy, of Talbot Theological Seminary, CA. These men have authored books which have been used by their readers to further this ongoing doctrinal debate. These books include The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism by Robert Saucy, Progressive Dispensationalism by Bock and Blaising, and Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church, edited by Bock and Blaising.

Is Progressive Dispensationalism Rightly Named?

Can one be rightly called a dispensationalist who denies the foundational tenets of dispensationalism? For the sake of argument, suppose one states that he is a “progressive Baptist”. You ask him what that means and he replies that he believes that infant baptism is biblical and the mode of baptism should be sprinkling. Can a Baptist who denies believer’s baptism be rightly called a Baptist. Likewise, can a progressive dispensationalist who rejects the tenets of dispensationalism be properly called a “dispensationalist”. The answer is obvious. It is of interest in this regard, to know what Amillenialists are saying about the title “Progressive dispensationalism”. Amillenial author Keith Mathison

writes, “The church suffers too much damage when people do not idenify what they really believe. For the sake of accuracy, honesty, and understanding, ‘progressive dispensationalists’ should no longer claim to be dispensational.…It is not enough to redefine the essential doctrines out of a system and call the resulting opposite teaching ‘progressive’. Progressive dispensationalism is not Dispensationalism.…My hope and prayer is that they continue their journey toward Reformed theology. Since they have come a long way already, it only makes sense to discard the misleading title “progressive dispensationalism”. (Keith Mathison, Dispensationalism, Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1995, p. 137)

Progressive Dispensational Departure

What are the tenets of Progressive Dispensationalism? At the outset, it must be mentioned that Progressives set forth a unique and, some would say, unorthodox method of interpreting the Bible. Progressive Dispensationalist Craig Blaising rejects Charles C. Ryrie’s insistence that an essential element of dispensationalism is the use of a literal, plain, normal, and consistent method of Bible interpretation. Blaising and Bock have put forth what they call a “complementary hermeneutic”. They suggest that the New Testament makes complementary changes to Old Testament promises without setting aside those original promises. This method of interpretation appears to be a merging together of the literal method (dispensational) and the allegorical/spiritualizing method (Covenant Theology). The application of this type of interpretation has led to a de-emphasis on the rapture of the church, an essential feature of dispensationalism. In the book Progressive

Dispensationalism, by Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising, the Rapture is considered only briefly, and it is not mentioned when it would be natural to do so. Some observers believe that this method of interpretation lies at the heart of the subtle disappearance of Darby/Scofield dispensationalism. Respected dispensationalist Thomas Ice warns, “No one can doubt that some are proposing radical changes within the dispensational camp. The question that arises relates to the nature and virtue of the change… I believe that these men are in the process of destroying dispensationalism” (Biblical Perspectives, Nov./Dec. 1992). To some, this charge against Progressive Dispensationalism has appeared to be too harsh. However, candid statements by the new president of Dallas Theological Seminary, Chuck Swindoll, have cast light on the accuracy of this suspicion. In an interview with Christianity Today, when Chuck Swindoll was asked about traditional dispensationalism at Dallas Theological Seminary, he replied, “I think that dispensations is a scare word. I’m not sure we’re going to make dispensationalism a part of our marquee as we talk about our school.” When asked whether the term dispensationalism would disappear, Swindoll replied, “It may and perhaps it should” (Christianity Today, Oct. 25, 1993).

Progressive Dispensationalism, the Reign of Christ, and Acts 2 Another area of serious concern is the change concerning the thousand-year millennial reign of Christ on earth. Traditional dispensationalists have always understood that the Davidic rule of Christ would be in earthly Jerusalem on a literal throne where His ancestor David once ruled. Progressives teach that the Lord already rules on the throne of David in heaven, a rule

that began at His ascension. Traditional dispensationalists reject that Christ's present rule in heaven is a fulfillment of the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:14. However, Progressives have further muddied the waters by teaching that Christ's millennial rule is present and is yet future at the same time. Acts 2:29-33, is used as support for this postition. This passage speaks of the two thrones of Christ; the throne of Heaven and the throne of David, an earthly throne. Progressives, have taught that these two thrones reflect two aspects of the millennial rule of Christ. They do not acknowledge careful distinctions between these two thrones of God. Scripture teaches clearly of a throne of God in Heaven. "The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven" (Ps. 11:4). In contrast to this, the throne of David, Scripture teaches, is future, earthly, and literal. The careful distinction between these thrones is made in Rev. 3:21, "He who overcomes, I will (future) grant to sit down with Me on My throne (earthly), as I overcame and sat down (present) with My Father on His throne(heavenly)." Blurring these distinctions will lead to confusion concerning promises made to Israel and promises made to the church. This confusion will greatly determine our convictions on the Lord's return, the tribulation period, and the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic law. The third major change proposed in Progressive Dispensationalism, which may prove to be the most serious, is the removal of significant distinctions between Israel and the Church. Traditional dispensationalists have taught that God has two programs of biblical history—one program for Israel and another distinct program for the church. In his book, "The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism", Robert Saucy explains, "Contrary to traditional

dispensationalism, it (Progressive Dispensationalism) does not entail separate programs for the church and Israel that are somehow ultimately unified only in the display of God's glory or in eternity.…The church today has its place and function in the same mediatorial messianic kingdom program that Israel was called to serve" (p. 28). Progressives see almost no difference between God's unique plan for the church and His plan for Israel. This has led one Progressive Dispensationalist to call the church "the new Israel " (Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church, p. 288). Many non-dispensationalist observers have commented that this view moves Progressive Dispensationalism closer to Covenant Theology than to Dispensationalism (Bruce Waltke, Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, p. 348). This view forces its proponents to de-emphasize many fundamental features of dispensationalism, including the pre-tribulational rapture of the church, an event uniquely involving the church on God's prophetic timetable.

Progressive Dispensationalism and the Future

What does this all mean for the future? Will other leading features of dispensationalism fall in favor of current theological trends? Will Progressives marshall the strength to resist the criticism and even the praise of non-dispensationalists? Or will Progressive Dispensationalism progress even further towards classical Covenant Theology? Leading Progressive Dispensationalists have not been timid in expressing their respect for amillennialism. Progressive Darrell Bock concedes his fondness for amillennial distinctives when he writes, "Progressive Dispensationalism is less land-centered and less future-centered" (Christianity

Today, September 12, 1994, p. 50). Observers can only hazard an educated guess as to the future of Progressive Dispensationalism. However, all of this has led Dr. Walter A. Elwell, of Trinity Theological Seminary, in a book review of Progressive Dispensationalism to surmise, “The newer dispensationalism looks so much like non-dispensational pre-millennialism that one struggles to see any real difference” (Christianity Today, Sept. 12, 1994, p. 28). If his evaluation is true, then the future bodes badly for traditional dispensationalism. In every generation, serious students of the Word of God must seek to effectively declare biblical truth. However, in doing so, they must not surrender important areas of Bible doctrine. May the exhortation of the apostle Paul to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) challenge our hearts, especially as we see Progressive Dispensationalism spreading from the seminary classroom to the Christian bookstore and then down into the local church, moving ever closer toward Covenant Theology. May God grant us wisdom and discernment concerning this difficult and important issue.

Suggested Resources

W. Wesley, J. Master (ed.), Issues in Dispensationalism, (Chicago, IL:Moody, 1994) Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today Revised, (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1997) Mal Couch, Dictionary of Premillennial Theology, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996)

Rahab Perished Not

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that Rahab did not perish with the others in Jericho. Why was she chosen from among the many others of this ancient city to become an object of divine grace? Why is Rahab used so frequently by New Testament writers to illustrate genealogy, faith, and theology? Spiritual minds bow in wonder at the God of infinite mercy who reached down low to lift her up to the very lineage and genealogy of the Messiah. Faithful Rahab is a shining example to every Gentile who has come to believe in Christ. Has not God reached down low to each of us? Are not we, likewise, innumerable objects of His matchless grace? Are we not sons and heirs of God? The apostle Paul has well said, “You…being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world…have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12-13). How does God take the “far off” sinners of the Gentiles and transform them into sons, heirs of God, and joints-heirs with Christ?

The Fear of God

To those who have no knowledge of God, the “lofty One who inhabits eternity” loves to first reveal Himself in majesty and power. This revelation of God would deeply grip Rahab’s heart and mind. This fear of God brought her to her knees and to faith in the high King of heaven. Rahab testified, “The terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainting because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, and what you did to the

two kings of the Amorites…our hearts melted…for the Lord, your God, He is God in heaven above and earth beneath" (Josh. 2:10-11). Godly fear is the sacred awe of God's majesty and holiness. It is that dread and amazement with which men and women are struck and overwhelmed by the awesome power of God. Rahab was never so impressed with a conviction of her insignificance, until she contrasted herself with the majesty of God. Godly reverence also involves the proper fear of God's displeasure. True faith acknowledges God's right to chasten, to punish, and to judge because of sin. This truth cast divine light upon Rahab's false gods and the empty worship of Canaan. All of Jericho was challenged by the majesty, glory, and power of God. They were all bowed by the power and terror of God, but not all believed.

Faith in God

The news of God's acts of power moved among the cities of Canaan with mysterious swiftness. Soon the news had reached Jericho. All the citizens had heard about the defeat of the Amorites, and now Sihon and Og, the king of Bashan, had fallen. Terror, melted hearts, and fear filled the breasts of the people. But there was one in the city that confessed, "Jehovah, your God, He is God in heaven about and in the earth beneath…I know that Jehovah hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us" (Josh 2:9, 11). Long before, in the song of Moses, the children of Israel heard, "The peoples shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestine. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away; fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the

greatness of Thine arm they shall be still as stone" (Ex. 15:14-16). All had now heard of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All had heard of His power, judgment upon sin, and victory over the heathen gods of Transjordan. But now Rahab turned from her sin and her back to Canaan's false gods; she believed, and took a stand among the people and received the promise. The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us of her, "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31). Only one believed and said "I know that the Lord…He is God.." and did not perish. The others of the city had every chance to believe as Rahab did, but refused. Rahab possessed the costly marks of faith: Rahab heard… "how the Lord dried up" (2:10); confessed… "our hearts did melt" (v.11); believed…. "I know the Lord" (v.9); entreated…. "I pray you, swear" (v. 12); received… "we will deal kindly" (v.14); worked… "she let them down" (v.15); and obeyed… "bind this cord" (v.18).

Faith Proved

When did Rahab believe? Did she believe after she received the spies in peace? How did the spies know to seek out her dwelling in the wall? There is evidence that Rahab believed days or even months before Joshua and spies ever made plans investigate the city. Her reception of the spies was evidence of her genuine faith in God. The New Testament book of James tells this side of Rahab's faith. James chapter two teaches that true faith in Christ will be evidenced by works. The touchstone phrase in this section is James 2:20, "Do you not know… that faith without works is dead?" James is making the point that genuine faith is always followed and proven

by works, using the Old Testament illustrations of Abraham and Rahab. He explains that when Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar, Abraham was proving his faith by works (2:21-22). But when was Abraham justified? James explains that Abraham was justified forty years prior, in Genesis 15:6, when “he believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (2:23). Abraham proved his faith in God by works after he believed. What of Rahab? James says, “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?” (2:25). James presses the point that Rahab first believed, then later proved her faith when she received the spies. Men are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone; it is proven by works. Commentator Lehman Strauss writes, “When did Rahab believe in the God of Israel? She had trusted her soul to Jehovah when she heard of His divine power in judgement against heathen nations. When she exercised that initial step of faith, she was justified before God….but the day arrived when she proved her faith by her works and not merely her words. When she hid the spies she was justified by her works before men.” (1) So Rahab is chosen by the Spirit of God from out of the many in Israel to be an biblical example of true faith demonstrated by works. This truth must not be missed by those in our day who would mistake a decision for salvation and occasional churchgoing for genuine new life in Christ. We must reject the current notion which suggests that one who lives an unholy and careless life may, nevertheless, be a true Christian.

Faithfulness of God

Those who know something of new life in Christ soon discover that the ways of God are perfect. And so it is with Rahab. Why was it that Rahab did not return with the spies to dwell among the people of God? She alone knew the grave danger that lay before the city. Before Rahab there lay two issues that were still of great importance: the deliverance of her family and the Word of the Lord. For the spies had said, "…you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, and your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home…" (Josh. 2:18). Rahab was about to discover that in the ways of God the most dangerous place in Jericho was the safest place in Jericho. Carl Armerding writes, "The only safe place in Jericho just then was Rahab's house. No matter how beautiful other houses were, no matter where they were located, not even the king's palace could afford such protection. but it was the most dangerous place of all in the wall of the city. But its safety did not depend on its location." (2) God had ordained that her house on the wall, the place of greatest danger, was also the place of divine deliverance. God's ways were higher than Rahab's ways and God's thoughts than her thoughts. It mattered not that other houses had thicker walls and firmer foundations. Regardless of the fact that the walls were always the first point of attack for invading forces, Rahab's house on the wall was the safest place because God's sovereign will had designed it to be so. Self-denial, faith in God, and heartfelt devotion were all in order. The Word of God via the spies was to remain in the house. Rahab's responsibility was to believe God. In war, the walls of ancient cities usually fell either inward because of the continual battering of opposing forces, or

outward as defending soldiers forced the walls to break down upon the enemy below. In either case, Rahab would be in danger. Rahab would shortly discover that the high God of heaven and earth had other plans for falling walls. “And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat” (6:20). Rahab’s lessons in the school of faith would be life-transforming. She learned that the God she once feared, now could be loved and trusted because of His mercy and faithfulness. She came to know that God, who was gracious in every way in the past, would be infinitely merciful in the future, eventually placing her, a harlot, in the very lineage of King David. May we also, like Rahab, be ready learners of God’s boundless grace in the school of faith.

Endnotes (1) Lehman Strauss, James, Your Brother, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1986), p.117 (2) Carl Armerding, Fight For Palestine, (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1949), p. 37

Reception or Joining a Church

Christians have debated for many years the issue of membership in the local church. Some churches have taught that, unless a Christian is a church member, he cannot partake at the Lord's Supper, be married in the church, or be involved in ministries of the church. Some have gone so far as to refuse to recognize baptism from other evangelical fellowships and insist on re-baptism. (1) What does the Bible say about fellowship in the local church?

What is "Reception"?

Many churches talk about "joining a church", but the language the Bible uses for fellowship in the local church is not "join" but "receive". We read in the New Testament: "Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man" (2 Cor. 7:2); "When Apollos was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him" (Acts 18:27); "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever, not now as a servant but above a servant, a brother beloved, especially to me but how much more to thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord" (Philemon 15-16). We might define "reception" as the welcoming of Christians into full Christian fellowship, privileges, and responsibilities within the local assembly. The Bible never uses the word "join" in referring to entrance into the universal or local church. When a person trusts in Christ as his Savior, he is "added"(Acts 2:41, 47) to the body of Christ, or the universal church. As we look closely at the New Testament, we see the word

“received” used over twenty times in regard to fellowship in a local church. Reception as a New Testament doctrine is near to the heart of God, for it expresses the unity of the church and the nature of the body of Christ, and it refocuses the believer on Christ rather than on church polity. New Testament churches received into their local assemblies those who knew the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and did not participate in moral or doctrinal error. In some cases, they may have been weak or untaught Christians, but nevertheless, they were received on the basis of being received by the Lord in salvation. “Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7); “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations…for God hath received him” (Rom 14:1). The New Testament emphasizes four essential principles when receiving a believer into fellowship: (a) Receive without respect of persons (Jms 2:1-5); (b) Receive him that is weak in the faith (Rom 14:1); (c) Receive him on the basis of spiritual life and not the degree of biblical knowledge (Acts 9:26, 18:24-28). (d) Receive him on the basis of spiritual life, not on church affiliation (3 Jn. 9-10). Some, to whom this distinction is new, may object. One may say, “Isn’t this difference between joining a church and reception into church fellowship merely a trivial nuance or a play on words?” What is the important difference between these viewpoints?

What is the Difference Between “Reception” and “Joining a church” ?

When we look at this question, we must never lose sight of the fact that the church is not primarily an organization or institution but a living body. The New

Testament lays great weight on this truth. The church has a head and members, it is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and it is composed of living stones. “You also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices…” (1 Peter 2:5). This truth must greatly influence any view on the doctrine of church membership. If the church is a living body, how then might one join such a living New Testament assembly? Many Church leaders would reply by outlining the typical process of joining a church. However, it should be pointed out that it is biblically impossible to join a church. Although many may strongly protest this statement consider the following illustration. Can an ear, of itself, join the human body? Of course not. To join the body of Christ means that one is still outside. If a believer is a part of the body, then there is no possible way to join. We, as believers, are already in the church and are, therefore, joined and in fellowship with one another. Thus, it is neither necessary nor possible to join the church. Of course, when one moves from the area of one local church to the area of another local church, he is received into the fellowship of that new group of believers. The New Testament teaches that entrance into the local church is based upon the same principles as entrance into the body of Christ. This doctrine has been understood by Bible students and scholars for many years, yet is largely neglected by many within the local church. The British New Testament Greek scholar F. J. A. Hort (1828-1892) writes: “There is no indication that Paul regarded the conditions of fellowship in the universal Ecclesia (church) as differing from the conditions for fellowship in the local Ecclesia…The universal and the local Ecclesia alike were wholly made up of men who had

each for himself believed, whose baptism of each was the outward expression…" (2) Along a similar line, Dr. Robert L. Saucy, a professor at Talbot Theological Seminary, CA, writes: "At the time of salvation believers are first 'called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord' (1 Jn. 1:3). This fellowship or participation with Christ constitutes the believer as a member of the universal church in the sense of the spiritual reality of the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ. But the New Testament does not stop with this fellowship. For when one is called into fellowship with God and made a member of the body of Christ, he is at the same time brought into fellowship with fellow members of that body." (3) Many will give theological lip service to the truth of reception but then question its relevance. There is a distinct difference between joining a church and being received into the fellowship of a local church. What lasting spiritual implications might be involved?

Why is this Difference Important?

One may say, "It is of no real consequence how a believer comes into the church, but rather, how he functions once he is in it." There is some truth in this line of reasoning, but it does seem to miss the larger focus. All would doubtless agree that departure from God's divine design for the church will have its consequences. Would not the God of incomparable order and design have specific purposes for the method of coming into church fellowship? What are some of God's divine purposes for reception into fellowship of the local church? Firstly, it safeguards against sectarianism, as it stresses the unity of the One Body. God knows, more than we ourselves, that man has the tendency towards

sectarianism. Men will create conditions and build walls to keep out certain kinds of believers from the local church. These barriers may be beliefs concerning views on prophecy, favored versions of the Bible, baptism, or political issues of the day. Reception bypasses these walls and lays stress upon whether or not a person knows Christ, thereby strengthening the unity of the one body of Christ. Secondly, it stresses a vital living fellowship with Christ as the basis of New Testament church life. The question is not primarily “are you baptized?” or “What church did you last attend?” Reception focuses on the most important issue in the believers life; do you have a vital living relationship with Christ? The heart of spiritual matters is usually a matter of the heart. When a believer is in proper fellowship with Christ, other areas of concern will usually fall into proper perspective. Instead of focusing merely on the outward marks of Christianity, reception places the main focus on the believer’s life in Christ and his love for Christ. Thirdly, it emphasizes the living Body aspect of the church instead of a human organization. Reception stresses that Christians are welcomed into a living spiritual body where there is spiritual service and spiritual needs among its members. In this gathering, each member is a “living stone” in a spiritual house where Christ leads as the Chief Cornerstone. In this living body, each member has a responsibility to Christ and contributes to the health and growth of its other members. Reception emphasizes being a participant in a living body, rather than having a name on a membership list. Finally, reception helps to re-focus the church on the very purpose of its meeting together—the person of Christ. Reception is not merely being a part of a religious center with its programs and activities. Joining

a typical evangelical church usually focuses on the requirements of the new members, such as tithing and attendance, and the importance of the church's programs and activities. However, reception focuses on the central attraction of the church—Christ. A believer is received into a gathering of saints, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is its head and center of worship. The very purpose of reception is to enable believers to turn away from the world and to turn their hearts and minds toward the Lord Jesus Christ in worship and service. This focus will by necessity invigorate the spiritual tone of worship and service in the local church.

How is a Believer Received into a Local Assembly

When a believer visits a local assembly and shows interest in being an active part of that fellowship, the elders should meet with him. This visit should emphasize the spiritual character of the local church. This time together should also stress the mutual responsibility of the assembly to the believer and the believer to the assembly. The believer has the privilege of giving in time, talent, financial resources, and the use of his spiritual gift to the blessing the of other believers.! The believer, armed with a servant-attitude, also has the privilege of displaying acts of practical love to the brethren in praying, sharing, opening one's home, and visiting others (John 13:34). The elders also have a responsibility to the believer. The believer will be held accountable to maintain a life pleasing to the Lord in doctrine and moral purity. The elders have a responsibility to the believer to disciple, challenge, and shepherd with the goal of being conformed to the image of Christ.! However, reception goes further than merely accepting one into the life of the assembly. The New

Testament often uses the Greek word "proslambano" (Acts 18:26, Romans 14:1) and also "apodechomai" (Acts 15:4, 18:27) when setting forth the doctrine of reception. These words indicate that reception is more than the simple welcoming of a believer into the fellowship of an assembly. These words show that it includes hospitality, teaching, and the spiritual care of these new ones now in the assembly. This principle is beautifully illustrated in the example of Aquila and Priscilla. When this couple saw the spiritual zeal in Apollos, they took (proslambano, ie. nurtured, taught, etc.) him into their home and began to teach and encourage him in the faith. The Greek words, used in Acts 18, show the tenderness and care exhibited as they ministered to him. "Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Priscilla and Aquila heard, they took (proslambano) him unto them and expounded to him the way more perfectly…when he was disposed to go to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive (apodechomai) him" (vv. 26, 27). Aquila and Priscilla showed sacrificial hospitality, taught, and gave spiritual guidance; then, when Apollos took his leave, a letter was written to the believers in Achaia asking them to receive him in the same way. This passage draws for us a word picture of what reception should look like in New Testament churches today. Reception goes much further than merely accepting a believer into fellowship. It must include spiritual care and teaching by the elders, along with the other believers in the assembly. Reception does not urge believers to join a new church or become members in a new denomination, but rather, to share in a new fellowship with those who love the Lord in their common salvation. New Testament churches do not rejoice because a believer is now a

member of their church or denomination, but because the believer now shares in the fellowship of saints as members of the body of Christ. This fellowship is emphasized throughout the New Testament. In the Lord's Supper, the cup is the " communion of the blood of Christ", and the bread is the " communion of the body of Christ." New Testament churches do not ordain ministers of the gospel but extend to them the "right hand of fellowship " (Gal. 2:9). Monetary gifts that are sent to support efforts in the gospel at home or on foreign soil are said to be "fellowship in the gospel" (Phil. 4:19). This fellowship was never considered by New Testament writers to be "partial", or "Sunday morning only", on the part of believers, but rather "steadfast" and continual. May all churches take up this New Testament pattern, striving to set forth reception and fellowship as a hallmark of their position in Christ and their love for Christ and for each other.

Endnotes (1) "Landmarkism",

Fred S. mead estimates 1,500,000 members of baptist churches hold to the Landmark position and doctrine (Handbook of Denominations, fifth edition, Abington Press,) p. 45 (2) F. J. A. Hort, The Christian Ecclesia, (New York, Macmillan, 1897), p. 169-170 (2) Robert Saucy, The Church in God's Program, (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1972), p. 102

Reformed Theology and Regeneration

Reformed Theology and Regeneration

This paper is by David Dunlap, Bible & Life Ministries, Inc. (3116 Gulfwind Drive, Land O'Lakes, FL 34639. It is taken from a larger work entitled Limiting Omnipotence--The Consequences of Calvinism--A Study of Crucial Issues in Reformed and Dispensational Theology. This paper is reproduced with the author's permission.

In 1883 on the island of Krakatao, in the Straits of Sunda, a volcano erupted, splitting mountains from top to bottom and scattering rock, landscape, and debris into the sea. Nothing was left of the island but a lifeless mass 100 feet deep of lava and volcanic ash. Observers estimated that 36,000 people lost their lives, thereby making this one of the deadliest eruptions in history. Scientists declared positively that no animal or vegetable life would be able to survive. Nevertheless, over the next three years, flowers and ferns began to sprout out of the dark soil. Seeds had been carried there by the wind and the sea. By 1897, many portions of the ground were covered with vegetation. Soon the entire island was covered with plant growth, and an array of birds, animals, and insects populated the island. This account vividly illustrates what takes place spiritually when the life of God completely transforms the sin-darkened souls of men through faith in Christ. The name the Bible gives for this experience is regeneration or “quickening” (KJV).

The term “new birth” never occurs in the Bible; the noun “regeneration” occurs only twice in the Bible

(Titus 3:5, Mt. 19:28). The Greek word translated "regeneration" is "palingenesia", which, when broken down into its component parts, means "born-again" ("palin"= again; "genesia"= birth). While the term new birth never occurs, related words occur many times, such as "new creation", "born again", and "new man".

What is regeneration? Regeneration is the one-time experience of receiving new life in Christ, when the work of a new creation is begun, and the process of sanctification is set in motion. The regenerate man is no longer the man he once was. By virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit, the new life (created after the image of God) has come into the souls of men. This new nature has its own desires, affections, and interests—they are all spiritual, rooted in Christ, and God-centered. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit"; the new nature is spiritual, for it shares the nature of the One who imparts it. The believer is made "a partaker of the divine nature…" (2 Peter 1:4). However, the old nature remains within the believer, struggling with the new.

The Reformed View of Regeneration

Students of Holy Scripture offer differing views on the divine order in regard to the new birth. This debate is not merely an academic exercise, but one which has far-reaching consequences. Clear biblical thinking in this area greatly helps the serious Christian. Current Reformed theology teaches that regeneration, or new birth, must precede faith. It maintains that since unregenerate man is dead and unable to respond to the gospel, he must first be "born again" so that he can receive the gift of faith. This regenerative work of God

will only take place in the lives of the elect as God irresistibly draws them. This all must take place in this order; otherwise biblical salvation, it is maintained, is no longer of God in His grace, but rather of man through self-effort. Calvinist professor Dr. R. C. Sproul sets forth this position when he writes:

In regeneration, God changes our hearts. He gives us a new disposition, a new inclination. He plants a desire for Christ in our hearts. We can never trust Christ for our salvation unless we first desire Him. This is why we said earlier that regeneration precedes faith. [R. C. Sproul, Chosen by God, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 1986), p. 118]

In a similar vein, concerning regeneration Reformed psychologist Jay Adams writes:

Only God can bring life to dead souls to enable them to believe. He does this when and where and how He pleases by His Spirit, who regenerates, or gives life leading to faith…As a reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ Himself who are His elect for whom He died. [Jay Adams, Competent To Counsel, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), p. 70]

On the other hand, non-calvinists teach that new birth occurs after an unregenerate man exercises faith in Christ. The unregenerate man, after he is drawn by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, enlightened by the power of the Word of God, gripped by grace, and prodded through prayer, is then enabled by God to exercise faith in the finished work of Christ. Although unregenerate man is dead in trespasses and sin and at

enmity with God, this does not mean that he is unable to express faith. God's sovereign design does, however, lay emphasis upon the infinite power of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, the grace of God, the will of God, and the Word of God. Without this work of God, no man would ever be saved.

Regeneration and Infant Salvation

Calvinism also teaches that infants, when yet unborn, are regenerated, even though they have no knowledge of Christ; and that, upon birth, infant baptism is to be practiced as a sign that the child is regenerate. John Calvin believed that all the children of believers were spiritually regenerated in the womb. To complete the salvation process Calvin also suggested that God granted a unique, supernatural faith to these infants in the womb. This would certainly add a new twist to the term “child-like faith.” But how is this all possible? John Calvin writes:

But how, they ask, are infants regenerated, when not possessing a knowledge of either good or evil? We answer, that the work of God, though beyond the reach of our capacity, is not therefore null. Infants who are to be saved (and that some are saved at this age is certain) must, without question, be regenerated by the Lord....Many He certainly has called and endued with true knowledge of Himself, by internal means, by the illumination of the Spirit, without the intervention of preaching. [John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion, Vol.11, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1962), p. 541,542]

The issue of the salvation of the children of the elect soon occupied the minds of many leading Calvinists.

How could one know if the children of the elect would eventually come to Christ, or might some never come to trust Him as Savior? Calvinists reasoned: if only the elect are regenerated and only the regenerated can be saved, is there any way of knowing if children are elect? John Calvin, comforted the hearts of many by stating that God had already made provision for that need. He suggested that all the children of the elect will be saved. Calvin writes:

Our children, before they are born, God declares that He adopts for His own when He promises He will be a God to us, and to our seed after us. In this promise their salvation is included. [John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion, Vol.11; (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1962), p.525]

What are the spiritual consequences of such speculation? First of all, if this is true, we need not concern ourselves with the spiritual condition of our children and our grandchildren. Why? Because if we are elect, our children are also elect, which means their children are also elect, and so on, until our family line comes to an end. While a Calvinist may find comfort in this view, he needs to flip the coin to see what lies on the other side. If it follows that a “Calvinist” child is elect and will be saved because of his parents' election, would it not also be true that if that child never believes in Jesus Christ, this proves that the parents were never elect? If a parent proves not to be elect, it would mean that his father could not be elect either. The Calvinist “election domino” must logically fall in both directions. Furthermore, Scripture stresses that children are not saved because the parents were elect but because

children themselves possessed faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation (Acts 16:31-32,2 Tim. 3:14-15).

The Reformed View and the Scriptures

Many have noted that the Reformed view of regeneration is in stark contrast to Scripture. The Bible clearly establishes that the blessings of salvation, the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, eternal life, and regeneration never precede faith, but are always the result of faith.

Resurgence of Religious Ritual

Large numbers of evangelical Christians are returning to the maze of religious ritual. Liturgical worship incorporating incense, candles, vestments, and ancient formal prayers has found its place on the platforms of evangelical churches. A recent study has reported that evangelicals are returning to ancient ritual at an alarming rate. Ritualism is finding that leading Bible schools and denominations are fertile soil in which to germinate. Robert Webber, a professor of theology at Wheaton College, IL and a leading spokesman for ritualism, writes, “I had to find a faith that brought me into contact with the transcendence and mystery of God.” (1)

Church of the Nazarene minister Randall Davey has begun to incorporate elements of Anglican liturgy into church services in Kansas. On the west coast, four former workers with Campus Crusade for Christ have formed the Evangelical Orthodox Church, which uses Byzantine liturgy. President Peter Gillquist writes, “Our goal is to bring America to orthodoxy.” (2)

Ritual and New Testament Assemblies

Our concern is that ritualism is beginning to find inroads among so-called “brethren” assemblies. Assemblies have long been noted for their singlemindedness in worship, love for Christ and devotion to the scriptures. Yet some Assemblies are undermining the spirituality and richness of worship through subtle and overt forms of ritualism. The Lord’s Supper has been dissected, dismantled, organized, and structured reducing it to only a shadow of its true character. The foundation of

reverence, holiness and the lordship of Christ during the remembrance meeting is slowly being eroded. In its place we now find ancient prayers, priestly theatrics, chants and mystery. Sadly, one seeks in vain to find among all these forms the cultivation of a more worshipful and Christ-honoring people. As in nature, it is only a matter of time before the subtle seeds of ritual sprout into fully developed error. A commended worker, who speaks throughout the US, has promoted this practice. He said, “To see people working in an organized, orchestrated and beautifully planned out way is beautiful…in liturgical churches when the procession would come in and the congregation would stand, and someone would enter carrying the Bible, and the music would play, and the trumpets would blast, there was a glorious feeling in the air. This may not be your style, but it is God’s style. This type of worship went on in the Old Testament.”

For more than a century the “assembly” movement has studiously avoided ritualistic error. Formalism has been fiercely denounced from its pulpits. Early leaders of the “brethren” movement exposed this lethal error for what it was, a contradiction of the true nature of New Testament worship. John Nelson Darby, a gifted and discerning leader among them summarized their convictions when he wrote, “A worldly religion, which forms a system in which the world can walk, in which the religious element is adapted to man on earth, is a denial of Christianity.” (3)

C.I. Scofield, Bible teacher and author, lays bare the fatal danger of this false worship when he writes, “The judaizing of the church has done more to hinder her progress, pervert her mission, and destroy her

spirituality than all other causes combined. Instead of pursuing her appointed path of separation from the world and following the Lord in her heavenly calling, she has used Jewish scriptures to justify herself in lowering her purpose to the acquisition of wealth, the use of imposing ritual, the erection of magnificent churches, and the division of the equal brotherhood into ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’.” (4)

These solemn words should sound out a warning. The revival of ritualism represents strands of a cord which together strangle spiritual life. The dangers of formalism should be trumpeted far and wide within the assemblies. Our liberty of expression, which is a great privilege in corporate worship, may prove to be the very gate for error. All too often, any expression of worship is permitted rather than spiritual expression in worship. Graciousness often wins out over the biblical mandate.

The Errors of Ritualism

What is wrong you may ask, with liturgical worship? Isn’t it just another approach to worship? What biblical principles does it violate? First of all, ritual, by its very nature, creates an unbiblical class within the assembly of believers through its use of vestments, honorific titles, and special privileges. The Bible states in Job 32:21, “Let me not, I pray you, accept any man’s person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man.” Again in Matthew 23:8 scripture says, “Be not called Rabbi; for one is your master, even Christ, and you are all brethren.” One of the most esteemed leaders of the early church was Paul, the apostle. What was his honored title within the church? The unassuming title which was used three times in the book of Acts (Acts

9:17, 21:20, 22:13), was simply “brother.” Ritual creates unwarranted offices, distinctions, and titles within the body of Christ. Ritualism rejects the priesthood of all believers. This treasured truth of the church does not exalt one spiritual gift above another, but teaches that all spiritual gifts are to be valued and are indispensable. The unjustified religious practice of ordination for the priesthood and ministry in many churches undermines the priestly responsibilities of every believer. C. H. Spurgeon, the British preacher, has aptly stated that ordination was often, “Placing empty hands on empty heads.” Vestments cannot signify a spiritual gift any more than a baseball cap signifies a position with a professional baseball team. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, usually very sound and reliable in his expositions of Scripture, on the subject of ordination and the importance of vestments, he swerves uncharacteristically from the sublime to the ill-reasoned when he writes, “ I believe it is good and right for a preacher to wear a gown in the pulpit. How do I reconcile that with what I have just been saying about spiritual authority? The gown to me is a sign of the call, a sign of the fact that a man has been ‘set apart’ to do this work. It is no more than that, but it is that. Of course, I must hastily add that while I believe in wearing a gown in the pulpit, I do not believe in wearing a hood on the gown! The wearing of a hood calls attention to the man and his ability, not to his call. So wear a gown but never a hood!” (5)

Ritualism and True Worship

Secondly, ritualism emphasizes form, beauty, and tradition above the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul warned the Colossians about the dangers of ritualism in

worship(2:8). Paul explained in his first chapter what the focus of our worship must be, writing, “He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence” (1:18). Formalism refuses to recognize the centrality of Christ in worship. Since her very inception, the essence of the New Testament church has been to gather unto the Lord Jesus Christ alone. He is the sole “attraction”; all other activities and church “traditions”, new and old, pale in significance to the person of Christ. In the weekly remembrance meeting believers do not come together to admire colorful vestments or listen to a recital of ancient prayers or to light candles. A believer’s desire is to glorify his risen Saviour. Worshipers who bring praise may be clothed in the latest fashion or in simple dress. They may gather together in a newly erected auditorium or in a simple hall. This makes no difference to our Lord. That which does make a difference is for Christ to receive all the emphasis and priority in worship.

Ritualism, Israel and the Judgment of God

Thirdly, the word of God thunders scathing denunciations against empty form in worship. Israel’s history teaches that the empty form remains long after the spiritual life has departed. For this very reason the discerning Christian must be cautious concerning unauthorized forms and structures in the New Testament church. The prophet Isaiah rebukes Israel’s outward religion, writing, “Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me…your appointed feasts My soul hates, they are a trouble unto me; I am weary of bearing them” (1:13-14). There is no more grievous act to the heart of God than that of empty

worship and the meaningless repetitions of prayers and chants. God delights in the heart-felt songs and praises of his people. Structure without spirituality and formalism without reality does not bring glory and pleasure to God. In our present-day evangelical mentality of “anything-goes-if-people-are-attracted”, many worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship. Many are seeking for something new, unique and innovative to appeal to the emotions and senses of unredeemed man. Little forethought is given to what God requires or what may please the heart of God. Author A. P. Gibbs rightly observes, “Christendom has its own specially educated and ordained priesthood, whose presence is indispensable. Men robed in gorgeous vestments who, within a roped off sanctuary, stand before a bloodless altar with a background of burning candles, crosses and smoking incense. With the use of an elaborate, prepared ritual and stereotyped prayers, and responses from the audiences, the whole service moves with mechanical precision. Yet if Jesus were to arrive on the scene today, He would indict this ritualistic worship and would accept only the true worship of those who worship the Lord in ‘spirit and in truth.’ ” (6)

May we be found to be worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth, seeking God’s glory alone.

Finally, religious ritual causes preparation and participation in worship to be unnecessary. Ritual permits but the select and privileged few to prepare for and minister in corporate worship. Many can testify that the weekly preparation and worship at the Lord’s supper has revitalized their spiritual life. Ritualism excludes the majority from the privileges of the believer’s priesthood.

Worship is then reduced to a spectator activity. The sad result of all this is that God's word becomes trivial and worship is robbed of its importance. The liturgical system, by its very nature, usurps the rightful place of Christ and the scriptures in the worshiping assembly. Therefore, all advances of ritualism, subtle or obvious, must be vigorously resisted.

Endnotes (1) Jeffrey L. Sheler, "From Evangelicalism to Orthodoxy", U.S. News and World Report, January 15, 1989. pp. 58-59 (2) Ibid., p. 59 (3) John Nelson Darby, Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, vol. 5, (Addision, IL: Bible Truth Publishers), p. 347 (4) C.I. Scofield, Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, (New York, N. Y., Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1892), p. 17 (5) D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Preaching & Preachers, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1971), p. 160 (6) A. P. Gibbs, Worship, (Kansas City, KS, Walterick Publishers, 1980), p.97-98

Reverence in the Local Assembly

Isaiah unfolds to us the holiness of God unlike any other prophet before him. The holiness of God had gripped his heart with unusual power and conviction. He was humbled by Him who is exalted high above all His creatures with infinite greatness. He saw, like never before, that there was a great chasm between the holiness of God and the unholiness of man. Israel's corrupt spiritual condition demanded a fresh and powerful manifestation of God's holiness. Israel's Spiritual Condition King Uzziah had reigned in Judah for 52 years. Although this king had protected his people from its enemies and brought a measure of economic prosperity and a sense of security, inwardly the nation was morally corrupt, spiritually empty, and superficial in its worship of God. As a result, in Isaiah chapter five, Isaiah pronounces six judgments of woe upon Judah. Many in Judah falsely believed that they were in a proper spiritual condition because of its economic prosperity. But in 740 B.C., king Uzziah died of leprosy when God struck him down because of his pride. When Uzziah died, the nation's sense of security was shattered, and Isaiah felt the need to enter into the presence of God. Isaiah, who sought to mourn a departed king, found himself bowed before the exalted King of glory. It was here that God gripped Isaiah with an awesome sense of His presence and holiness. He saw the Lord high and lifted up. He heard the seraphim cry back and forth, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is filled with his glory" (v. 3). He is broken by his own unworthiness. Why was Isaiah so visibly shaken by all that he had seen and heard? He

tells us the reason, "... mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:5). Likewise, when we are gripped by the holiness of God, our instant and only reaction must be worship and reverence. Without such a revelation or conviction, we cannot truly worship God. Devotion and reverence are the life-blood of worship. Worship that is marked by a fresh vision of God's holiness is never casual, flippant, and superficial. True worshippers do not rush into His holy presence unprepared to bow in reverence. Sincere worshippers of God possess deep convictions about the holiness and glory of God. However, just as in Isaiah's day there was great spiritual apathy, so also is there much spiritual indifference and casualness in the church today.

The Need for Reverent Worship

Many are concerned that today there is too much shallowness in our worship of God. Irreverence in worship is now becoming all too common in modern churches. Unfortunately, New Testament assemblies are not immune to this affliction. Increasingly, believers are sashaying into worship meetings 10-15 minutes late without the slightest hint of embarrassment. The retelling of personal anecdotes, the singing of favorite hymns, and nonchalance have replaced holy and reverent worship. Psalm 111:9 exhorts, "Holy and reverend is His Name." Hearts full of Christ have now given way to hearts full of competing interests. Many still attend times of worship, but have lost their first love. The stirring hymns of the faith are still sung, but rarely with passion and conviction. Gripping passages of Scripture about Christ and the cross are still read, but with little apparent devotion or heart-felt affection. Eloquent prayers of praise and worship ring hollow.

It was not always this way. In earlier days the assemblies were known for men of God whose passion to worship the Son of God was unrivaled. The believers in the Lord Jesus Christ might have gathered in a grange hall or a refurbished building, but the gathering place was not as important as the gathering Center, the Lord Jesus Christ. The hymns were sung heartily. Worship was mingled with tenderness and devotion by men of God who knew the Word of God. There was a beauty of holiness that attracted all true saints of God. The holiness and reverence that characterized the meeting were evident to all. Concerning the character of those meetings, one writes, “I sometimes smile when I hear ministers state the assumption that a new type of building will create a worship atmosphere. In my late adolescence I occasionally worshiped with those known as ‘Plymouth Brethren’. Meeting in the barest halls, adorned only with signs carrying Scripture verses, they had the most worshipful services that I have ever attended. No organist in whispering conferences, pushing or pulling stops. Greeting, giggling, whispering, and coughing were all hushed by the miracle drug: reverence. Children were quieted. People tiptoed to their places in the circle to sit with bowed heads or read their Bibles. The keen anticipation of the movement of the Spirit of God in leading one of the assembled men to announce a hymn, read the Scripture, or to offer prayer was sensed in these moments of deep reverence, which sharply contrasts with the hubbub of many Protestant services.” (1) Reverence is not something we can bring to God or create in ourselves, but rather, it is a spiritual grace we receive when we begin to see God as He truly

is. Reverence acknowledges in our hearts the glory of God as presented in the Scriptures, and then yields to God His rightful place in our lives. Reverent worshippers acknowledge their unworthiness and in godly fear bow before an awesome and holy God. Concerning this source of holy reverence, the Swiss reformer John Calvin writes, “Reverence is that dread and amazement with which holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God…Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.” (2) Just a sudden glimpse of the holiness of God will change us forever. As Isaiah is thrust into the presence of God and the seraphim cry out, “Holy, holy, holy”, the prophet confesses, “Woe is me! For I am undone.” Isaiah, the righteous prophet, in one brief moment, is exposed and broken under the gaze of the Almighty. In an instant he is measured by the ultimate standard of holiness; he is weighed in the balance and is found wanting. The holiness of God has seized his heart, soul, and mind. He cannot forget what he has seen. Boredom, casualness, and lukewarmness about the things of God are gone forever. “Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

The Biblical Standard for Reverent Worship

All too frequently churchgoers gather to worship God who have never had a fresh vision of God’s holiness. Nice songs are sung, religious thoughts are offered to God, and well-crafted words are uttered, but all this falls far short of true worship. This worship may be more psychological and fleshly than spiritual. This kind of worship bears no resemblance to the worship that we find in Scripture. The psalmist writes, “He is to be

feared above all gods…splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary…O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before Him all the earth" (Ps. 92:4-6, 9). Godly fear, majesty, the beauty of holiness, and splendor were ready themes in the hearts of the worshippers of old. How this should challenge our hearts! There are many who study theology, but where are those who study to be worshippers of God? Where are the churches today whose passion is to "worship God in spirit and truth"? Where are the books exhorting, teaching, and equipping this generation to worship God? A. W. Tozer exhorted the fundamentalist-Bible-believing church prior to his death in 1951, "Many of our popular songs and choruses in praise of Christ are hollow and unconvincing. Some are even shocking in their amorous endearments, and strike a reverent soul as being a kind of flattery offered to One with whom neither composer nor singer is acquainted. The whole thing is in the mood of a love ditty, the only difference being the substitution of the name of Christ for that of the earthly lover. How different and how utterly wonderful are the emotions aroused by true Spirit-incited love for Christ. Such love may rise to a degree of adoration almost beyond the power of the heart to endure, yet at the same time it will be serious, elevated, chaste, and reverent. Christ can never be known without a sense of awe and fear accompanying the knowledge. He is the fairest among ten thousand, but also the Lord high and mighty. He is the friend of sinners, but also the terror of devils. He is meek and lowly in heart, but He is also the Lord and Christ who will surely come to be the judge of all men. No one who knows Him intimately can ever be flippant in His presence. If Bible Christianity is to survive the

present world upheaval, we shall need to recapture the spirit of worship." (3) May God raise up such an army of worshippers, those who long to reverently remember Him who first remembered us on Calvary's cross. Might God raise up tender-hearted worshippers; but more than this, may He raise up those whose passion and aim is to equip others to worship God.

A Call to Reverent Worship

Sadly, there are many today to whom the idea of reverence in worship sounds too old-fashioned, so out of step with the times, and at odds with contemporary worship trends. Indeed, many believers seem to be strangers to the foundational truths that form the basis for our worship. The New Testament teaching concerning worship, the Lord's supper, and the person of Christ no longer seem to hold their interest. These do not seem to be popular. We are a spiritually carefree generation. Unfortunately, the broad road has always been more appealing than the narrow way. But the apostle Paul's exhortation must not go unnoticed, "For we are the circumcison, which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3). Therefore, let us draw near unto Him, who in mercy, first drew near to us and humbly bow our hearts as worshippers in His holy presence. May our reverent worship once again shine bright as the hallmark of our devotion to Christ.

Endnotes (1) John Drakeford The Awesome Power of a Listening Heart (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985) (2) R. C. Sproul The Holiness of God (Wheaton, IL:Tyndale House, 1985), p. 72 (3) A. W. Tozer That

Incredible Christian, The Art of True Worship (Harrisburg, PA:Christian Publications, 1964), p. 125.

Sovereignty of God

The blazing African sun beat down upon the crowded Arab marketplace as women busily bartered with the merchants. The bustling walkways were lined with storekeepers selling their wares, as the children played nearby. The air was filled with the pungent smell of spices, and the confusing din of a thousand voices. Amid these dusty streets teeming with people, a pregnant woman began to slowly make her way across a wide thoroughfare. Suddenly, there was a great noise and commotion in the marketplace, and in an instant, an out-of-control wagon, being pulled by a team of horses in full gallop, raced through the marketplace. Without warning, the team of horses trampled down the helpless woman with tremendous force. Immediately, a crowd began to gather to see what had happened. The driver, now realizing what he had done, brought the horses to an abrupt stop. While looking at the woman lying dead on the ground, he said with callous indifference, “It was the will of Allah”, and continued on his way. To many, this account describes their view of the sovereignty of God. To them, God's actions are arbitrary, capricious, and often unjust. Their attitude is “whatever will be, will be”. No matter what happens, it is God's will. This is the fatalistic view of God. Such a God will be feared, but how can He be loved? If He cannot be loved, how can He be trusted?

Divine Sovereignty and the Attributes of God

Thankfully, the Bible does not present such a view of God's sovereignty. The Bible presents God as both infinitely all-powerful and infinitely good. God's

goodness, justice, mercy, grace, and His numerous other attributes meet together to form the righteous and holy sovereign actions of God. God's sovereignty may sometimes involve testing in the form of calamity and trials, but never without love, faithfulness, and compassion. His sovereign will may appear for the moment to be without purpose or sense, yet the ways of God are always perfect. He is a God whom we can trust, love, and worship for His sovereign will. While sovereignty is surely to be believed by all who love sound doctrine, it must not be understood to be exercised in conflict with God's attributes, such as love, justice, truth, and immutability. Some have erred in this respect and have raised sovereignty to such a level that all the attributes of God become secondary, thereby causing discord in the nature of God. The sovereignty of God can never be exercised in expense to His divine nature, which is love (1 Jn. 4:8). Concerning this conflict, Dr. James Orr, general editor of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, writes, “Calvin exalts the sovereignty of God, and this is right, but errs in placing his root-ideas of God in the sovereign will rather than in love.” (1)

Divine Sovereignty and the Goodness of God

The biblical principle that God is good and does good applies to His sovereign actions. God's nature and His holy purposes cannot be divorced; for God will not act contrary to His holy nature. Scripture reveals that God's mercy, goodness, grace, and compassion all undergird His sovereign purposes and will. Abraham echoed this very principle, when he said, “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Even when affliction and suffering are God's divine will, it too is ruled by His

“compassion and unfailing love”. Jeremiah the prophet explains, “Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men” (Lam. 3:33). Theologians have called this linking of God's sovereign rule with God's infinite goodness the doctrine of “providence”. Providence is divine care, sustenance, and love, and His sovereign rule over creation for His glory and the good of man. The two-fold goal of providence is the glory of God and the good of His people. God never pursues His glory at the expense of the good of His people, nor does He ever seek our good at the expense of His glory. He has designed His eternal purpose so that His glory and our good are inseparably yoked together.

Divine Sovereignty and the Wisdom of God

All God's sovereign actions are also rooted in His infinite wisdom. God's wisdom enables Him to direct every act that occurs upon the world stage into a perfect plan that accomplishes His divine purpose. God is the master of every situation. Man can be frustrated by circumstances outside of his control, but this is never true of God. There is never a situation, problem, or difficulty which can ever frustrate the wisdom of God. His sovereign actions are advanced by His unbounded omnipotence and ruled by His infinite wisdom. The Psalmist has said, “Great is our God, and of great power: His understanding is infinite” (Ps. 147:5). His ways are infinitely perfect. No act of God is flawed, marred, or suspect. No decision of God can ever be improved upon. We may not understand the ways of God, yet they remain rooted in perfect wisdom. It is not our place to raise doubts about our “God only wise”, but rather to

bow in worshipful submission. The psalmist writes of the works of God, “O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches” (Ps. 104:24).

The Biblical Scope of Divine Sovereignty

The doctrine that God is sovereign in His created universe is a truth that must be believed by all Christians. That God is sovereign means that He is the highest and greatest, exalted above all. He is omnipotent and controls everything, working everything according to His eternal plan and purpose (Eph. 1:11). The Bible states that God is eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient, unchanging, all-powerful, all-knowing and He alone stands unequaled, above all. “For Thou, Lord, are high above all the earth: Thou art exalted far above all gods” (Ps. 97:9). Since God is infinite, His rule must be absolute. His rule must involve total control of everything in His creation--every circumstance, every situation, every event. God's sovereignty means that He either directly causes or consciously permits all that happens in human history. God claims full responsibility for establishing and removing human rulers. God, according to His holy character, has the right to do those things that please Him (Ps. 115:3). Yet we must never forget that those things that please Him most are marked by love, mercy, and justice. God is in complete control, and yet He does not manipulate people like mere puppets. He gives them the dignity and freedom to make decisions and holdsthem responsible for their choices. Those decisions may bring to pass untold misery and suffering, and yet God allows it. However, through divine omniscience God knows every choice that man would make, and through divine sovereignty

He takes those choices and uses them to serve His purposes. In this way, God has complete control over every decision and action, and man has the freedom to make decisions. However, where divine wisdom deems it best, He will overrule man's decisions in order to accomplish His own matchless purposes. Only an omnipotent God can take man's choices and the suffering that follows and cause them to ultimately serve His sovereign and perfect will. God does not always allow man's sinful actions to run their full and natural evil course, but He intervenes and overrules. Moreover, we should not question God's sovereignty, but rather yield to the good and perfect will of God.

Divine Sovereignty and the Scope of Man's Free Will

However, some have wrongly concluded that if God is absolutely sovereign, then man does not have a free will. It is thought that man can only act insomuch as God will allow him to act, and that man must act only as God desires. Therefore, according to this view, man cannot resist the sovereign will and desires of God. This view may strike us as biblical and logical; however, Scripture does not seem to support this view. Moreover, Scripture emphasizes that God has sovereignly granted to man the ability to make free choices. This is not man usurping God's role in the world, but this is God's sovereign design and purpose for man in the world. Man could not make free choices except that it was given by God. This principle is stated by our Lord Himself in His interview with Pilate before the crucifixion. Pilate charges the Lord, “Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and have power to release You?” Jesus answers, “You could have no power at all against Me, except it were given to you from above...” (John 19:11). Pilate thought

that his ability to make free decisions was a personal right. Our Lord rightly corrects Pilate and states that the ability to make free choices is from God--“it is given from above”. Frequently throughout Scripture we see man acting in defiance to God's desires. This ability is granted to man from God. King Solomon in the book of Proverbs declares, “For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof” (Prov. 1:29). God has not determined and caused all things to come to pass as they do. God exercises sovereign control in the world; but within this control, He permits certain events and purposes others. It is of great importance to carefully distinguish between these two aspects of God's sovereignty. For this reason, the sinful consequences of man's will must never be attributed to God. The Word of God clearly states that all sinful temptations, the acts of the flesh, wars, lust, killings, and the misery that results because of sin are not caused by God, but by the free choices of man (James 4:1). The Word of God carefully sets forth both the infinite sovereignty of God and human responsibility. God is sovereign, and yet in this infinite sovereignty, God has granted to man a free will. To detract from either of these truths is to detract from the fullness of the Word of God. A proper biblical balance between the two must be rigorously sought and maintained. Respected author A. W. Tozer strikes this proper biblical balance between the sovereignty of God and man's free will when he writes, "God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it,

inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give limited freedom, whois there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest Thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so." (2) Dr. Norman Geisler adds further clarity, writing, "Human freedom is not contrary to God's sovereignty. God sovereignly gave man his freedom by creating him a free creature, and God sovereignly continues to allow man to exercise his freedom moment by moment in existence. Thus the sovereignty of God is not thwarted by human freedom but glorified by human freedom. For God gave man free will, He sustains man so he can act freely, and he brings about all his purposes without violating man's free will." (3) The scholar and gifted preacher C. H. Spurgeon draws together the importance of these two lines of biblical truth: "Man is a free agent, a responsible agent, so that his sin is his own wilful sin and it lies fully with him and never with God, and yet at the same time God's purposes are fulfilled, and His will is done even by demons and corrupt men--I cannot comprehend it: without hesitation I believe it, and rejoice so to do, I never hope to comprehend it...I worship a God I never expect to comprehend." (4)

Finally, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God must never provide man with excuses. Systems of theology may give reasons to do so, but not the Word of God. For no man can deny full responsibility for his actions, claiming that he was irresistibly led by God; for God never does violence to the free will which He has graciously given to man. God's sovereignty and man's

freedom dwell side by side in such a way that the former does not force itself upon the latter; but in some cases He does overrule for His highest eternal purpose. In a future day we will see that mankind, in complete freedom, in uncoerced decisions, has been working out God's eternal divine plan. How can this be brought to pass? It is only by and through a sovereign God who is characterized by infinite power, wisdom, love, and goodness. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!…” (Rom. 11:33-36).

Endnotes (1) James Orr, The Progress of Dogma, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 292 (2) A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, (New York, NY: Harpers and Row Publishers, 1961), p. 118 (3) Norman Geisler, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), p. 429 (4) C. H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 16, (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), p. 501

Spiritual Revival & The Lord's Supper

The practice of the Lord’s supper has fallen on unfortunate times. To many believers, the Lord’s supper is considered an incidental ordinance of the church to be dispensed with quickly at the end of a preaching service; to others it is an ancient ceremony whose meaning is hidden in mystery and ritual. However, this was not always the case. In the early church, the Lord’s supper was integral in the life of the church. The Lord’s supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospels. The book of Acts lists the Lord’s supper as one of the four foundational practices of New Testament church life (Acts 2:42). The apostle Paul declares that his teaching on the Lord’s supper was received by special revelation from the risen Christ (1 Cor. 11:23). The weekly Lord’s supper was important in the early church; it was important during the Reformation; it was important during the Wesleyan revivals in England. In virtually every major period of church history, the Lord’s supper stood at the forefront of the life of the local church. Throughout the history of the church, whenever the church was experiencing spiritual revival, the Lord’s supper was especially vibrant and alive. However, when the church was in spiritual decline, the worship of Christ at the Lord’s supper was stifled, muted, and shrouded in mystery. In every generation the Lord’s supper functioned as a spiritual barometer, measuring the spiritual health of the church.

The Current Situation in the Evangelical Church

Today, as never before, the biblical practice of the Lord’s supper stands in jeopardy. There are many who are

questioning its significance. Others are trivializing its importance. Others allege that the regular celebration of the Lord's supper is an obstacle to church growth. They contend that Scripture never commands us to celebrate the Lord's supper weekly. Long accepted principles of biblical worship are now being replaced by modern marketing techniques. Clever numerical growth strategies using sociological and demographic studies are competing with the standards and patterns of the Word of God. Saddest of all, in many New Testament churches the Word of God is losing this all-important battle. If the pages of Christian history could speak, they would raise their uncompromising disapproval. Was there ever a true revival where there was not a return to true worship? Was there ever a time that the practice of the Lord's supper was not a mark of genuine revival? Would we dare neglect to examine our own spiritual condition when the worship of Christ at the Lord's Supper no longer attracts our hearts? Can our hearts remain unmoved and indifferent when churchgoers crowd in to hear a rock band and drama presentation at the 11:00 service, while there are so few true worshippers found at the Lord's table? Has the church exchanged holiness and reverence in worship for the atmosphere and glitter of Hollywood? Have we become so busy being happy that we have forgotten to be holy worshippers?

The 1st Century Church and the Lord's Supper

The early church period was characterized by spiritual worship. During the first century, after the death of Christ, the church expanded at a rapid rate. Hundreds of local churches were established in Europe, Africa, and throughout Asia Minor. Nevertheless, the Lord's supper

remained central in the life of the local church. Justin Martyr (120-165AD) was a leading historian and apologist for the early church. He describes the vigor and the importance of the Lord's supper during this time of spiritual revival. He writes:

We greet one another with a holy kiss. Then a leader from the believers takes a loaf of bread and a cup of wine; after taking them, he offers up praise to the Father of all things, through the name of the Lord. When he has ended his prayers and thanksgiving, the whole congregation present assents by saying 'amen'. After thanksgiving, the deacons among us distribute it to those who are present…no one is allowed to partake of it unless he believes…For the apostles delivered in the memoirs compiled by them, which are called Gospels, that this command was given to them that Jesus took bread.1 Protestant Reformation and the Lord's Supper During the Reformation many truths that had been shrouded in darkness since the early days of the church were recovered. Some of the truths recovered: were solo fide, salvation my faith alone; solo scriptura, the word of God is the sole authority of faith and life; and solo gratis, salvation is by and through the grace of God. However, the New Testament teaching concerning the Lord's supper was also a leading truth during the Reformation. Thousands of men and women who had found faith in Christ sought to express their worship at the Lord's supper. One of the leaders of the Reformation, John Calvin, sought to give direction to these swelling numbers of new believers. He wrote in his Institutes:

At least once a week the table of the Lord ought to be spread before each congregation of Christians, and the promises should be declared for their spiritual

nourishment; no person ought to be compelled to partake, but all ought to be exhorted and stimulated, and those who were negligent should be reproved.2 Martin Luther also provided important teaching to these believers. Luther, along with John Calvin and the other Reformers, argued for a weekly remembrance of the Lord's supper. Historian Scott Brenner writes of Luther's passion concerning the Lord's supper and its lasting effect on generations of Christians:

Luther heartily advocated a return to the Lord's supper as the normal worship of the congregation on the Lord's day. The determination of Luther to retain the Lord's supper as the norm of worship was so strong that the Lutheran churches in Germany continued without a break to worship in this historic way until about 1722, when the acids of rationalism had eroded their biblical moorings.3 The passion for the worship of Christ would not die in Europe with the rise of German Rationalism. In England, the Wesleyan revival would restore some of its New Testament character.

The Wesleyan Revival and the Lord's Supper

In every great spiritual revival, renewed emphasis and interest in the Lord's supper was God's stamp of approval upon that movement. Interest in the Lord's supper was never a detriment to spiritual growth. Worshipful appreciation of Christ is the natural outflow of a changed heart and life. The most powerful spiritual awakenings in history have often been characterized by a two-fold renewal in worship: firstly, a renewal of simplicity in the practice of the Lord's supper; then a renewal of spiritual appreciation for the Lord's supper. Simplicity of worship has often been a great

characteristic of true revival down through the centuries. Elaborate ceremony and arranged worship will, almost without exception, lead to dead ritual, which neither pleases God nor satisfies the heart of man. A true mark of spiritual revival time and again has been a return to worship in simplicity and the rejection of the forms and ceremony of the established churches. The Wesleyan revival in England is a striking example of this practice. The Spirit of God began to work in the hearts of a small company of believers. As they studied God's Word, they were convinced that these principles of worship should be put into practice. In simplicity they attempted to carry out what they found in the Scriptures to be true. Soon the power of God began to change the hearts and lives of these men. As their lives changed, their hearts were soon burdened to express their worship of Christ. Soon, to celebrate the Lord's supper simply as the New Testament instructs, became their passion. One researcher writes of how the Lord led in their lives:

In November, 1729, four young gentlemen of Oxford, Mr. John Wesley, Mr. Charles Wesley, Mr. Morgan, and Mr. Kirkham of Merton College spent some evenings together in reading chiefly the Greek New Testament. To the original four, others were added to the Club, one of whom, John Clayton, son of a Manchester bookseller, led the members in a new direction. In his father's shop he had read many of the early Christian writers and was constantly illuminating discussions with references from the same. Soon the group eagerly embraced the early church practice of the weekly Lord's supper. The evangelical revival quickly became a revival of worship as well. Hundreds of eager converts crowded into their

once near-empty parish churches to receive communion often, to the consternation of the religious leaders who were unused to such enthusiasm. The evangelical leadership were quick to restore, first monthly, and then weekly communion services.4 The simple way of worship also found its way into the life of believers in the north of Great Britain. Fifty-eight years later in Scotland, James and Robert Haldane, ministers of the gospel, traveled in a carriage and were well supplied with tracts which they themselves wrote, printed, and distributed. They spoke in churches and schools, but chiefly in the open air. Hundreds, and sometimes thousands, gathered to hear them; there was much power in their testimony and many were converted. At the fair at Kirkwall, three to four thousand listened daily, and on the Lord's day some 6,000 gathered to hear. Following the principle of the New Testament, they began to take the Lord's supper the first day of each week. Robert Haldane recalled, I began practising the Lord's supper monthly. Afterwards I became convinced that on the principles I held, that I ought to observe it weekly. I met with a few individuals who erected themselves into a church; and I am convinced that any group of Christians may act as we did.5 Missionary Revivals and the Lord's Supper An accompanying hallmark to simplicity in worship has been a great heartfelt appreciation of Christ at the Lord's supper. A leading feature of spiritual revival has been the tenderhearted affection present in remembering the Lord Jesus Christ in His death. In America the gospel went forth to the Indians in New Jersey through the missionary David Brainerd. Here, and in other places, as the Spirit of God mightily moved in the hearts of men, spiritual revival was accompanied by a sincere

appreciation of the Lord's supper. David Brainerd wrote in his journal on July 13, 1746:

There appeared tender affection in the assembly under divine truth; my soul was also somewhat refreshed. I administered the Lord's supper to 31 of the Indians. God seemed to be real and present among us. The worshippers were sweetly melted and refreshed. Oh, how they melted when the elements were first uncovered. There was scarcely a dry eye among them when I took off the linen, and showed them the symbols of Christ's body.6 It is refreshing to see Christ-centered worship at the forefront of the gathering-together of the New Testament church. This worship pleases the heart of God and empowers the evangelical witness and spiritual life of the church.

Worship, the True Mark of Spiritual Vitality

Throughout the centuries, the weekly practice and the genuine appreciation of the Lord's supper was an indication of the spiritual strength of the Christian church. The past is the great interpreter of the present and a safeguard of the future. A worshipping assembly is always a spiritually robust assembly. Biblical orthodoxy leads to worshipful doxology. Where there is no vision the people perish; and likewise it is true where there is no worship believers languish. When the assembly gathers together, the Lord Jesus Christ must have the first place in all things. He is the Lord of our lives and Head over the church, His body. Unfortunately, today we are beginning to see amarked departure from this essential truth. May the church soon realize that the sincere appreciation and the regular practice of the Lord's supper is a measure of her spiritual strength. The

pattern is plain throughout history: when the church began to forget the Lord in worship, very soon thereafter she also forgot her calling in the world. When we ignore the voice and testimony of history, we do so at our peril.

Endnotes

1 Justin Martyr, Apology addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius translated by L. W. Bernard, (Cambridge, 1967), p. 61 2 John Calvin, The Institutes of Christian Religion, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 602 3 Scott Brenner, The Way of Worship (New York, NY:MacMillian, 1944), p. 75 4 Donald Bridge and David Phypers, Communion: The Meal That Unites (Wheaton, IL: Harold, Shaw Publishers, 1981), p. 124 5 E. H. Broadbent, The Pilgrim Church (London: Pickering and Inglis,1931), p. 298 6 Jonathan Edwards, The Life of David Brainerd (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker,1978), p. 280

Spiritual Warfare With Territorial Spirits

The spiritual warfare “Prayer Intercessor” exclaimed, “This city is overrun with demons…there are demons in every house and on every street…souls will never be saved until this city is taken back by the power of prayer, house by house, street by street!” These Christians were exhorted to take part in a week-long prayer vigil, and to pray and fast around the clock. Some of the faithful walked along every street in nearby neighbourhoods, commanding the demons in every house to leave in the Name of Jesus. At the end of the week, words of prophecy were spoken in the church, encouraging the believers that their efforts had been successful and the demons in these neighborhoods were routed. Now, many souls would be saved. But can such prayer exorcise a city of demons? Is such a practice even biblical? This hypothetical, but all too real, scenario has been repeated numerous times in churches throughout North America.

What is Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare?

This technique of spiritual warfare with “territorial spirits” may be the fastest growing method in evangelism today. This popular method has crossed denominational boundaries and is practiced by Charismatic and non-Charismatic believers alike. Its impact on the mission field has been dramatic. And its inroads at the homefront are unrivaled. This doctrine, which is also called “Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare” (SLSW), is the popular charismatic method of casting out demons from geographical locations, so that,

we are told, the gospel can go forth unhindered, saving thousands of lost souls. John Dawson, the President of the charismatic missions organization, Youth With A Mission, and author of Taking Cities for Christ, explains, “For the last 10 years I have lived in the black community in Los Angeles. My neighbors and I have common enemies. Spirits of despair, hopelessness, depression, discouragement, and rejection torment this community…Several years ago my staff and I went on a prayer walk around our neighborhood. We stood in front of every house, rebuked Satan in Jesus’ name, and prayed for a revelation of Jesus in the life of each family.” (Winning the Battle for Your Neighborhood, Charisma Magazine, April 1990; p. 60-61)

Leaders of SLSW teach that there are three levels of demonic control on earth. Firstly, there are “Ground-Level” demons, which possess people. Secondly, there are “Occult-Level” demons, which empower witches, shamans, and magicians. Finally, the “Strategic-Level” demons, which are the most powerful of the three, are said to rule over certain regions or territories and to direct the efforts of the hordes of “ground-level” demons. Their main purpose is to hinder people from coming to Christ. Proponents teach that the traditional methods of evangelism are time-bound, out of step with current cultural trends, and will be unfruitful unless this new warfare praying technique is practiced.

The History of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare

How did this unbiblical method gain such a strong foothold so quickly? In the early 1980’s, there were a number of city-wide gospel campaigns in Latin America. Some of the evangelists attributed their success to days

spent in prayer, wrestling against the powers of darkness. Thus, this movement was born. But life was infused into the movement in the early 1990's, when Charismatic leader Peter C. Wagner, of the Fuller Seminary School of World Missions, linked himself with the movement. Since then, he has been one of its most vocal spokesmen and its most prolific writer. Peter Wagner has attributed astonishing claims to the use of SLSW prayer: 10 million Japanese will come to Christ by the year 2000; it helped to bring down the Berlin Wall; it has opened Albania to the gospel; it deposed dictator Manuel Noriega; it lowered the crime rate in Los Angeles; and it broke the power of demons over Japan (Breaking Strongholds in Your City, Ventura, CA, Regal, 1993, p. 25). Author Frank Peretti stirred the imaginations of believers with his two early books: 'This Present Darkness' (1986) and 'Piercing the Darkness' (1989). These fictional books demonstrated, in graphic and sensational detail, the battle of believers with territorial spirits. By these efforts, coupled with the zeal of many others, this movement has been tremendously successful in making inroads into the mainstream of the evangelical church. A large and growing number of evangelical organizations, such as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ, currently practice its techniques and are supportive of the goals of SLSW.

The Methods of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare

How is it that proponents of SLSW go about breaking demonic territorial dominion? According to the movement's leaders, a number of detailed steps are required. Firstly, seek the name of the ruling spirit and identify its territory. For example, SLSW leaders state

that the names of the six worldwide ruling demons directly under Satan are Damian, Asmodeo, Menguelesh, Arios, Beelzebub and Nosferasteus. The territorial spirits controlling Costa Rica are Shiebo, Quiebo, Ameneo, Mephistopheles, Nostradamus and Azazel. Those in the United States are Ralphes, Anoritho, Manchester, Apolloyon, and Deviltook. (C. Peter Wagner, Wrestling with Dark Angels, Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990, p. 85) Secondly, seek to identify the function of demons in a particular area. Thirdly, determine which course of action should be pursued. If demons occupy a neighborhood, then a "Prayer Walk" is required. If demons control a city, then a "Praise March" is necessary. If demons exercise power over a region, then a "Prayer Expedition" is demanded; and if demons rule in a nation, then a "Prayer Journey" should be carried out. "Identification Repentance" is the practice of discovering the sin and guilt which give the demon a foothold in an area, andrepenting of that sin to break the demon's grip. Every year thousands of SLSW intercessors walk all the known routes of the first Crusades, which left Cologne, Germany, on Easter of 1096 AD. The purpose is to loosen the demonic stranglehold ofdemons in this area by repenting and apologizing to Muslims and Jews for the atrocities committed by the Christians at that time. Another technique used is "Spiritual Mapping", which is the process of discovering the exact location of the demon's domain. Peter Wagner exhorts the SLSW faithful, "Spying out the land is essential when warring for a city…Christians should walk or drive every major freeway, avenue, and road of their cities, praying and coming against demonic strongholds over every neighborhood… Even if you don't see instant results,

keep the trumpets blowing…Always remember, God is not slack concerning His promise; the walls will come down!" (Engaging the Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits- C. Peter Wagner, Ventura, CA; Regal, p. 98)

These elaborate and specious techniques were virtually unknown to the Apostle Paul, and we fail to find the slightest trace of them in the New Testament. However, thousands of undiscerning Christians are giving themselves over to an unbiblical method and, as its short history has shown, an unfruitful method. Who can estimate the money, time, and the resources that have been lost? Yes, anecdotal evidence and sensational accounts abound; however, when SLSW leaders are pressed for verifiable proof, they cannot point to a city or village or nation that has been freed from demonic control!

Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare and Daniel 10

What do the Scriptures say concerning Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare? For the Scripture must be our standard in determining the soundness of any doctrine. Let us look at the most commonly cited proof text of SLSW leaders, Daniel 10:13, 20, which sets forth the battle between the prince of Persia and Michael the archangel. The prince of Persia is said to be an example of a territorial spirit which can be defeated through the techniques of SLSW. Peter Wagner writes:

"This story leaves not doubt that territorial spirits greatly influence human life in all its sociopolitical aspects." (Warfare Prayer, Ventura:Regal, 1992, p. 66)

What is the account in Daniel 10 teaching? Daniel, indeed, does speak of a demonic "prince of Persia" and a

“prince of Greece” (Dan. 10:13, 20). These “princes” are not merely infernal militia fighting side by side against the people of God, but they are also adversaries, battling each other (Dan. 11:2). The thrust of Daniel 10 more properly is a prophetic look at the history of the Middle East. Persia will fall before Greece and Greece will split into four smaller kingdoms (Dan. 11-12). Daniel never prays against the demon princes, nor seeks to cast them from their regions. A careful examination of this passage will not yield support to territorial demonic possession. On the contrary, Daniel 10 soundly refutes the detailed and sensational practices of SLSW. It may be helpful to notice the following in this passage: 1. The battle was fought in heaven, and not on earth. 2. The battle did not involve any humans; rather, two angels and one demon. 3. The battle was directed by God in heaven and by Michael, not by men on earth 4. Daniel was not asked to bind a demon. 5. Daniel was not even asked to pray.

Biblical Principles in Spiritual Warfare

In summary, we learn from Scripture that Satan’s minions are highly organized (Eph. 6:12), but nowhere does the Bible say that Satan has assigned them to every geo-political unit. Nowhere does the Bible give an example of a believer rebuking or confronting geographical demons. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we are to command demons to give up territory. Yes, Satan is a formidable adversary (1 Pet 5:8), yet the Lord Jesus Christ has already conquered him on the cross (Col 2:15), and will one day consign him to hell forever (Rev. 20:1-10). We must not pass over quickly the important charges of Jude 8-10 and 2 Peter 2:10-12, which rebuke those who verbally abuse spirits. Indeed, we are called to turn them over to God. The New

Testament never encourages the Christian to take the offensive against demonic strongholds. Paul and the other apostles never engaged in this practice. In rare cases, where demons were cast out, it was the result of demons taking the offensive against the apostles (Acts 16:16). In the meantime, we are called to resist Satan through our spiritual armor (Eph 6:10-18), standing firm in the power of His might, and praying always with all prayer.

Further Reading:

Thomas Ice, Robert Dean, A Holy Rebellion-Strategy For Spiritual Warfare, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR 1995 Chuck Lowe, Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation? Christian Focus Publications, GB, 1998 Dave Hunt, Occult Invasion, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1998 Donald Grey Barnhouse, The Invisible War, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 1995

Suffering the Reproaches of Christ

There is a suffering that a Christian must indeed endure if he is to be used of the Lord. The book of Hebrews describes this suffering when we are told of Moses, who "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt..." (Heb. 11:24). To suffer the reproaches of Christ is characteristic of a Christian who has willingly chosen a path of suffering for Christ's sake and affliction on His behalf. The Christian who is not willing to suffer the reproaches of Christ and to endure affliction for His Name's sake will find, at the end of his labors for Christ, superficiality in the spiritual harvest. Bearing reproach for Christ's sake deepens our faith in God, diminishes our self-sufficiency, and releases the power of God to work mightily. This biblical truth makes us uncomfortable in our comfortable age. But it is, nevertheless, unquestionably true. Those whom the Lord chooses to greatly use will know something of the divine hammer, and chisel from the hand of the Lord. The sculptor must strike the stone with many carefully measured blows before a formless shape becomes a thing of beauty. In like manner, Job tells us of the ways of God when he writes, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: for he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole." (Job 5:17-18). Our Lord uses the crucible of suffering to mold our character, refine our obedience, and strengthen our passion for God. It is striking to note what suffering will do in the life of a follower of Christ.

All seasoned servants of God have known something of suffering. Our minds turn to the prophets Jeremiah, Elijah, Isaiah, and on to the apostle Paul in Rome, and John on the Isle of Patmos and down throughout the annals of church history, to the reformers, and the innumerable missionaries, and servants of God who have suffered profoundly for Christ's sake. There is nothing like this kind of experience with God to radically transform our lives forever. Those who have suffered deeply know well the frailty of the flesh, the faithfulness of Christ, and need of dependence on Him. Frank Holmes, in his book "Brother Indeed", the biography of Robert Chapman, illustrates this truth with the story of the conversion of Eliza Gilbert. This young factory worker, upon hearing the gospel powerfully preached in the almshouses at Pilton in Barnstable,was wonderfully saved. Soon she expressed a desire to honor the Lord in baptism, yet her mother forbade her in the strictest of terms. Eliza confided to Chapman, "My mother declares that when I go out of the house to the service it will be to leave home for the last time." Despite the threat Eliza was baptized. As the congregation broke up, many followed her as she walked home; in a few moments she was out again. "The sight of her wet hair had infuriated her mother who now stood on the threshold barring her entrance, and cried, 'Go away. Never come back. I'll have no dissenters in this house.'" Afterwards, Eliza became gravely ill and her mother refused to visit her for three years; speaking of Chapman she once remarked, "I wish the chapel would fall on his head." Eliza was eventually restored to full health and through efforts in the gospel many in her family were also saved. But her mother would resist the pleadings the Spirit of God and was not saved until she was past the age of

eighty. (1). Suffering the reproach of Christ is a holy fire whose refining flames burn away the dross of prayerlessness, spiritual indifference, and a compassionless Christianity. Suffering is also an indispensable part of a Christian soldier's armor, fitting him for spiritual warfare. Peter writes, " Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind…" (1 Peter 4:1). A "mind to suffer" is the piece of armor which will protect us against the Adversary when he attacks us at our weakest point. If we lack this piece of our spiritual armor we will be woefully unfit for true spiritual battle. There are Christians who enter the heat of battle unprepared, and when they experience a season of suffering, are greatly surprised at adversity and hardship, and the devil gains the advantage. Such Christians often fall in battle and do not continue to profitably serve the Lord. Others, who endure affliction for Christ's sake, do so with the conscious understanding of its preciousness and eternal spiritual value. Those who are armed with a mind to suffer will go on steadfastly for the Lord, despite intense hardship and adversity. Such Christians realize that scholarly acclaim, prominent position, wealth, and title all pale in contrast with the Lord's commendation, "Well done my good and faithful servant." William Kelly, an early leader among the so-called "Plymouth Brethren", understood this truth well. He was recognized as an outstanding Greek scholar and a learned Hebraist. C. H. Spurgeon, in his book "A Guide to Commentaries", commenting on Kelly's intellectual ability, said, "Kelly has a mind born for the universe". In 1860 William Kelly himself published a critical edition of the book of Revelation, which Professor Heinrich Ewald of Gottingen, a prominent

German scholar, declared to be the best piece of English work of its kind that he had ever seen. In our own generation, Professor F. F. Bruce, formerly of the University of Manchester, praises Kelly's knowledge of the original languages, writing, "It is the manifest mastery of Greek usage which make his commentaries, especially those on Paul's epistles, so valuable. It was his wide and accurate acquaintance with Greek usage that made problem texts plain to him. It is not knowledge gained by a grammar book or dictionary but an acquaintance with Greek usage which is the fruit of long and patient study." (2). However, a distinguished professor in Dublin once approached William Kelly and urged him to consider a religious professorship at one of the leading universities in the city by proposing, "Why don't you settle here in Dublin, you could earn a great deal of money and you could make a name for yourself in the world?" To which William Kelly tersely replied, "For which world?—would I have a name…in the present one…or in the world to come?" Shortly before he passed away in 1906 William Kelly commented to a friend at his bedside, "There are three things that are real—the cross, the enmity of the world, and the love of God." (3). God's choicest servants have been those who have meant business for Him; they did not hesitate to deny self and give up name, position, and financial gain for His sake and glory. C. H. Spurgeon wrote to his son, "It would not please me if God meant you to be a missionary, and you were to die a millionaire. I should not like it, were you fitted to be a missionary, that you should drivel down to be a king. What are all the kings and all the nobles when put together, compared with the dignity of winning souls for Christ…?" Those who have had the greatest impact on the world "below" were

those intimately concerned about the world “above”. The apostle Paul wrote, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things…” (Phil. 3:8). There is also a suffering of the reproaches of Christ because of our earnest convictions concerning New Testament church truth. There will be some who will misconstrue a passionate love for Christ’s church and our separation from all that dishonors His lovely Name, and assail us for being narrow-minded and unloving. There will be others who may misunderstand our sincere desire to gather unto the Lord Jesus Christ alone in simplicity, and thereby belittle our gatherings as those that are out of step with the current trends. There will be yet others who attend our efforts in the clear and simple presentation of the gospel and charge that our “Church Growth” methods are old fashioned. Others will observe the sisters’ covering of their heads in loving submissionto the headship of Christ in the local assembly, and harshly label their sincere obedience as legalism. Others yet will observe the absence of one ordained “pastor” and conclude that the assembly is disorganized and is not yet a “real church”. Some will criticize our emphasis on serious Bible study, spiritual fellowship, prayer and worship, while setting aside the newer trends of “Christian” drama, entertainment, and contemporary rock music, as a lack of concern for the social development and well-being of the young people in the assembly. Others may take note of our earnest spiritual discernment concerning the new evangelical movements and trends and condemn these efforts as being divisive and ungracious. However, the Scriptures counsel us that “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God

rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:14). For our suffering the reproach of Christ honors Him through the holy desire to be conformed to His lovely image. This conforming work in our lives means that His convictions will become our convictions; those things which break His heart, will break our hearts; His priorities will be our priorities; and as He has suffered, we will also have a mind to likewise suffer for His sake. George Mueller of Bristol has set forth the essence of suffering the reproach of Christ when he writes, "There was a day I died, utterly died, died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will…died to the world, its approval or blame, even of my brethren and friends…and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God." May these marks, of the refining work of bearing the reproaches of Christ, be fully manifest in our own lives. Let us, therefore, go "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13-14) and joyfully take our place with Christ, bearing His reproaches in a hostile world.

Endnotes:

(1). Frank Holmes, Brother Indeed, (Kilmarnock, Scotland, Ritchie, 1988), p. 27-28 (2). F. F. Bruce, In Retrospect Remembrance of Things Past, (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1980), p. 293 (3). Hy Pickering, Chief Men Among the Brethren, (Neptune, NJ, Loizeaux, 1986), p. 105

The Age of Ages

As the past millennium has come to a close and a new millennium looms before us, many are speculating concerning what we should expect in this new age. Newsweek magazine recently disclosed that there are 239 different web sites on the Internet exploring the uncertainty of the coming millennium. Philosophers, scientists, sociologists, and religious leaders are raising their voices; some in dire predictions, others in rapt anticipation of this glorious new epoch. Medical researchers claim that in the next millennium virulent diseases will be eradicated, new medical advances will enable men and women to commonly live past 100 years. On Wall Street, pundits and financial observers are promising rising levels in the stock market far into the next century. Social scientists expect great advances to be made in the areas of race relations, poverty, and crime. Human ability and human achievements are causing many hearts to quicken with eager anticipation for this new millennium. Scientists, political leaders, and other experts are placing great faith in the triumph of humanism for a utopian future.

Christ and the Eternity of Ages

The Bible, however, describes a very different scene for the future. The glorious ability and advances of man do not find themselves on center stage. The center stage in the age to come is reserved exclusively for the glory of God, in the person of Christ, seen in all of His manifold and shining excellencies. This biblical age may not begin on January 1, 2001, but when it finally breaks upon the world stage it will be the decisive age within human

history. The apostle Paul beautifully described this time to come when he wrote, “Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:21 KJV). It is worthy of notice that the apostle wrote in the original manuscript, “Unto Him be glory in the church in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of ages, Amen.” At once this striking phrase “Age of ages”, or “Eternity of ages”, stirs our spiritual imagination. This time period will not be merely another age, much like many others that have gone before it. It will not be marked simply by medical, political, and societal advances. This age will be unlike all others, for it will be the “Age of Ages.” Careful students of the Word of God have long labored to grasp the breadth of this remarkable phrase. Theologian Charles Hodge expresses something of the greatness of this age, when he writes, “ ‘To all the generation of an eternity of ages.’ In finding no ordinary forms of expression suited to his demands, the apostle heaps together terms of the largest import to give some vent to thoughts and aspirations which he felt to be unutterable…” (1) Greek scholar W. Robertson Nicoll adds, “The phrase age of ages may have the force of a superlative, the ‘age par excellence’, the age besides which there is none other to be named”. (2)

The Definition of the Age of Ages

However, among serious Bible students there is not complete agreement concerning whether this period refers to the one thousand year reign of Christ or the period after the millennium called “Eternity ” or the “Eternal State”. We may safe in saying that this biblical time period, in which the church will be privileged to display to angels and the nations the glories of her

Saviour, will begin at the millennial reign of Christ and continue on into eternity. However, among Christians there is broad agreement concerning the high privilege and importance of this time period to those who are numbered among the church of God. Commentator Albert Leckie writes concerning this time period, “If the age of ages be the coming millennium, as I judge it to be, then the church in its peculiar and unique relationship to Christ will be seen by generations to the glory of the Father. The church on earth today displays to angelic beings in the heavenlies the multi-varied wisdom of God. In the age of ages it shall display from its place in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus glory to the Father to generations of men on the earth. Amen.” (3)

The Centerpiece of the Age of Ages

There are two principles concerning the glory of Christ which characterize this time period from the commencement of the millennium to the “eternity of ages” in the eternal state. The first of these is that Christ is the centerpiece of the “age of ages”. This principle is brought out in a quiet and yet profound way in the fourth and fifth chapters of Revelation. Properly speaking, Revelation chapters four and five do not take place during the millennium or the eternal state, but rather at a time in heaven after the church is taken up, while the earth below experiences that which the Bible describes as the “time of Jacob’s trouble.” However, spiritual principles that we find here will be carried on into the millennium and the eternal state. In Revelation four and five we find Christ to be the very centerpiece of heaven. Christ is the backdrop, foreground, the all-surpassing theme, the gathering center, and the preeminent One of heaven—truly the Lamb is all the

glory. Heaven would be not be heaven if the Lamb was not there. Christ's presence defines heaven. One of the most frequently-used descriptive phrase in the New Testament for heaven is simply, "Where I am" (John 14:3, 17:24). All things in heaven, whether they be objects, persons, or spirit beings, are described in their relationship to Christ upon the throne. The first thing John mentions that he sees in heaven is the throne and the One who sits upon it. The sight of the throne is so gripping to his spiritual mind that he mentions it fifteen times in these two chapters. This scene in the most descriptive and detailed portion in all of Holy Scripture concerning heaven. Remarkably, we find that virtually everything in heaven is spoken of in its relationship to the throne of God. Notice the following references: "a rainbow round about the throne" (4:3); "round about the throne were four and twenty seats" (4:4); "Out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices" (4:5); "before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal" (4:6); "the four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne" (4:10); "cast their crowns before the throne saying…" (4:10). Christ is the centerpiece of Heaven. In the age of ages He alone will captivate our hearts, He alone will be the incomparable object of worship, and He alone will distinguish and mark the glory of the Age of ages.

The Lamb of God and the Age of Ages

Not only will Christ be the centerpiece of that age but He also will be the masterpiece of that age. Ages, whether they be decades or centuries, have been characterized by temporal and passing human achievements. Ages, that we have called "Stone Age", "Bronze Age", "Age of Enlightenment", and the

“Computer Age”, have all come and will all go—history will notice that they were marked by mere temporal developments. In marked contrast to these ages, the age to come will have upon it the imprint of eternity. Its achievements will be marked by the unequalled and unparalleled changeless work of God. In that day, one work of God will stand above all others, imbedded in our hearts forever, —the penal and substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. At three different times, John the apostle writes in Revelation chapter five that the Lamb had been “slain”. We read, “…in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain” (5:6); “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation’ ” (5:9); “Saying in a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing’ ” (5:12). The slain Lamb will be the reason for our eternal praise, it will be the cause of our love, and it will distinguish our triumphant worship. The memory of the Lamb slain will grip our hearts and minds for eternity. The Lamb slain will be the masterpiece of God in heaven. It shall stand in that day unrivaled, unmatched in glory, importance, and worth. James Flanigan has well written, “John looks through his tears,…and sees the Lamb of God, in the midst of the Throne. The marks of sacrifice are upon Him, as if freshly slain. The memory of Calvary will ever be fresh in heaven throughout all eternity”. (4) As we enter the new millennium, aware of this world’s yearning and aspirations for it, believers remain cautious, for our hearts pound with eager expectation of the soon coming of our Lord from heaven. Our hope lies

not in what man has in store for himself, but rather in what our Lord Jesus Christ has marked out for His bride. The Christian races not in lock step with the world, running in the same direction with the same purpose, desire, and longing. We look up to heaven, awaiting our Lord, in anticipation of the day when the King in all His glory shall stand upon that Jerusalem mount. Upon His thigh a name will be written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16). Near to His side will be the holy armies of heaven, following Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:14). Then that innumerable host of blood-bought saints of the Lord will be gathered with Him to reign as kings and priests forever (Rev. 5:10). There in the midst stands the Lamb, slain for before the foundation of the world, yet crowned in brightest glory, and “everyone in the temple speaks of His glory” (Ps. 29:9). Expectantly, we look for the inauguration of the Age of ages, with the saints of all ages who love Him. Of this age, the saintly Samuel Rutherford has written: The King there in His beauty Without a veil is seen: It were a well spent journey, Though seven deaths lay between. The Lamb, with His fair army, Doth on Mount Zion stand, And glory—glory dwelleth in Immanuel’s land.

Endnotes (1) Charles Hodge, Ephesians, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), p.195 (2) W. R. Nicholl, ed., The Expositors Greek Testament,vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 319 (3) Albert Leckie, Ephesians, (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd, 1983), p. 149 (4) James Flanigan, Notes on Revelation, (Glasgow, Scotland: Gospel Tract Publications, 1987), p. 46

The Battle For Continuing Faith

Evangelical Christians have never doubted the necessity of faith for salvation. Since the days of the early church, the importance of faith in Christ as the means or "agency" of our salvation has been loudly proclaimed. During the Protestant Reformation in Europe, the cry of the Reformers was "solo gratis" and "solo fide"; that is, salvation is by grace through faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Some outside the fold of the evangelical church have insisted on conditions, terms, and "works" plus faith as a basis for salvation. These groups have never stood on the bedrock of New Testament doctrine but have relied on the writings of philosophy, the church fathers, and church dogma.

However, over the last thirty years, a growing number within the evangelical church have introduced a radical twist. They rightly teach that salvation is by grace through faith, but then comes the twist—one does not need to continue to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Our salvation, it is said, is so rooted in grace that faith is only needed as the door to Christ. Once entrance is made to Christ by faith, this saving faith is no longer necessary for our salvation. Some see this view as the purest form of Dispensationalism; however, many others view this position as serious departure from traditional Dispensationalism. This "Free Grace" position is taught by leading evangelical pastors, theologians, and seminary professors. The Grace Theological Society, through its conferences and publications, has provided this movement with scholarly teaching resources. In many other areas, these Christian

leaders have proven themselves to be sound ministers of the gospel and have been greatly used in the work of God. Two of the more prominent leaders of this view are theologian Zane Hodges, a former professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, and pastor Charles Stanley, of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, GA.

Is Continued Faith Necessary for Salvation?

The traditional evangelical view is that a true believer in Christ will continue in his faith. Yes, a believer will have periods of doubt, his conduct will not always be pleasing to Christ, and he will fail in his obedience to Christ; however, he will never totally lose his belief that Christ is his Savior. Proponents of the “Free Grace” position insist that this view is unbiblical. In his book entitled Eternal Security-Can You Be Sure?, Dr. Charles Stanley explains that a true believer does not need to continue in faith. He emphatically states that ongoing faith is not necessary for salvation. He writes:

"The Bible clearly teaches that God’s love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand."

(1)

In another place he writes:

"When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved, they did not tell him to begin believing and maintain a believing attitude. The focus here is the act of his believing, not the maintenance of his faith or even the intention to maintain his faith. If one must keep believing to stay saved, why didn’t Paul and Silas explain this fact to the jailer? The obvious

answer is that Paul and Silas did not believe salvation was the result of continuing faith."

(2)

It misses the mark to say that one only needs faith for salvation and then never needs it again. The very word “faith”in the Greek New Testament indicates ongoing belief in Christ. The Greek verb for faith, pisteuo, is usually found in the continuous present tense in the New Testament. Pisteuo is in only a very few cases found in the aorist, indicating one-time action. Therefore, the overall pattern of the use of pisteuo in the New Testament indicates that faith in a believer’s life will be continuous and vital.

Evangelical Antinomianism

Proponents of this view argue that a person, after initially expressing faith in Christ, may turn his back on Christ, reject the faith, and fall into a life of immorality; nevertheless, this person is saved and kept eternally by the grace of God. Tom Stegall, the author of an article entitled “Must Faith Endure for Salvation to Be Sure?”, argues that a person can continue in a life of sin, show no marks of true faith, deny the faith, even follow Satan, and yet be a Christian.

“The Bible actually teaches that it is possible for one who is eternally saved by God’s grace to: commit idolatry and apostasy; believe only for a while; not continue in the word of Christ; not abide in Christ; resist God’s chastening and correction unto the point of physical death; stray from the faith; shipwreck faith; fall away from the faith; deny the faith; cast off initial faith and follow Satan; stray from the faith by professing false doctrine; deny Christ and be faithless.”

(3)

Charles Stanley also teaches that a person can deny the faith, continue in a life of sin, and still be a Christian. Stanley, anticipating the question of how this can be, illustrates how initial faith is all that is necessary for salvation:

“God does not require a constant attitude of faith in order to be saved—only an act of faith…If I chose to have a tattoo put on my arm, that would involve a one-time act on my part. Yet the tattoo would remain with me indefinitely. I don’t have to maintain an attitude of fondness of tattoos to ensure that the tattoo remains on my arm. In fact, I may change my mind the minute I receive it. But that does not change the fact that I have a tattoo on my arm… Forgiveness/salvation is applied at the moment of faith. It is not the same thing as faith. And its permanence is not contingent upon the permanence of one’s faith.”

(4)

It is hard to believe that this is the same doctrine that so overwhelmed Martin Luther and birthed the Protestant Reformation. For Luther’s study of Romans convinced him that the “just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17), not that the “just shall walk away from faith” and nonetheless are saved. The Scriptures emphasize that transforming faith will so grip a believer that he will desire to live a holy life. As a new creature in Christ, a believer is not only “declared righteous”

but lives righteously by the power of the Holy Spirit residing within (2 Cor. 5:17).

Will Non-Believers Be Forced to Go to Heaven?

This teaching raises a very awkward issue for its proponents. If initial faith is all that is necessary for salvation, and if those who turn their backs on Christ and the faith are nevertheless saved, will those who do not want to go to heaven go, regardless? Amazingly, the answer to this question from “Free Grace” advocates is an emphatic, Yes.

A number of years ago, Zane Hodges was invited to a summer Bible conference in Pennsylvania for a week of Bible teaching. In the afternoon, there was a question-and-answer period with the speakers. Mr. Hodges had been teaching that initial faith was all that was necessary for eternal salvation. He had explained that a person could deny the Lord and turn his back on his faith, and he still possessed eternal life and was on his way to heaven. An attendee at the conference raised his hand to ask a question concerning Zane Hodges’s teaching. He said, “Mr. Hodges, if a person had initial faith, but has since turned his back on Christ, and did not want to go to heaven, would he go to heaven nonetheless?” Hodges replied, “He would go to heaven even though he did not want to go.”

(5)

Some observers have noticed a parallel between this view and Hyper-

Calvinism. While “Free Grace” advocates go to some lengths to distance themselves from Calvinism, nonetheless there is an important similarity. Hyper-Calvinism has all but removed man’s free will or human responsibility from the area of eternal salvation. In like manner, “Free Grace” proponents have removed human responsibility from the area of eternal security. In the

“Free Grace” view, God’s sovereign grace is so extensive that after an “act of faith” all human responsibility or free will is denied.

Is Continued Faith A Works-Salvation Teaching?

Proponents of this view argue that an essential theological truth is at stake. They contend that if one teaches that continued faith is necessary for salvation, then that position is tantamount to a works-salvation gospel. Charles Stanley argues that continued faith is maintained by activities of self effort such as prayer and Bible study. If one insists that salvation is conditioned on faith, then that person is in danger of teaching a works-salvation gospel. He writes:

“If my faith maintains my salvation, I must ask myself, ‘what must I do to maintain my faith?’ For to neglect the cultivation of my faith is to run the risk of weakening or losing my faith and thus my salvation. I have discovered that my faith is maintained and strengthened by activities such as the following: prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, church attendance, and evangelism. If these and similar activities are necessary to maintain my faith—and maintenance of my faith is necessary for salvation—how can I avoid the conclusion that I am saved by my good works?”

6 Circular reasoning is usually evidence of a weak argument. And so it is here. Instead of arguing that Christian disciplines prop up faith, should we not argue the very opposite? Is not faith the engine and the fuel of all of Christian living? The Scriptures teach that the believer should “walk by faith”(2 Cor. 5:7);

“Stand fast in faith”(1 Cor. 16:13); “…the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith”(1 Tim. 5:4). Does

not the principle of faith in a believer's life drive him to the disciplines of prayer, evangelism, and Bible study rather than the other way around? Faith may indeed be strengthened by these disciplines, but it is a desperate leap to suppose such faith results in a works-salvation message. Moreover, does not the prayer ministry of Christ assure continued faith in the believer's life? Just prior to His arrest, the Lord Jesus Christ said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen the brethren"(Luke 22:31-32). Peter would wrestle with doubt and fear for his life, yet his faith in Christ would never fail. It was guaranteed by the prayer of Christ. It should be remembered that doubt and faith are not mutually exclusive. After Peter denied the Lord, he went out and wept, indicating faith in Christ but shame that he had failed his Lord. We can be assured that this same ministry of Christ is exercised on behalf of believers today. Faith is the indisputable mark of Christ's ongoing ministry in the believer's life.

To continue in faith and to be faithful to Christ are not the same thing.

True believers are not always faithful. They, like Peter, may fail in their obedience to Christ, but they do not lose their salvation; for the Lord Jesus Christ promised, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"(John 10:28). Many of the great saints of Scripture failed Him, but did not lose their faith in Him. Abraham, Lot, David, John the Baptist, and Peter all failed the Lord; but Scripture never records one example of

anyone anywhere who was known to be saved, and then completely gave up their faith in God.

“Free Grace” proponents have the worthy intention of preserving the doctrine of justification by faith alone. However, that doctrine becomes distorted when faith is redefined in an unbiblical manner. May we guard against the teaching that suggests a Christian does not need to continue on in faith in Christ. For the writer of Hebrews charges us, “Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have not pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38)

Endnotes (1) Charles Stanley,

Eternal Security, (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1990), p. 74 (2) Charles Stanley, Eternal Security, (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1990), p. 88 (3) Tom Stegall, “Must Faith Endure for Salvation to Be Sure?”, Fall 2003, Grace Family Journal, Duluth, MN (4) Charles Stanley, Eternal Security, (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1990), p. 80 (5) As told by Jean Gibson, California, an invited speaker to the same conference.

(6) Charles Stanley,

Eternal Security, (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1990), p. 87

The Believers Rule of Life

Reformed theology has long given great significance to the term “the believer’s rule of life”. By this term they are referring to the “moral” law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Reformed teachers acknowledge that this phrase does not occur in the Bible; nevertheless, they argue that it is an indispensable principle in the life of a Christian. These teachers fully concede that the ceremonial law and civil ordinances and statutes have been done away by Christ on the cross of Calvary (Rom. 7:4-6, 10:4). However, they contend that the moral law is God’s method of leading a Christian into a life of holiness. Representative of this perspective, Reformed preacher D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones writes, “The Christian has been delivered from the curse of the law. But that does not release him from the law as a rule of life. Holiness means being righteous and righteous means keeping the law. The ten commandments and the moral law have never been abrogated.” (1). Similarly, Anthony Hoekema, a former professor at Calvin Theological Seminary writes, “The Christian life must be a law-formed life. Though believers must not try to keep God’s law as a means of earning their salvation, they are nevertheless enjoined to do their best to keep the law… the law is one of the most important means whereby God sanctifies us.” (2). The question naturally arises: What was the purpose of the “moral” law? And what does the New Testament teach concerning God’s way to a holy life. Let’s take a closer look at these and other questions.

The Law of Moses and Sanctification

The New Testament makes it clear that a Christian is not under the law as a means of his salvation or sanctification. The law in its entirety, moral, civil and ceremonial, has been done away (Rom. 6:14,15). Time and again the New Testament states “we are not under law but grace”. This truth includes our justification, sanctification, and the rule of life. What was the purpose of the law? The law was given to reveal sin. “What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin but by the law…” (Rom. 7:7). The law can “show sin to be exceeding sinful” (Rom. 7:13)! The law can condemn, penalize, and punish, but never make a Christian more holy. Just as our nation’s system of law does not empower men to live moral lives, but punishes; so too God’s law cannot make a believer more holy, but reveals him to be a sinner. The book of Romans makes this principle exceedingly clear. The apostle Paul first presents the doctrine of justification in chapters 3:21-5:11, and then in chapters 5:12-8:4 the doctrine of sanctification. Concerning the doctrine of justification, the apostle writes, “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). The law has no part in the justification of man. Then as he takes up the doctrine of sanctification in chapter six, he writes, “for ye are not under the law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Here the law has no part in the sanctification of a believer. He is making it clear that the Christian is not under the law, including the “moral” law, concerning his sanctification. The way to be free from sin’s power and dominion is through the grace of God, Spirit of God, through the cross of Calvary (Rom. 6:1-13), not the law given to Moses at Sinai. In another place the apostle

writes, “I through the law died unto the law that I might live unto God” (Gal. 2:19). The believer is delivered from the law and its bondage through the death of the “old man” and is free and empoweredby the Spirit to live for Christ. One has written:

“Run, run and do, the law commands.

But gives me neither feet nor hands.

Better news the grace-gospel brings.

It bids me fly and gives me wings.”

The Believer’s Rule of Life

What then is the “rule of life” for a Christian? Where can he find the power to live a holy life? The Christian life is a dynamic, living relationship with the resurrected Christ. It is this power and life flowing out of the indwelling Christ that transforms the believer. The Spirit of God in the souls of men does not set the believer’s affections upon ordinances, statutes and regulations, but rather fills him with a vital, living relationship with Christ. This love relationship so completely empowers us that the Christian, with a holy desire, finds himself yielding to the holy and righteous requirements of God. The apostle Paul describes this spiritual phenomenon when he writes, “…that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4). This powerful reality is surely the New Testament’s teaching concerning our “rule of life”. Listen to the apostle: “…for me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21); “looking unto Christ the author and finisher of our faith…” (Heb. 12:1-2); “the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God…”(Gal. 2:20). Interestingly, the word “rule” in respect to living

the Christian life only occurs once in the New Testament. In Galatians 6:16 we read, “as many as walk according to this rule”. What is this “rule”? Just two verses earlier we read, “But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14). We may conclude from these verses that our rule of life is not the law, but Christ and His death. It is our focus upon Christ that is the “rule of life” for the believer. As a Christian is taken up with Him, he is transformed “from glory to glory” by the power of the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). This is the secret to power and holiness in the Christian’s life.

C. H. Spurgeon and the Rule of Life

It is noteworthy that this principle is recognized in reality, though not doctrinally, even by Reformed and Calvinist leaders to be God’s way to power and effectiveness in the Christian life. Following the death of Calvinist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Mr. William Olney, a deacon for many years at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and a close friend of Spurgeon’s, was asked, “What was the secret of Spurgeon’s power?” Mr. Olney almost leaped out of his chair and with deep emotion said, “It was his personal love for Christ.” (3). Was Mr. Olney familiar with the Reformed doctrine of the “rule of life”? Undoubtedly, he was. Did Spurgeon believe, preach and teach this Calvinist doctrine? Indeed, he did. How forcefully, then, does this illustrate the reality of the New Testament doctrine of Christ, not the law, as the believer’s “rule of life”!

Antinomianism and the Believer's Rule of Life

Dispensationalists, who teach that Christ is the believer's rule of life, have been branded as unorthodox and unjustly accused of antinomianism. Reformed writers have incorrectly concluded that if dispensationalists have set aside the Mosaic law as the rule of life, then they must be lawless in Christian life and conduct. Moreover, they charge that the standard of holiness has been lowered, thus corrupting the church of God. Certainly, nothing could be further from the truth; instead of debasing the standard of holiness in the church, this teaching has elevated it to a level higher than the law—to Christ Himself. In 1907 respected author and then president of the Rochester Theological Seminary, Dr. Augustus Hopkins Strong unjustly accused the so-called "Plymouth Brethren" of antinomianism in his book Lectures in Systematic Theology.4 Mr. Harry A. Ironside, in the spirit of Christian love, silenced this unfounded criticism. Regarding this charge he wrote, "We are neither saved by the law, nor under it, as a rule of life; we are not lawless, but "under law, (enlawed) to Christ". Is Christ Himself a lower standard than the law given at Sinai? This is not antinomianism, but its very opposite. It is subjection to Christ as Lord of the new dispensation and mediator of the New Covenant." (5). How can obedience to Christ be a lower standard than the Mosaic law? For Christ is the very source of the law. Is the moon a greater light than the sun, whose light it reflects? The scriptures speak eloquently for themselves concerning this point. The law of Moses commanded, "…thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. 19:18); but the Lord says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that

ye also love one another" (John 13:34). The New Testament urges, "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6); and in another place we read, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). Is this teaching lowering Christian character or enhancing it? How can emphasis laid upon the imitation of Christ ever be considered a vice and not virtue? Conformity to the image of Christ, who is the highest measure of holiness, is God's way to a godly life. When He is our heart's desire and our love is upon Him, we will find our lives and character being daily transformed into His likeness. This is not a one-time crisis event, but a daily discipline; this is not holiness attained nor perfectionism sought after; on the contrary, it is a humble heart and mind looking away from self unto Christ. W. E. Vine, Bible commentator and respected authority on the Greek New Testament, may have described the believer's rule of life best when he wrote, " 'Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord' (1 Peter 3:15). This is not an attainment to be reached by the Christian of mature experience; it is the daily, joyous rule of life for every believer." (6).

Endnotes:

(1). D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Sermon on the Mount, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1979, p. 179 (2). Anthony Hoekema, Five Views of Sanctification, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1987, p. 88 (3). Richard Day, The Shadow of the Broad Brim:: The Life of C. H. Spurgeon, Chicago, IL, Judson Press, 1934, p. 227 (4). A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, Chicago, IL, Judson Press, 1907, p. 895-896 (5). H. A. Ironside, The Teaching of the So-

called Plymouth Brethren: Is it Scriptural?, N.Y., Loizeaux Brothers, 1930, p. 13 (6). Percy O. Ruoff, W. E. Vine; His Life and Ministry, London, Oliphants LTD, 1951, p. 146

The Challenge of Personal Evangelism

Witnessing for Christ is a way of life. By virtue of the fact that one is a Christian, one is a witness for Christ. I may or may not be a good witness, but nevertheless I am one. Jesus said, "...you will be witnesses unto me..." (Acts. 1:8). Our witnessing is important. We can have a considerable impact on those who do not know Christ. The question is not when to witness or where to witness. If we are Christians we are witnesses. But how can we become more effective communicators of the gospel? Knowing the truth is essential for an effective witness. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). We live in a day of methods. By and large our evangelism has become method centered. Many have attended seminars on better methods of evangelism. Yet at the same time the church has become weaker in its understanding of the content of the message, and in her ability to communicate it. We have forgotten that the New Testament defines "to evangelize" as "to tell/declare/announce good news. "News", by the very meaning of the word means content. Any presentation to the unsaved must have Bible-based content. 1. GOD—THE HOLY AND LOVING CREATOR: We can't assume that people today have a proper concept of God. We must make them see that He has an absolute claim on their lives. The concept that we want to drive home is God's ownership of each one of us. We should speak of a sovereign Creator who brought all things into being out of nothing, creating and sustaining us of His own will so that we are dependent on Him for everything (Gen. 1-2, Acts 17:25, Isa. 40:28, Ps. 100:3). From this foundation come the two great pillars of His

Being—light and love. Light speaks of God's majesty, truth, and holiness (1 Jn 1:5, 1 Tim. 6:15-16). But our God is also a God of love. Out of His love He created us in His image so that we could have fellowship with Him. Worship, therefore, can be the only appropriate response (Deut. 6:4-5). 2. MAN—THE SINFUL CREATURE: Man disobeyed God and willfully rebelled. The Bible calls this sin. We must both define sin and state it consequences to a lost world. Sin is comprised of two parts: first, it is the attitude that I am my own god and therefore try to live as if God did not exist. Romans 1:21 portrays this attitude when it defines sin as not worshipping God. We thereby deny all that God has revealed to us about Himself. Second, sin is rebelling against God—breaking His law. Using the Ten Commandments in evangelism helps people feel the guilt of sin, and creates a desire for the forgiveness found in Christ alone. (See: Rom. 3:12, James 2:10, Jer. 17:9) The consequences of sin is death. The Bible speaks of death as separation of the spiritual and physical. Theses two elements, when joined together comprise the essence of life. Physical death is separation from the body. The symptoms of disease and physical suffering indicated that physical death is near. Spiritual death is separation from God for eternity. Symptoms that one experiencing this type of death: hatred, war, alienation, purposelessness, guilt, and despair. (See: Isa. 59:2, Eph. 2:1) 3. CHRIST—THE MERCIFUL REDEEMER: When you read the Old Testament, you see clearly that Jesus Christ came to fulfill three roles: prophet, priest and king. Evangelism over the last 100 years has tended to speak merely of His role as Saviour. This has led many people to make superficial "decisions for Christ." We must present Christ in all three roles—His perfect life,

sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection: As Prophet, He revealed God through His teaching and life (Deut. 18:15-19, John 1:14-18, 7:16-24). His perfect life qualified him to be our substitutionary sacrifice. The Priest represented the people to God. We must present the cross not simply as a vague demonstration of God's love, but as the place in history where, in the death of His Son, God dealt with the sins of the whole world. God is still just and holy, yet loves us through Christ, who bore our sins (1 Pet. 2:24, Heb. 7:27, 10:10). We must speak of His office as King. The New Testament refers to Jesus Christ as "Saviour" 24 times but calls him "Lord" 694 times—more than 28 times for every reference as "Saviour". All who will have Jesus as Savior must, after salvation, also have Jesus as their King. Jesus now lives to rule his people in love and truth (Mt. 25:24, Acts 2:3-36, Rev. 5). 4. OUR NECESSARY RESPONSE FOR SALVATION: Since man's only hope is to be saved through the finished work of Christ, how can man come to know Christ as Savior? We must urge the unsaved to acknowledge with their mind and heart that they stand guilty before God and deserve His judgement. They must acknowledge their rebellion against Him and turn from it, trusting in Christ's redemptive work. They must realize that they can do nothing to make themselves acceptable to God. We then invite them to trust in Christ and rest in Him as Savior (John 1:12, 3:16, Eph. 2:8-9). 5. SOME KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER: Use your Bible: Have the person read the text himself, and have him explain to you his understanding of its meaning. Many times this has turning point in the presentation of the gospel. It prevents tangents and arguments, and confronts them with the God's final authority. Memorize Scripture: Memorize verses and their references so that

you can give the appropriate portion of God's Word to that person. Pray: Our message may seem foolish to the non-Christian, but if we really believe that only the Holy Spirit can make them respond, we will pray—before, during, and after our presentation of Christ to the sinner. Communicate: Communicate absolute biblical concepts clearly so that the person does not read his or her own ideas into them. Be careful to explain that your are speaking about absolute truth, not just your opinion. Your message should be faithful to the Word of God in content and emphasis. But be encouraged: God did not commission tape recorders to evangelize so He could have the "perfect message." You will make mistakes, as all do. But if you seek to be faithful to God and His message, He will teach you on the job. 6. WORK HARD AND KEEP AT IT: "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). Many Christians give up too quickly at gospel work. They go out a few times and knock on door during a weekend. When a few contacts are made, they tell themselves, "This isn't for me. I'm just not cut out for it." No one is cut out for it: it's hard work! Satan will fight it at every turn. Keep at it, keep praying, scattering seed, and God will give the increase. 7. BE AUTHORITATIVE: They said of Jesus, "He taught them as One that had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mk. 1:22). A witness must be authoritative, but not arrogant. Some Christians witness with almost an apologetic manner. Generally this approach does not see many results. The unsaved will not have confidence in a message that is given in an unsure, indecisive manner. They need a "Thus saith the Lord." 8. LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN: If the person being witnessed to is not receptive, don't push. If the person makes smart remarks, never

give an unkind remark in return. This can damage all the progress you have had thus far, or bar opportunities others may have in the future. Never argue. “The servant of the Lord must not strive” (2 Tim. 2:24). You may win an argument, but lose a soul for Christ. If a witnessing situation is beginning to heat up, stop! Apologize. Let the person know you don’t want to argue, and that you are sorry for anything you might have said or done to be offensive. If the gospel is offensive, so be it. But if I’m offensive, that must be corrected. 9. DON’T USE DIFFICULT THEOLOGICAL TERMS: A witness must learn to think as the unsaved think. Put yourself in their shoes. Many have heard the term “born again” but don’t know what it means. To talk about “propitiation” and “justification” may only confuse the issue. They will understand terms like “sin”, “forgiveness”, “heaven”, “hell”, and “judgment.” Keep it simple. 10. LEARN TO GIVE INVITATIONS: Truth not only informs but transforms. Many people will take up the offer when it is given. Learn to give people the opportunity to respond. Don’t manipulate or force decisions, but do give the unsaved a chance to say yes to God. You never know the heart. An individual may be bursting with conviction inside without any indication or outward emotion. After you have explained the gospel and answered objections and questions, you might want to simply say, “Would you like to receive Christ tonight?” The biblical pattern is to call men and women to response after presenting the gospel. Paul said, “We…preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God” (Acts 14:15). Peter said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). 11. AVOID DETOURS: Don’t get off on a tangent. If Satan can’t defeat you, he’ll try a detour. If a person

asks a question that may be a detour, suggest that you first finish presenting the plan of salvation and then you will answer the question. Don't get into discussion about the doctrine of other churches, or the errors of prominent television preachers, Bible translations, etc. The main thing is that the main thing remains the main thing: presenting the gospel. 12. PRESENT THE ISSUE OF SIN: We must clearly and boldly press the issue of sin in their lives (Romans 6:23). We should present the love, grace and mercy of God, but we must present the judgment and consequences of sin. This is the biblical method. Note Peter preaching, "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murdered to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life." (Acts 3:14-15). 13. GIVE PERSONAL TESTIMONY: Learn how to give a brief yet clear account of how you were saved. Emphasize your need of salvation because of sin, and the change in your life afterward. You may want to open the conversation by saying, "May I tell you the most amazing thing that ever happened to me?" After a brief account, you can say, "I found it so wonderful to know that all my sins were forgiven and that I'm going to heaven, I had to tell others about it." Afterwards you can add, "Do you know for sure you are going to heaven?" 14. USE THE WORD OF GOD: In answering the temptations of Satan in the wilderness, Christ used the Scriptures. In the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts, the Old Testament was used. Jeremiah says, "Is not My word like a fire? saith the Lord; and like hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29) Many have used established methods of presenting God's salvation plan with great success. One of the best known is called "The Romans Road"—3:10; 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9. Many use this outline but add variations. It's good

to have an outline to keep you on track; then other verses can be added to suit the individual's need. One fatal mistake is to be accusative: "You need to know that you are a sinner." They will usually become defensive rather than receptive. Instead, have them read, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10); "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (3:23). Then say, "We've all sinned, haven't we?" More will admit being a sinner when we include ourselves. Otherwise, they conclude that we think that we re holier than they, and unfairly judgmental. Use illustrations for emphasis and explanation. For example, one way to illustrate the nature of sin: "Suppose we had a ten-gallon jug of pure water and someone poured a cup of poison into it. Would you drink it? Of course not. Sin is like poison. One small amount will pollute us, making us unclean and unfit for heaven."

The Culture War

An increasing number of Evangelicals are finding themselves drawn into a bitter conflict. In this struggle between light and darkness, it is reported that the very future of Christianity is at risk. All the forces and resources of the church have been marshalled against this formidable foe. This opposer of Christianity is not a modern enemy—surprisingly, it is as old as the church itself! What is this enemy? It is anti-christian culture in society. This multi-headed beast is thought to possess powerful tentacles which threaten to strangle Christian morals and traditional family values in society. Some of these tentacles are abortion, pornography, the public school system, liberal politics, the “gay” advances within society.

Are the Roman Catholics our Allies in the Culture War?

So important is this new battle that Christian leaders are calling for alliances with the Roman Catholic church, and other doctrinally unorthodox religious bodies to fight this adversary. Unwisely, the deep doctrinal chasm which lies between these religious bodies is now being bridged in order to enlist a greater army of foot soldiers to do battle in the culture war. In doing so, the recent casualties of this war have been the long-held doctrinal convictions of the reformers: solo fide (by faith alone), solo gratia (by grace alone) and solo scriptura (Scripture alone). And now, “missing in action” are the trusted allies: evangelistic zeal for world missions, gospel preaching, and soul-winning. The strategists of this movement against anti-christian forces are prominent evangelicals. Their ranks include such notables as Bill

Bright, the president of Campus Crusade for Christ, theologian J. I. Packer, and Pat Robertson, the president of The Christian Broadcasting Network. Their insistence for change is earnest and compelling. However, their arguments and reasoning are aimed at the emotions, rather than the spiritual mind. Former presidential advisor Charles Colson, who is currently a Christian leader in this culture war, displays this approach when he writes, “Believers on the front line, battling issues such as abortion, pornography, and threats to religious liberty are forging an ‘ecumenism of the trenches’. As the hosts of secularism and New Age spirituality threaten to sweep every trace of Christianity from the public arena, we must gather together. In today’s culture war, Christians ought to heed the classic of principle: Concentrate your forces. This was the driving motivation for those who signed the Evangelicals and Catholics Together(ETC) statement.” (1)

His tone is urgent and he characterizes the situation as a pressing crisis. He implores us to immediate action; otherwise the consequences will be dire, as “every trace of Christianity will be swept from the public arena…”

Author J. I. Packer uses similar reasoning in explaining his convictions. He writes, “North American culture generally has lost its former knowledge of what it means to revere God, and hence, it has lost its values and standards, so that it drifts blindly along materialistic, hedonistic, and nihilistic channels. It is the ‘Theological conservationists’ (Christians), and they alone—mainly, Roman Catholics and the more established evangelicals —who have the resources for rebuilding of these ruins, and the domestic differences about salvation and the

church should not hinder them from joint action seeking to re-Christianize the North American milieu." (2)

J. I. Packer describes the same ominous scenario but his conclusions and goals are mis-guided. He and others seem shocked that "sin", like an unholy plague, has spread to infect every segment of society. Rather, it should surprise us when a world shrouded in spiritual darkness would bring forth works of righteousness. Moreover, he finds the solution to the "crisis" in the "resources of the Roman Catholic and established evangelicals" instead of sovereign God, who can bring spiritual transformation to a sin-ruined world. In addition, he now argues that the primary goal the church is "to re-Christianize North America". Is this heretofore unestablished biblical mandate now the fitting new course of the church? Is this new focus the right direction for the New Testament Christian?

Critical Issues in the Culture War

Certainly, all Christians would agree that abortion and pornography are sin and are wrong. That is not in question. However, to conclude that those who oppose this "culture war" somehow condone evil is unwarranted. A Christian's non-involvement in this "culture war" is not a test of his or her biblical orthodoxy. Rather, the question should be, is this new focus of political involvement and civil disobedience the proper direction for a sincere Christian? There are three crucial issues at stake for the Christian regarding the culture war: the importance of eternal values over temporal concerns, the use spiritual weapons over political influence and pressure, and the present danger that religious alliances will advance the compromise of

Biblical truth. God is, beyond any doubt, concerned about every aborted child, and each moral evil of society. However, is there not a greater burden that weighs heavily upon the heart of God? Was not the cry of the psalmist, “If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O, Lord, who shall stand” (Ps. 130:3), the greater concern of God? Indeed, was not this the reason that the Lord Jesus Christ laid down His life on the cross of Calvary? Was not the eternal salvation of every soul ever upon the mind and heart of God? Truly, every pursuit of the Christian must certainly be subservient to this solemn truth. We might reason in the following way. What pleases the Lord more—a dollar given to a faithful missionary laboring to win souls in a forgotten jungle clearing, or a dollar given to a political action committee to lobby politicians in Washington? What pleases the Lord more—a word of loving witness to your neighbor about the Lover of their souls, or to speak to others as a “poll worker” about the virtues of a particular politician? What pleases the Lord more—a sincere prayer to God rising from a burdened heart for the lost, or a letter to your local newspaper pleading the morality of a particular social issue. The answer to these questions is obvious: eternal values have a greater significance.

Eternal Values vs. Preserving Culture

Eternal values have not only a greater significance, but also a greater effectiveness. Concerning the role of the Christian in the public arena, C.S. Lewis writes, with unique insight, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles, themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the English evangelicals who abolished the

slave trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one. Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth “thrown in”. Aim at Earth and you will get neither.” (3)

Assuredly, a moment given to God is a moment invested for eternity. A life devoted to eternal realities is a life lived and not wasted. Jim Elliot said it best, “A man is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.”

What was the New Testament’s counsel to Christians living amid an anti-Christian society The apostle Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans to a new gathering of believers concerning the immorality and godlessness of first-century Rome. Many observers consider this society to be unequaled in corruption and hedonism. Homosexuality and lesbianism were shamelessly flaunted; murder and violence was unparalleled; broken families and divorce abounded; religious corruption was the order of the day (Rom. 1:21-30). Yet, when the apostle gave the mandate to the Christian church for action, suggestions for the use of political pressure and civil disobedience were strangely silent. Public demonstrations and letter writing campaigns were not considered. The biblical solution to godlessness was gospel preaching. God’s remedy to social problems was spiritual power. He charges them in Rom. 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Was not this the solution in every generation? Was it not the preaching of William Booth when whiskey ran like water in the

gutters of Whitechapel and East London, and that of Moody in the slums of Chicago, and the Wesleys and Whitefield preaching in moors and marketplaces of England? As it was then, so must it be in our day! However, the question rightfully arises: Does not compassionate social action have a place in Christian ministry? Of course, but as an outgrowth and support of the work of the gospel; never in place of the gospel. Gospel preaching must remain pre-eminent. Listen to the words of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, as Harry Ironside heard them being addressed, "…take a man from the filth and squalor of the slums, exchange his rags for decent clothing, move him from the stifling stench of the city tenement to a neat little cottage in the pure air of the country, put him on his feet economically where he can make a decent living for himself and his family, and then let him die in his sins, unsaved, and be lost forever at last—really it is not worthwhile, and I, for one, would not attempt it." (4)

The so-called "culture war" is a deception; for the Christian the battle is truly a spiritual warfare fought with the spiritual weapons of the Word, prayer, and faith in God. Our conflict is "not against flesh and blood, but… against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). Today's anti-Christian culture is not the enemy. The true Enemy, the prince of darkness, would delight to have the church battle in the shadows, squander precious resources, and be distracted from the true war. Christian, refuse the deception, take up the true sword, and in the power of the Holy Spirit join with the Psalmist and say, "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hand to war, and my fingers to fight" (Ps. 144:1).

Endnotes (1) Charles Colson, “Why Catholics Are Our Allies”, Christianity Today, Nov. 14,1994, p.136 (2) J. I. Packer, “Why I Signed It”, Christianity Today, Dec. 12, 1994, p. 36 (3) C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, MacMillian Publishing, New York, 1963 (4) H. A. Ironside, Unless You Repent, Gospel Folio Press, Grand Rapids, MI 1994, p. 139

The False Charge of Semi-Pelagianism

Many Reformed leaders find themselves in an war of words with evangelical Christians, especially those who hold and teach Dispensational theology. This is unfortunate, for Dispensationalists have always stood on the front lines fighting for the truth of inerrancy and plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture, the person and work of Christ, and the doctrines of salvation. In their ranks number some of the stalwarts of the faith: J. N. Darby, D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, W. E. Vine, John Walvoord, W. A. Criswell, and others. However, over the years, Reformed leaders have come to see Dispensationalists less as allies and more as an enemies of biblical truth and New Testament Christianity. Within recent years their charges have become increasingly more shrill and accusatory. One area in which Reformed leaders have chosen to focus their attack is the doctrine of “semi- Pelagianism”.

Reformed Theology’s Charge of “Semi-Pelagianism”

In recent years Reformed writers, Bible teachers, and church leaders have repeatedly charged Dispenationalism with the error of semi-Pelagianism. This serious and false charge has been used so frequently that within Calvinistic circles Dispensationalism is considered to be rank heresy. One can scarcely open a book by a Reformed writer without seeing this indictment. Examples seem to abound on every hand. Reformed writer Keith Mathison writes:

Dispensationalism has adopted a semi-Pelagian, Arminian doctrine not based on Scripture and has

rejected the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity rooted deeply in Scripture. (1)

Respected Calvinist author Dr. R. C. Sproul continues the assault:

In the church we are widely exposed to Arminianism, which is more properly speaking a variety of semi-Pelagianism; the “semi” is a thin patina. The essence of Pelagianism is retained in semi-Pelagianism, and it is carried through into Arminianism and, to a degree, into Dispensationalism. (2)

Before, we can determine whether or not these charges are fair, accurate, or factual, let us first examine the doctrines of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism.

What is Pelagianism and “semi-Pelagianism”? Pelagius (350-409?AD) was a Roman Catholic monk from Great Britain who, church history records, was a heretic and unorthodox teacher. Pelagius (1) denied the biblical doctrine of original sin and the depravity of man; (2) argued that each person is created with perfect freedom to do good or evil; (3) taught that salvation is possible without the aid of divine grace. Pelagius wrote, “An unregenerate man can be without sin and keep the commandments of God, if he wishes…” Aurelius Augustine (354-430 AD), the bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was outraged, and this began a 25-year crusade against the teaching of Pelagius. In 431 AD, the teaching of Pelagius and his followers was fully condemned by the church council at Ephesus. In time, the condemned teaching of Pelagius was no longer a factor in the church, and Pelagian’s followers disbanded. However, over the next 100 years, semi-Augustinians began to rise in influence and threatened biblical orthodoxy. The

much-used term “semi-Pelagianism”, however, is unfortunate and misleading. This doctrine was not developed by either Pelagius or his followers, nor was it based on his writings, for Pelagius put very little of his teaching into written form. Where then did so-called “semi-Pelagianism” originate? Semi- Pelagianism would be more correctly called semi-Augustinianism for the doctrine developed from the fellow-leaders and followers of Augustine. Church historian and theologian Richard Kyle writes in the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology:

The label “Semi-Pelagianism,” however, is a relatively modern expression, which apparently appeared first in the Lutheran Formula of Concord (1577) and became associated with the theology of the Jesuit Luis Molina (1535-1600). The term, nevertheless, was not a happy choice, because the so-called semi-Pelagians wanted to be anything but half-Pelagians. It would be more correct to call them semi-Augustinians who, while rejecting the doctrines of Pelagius and respecting Augustine, were not willing to follow the ultimate consequences of his (Augustine’s) theology. (3)

A good number of Bible scholars and church historians have chosen to use the term “semi-Augustinian” instead of “semi-Pelagian”. Theologian and author Gordon Olson and church historian Philip Schaff are among those who have chosen to use the term “semi-Augustinians” in their writings. Followers of Augustine believed that his teaching on total depravity and the bondage of the will was too severe and felt, therefore, that a new more moderate position was needed. This issue became more heated in the fifth century when Augustinian leaders such as John Cassian, Hilary of Arles, and others began propounding a tempered Augustinian position. They

suggested that, unlike Pelagius, there was indeed original sin and that this corruption had touched all mankind. However, this corruption was not total or absolute. They taught that original sin was better understood as a sickness which merely limited unregenerate man. Man, though ruined by original sin, still had the ability in this fallen nature to choose for God. Augustinian John Cassian taught that it was possible for unregenerate man, despite his weakened position, to take the initiative in salvation, apart from divine grace. Therefore in 531 AD this teaching was condemned in the Synod of Orange. This position is in direct opposition with the biblical teaching that "salvation is of God"(Jonah 2:9); "there is none that seeketh after God" (Romans 3:11). Today very few orthodox Christians hold this teaching. Interestingly, all Reformed leaders and teachers readily admit that Augustine laid the foundation for what is called Calvinism or Reformed theology. Calvin himself said that he was indebted to the theology of Augustine. However, although Augustine did not support semi-Augustinianism, yet his followers, and not those of Pelagius, were the ones who eagerly moved it forward. So, today it is very surprising to find Calvinist leader after Calvinist leader falsely accusing many Bible-believing non-Calvinists of semi-Augustinianism. The chief targets of their attacks are Jacob Arminius, John Wesley, and especially Christians who hold Dispensational theology. Furthermore, these attacks have caused great harm to the cause of Christ and have polarized the evangelical church in her efforts in outreach and evangelism. The question we would raise is: Are these attacks fair, true, and based upon the writings of these respected leaders?

The Testimony of Jacob Arminius, John Wesley

A careful reading of Church history will show that Jacob Arminius (1560- 1609) was a Calvinist in good standing until his death in 1609. However, he differed in a number of points from the hyper-Calvinists who lived in Europe at the time of his death. Nevertheless, it cannot be shown that Arminius followed the view of the semi-Augustinians or in any way denied the biblical doctrine of original sin or the depravity of man. Many of his writings which exist today clearly show his position. In the Works of Jacob Arminius we find the following statement:

In his sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform what is truly good. (4)

Jacob Arminius was biblically-based, orthodox, and sound on the fundamentals of biblical faith*. It is inaccurate to label him as a false teacher or even as one who held any teaching related to false teacher Pelagius. Church history clearly shows that John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, likewise was not a proponent of semi-Augustinianism. We may find error in some of his later followers, but it is impossible to label John Wesley as one denying original sin or the depravity of man. We can easily find his position in this area through his many writings that exist today. In the Works of John Wesley we read:

My theology is within a hair's breadth of Calvinism; for I ascribe all good to the free grace of God; and deny all natural free will, and power prior to grace, and excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or what he does for it is all by the grace of God. (5)

Occasionally one finds a fair minded Calvinist who readily admits to the biblical position of John Wesley and who is willing to set the record straight. Calvinist Thomas R. Schreiner of Southern Baptist Seminary writes:

Wesley's analysis of the human condition and his bold proclamation of divine grace should warm the heart of any evangelical Calvinist. (6)

Dispensationalism, Human Depravity, and Salvation

Dispensational theology differs from that of Arminian or Wesleyan theology, yet all these theologies are sound in the fundamentals of the faith* and none can be called heresy. In the area of human or total depravity, all Dispensationalists argue that man is separated from God by original sin. Man, apart from God, can not seek after God nor initiate an approach to God nor produce faith for salvation. Salvation is the work of God. Concerning this, Dispensational preacher and author H. A. Ironside writes:

Man is hopelessly corrupt. He is not only guilty, but is utterly unable to retrieve his condi tion. The law only accentuates his guilt. (7)

Only God, through the Holy Spirit, can transform the unregenerate man into a new creature in Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can so work in the unsaved heart to move the individual to exercise faith in Christ (Acts 2:36-41);

only the Holy Spirit can convict of sin, which works salvation in the souls of men (John 16:8-9). Only divine grace can speak so that the "...Dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live"(John 5:25). While this is not Calvinist theology, neither is it Pelagiansim or semi-Pelagianism. It is a sound, fundamental theology of salvation.

Closing Challenge

Yet a question remains: why is it that Reformed leaders today seek to attack Jacob Arminius, John Wesley, and leading Dispensationalists? History clearly shows that these men did not hold to the teaching of which they are accused. Why then the charges? What theological viewpoint do all of these leaders hold in common? Interestingly, all of these Christian leaders do not support many key aspects of Calvinism. They all, nevertheless, are biblically sound on the fundamentals* of the faith; but if these men can be accused of error often enough and loudly enough, it is hoped that perhaps some their followers may turn away to embrace Calvinism. Have we come to the place where a Christian's doctrine must be regarded with highest suspicion merely because he is not a Calvinist? Must we label Christians as heretics because they do not agree with Augustine or Calvin on every point? Certainly not! Nonetheless, in every age there is a need for all Christians to test the doctrines of men with the teaching of Scripture. However, in all our striving after biblical truth may labor to be accurate, generous, and fair in all that we affirm.

Endnotes (1) Keith Mathison, Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God? (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R

Publishing, 1995), p. 50 (2) R. C. Sproul, Grace Unknown, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), p. 180 (3) Walter Elwell (ed.) Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Semi-Pelagianism, Richard Kyle, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), p. 1089-1090 (4) Jacob Arminius, Works of Jacob Arminius, vol. 1, trans. James Nichols, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), pp. 659-660 (5). John Wesley, Works of John Wesley, ed. T. Jackson, vol. 8 (1831; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 284 (6). T. Schreiner, Bruce Ware (ed.), Still Sovereign, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), p. 233 (7). H. A. Ironside, Romans, (New York, NY: Loizeaux, 1976), p. 46 * "Fundamentals of the faith" includes orthodox views concerning Trinity, Total Depravity, Inerrancy, the Inspiration of Scripture,Deity of Christ,Death & Resurrection of Christ, etc.

The Gift of Faith

D. L. Moody was once asked if he thought faith was a gift of God. He replied, “Some say that faith is the gift of God. So is the air, but you have to breathe it; so is bread, but you have to eat it; so is water, but you have to drink it. Some are wanting some miraculous kind of feeling. That is not faith. ‘Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.’ It is not for me to sit down and wait for faith to come stealing over me…it is for me to take God at His word.”

The teaching that faith is a gift of God is a truth stated in Scripture. It is given by the One who gives every good and every perfect gift. Faith is not the only gift which comes from the Father of lights. The Scriptures also teach that salvation is an unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:15). Our daily bread is a gift from God, along with His grace, the Word of God, and the Son of God. These and many others are God’s gracious gifts. Indeed, the gift of faith is one of God’s most precious gifts for it is by grace through faith that we are saved.

The Scriptures and the Gift of Faith

A number of scriptures speak of faith as a gift of God, such as Romans 12:3, “As God has dealt to every man a measure of faith,” and 1 Corinthians 12:8-9, “For to one is given…faith by the same Spirit.” These verses when carefully studied reveal that this gift of faith is not a condition for salvation but a requirement for effective Christian living and service. The gift of faith in this sense is the special ability given to members of the Body to accomplish great things for God. George Mueeller of Bristol, who established an orphanage which thousands

would call home, and Hudson Taylor, who reached the previously unevangelized interior of China with the gospel, show examples of this gift of faith. This may have been one of the gifts that Stephen possessed, for he was “full of faith.” This may have been in the apostle’s mind when he wrote, “if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). But this gift is not the faith which saves but the gift of faith for service.

The important question is not so much whether faith is a gift of God; rather, is this gift given in a unique way exclusively to those whom the Bible calls the elect? These teachers appeal to the words of Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” They are convinced that the gift of God spoken of here is faith, that is, saving faith without which no one can be saved. Their argument runs: since salvation is fully and exclusively of God, saving faith cannot proceed from the natural man; it must be a gift of God. They conclude that faith which flows out of the natural man cannot save, for this faith would be a work, and no one is saved by works.

Is Faith the Gift of God (Eph. 2:8)?

The Greek construction of this verse seems to indicate that faith is not the gift but rather that salvation is the gift of God. New Testament Greek authorities contend that the key to understanding Ephesians 2:8 is to properly identify the antecedent of the pronoun “that” (tauto). A general rule of Greek grammar concerning identifying the antecedent is: Pronouns agree with their antecedent in gender and number. Their case is determined by their use in their own

clause. The fact that the demonstrative pronoun “that” is neuter and the words “faith” (pistis) and “grace” (charis) are feminine in gender must rule out faith as the gift of God. If Paul wanted to say that “faith” was the gift of God, he would have used the feminine form of the word “that” (haute).

A number of respected evangelical Greek scholars, commenting on the grammatical structure of this verse, have concluded that salvation and not faith is the gift of God. The word “that” seems to refer back to verses 4-7, to God quickening and raising us up together and in showing His grace toward us. None of this is of works; it is a gift of God. Commentator F. F. Bruce writes, “The fact that the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ is neuter in Greek (tauto), whereas ‘faith’ is a feminine noun (pistis), combines with other considerations to suggest that it is the whole concept of salvation by grace through faith that is described as the gift of God.”1 W. E. Vine, a respected authority on the Greek New Testament, concerning the word “gift” writes, ”…Doron, to give, is used of salvation by grace, as the gift of God in Ephesians 2:8.”2 What is Faith?

After considering whether or not faith is the gift which leads to salvation, one naturally asks: What then is faith? The biblical faith which leads to salvation, sometimes called “saving faith,” consists of three primary elements: 1. knowledge of the object of faith; 2. mental assent—what the Bible says about Christ, the object of our faith, is true; and 3. the use of the human will to place dependence in Him alone. It is noteworthy that this definition is accepted by Calvinist teachers. It is striking that this definition of faith includes the exercise of the human will. Both Calvinists and non-Calvinists concede

this point. The Calvinist generally will go further in his theology and state that new birth by the Spirit is prior to the exercise of faith.

This is in striking contradiction to the biblical order which posits that faith comes first and then is followed by new birth or salvation. The non-Calvinist believes that man through the Fall, as the Scriptures describe, is “dead,” “lost,” “perishing,” “condemned,” “in darkness.” The Fall includes all of this and more besides. However, the Fall has not brought to pass an inability to believe in Christ unto salvation. For the boundless grace of God and penetrating power of the Word of God and convicting of the Holy Spirit are more than sufficient to enable a man to exercise faith (Jn. 5:25).

Faith truly is a Gracious Gift of God

What is the source of faith? The Word of God tells us that, from the divine side, the Scriptures, the Spirit of God, and the grace of God work in concert to produce faith. But there is the human side, which is the exercise of the human will in response to these divine promptings. The Word of God tells us: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Concerning the Spirit’s work in new birth we read, ”...except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Although God enables us to believe through divine promptings, the responsibility to believe is ours. God has done all that is necessary for salvation. Our responsibility is to receive the gift of salvation by faith.

Concerning the inter-working of the divine and human aspects that together produce faith which ultimately leads to regeneration, Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost

comments, “The Word of God convicts, reproves, enlightens, exhorts, reveals, not only our need but the Lord Jesus Christ who can meet that need. The instrument that convicts is the Word of God, but it is the Spirit that produces the new birth. The Word of God, energized by the Spirit of God, produces new birth.”3 Another respected author, C. H. Mackintosh, comments, “New birth is not a change of man’s fallen nature, but the imparting of a new divine nature. How is this new nature produced? This is a point of immense importance, inasmuch as it places the Word of God before us as the grand instrument which the Holy Ghost uses in quickening dead souls…All who place their trust in Christ have gotten new life—are regenerate.”4 Is Faith a Work?

Some argue that unless faith is given irresistibly by God, salvation is a “works salvation.” It is said that this defective salvation is not of God, for it is partly of God and partly of man. Is this view in accordance with Scripture? Does this view stand upon sound logic?

First, the very nature of faith is an admission that man is unable to earn or merit salvation but rests on God alone and His grace. It is an act of the will prompted by the moving of God’s abundant grace. Faith is not the act of doing something but of receiving something. Does the downtrodden beggar who accepts a handout receive the credit for the gracious deed? The act of receiving God’s unconditional gift of salvation is of no merit to the receiver. All glory goes to the Giver. Faith may rightly be considered a gift of God in the sense that all good things come from God. Faith is of God, who has inscrutably given fallen man the ability to respond to the drawing power of God—through the promptings of the grace of

God, the Word and the Spirit working together to form faith in a willing heart. Yet the responsibility to believe is all of man. The charge from God to the lost is: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." We are not to pray to receive the gift of faith so we can believe. We are to believe as an act of the human will in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation.

Endnotes

1. F. F. Bruce, Ephesians, (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1961), p. 51-52

2. W. E. Vine, Dictionary of N. T. Words, (Old Tappan: Revell, 1981), p. 146

3. J. D. Pentecost, The Divine Comforter, (Westwood: Revell, 1963), p. 131

4. C. H. Mackintosh, Mackintosh Treasury, (Neptune: Loizeaux, 1976), p. 618

The Lord of Hosts …. the God of Jacob

“The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.” Psalm 46:7 Dawn Robinson moved from the open spaces of rural Georgia to Bible college, then on to California, and finally to the fast paced life in New York City. She found a management position with the financial firm Morgan Stanley on the 61st floor of the World Trade Center. Soon, Dawn found opportunities to witness to Cassie, her co-worker about her love for the Lord Jesus Christ. This new friend would listen with interest and probe her with questions. Near the end of their conversations together, as the subject would turn to spiritual things, Dawn would point out the pressing issue of sin and urge Cassie to trust Christ as her Savior. Each time Cassie would answer, “You know I’m searching, but I don’t think I’m ready to get on the bus.” But at 8:45AM on the morning of Tuesday, September 11th everything changed. Both Dawn and her co-worker had just arrived to work at the south tower of the World Trade Center, when suddenly a large fireball burst from the north tower filling the air with smoke and debris. Over the inter-office loudspeaker came the announcement, “Do not leave the office, do not panic, everything is under control.” Despite the announcement, Dawn grabbed Cassie and they began to make their way down the winding stairways to the bottom floor. As they entered the stairwell, United Airlines flight 175 exploded into the south tower. Soon the stairways were choked with people, thick dust and debris began to litter the passageways, and water from the sprinkler systems soaked their clothes. After about 30 minutes, the two found their way to the ground level exit, and joined the

thousands who were running franticly for safety before the towers collapsed. Soaked, shaken, and exhausted, the two took refuge in an abandoned, debris-covered bus. They huddled together as hot tears streamed down their faces. They both realized that, except for the mercy of God, they would have lost their lives along with the thousands of others. This realization gripped Cassie powerfully. She now understood that if she had perished with the others, she would have faced an eternity without Christ. But there in an abandoned bus, amid the cries of terror and fear that filled the blackened sky outside, peace and security began to fill the heart of Cassie who finally “got on the bus” and trusted Christ for her eternal salvation. (1) Amid all the confusion, terror, and conflict that rages today, our God remains a refuge of grace and strength. He stoops down to us in our need and misery to lift us up. Then, through acts of omnipotence and power, He makes known to men that the sovereign God of the universe is still on the throne. He is a God who is there in times of tragedy, and crushing need, as well as in times of joy and triumph. He is a gracious and strong God who is faithful and true. In these difficult days, the families of victims of 9-11, all of New York City, and indeed the entire world need the touch of a merciful and gracious God. It is He who asks us to “cast all our care upon Him, for He cares for us”; and it is He who desires “to show Himself strong on their behalf”. This is the kind of God that Psalm 46 tells us about. This God, the writer says, is God strong and mighty—“The Lord of Hosts is with us.” But He is also God tender and compassionate, never forgetting the needy—“He is the God of Jacob, our refuge”.

Lord of Hosts is With Us

Psalm 46, it is believed, was written on the occasion of the invasion of Israel by the Assyrian King Sennacherib and his 185,000 veteran troops. The northern cities had already been ravaged, its walled cities razed to the ground, and their crops burned in the army's wake. Sennacherib now besieged Jerusalem, sending his envoy, Rabshakeh, to ask for King Hezekiah's unconditional surrender. Rabshakeh mocked the God of the Jews, and scoffed at His power. Hezekiah, encouraged by the word of Isaiah, and buoyed by a season of sincere prayer, refused to surrender. Then one night, God sent an angel to deal with the besieging Assyrian army. One angel… One night… One God, and the Assyrian army was no more! The powerful, arrogant invaders were now thoroughly defeated. The Lord of Hosts had manifested Himself with glory. Truly there is much meaning is wrapped up in the words "Lord of Hosts"! This divine title, although not used in the Bible until the book of 1 Samuel, is frequently used in the Psalms and by Isaiah. The term seems to refer to God's sovereign power over all earthly and celestial rulers in the universe. "The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory" (Ps. 24:10); "O Lord God of Hosts, who is a stong Lord like thee?" (Ps. 89:8); and "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory…then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:3,5). But here, in Psalm 46, the writer tells us that the Lord of Hosts is with us (v. 11). The high King of Heaven's compassion, mercy, and nearness to the needy and and downcast is emphasized. This universal power, this unlimited sovereignty, this unbounded omnipotence is shown to be strong on our behalf. In war, tragedy,

calamity, natural disaster, and terrorist attacks, the Lord of Hosts is not distant and far removed from our lives; but very near, for He “is with us”, showing Himself strong on our behalf. Although from our earthly vantage point this world appears to be in chaos and confusion, we must acknowledge that He is still in control.

Joseph Stalin and Jewish Nation

However, God’s divine ordering and purposes in the world cannot be discerned by simple observation. Providence is the work of God that can only be truly appreciated and discerned by the eye of faith. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the history of the Jewish nation. God preserved the Jews through the hands of Moses in Egypt, and later through the bravery of Mordecai and Esther; but one of the most remarkable acts of providence took place in the Soviet Union in 1953. On March 1, 1953, Josef Stalin unveiled a proposal to liquidate the three million Jews then living in the Soviet Union. Stalin, a paranoid Jew-hater, had put to death thousands of Jews in the 1930’s, including many loyal Jews who had supported the Communist cause since the beginning of the Bolshevik revolution. Stalin’s anger against the Jew was rekindled after World War II, when Israel’s first ambassador to Moscow, Golda Meir, was invited to a reception held by Soviet Jews. Soon afterwards, Stalin suddenly announced that a “plot” to kill him had been discovered. He explained to the Soviet press that the clever and sinister plot was arranged by Jewish medical doctors. Soon denunciations against all Jews from leading Communists were broadcast on government-controlled radio and television and circulated in the print media. On March 1, 1953, at 12:00 noon, Stalin called a meeting of the Politburo in

the Kremlin and read to the Soviet leaders his plan for the extermination of the Jews. However, Stalin's evil plan to exterminate the Jews never took place. On March 2, nearly 24 hours after outlining his plans and exactly one week before the devastation would begin, Josef Stalin died of a stroke. He lay in state for a week and was buried on March 9, which was the Jewish holiday—Purim. (2) In the human mind, the calendar dates of the week, month, and year often are forgotten, but the mind of God remembers always. Purim is the Jewish holiday which remembers God's deliverance of Jews from extermination by the hand of Haman in the book of Esther. God is still in control. His sovereign hand is at times imperceptible, yet His divine purposes and ordering are being worked out "in the kingdoms of men". "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge".

The God of Jacob, Our Refuge

The heart of God is no better defined than by the phrase, "the God of Jacob is our refuge". For the Bible records no greater example of deceit, selfishness, and craftiness than Jacob, the supplanter. There is, perhaps, no one more unworthy of God's grace than Jacob. Yet the words "God" and "Jacob" are now linked together in grace to show us the heart of God. The sovereign Lord of the universe, the Lord of Glory, is none other than the God of all grace, who bends low to the lowly and undeserving. "The Lord is high about all nations, and his glory above the heavens…He humbles himself to behold things that are in heaven and in the earth. He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the needy…" (Ps. 113:4, 6,7). He has the individual on His heart as much as nations, governments, and history. God's values and

man’s values are as distinct as heaven is from earth. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). Man values the mighty and strong—governments, nations, industry, and wealth are the focus of his eye; but the Lord’s eye is upon the weak, the hurting, and the needy. This grace is nowhere more vividly set forth than at Calvary, when the Lord Jesus Christ was forsaken of God on the cross so that God would never leave or forsake us. There our Lord was shown divine wrath of God without mercy that we might enjoy divine mercy without wrath. The “God of Jacob” is our refuge. What a high, strong tower it is which was purposed and designed by the mind and heart of God for the Jacob’s, the Dawn’s, the Cassie’s, and the nations of the world. Unassailable. Impenetrable. Impregnable. Eternal. Scottish expositor Alexander Maclaren declares, “The God of Jacob is our refuge, and so we may say to the storms of life,—blow winds and crack your cheeks, and do your worst, you cannot touch me in the fortress where I dwell. The wind will hurtle around the stronghold, but within all will be calm.” (3) How rich are His promises, how strong is His love, how great is His grace, and how secure is His refuge! “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of Host is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah” (Psalm 46:10-11).

Endnotes (1) James Cymbala, God’s Grace from Ground Zero, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002),(tape) (2) Harold Willmington, Willmington’s Guide to the Bible, (Wheaton, IL, Tyndale, 1981), p.253 (3) Alexander

Maclaren, Exposition of Holy Scripture, Psalms, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 350

The New Covenent Controversy

The institution of New Covenant powerfully unfolds the depth of God's faithfulness and the integrity of His promises. This unconditional agreement was made with Israel because they had broken the terms of the earlier Mosaic covenant. This (new) covenant would be rooted in God's faithfulness rather than Israel's obedience. It points to a future day, when God will gather Israel out of all the nations and bring them into their own land, giving them a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:28). He will own them as His covenant people - "a nation born in a day." He will merge the two parts of divided Israel into one nation under one sovereign King, and set His sanctuary in the midst of them forever (Ezek. 37:15).

The authority of the New Covenant is anchored upon the blood of Christ, the Mediator of the covenant (Heb. 8:13). Because of this fact, Christ is called by the writer of the book of Hebrews to be now the Mediator of the New Covenant, "He is the mediator of a better covenant" (Heb. 8:6). The Lord's Supper demonstrates this - "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood which is shed for you" (Lk. 22:19). As Christians, we are identified with the glorious Mediator and enjoy the spiritual privileges and blessings of the New Covenant, but it is essentially a covenant with Israel. Its final consummation awaits the time when "the Deliverer will come out of Zion, and...turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:25). Afterwards, this covenant will be fully realized by Israel in the Millennial age.

REFORMED THEOLOGY AND DISPENSATIONALISM

However, this dispensational understanding of the New Covenant is seen by Reformed-Amillennialist teachers as a weak link in traditional dispensational theology. Reformed literature seeks at every turn to attack traditional dispensational teaching concerning the New Covenant. A leading Reformed theologian, Professor Keith Mathison, writes:

The New Covenant is perhaps the clearest example of a promise made to national Israel that is now being fulfilled in and by the church. Dispensationalists have consistently taught that the church cannot fulfill the new covenant of Jeremiah 31…Dispensationalists insist that the church cannot fulfill the new covenant because such a fulfillment would undermine the doctrine of Premillennialism… (1)

Current Reformed theology teaches that the church now fulfills the provisions of the New Covenant. The Reformed view has been adopted by a growing number of Charismatic leaders to buttress their view for miracles and healing during this age. They teach that since Christ is presently reigning as the covenantal King, the supernatural blessings of the New Covenant should be experienced by the church today. This view has been espoused by many past and present Charismatic leaders such as Jack Hayford, John Wimber, Peter C. Wagner, and others. This view teaches that Christ, as the Mediator of the New Covenant is now seated on His Millennial throne in heaven. From this center of His kingdom authority, miracles, physical healing, and power over demons will flow down to His people on earth in an unprecedented way. Elements of this “Kingdom Authority” teaching have even found their way into contemporary praise music. Jack Hayford, a

Charismatic pastor and musician from Van Nuys, California, in the lyrics to his song “Majesty” writes: “Majesty, kingdom authority flow from His throne down unto His own, His anthem raise.” This teaching is inevitable when the Reformed view of the New Covenant is carried to its logical conclusion.

A PROBLEM PASSAGE: HEBREWS 8:6

Critics of Dispensationalism are quick to point to Hebrews chapter eight as support for their view that the provisions of the New Covenant are fulfilled in the church. In Hebrews chapter eight we read, “…by how much also He is the Meditator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6). Calvinistic writers place emphasis on the phrase “He is the Mediator of a better covenant.” They argue that Christ presently is the Mediator of the terms of the New Covenant. They contend that since Christ is now the Mediator of the New Covenant, then the Covenant is now fulfilled by the church, and not by Israel in a future Millennial kingdom. They teach that Israel has no future Millennial hope, nor should they expect any future fulfillment of the New Covenant. Some Reformed leaders seem to believe that this viewpoint is the most convincing interpretation of this verse. Reformed theologian Keith Mathison, writes:

Hebrews 8:6-13 tells us that Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant now. Hebrews teaches repeatedly that the old covenant has been abolished and that the New Covenant has been inaugurated by Jesus Christ through the shedding of His blood. (italics mine) (2)

THE TWO-FOLD STRUCTURE OF THE NEW COVENANT

There is an important theological distinction between inauguration and institution. Inauguration indicates the fulfilling of the provisions of the covenant, whereas institution refers to the setting forth of the terms of the covenant. Has the New Covenant been inaugurated? Yes, Christ is the Mediator of the covenant; but must we then conclude that the church now replaces Israel in fulfilling all the provisions of the New Covenant? How have Dispensational writers answered this question? Dispensationalism offers a reasonable explanation to the question of how Christ is presently the Mediator of the New Covenant, but the new covenant is not yet fulfilled in the church. In defense of their position, many Dispensational writers point to the two-level structure of the four major biblical covenants. In all these covenants, the covenant was first instituted, and then many years later, some or all of the covenant's provisions were fulfilled. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God unconditionally promised a seed (son) to Abraham and Sarah; however it was not until twenty-five years later that that provision of the covenant was fulfilled. In the Davidic Covenant, one of the terms of this unconditional covenant was that from David's seed One would come who would "build a house for My name" (2 Sam. 7:13). This would not take place until the reign of Solomon many years later. God's pattern for His covenants is that a covenant is first introduced, and then many years later, the provisions of the covenant are fulfilled. This is also the pattern of the New Covenant. The New Covenant was introduced by the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, it was sealed by our Lord when His blood was shed on the cross of Calvary. The provisions of the covenant were offered to the nation of Israel after the resurrection of Christ, but were rejected. Nevertheless,

the terms of the covenant will be fulfilled in the nation of Israel during the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Elliot Johnson, a professor of New Testament at Dallas Seminary explains:

The distinction between the institution and the fulfillment of a covenant must be clarified further. To institute a promissory covenant is to introduce provisions of the agreement which are now available to be received. To inaugurate fulfillment is to keep all of the provisions of the agreement. The new covenant was instituted only after the death of Christ, the Mediator of the covenant; then He and the provisions of the covenant were offered to the nation, following His resurrection and ascension. Some of the provisions were then made available as given to the remnant gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. The new covenant will be inaugurated in fulfillment when Israel as a nation will accomplish her national destiny." (3)

Theologian Dr. Dwight Pentecost, a former professor at Dallas Seminary, adds:

There is a marked and critical difference between the institution of the covenant and the realization of its benefits. By Christ's death, Christ laid the foundation for Israel's new covenant—but its benefits will not be received by Israel until the second advent of Messiah." (4)

NEW COVENANT and ISRAEL

The New and Old Testaments provide support for the idea that national Israel will still inherit the spiritual and temporal provisions of the New Covenant. If this is true,

then it is a powerful argument against the view that the church replaces Israel and inherits all of the provisions of the New Covenant. As we look more closely at this subject, the Holy Scriptures must be our only standard and guide. There are two main categories into which the biblical evidence can be arranged:

THE INTEGRITY OF GOD'S PROMISES TO NATIONAL ISRAEL

The Scriptures teach that God must be absolutely faithful to His Word. In the New Covenant, He has unconditionally bound Himself to be faithful to its provisions and terms. In Jeremiah 31 and in Hebrews chapter 8 (where the terms of the New Covenant are discussed), no less than five times does God use the phrase "I will" to express His loyalty to the terms of the New Covenant. This is essential, for God's integrity, His faithfulness, and the veracity of His character are at stake. The psalmist comforts himself in God's faithfulness when he reminds us, "My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips"(Ps. 89:34). In the New Testament, sixty years after the death of Christ, the apostle Paul in the book of Romans tells us that Israel still possesses the provisions contained in the covenants. Paul writes, "Who are Israelites; to whom pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants... (Romans 9:4). The use of the present tense by Paul in this verse is very important: "to whom pertain....the covenants." The present tense indicates that God has never wavered in His promises made to Israel.

NATIONAL AND MATERIAL PROMISES

Closely associated with the fact that God must be faithful to His promises, is the uniqueness of the covenant provisions to Israel. God has made both spiritual and material promises to Israel. Today, the church enjoys some of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant by virtue of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in a careful study of the New Covenant, it soon becomes obvious that many of its spiritual and material provisions can only be fulfilled by national Israel in the future Millennium. By their very nature, it is impossible for these promises to be fulfilled today in the church. Allow us to look at just a few of them. The prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34, begins to speak of some of the blessings of the new covenant. In this chapter, he calls it a “covenant of peace” (v. 25) and states that Israel will be “His people and He will be their God”, a provision of the New Covenant detailed in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8.

Clearly the context of this passage is that these are blessings which flow out of God’s New Covenant relationship to the nation of Israel. Notice some of the provisions:

(1) Wild animals will be removed from out of the land so that the inhabitants may sleep in safety in the fields and woods (v. 25).

(2) There will be a supernaturally abundant harvest of farm crops and other agriculture from the land (v. 27).

(3) Israel will not receive any threats and insults from other nations (Ezekiel 34: 28-29). All of these provisions mentioned by Ezekiel have not taken place today in the church nor in the land of Israel; they are provisions of the New Covenant that will be fulfilled in the future.

(4) In Jeremiah 31:34, the prophet mentions that “they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’: for they shall know Me from the least of them unto the greatest of them.” This is one of the spiritual provisions in the New Covenant that is certainly reserved for the future. Clearly, this is not true today, even in the church. Instead of seeing a growing knowledge of the things of God, we are presently seeing a sharp decline in the knowledge of the Lord and of spiritual things.

CONCLUSION

The New Covenant is expressly promised to both the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It is a better covenant than the one God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, as it provides for the future salvation of the nation and endows the people with the ability to walk in God’s laws and statutes (Heb. 8:10). Under these conditions, the nation of Israel will be able to safely dwell in her own land under the shelter of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews. The church, on the other hand, is the Body and espoused Bride of Christ. As such, she bears witness on earth to the fact that Christ, as Meditator of the New Covenant, has shed His blood for the remission of sins.

Endnotes (1) Keith Mathison, Rightly Dividing the People of God?, (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R Publishing, 1995), p. 28 (2) Ibid., p. 29 (3) Elliot Johnson, (Grand Rapids, Contemporary Dispensationalism, MI: Kregel, 1999), p. 146 (4) Dwight Pentecost, Thy Kingdom Come, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1995), p. 173

The Origin of Sin

The origin of sin has perplexed Christians throughout history. Many have asked: Since God is supremely good, untainted by sin, and infinitely sovereign over His universe, how is it that sin entered the world which God declared to be “very good”? It has been suggested that God could have created angels and man in a state of holy perfection, so it would have been impossible for them to sin. However, this would have resulted in reducing God’s noblest creation to mere machine-like figures void of free choice. God desires man to respond to Him through choice.

God in His sovereignty gave to man a will to exercise freely as an integral part of his nature. God will not oppose His own will nor violate the nature He has designed for man. However, Scripture reveals that man’s choice is not always God’s will. How did sin enter the world? It was through disobedience on the part of the first man and woman to God’s revealed will. We read, “By one man sin entered into the world, and sin by death” (Rom. 5:12). God did not ordain it, but allowed it.

It has been rightly said that man’s freedom of will comes at a high price—war, crime, rebellion, and sin. God determined this freedom of choice given to man to be worth the price. This being said, we must never infer that the freedom of choice in man can thwart God’s ultimate will. This perfect will is the eternal purpose of God, founded upon His all-wise and eternal counsel, which is settled, ordained, and unalterable (Eph. 3:11).

In wrestling with this solemn question, some have sadly concluded that God Himself is the author of sin. This

doctrine was set forth by overzealous followers of John Calvin, seeking to validate his theology. To their credit it must be said that John Calvin and many moderate Calvinists did not hold to this teaching. Nevertheless, its foundations are rooted in the writing and thinking of Calvin. Calvin rightly believed in God's sovereignty over His created universe, but then took this important doctrine an unfortunate step further. He taught that God decrees all things which come to pass. According to this teaching, called Determinism, there is no event, no act, no decision of man that God does not ordain to happen exactly as it occurs. This includes war, political corruption, injustice, immorality, and sin. In his most important theological work, The Institutes of Christian Religion, which formed the thinking of his followers, John Calvin wrote, "…we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen with regard to every man."1 Following him, the intrepid reformer Martin Luther, in his classic work, On the Bondage of the Will, defended the view that God decrees all things, including the sinful acts of man and Satan. "…We do everything by God's will alone, and by a necessity that is laid upon us…so that all things still happen by necessity, as it respects us…since then God moves and actuates all things in all things, it cannot be but that He also moves and acts in Satan and in the wicked…(the wicked) hurried along by this impulse of divine omnipotency…Hence it arises, that the wicked man cannot but go astray and commit sin continually; inasmuch as being seized and urged by the power of God, he is not allowed to remain idle; but wills, desires, acts just to what he is."2 This theological perspective continues to be taught in our present day. A. W. Pink, the hyper-Calvinist author who died in 1952, writes,

“Nothing ever comes to pass except what He decreed.”3 The next logical step in this teaching of determinism is to declare that God is the originator of sin. After the death of John Calvin in 1564, Theodore Beza, professor of theology at the University of Geneva, became the leading proponent of this particular error of Calvinism. Through his far-reaching influence, this error became accepted as orthodoxy and spread rapidly throughout Europe. Unfortunately this doctrine, that God is the source of sin, continues to be taught by many Calvinists to the present day. This is the inevitable conclusion of the teaching that God decrees and determines everything that comes to pass. If one is to be a consistent determinist, he must believe that the God that decrees eternal salvation for the elect, must also decree the more repulsive acts that have occurred down through the pages of world history. This, according to many Calvinist writers, must also include the entrance of sin into the world.

The earnest Christian must recoil and reject the blasphemy of this God-dishonoring doctrine. One can hardly imagine that Christians would publicly teach such a doctrine, but sadly it is true. Mark the words of Calvinist professor Dr. John Fineberg of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, who writes, “I hold that all things are causally determined…God having made the choice, He created Adam as sinning.”4 This seems to imply that God not only created Adam and Eve, but that God was involved in the act of Adam’s and Eve’s sin. This quotation is not written in isolation; its author is one of many Calvinists who have taught that sin is a result of God decreeing it in man. A. W. Pink, presses this doctrine on his readers when he asserts confidently,

“Clearly it was the divine will that sin should enter this world, or it would not have done so. God had the power to prevent it. Nothing ever comes to pass except what He decreed…God’s decree that sin should enter this world was a secret hid in Himself.”5 Is this what the Bible teaches? How did sin enter the world? In using the Scriptures as our divine compass, we find they clearly teach that God is not the author of sin, nor will He entice man to sin. The New Testament states, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man” (Jas. 1:13).

In another place we read, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13). The careful student of Scripture will conclude that God has never caused anyone ever to sin, for sin is always the result of rebellion against God. “From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (Jas. 4:1).

Beyond a doubt, God is sovereign, holy, faithful, just, good, unchanging, all-powerful, unequaled, above all. Therefore, to ascribe, surmise, or to insinuate in any way that God is the author of sin is to besmirch and malign the surpassing greatness of His Name. In setting forth the seriousness of this error, Bible teacher Harold Mackay passionately writes, “Does God foreknow all things? Absolutely! Does God permit all things? Yes! Did God decree all things? No! There is no question but that all God’s eternal plans and purposes will be ultimately and completely fulfilled. But this is not to say that God decreed all the intervening happenings in the history of mankind. To infer that all the crimes, corruptions,

atrocities, tragedies, and wars that have stained the pages of human history were according to God's eternal decree is too horrible a thought to entertain for one moment.''6 How then does Scripture reconcile God's sovereignty with the entrance of sin? We find that God certainly, by virtue of His foreknowledge and omnipotence, has the power to know all things and ordain all things, yet the Bible teaches that He allows certain events and decrees others, but does not decree all things.

Though Scripture plainly teaches that man can oppose both the will and plan of God (Lk. 7:30; Mt. 23:37), mortal man cannot hinder or thwart God's ultimate plan for this world. However, individually, man can decide not to have a part in it. The Lord Jesus Christ will come again to rapture the Church—this is His sovereign plan; but some may choose not to have any part in it. The Scriptures repeatedly state that man can exercise a will given to him by God, and with that will reject the desires, blessings, and privileges that God has for him.

Psalm 32 reveals to us something more of the eternal ways of God. The psalmist states, "I will instruct you in the way that you should go: I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Be not as a horse, or as a mule which has no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle" (vv. 8-9). This verse may suggest to us that God in His sovereignty does not want "mule-like" followers. On the contrary, He wants those who will freely accept His instruction and counsel. He wants relationships with His people that are based on mutual affection and love, not on coercion and force.

God could, figuratively speaking, “bridle” unbelievers and irresistibly cause their hearts and wills to do as He pleases. However, it would result in bringing to pass “bridled mules” without wills of their own, the very thing God does not desire. God desires men to believe in Him unconstrainedly through the use of the freedom of the will which He has given to them.

Why is it that sin entered the world? It is the same reason that some men perish and others believe in Christ unto eternal life—the decision of man to act in rebellious disregard to God’s will. We must set aside the notion that sin entered the world by any desire of God; and in like manner, the notion that God does not desire to save all, for Scripture tells us that He does. But man can and does reject God’s will and plan for him. God in His sovereignty, designed man with a free will and, despite the fall and ruin of sin, His divine purpose will not be frustrated. He will not force men to believe, but desires all men to freely come to faith in Christ.

1. John Calvin, Institutes, Vol. 2, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdman, 1952, p. 206

2. Quoted by G.H. Lang, World Chaos, London, Paternoster, 1950, pp. 60-61

3. A.W. Pink, Gleanings from the Scriptures, Chicago, IL, Moody, 1964, p. 206

4. John Fineberg, Predestination and Free Will, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1986, p. 24

5. A.W. Pink, Gleanings from the Scriptures, Chicago, IL, Moody, 1964, p. 207

6. H.G. Mackay, Biblical Balance, Toronto, Everyday Publications, 1978, p. 55

The Origins of the Scofield Reference Bible

The Scofield Reference Bible has proven to be an immeasurable aid in guiding generations of serious Christians into a greater understanding of God's word. Within 30 years of its issurance Oxford University Press reported that 1,925,000 copies had been published; and in our own day, the Scofield Bible remains one of the most popular reference study bibles available. Who was C. I. Scofield? How did this Reference Bible originate? Cyrus Ingerson Scofield was born August 19, 1843. During the Civil War he served with distinction as a Confederate soldier, earning the Confederate Cross of Honor. After the war he studied law in St. Louis, Missouri, and was later admitted to the Kansas bar. In 1873 he was appointed to the United States Attorney for Kansas by President Grant. He was converted in 1879 through the efforts of a Y.M.C.A. worker named Thomas McPheeters. Not long after his conversion, he made the aquaintance of James H. Brooks. Brookes helped him in his study of the Bible and introduced him to dispensational teaching.

Early Ministry in Dallas, Texas

While serving at the First Congregational Church (Independant) in Dallas, Texas, Scofield deepened his understanding of the Scriptures. This congregation numbered only 14 members when he came to teach the Word of God in 1882. When he left, after 13 years of faithful ministry, this church numbered 814 members. On the last Sunday of ministry at this church the members presented him with a letter of commendation

which reflected the depth of his Christian character. This letter contained the following, “We commend him to you as one who delights to hide behind the uplifted cross of Jesus; one who will preach a full and free salvation through the shed blood of God’s Lamb; one who will lead you into the deep things of the Word of God, and one who preaches the whole truth of God.” During this time C. I. Scofield became a popular speaker and in demand at Bible conferences throughout the country. In 1903 he began to work on the Reference Bible. The idea of a reference Bible had been growing in his mind for some time; he was already busy writing a Bible study course. In 1902, he had receieved encouragement in this work from Arno C. Gaebelein, and later from three men who organised the Sea Cliff Bible Conference in Sea Cliff, NY - Alwyn Ball, Jr., John Pirie and Francis Fitch. All three of these men fellowshipped at so-called “Brethren assemblies” in the New York City area. Francis Fitch had a printing establishment that printed the New York Stock Exchange lists, and he acted as publisher of the Scofield Bible Course in its first years. John Pirie was a partner in Chicago’s large department store, “Carson, Pirie and Scott”. Alwyn Ball, Jr., a successful real estate broker, was a partner in the New York firm “Southhack and Ball”.

The Beginning of the Reference Bible

From 1901 to 1906, Bible Conferences were held on Pirie Green, also called “Reservoir Park” because the water tower was located there. John Pirie, who owned the water company, erected a tent for the conferences, which seated 600 people. Later the conference grew to attract 5,000. Some early speakers were Richard Hill,

John Hill, Arno Gaebelein, C. I. Scofield and William Issac, in whose home the Sea Cliff assembly began. At one of these conferences, C. I. Scofield, while walking along the Sea Clif shoreline with Arno Gaebelein, discussed this desire to produce a reference Bible that would help readers understand the Bible more clearly. To give him time and the facilities for this work, John Pirie and Alwyn Ball financially supported him. Much of the study and final drafts were completed in the home of John Pirie, “Greyshingles”, in Long Island, NY. This Bible edition, named the Scofield Reference Bible, was published by the Oxford University Press in 1909, followed by revised editions in 1917 and 1967. This monumental work received world-wide recognition. The Scofield Reference Bible reflected the dispensational distinctives, prophetic highlights, and New Testament church truth of those known as “Plymouth Brethren”. In the first edition in a note explaining the nature of the local church, we read, “A local church is an assembly of professed believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, living for the most part in one locality, who assemble themselves together in His name for the breaking of bread, worship, prayer, testimony, the ministry of the word, discipline, and the furtherance of the gospel. Such a church exists where two or three are thus gathered. Every such local church has Christ in the midst, is a temple of God, and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When perfected in organisation a local church consists of saints, with elders and deacons.” (annotation for Philippians 1:1) This appreciation for the “Brethren” was the result of an intimate acquantance with their writings and an abiding friendship with many of their leading Bible teachers. Mr Scofield greatly valued the writings of the early Brethren, and often shared the conference platform with

Assembly Bible teachers such as Walter Scott, F. C. Jennings, and W. W. Fereday. He fellowshipped between the years 1902-1909 in an assembly in Oxford, England while researching material for the reference Bible. One of Scofield's most valued editors, Arno C. Gaebelein, once wrote concerning his appreciation of "Brethren" writers, "I found in Darby's writings, in the works of William Kelly, C. H. Mackintosh, F. W. Grant, Bellet and others, soul food I needed. I esteem these men next to the apostles in their sound and spiritual teaching." Mr Scofield appreciated the editorial help he receieved from those in assembly fellowship in the United States and Great Britian.

The Formation of the Reference Bible

The trusted Bible teacher and author, Mr. Walter Scott, reviewed many of the notes in the first edition. In the preface of that edition Scofield writes, "The Editor's acknowledgements are also due to a very wide circle of leaned and spiritual brethren in Europe and America to whose labours he is indebted for suggestions of inestimable value....Mr. Walter Scott, the eminent Bible teacher…" After the issuing of the first edition, Mr. William Isaac, aleading elder and outstanding Bible teacher in the Sea Cliff assembly, expressed concern as to the accuracy of seventeen of Mr. Scofield's annotations. He graciously submitted them to Mr. Scofield in writing. The second edition of 1917 included the accepted corrections of Mr. Isaac. When seeking help in the proofreading work of the Reference Bible, Mr Scofield enlisted the services of one of the best, Miss Emily Farmer. In 1907 Miss Farmer moved from Colchester, England to the United States and soon distinguished herself as an accurate and able

proofreader with the Loizeaux Brothers Publishers in New York, where she remained until 1947. In 1908 she took a short leave from their employ to dedicate time to the Reference Bible. Miss Farmer was used to give editorial assistance in preparing the notes in their final form. Miss Farmer was also greatly used in editing the commentaries of Mr. H. A. Ironside and in the foreword of Mr. H. A. Ironside's commentary on Isaiah we read these words of praise, "...the excellence of the Scofield Bible today is attributable in no small measure to Miss Farmer's keen disernment of sound doctrine."

The Oxford University Press and the Reference Bible

Mr. Scofield visited England twice and spent two years in Switzerland while researching material and seeking technical advice concerning the publication of the study Bible. One man who would prove to be invaluable in the latter regard was Mr. Henry Frowde of London. Mr. Frowde fellowshiped all his adult life with those known as the "brethren" and had distinguished himself as an authority in he printing and binding of Bibles. In 1880 he was appointed Publisher to the Oxford University Press and the Clarendon Press. He achieved at the Oxford University Press what was once considered impossible – the distribution of 1,000,000 New Testaments in one 12-hour period. While in England, with the encouragement of Alwyn Ball of NY, Mr. Scofield was introduced to Mr. Frowde. After meeting with Mr. Frowde, Scofield was advised, "there is only one publishing house which can handle your Refernce Bible, and that is the Oxford University Press, and in January of 1909 the first Reference Bible rolled off the presses. Since that time, the Scofield Reference Bible has been published in French, Spanish, Swahili and in

ninety other languages. This study help has ably equipped thousands of Christian workers, evangelists, and Sunday School teachers to better understand the word of God and, thereby, serve the Lord more effectively. In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, the Reformed preacher and author Montgomery Boice writes, “I am delighted to say that the Scofield Bible was a great influence upon my own studies of the Scriptures. Moreover, I have the deepest respect for these Bible teachers. They were steeped in the Bible – far more than most Bible teachers today.” Only eternity will tell the vast usefullness of this study tool, which has introduced countless numbers into a knowledge of dispensational truth, the prophetic word, and New Testament assembly distinctives.

Sources:

Arno C. Gaeblein, The History of the Scofield Reference Bible, Living Words Foundation, WA, 1991 Sea Cliff Gospel Chapel 1889-1989, A Century of Proclaiming God’s Word, Sea Cliff, NY, 1989 Charles Gallaudet Trumbell, The Life of C. I. Scofield, Oxford University Press: London, 1920 Larry V. Crutchfield, The Origins of Dispensationalism, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992

The Phenomenon of Holy Scripture

It is a tremendous understatement to say that the Bible is unlike any other book. But it is nevertheless true! The Bible is the most loved book, but at the same time, the most hated book in the history of the world. The Bible is the first book ever printed and yet remains the best-selling book of all time in nearly every language of the world. Its claims, truths, and prophecies are unique, powerful, and life-transforming. For this reason, God calls His Word living (Heb. 4:12)! Moreover, God has built life into His Word. For centuries God has used these Scriptures to capture the hearts of men and women from every time and culture—the rich and poor, the proud and the humble, the educated and the unschooled. The Bible is amazingly accurate in all that it teaches and affirms. The primary message of the Bible is one of salvation. However, when the Bible deals with history, nature, science, or archaeology, it reveals advanced knowledge that is true and verifiable. The Bible's wisdom, knowledge, and ethics clearly evidence its divine origin to anyone seeking answers to life's most profound questions. There is no explanation for this phenomenon called the Bible except divine inspiration.

The Inspiration of Scripture

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"(2 Tim. 3:16). What do Christian scholars mean when they say that the Bible is divinely inspired? The term "plenary verbal" has been used to convey something of inspiration's breadth and scope. The word "plenary" points to the inspiration of

every book, chapter, and verse of Scripture. The second half of the term, “verbal”, points to the fact that every word of Scripture is divinely inspired. Thus, we might say that inspiration is the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon biblical authors which ensures all their writings to be true, infallible, and inerrant. However, a remarkable fact of Scripture is that, although the Bible clearly states the fact of its inspiration, it never seeks within its pages to defend it. Some have wondered at this paradox. The beloved Bible teacher C. H. Mackintosh (1820- 1896) was once asked why the Bible does not defend its inspiration. He replied, “It would be like taking a flashlight and pointing it towards the sun to prove it was still shining!” His point was that the Bible itself is its greatest defense. Nevertheless, the Bible bears the imprint of the Eternal from cover to cover.

Indestructibility of Scripture

An exceptional book may remain in print for twenty-five years. One that is read for a century is very unusual, and those that remain for a thousand years are extremely rare. Yet the Bible has remained the most popular book in the world for thousands of years, despite the fact that it has faced the most determined efforts to attack and destroy it. Since the time of the Roman emperor Diocletian (303 A.D.) down through the centuries unto our own day, many have tried to rid the world of the Bible. Through military might and oppression, the Roman empire, the Catholic church, Communist governments, and governments of Muslim lands have all sought to attack or destroy the Bible. Yet none have seen more than only a measure of success. In the 1700’s, the Scriptures came under attack by “Enlightenment” skeptics and atheistic philosophers such as Voltaire,

Thomas Paine, and others. But their efforts were even less effective. Voltaire, the French humanist, once proclaimed, “Fifty years from now, the world will hear no more of the Bible”. However, fifty years after the death of Voltaire, Bibles were being printed by the Geneva Bible Society in the very house where Voltaire had lived and on his own presses. Such attacks did not serve to weaken faith in the Scriptures but rather to strengthen faith in them. The French Huguenots, who were fiercely persecuted for their faith, portrayed the Bible and Christianity as an anvil surrounded by three blacksmiths. Beneath the picture they inscribed these words:

“The more they pound, and the more they shout, the more they wear their hammers out!”

The indestructibility of God’s Word has been verified unto this day. Scripture reminds us, “The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the Word of God abides forever” (1 Peter 1:24-25).

Archaeological Evidence

Abundant findings and detailed research in the field of archaeology have supported the authenticity of the Biblical accounts. For generations textual critics and modernist scholars have scoffed at the history and accuracy of the biblical accounts. However, in the last twenty-five years archaeological discoveries have proven the Bible right and liberal scholars wrong. Dr. Nelson Glueck, the most outstanding Jewish archaeologist of the twentieth century, wrote:

It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which

confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. (1)

Archaeology's affirmation of the biblical record is no better seen than in the account of a census taken during the reign of Herod when Quirinius was governor of Syria. For generations liberal scholars scoffed at the idea that such censuses were ever enacted. They reasoned: how could a government possibly force all its citizens to return to their birthplace? They also challenged Biblebelieving Christians to show any proof that such a census ever was undertaken in the ancient Middle East. However, in recent years documents have been discovered that provide support for such censuses. Evangelical scholar Dr. John McRay, in his book Archaeology and the New Testament furnishes us with a document from the first century. The document reads:

Gaius Vibius Maximus, Prefect of Egypt [says]: Seeing the time is come for the house to house census, it is necessary to compel all those who for any cause whatsoever are residing out of their provinces to return to their own homes, that they may both carry out the regular order of the census and may also attend diligently to the cultivation of their allotments. (2)

This discovery, along with many others, supports the veracity of Scripture. Some recent archaeological discoveries that further support the biblical text are: the Elba tablets, the existence of the Hittite empire, the walls of Jericho, the Pavement (the court where Jesus was tried), and the pool of Bethesda.

Authenticity Test

Bible-believing scholars have pointed to the "Authenticity Test" as the textual cornerstone for the

reliability of Scripture. According to the authenticity test, the genuineness of a document is determined by the number of copies that were made from the original manuscript (hand-written document), the time interval between the original and the copies, and the number of discrepancies within the copies. Based upon this test, the New Testament is the most reliable document of comparable age in existence. Presently, there are 20,000 hand-written copies of the New Testament in existence. Homer's Iliad, which has only 643 manuscript copies, ranks second to the New Testament in manuscript authority (numbers of copies). Furthermore, the earliest copies of the New Testament manuscripts are extremely close to the time when the originals were penned. Moreover, there is only a 2% variation within the manuscripts—most of these variations being accounted for by differences in spelling and punctuation! In the manuscripts in existence, there is not one variation which alters any fundamental point of Christian doctrine. For this reason, the former director of the British Museum and respected New Testament textual scholar, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, has said:

The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established. (3)

The authenticity test, then, assures us that the New Testament is the most reliable piece of ancient classical literature in existence today! However, before we leave

this point, a look at the manuscripts of classical works is striking. For example, the earliest copy of Tacitus's Annals was written 1,000 years after the original and there are only 20 manuscript copies in existence today. Likewise, the earliest copy of Suetonius's The Twelve Caesars was written 800 years after the original and there are only 8 copies in existence. In contrast, the earliest copies of the New Testament were written 50 years after they were originally authored and there are nearly 24,000 manuscript portions in existence today!

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, a young shepherd boy searching for his lost goat made one of the greatest manuscript discoveries of all time. In the limestone caves overlooking the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, he discovered over 900 documents, representing 350 separate biblical and non-biblical works. In one cave alone, 520 texts were found dating as far back as the third century B.C. The scrolls contained copies of every Old Testament book except the book of Esther. Before the scrolls were discovered in 1947, the oldest existing complete manuscript of the Old Testament dated around 900 A. D. One of the Dead Sea scrolls found in cave #1 at Qumran dated at 125 B.C. contains the entire prophecy of Isaiah. This scroll was penned over 1,000 years before any of the manuscripts (Masoretic text) previously possessed. Amazingly, the text of the earlier and later copies were identical in 95% of the text. The other 5% variation consisted of spelling errors, grammar, and punctuation oversights. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls reveals the remarkable dedication to detail of the Hebrew copyists of the Old Testament Scriptures. Critics and skeptics were shocked at how closely these ancient

texts resemble our present-day Bibles. Recent textual research on New Testament manuscripts combined with the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt the amazing accuracy of the Scriptures.

Prophetic Evidence

Finally, the prophetic teaching of Scripture is one of the most persuasive proofs for inspiration. There are about 3,856 verses directly or indirectly concerned with prophecy in Scripture—about one verse out of every six tells of future events. The Old and New Testaments equally reveal God's imprint upon future world events. The destruction of Tyre, the invasion of Jerusalem, the fall of Babylon and Rome—each were accurately predicted in the Bible and fulfilled to the minute details. When we contrast this with the religions of the world, the Bible stands alone. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam all have their own sacred writings, but in them the element of prophecy is strikingly absent. It is as if the divine Author uses this truth to set Himself apart from the gods of this world. God's challenge to the world is, "Prove me now—I am the Lord...I speak, and the word that I speak shall come to pass" (Jer. 28:9, Ezek. 12:25, 24:14). No other work of man in any language even faintly resembles the intricate structure and design of the Bible. The fact remains—only an infinite mind could have devised this Book of books.

Conclusion

The body of evidence in support of the inspiration of Holy Scripture is overwhelming and convincing. The historical, scientific, and moral proof of the reliability of Scripture stands as a high impregnable fortress.

Nevertheless liberal critics and skeptics have hurled their attacks and issued their challenges, but not one has succeeded in weakening the truth of Holy Scripture. The Bible is a book with a universal message for all men. It is the only volume in which both a child and a scholar can find equal delight. Its simple, life-changing power transcends national borders, cultural barriers, and language differences, bringing peace, joy, and forgiveness to countless millions. Only the Bible can make bad men good and transform a rebel into a saint. The greatest proof of the Bible is the difference it can make in your life.

Endnotes (1) Dr. Nelson Glueck, Rivers in the Desert, (New York, NY: Grove, 1960), p. 31 (2) Dr. John McRay, Archaeology and the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), p. 155 (3) Frederic G. Kenyon, The Story of the Bible, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 133)

The Priesthood of All Believers

“On the 1st of March, 1546, a scaffold was erected before the Castle of Saint Andrew in Scotland and foggots of dried wood were piled around it…When all was ready two deathsmen brought George Wishart from his prison…He knelt down and prayed before the pile; then exhorted the people to love the word of God and to suffer patiently…as he was tied to the stake he announced, “for the true Gospel which was given to me by the grace of God, I suffer this day by men, not sorrowfully, but with a glad heart and mind.” (1) Devout men of a bygone era were not characterized by the doctrinal indifference that ofttimes plagues the present generation. These men were willing to suffer greatly, indeed, and even die for the truths of the Word of God. The conviction and cry of their hearts concerning biblical truth was—“for this will I die.” One of the great doctrines for which great men of God died was the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer. This doctrine set forth the truth that every believer, by virtue of the death of Christ, has access into the holy presence of God to offer up spiritual sacrifices of worship unto God. This doctrine was a foundational truth of the Reformation, standing side by side with solo fide (salvation by faith alone), solo scriptura (scripture alone), and solo gratis (salvation through grace alone). These Reformers spoke loudly and boldly concerning this truth. Martin Luther (1483-1543), that intrepid warrior, was one who outshone other Reformers in the proclamation and the defense of this important doctrine. In a time when the majority of Christendom opposed the priesthood of all believers, Martin Luther stood as an

impregnable fortress. When his very life and livelihood were threatened for the truth of God"s Word, he remained steadfast. When the scholars of the day argued that only a trained class of ordained clergy were permitted to serve God as priests, he stood unmoved upon the bedrock of Scripture. He declared that the Scriptures stated that, "All Christians are altogether priests, and let it be anathema to assert there is any other priest than he who is Christian; for it will be asserted without the Word of God, on no authority but the sayings of men, or the antiquity of custom, or the multitude of those that think so." (2) Ready weapons in their defense of truth were the words of the apostle Peter and other New Testament writers.

God"s Divine Plan of Priesthood

The apostle Peter was uniquely chosen by God to set forth the New Testament charter for the priesthood of the believer. He explained, "You…as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"; and later, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood…that you should show forth the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). In the New Testament every believer, regardless of scriptural knowledge or area of service, stands as a priest, divinely appointed, to offer spiritual sacrifices unto God. Every believer has the privilege of access into the presence of God by virtue of the death of Christ. However, to better understand the New Testament"s teaching on the believer-priesthood, we must go back to the Old Testament where God"s plan for a spiritual priesthood began with Israel. In the beginning, Israel was formed by God to be a priestly

nation; the entire nation of Israel was called a “kingdom of priests” at Sinai (Ex. 19:6). But because of her spiritual failure, God set aside her national priesthood and raised up a special limited number of priests that would represent the nation before Him. The Aaronic priesthood continued to fulfill priestly duties for generations until the death of Christ, who offered Himself as the fulfillment of all Levitical sacrifices. But during this present age the Aaronic priesthood has been set aside and the church has been appointed to function as God”s priestly people. However, in future day Israel will once again function as a priestly nation (Isa. 61:6, 66:21).

The Priesthood Defined

Despite the fact that the word “priest” is the most frequently used title today to refer to religious leaders, much confusion still remains concerning the role of the priest. What is a biblical “priest”? The basic term for priest in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word Cohen. The root meaning of this word is “to stand”; and therefore, this word indicates that a priest is one who stands before God and serves. The Greek word for priest in the New Testament is Hiereus. This word means “one who offers sacrifice”. So included in both the Old and New Testament words for priest, is the idea that a priest is one who stands before God to offer sacrifices and to serve. In the Old Testament the sacrifices consisted of the ritual offering of animals to cover the guilt of sin; but in the New Testament, believers offer the spiritual sacrifices of praise, worship, and service. W. E. Vine, the respected Greek language authority, writes, “Hierateuma denotes a priesthood, a body of priests, consisting of all believers, the whole church, called “a

holy priesthood"; this term is associated with offering spiritual sacrifices. The "royal priesthood" speaks of the royal dignity of showing forth the Lord"s excellencies."" (3) However, associated with a detailed and doctrinal understanding of the "priesthood", comes spiritual responsibility. Therefore, Christians have the holy charge to take up the duties and privileges of New Testament priesthood with great seriousness.

The Responsiblities of Believer Priests

God"s high and holy plan that every believer would be also a priest unto God was never fully realized in the Old Testament. It would have to wait until the days of the New Testament dispensation to be more fully set forth and enjoyed by believers. But within a very short period of time, ritualism and clerisy had so dominated the teaching of the New Testament church that the truth and practice of the believer"s priesthood had all but disappeared. Ignatius of Antioch (110AD), and other early church leaders vigorously taught that the authority of a single bishop was paramount. The early leaders love for power was so great that even a baptism or agape meal could not be conducted without their presence and authority. Thus the joyous praise and contagious worship of the believer priests was soon quieted. This theological error cast a thick, dark fog over true biblical worship. Sadly, this silence in collective worship continued for hundreds of years, until the light of truth began to shine again first in Germany, and then in greater Europe. However, even then the truth of the believer"s priesthood was still not fully revealed. Yes, believers had learned that they did not need a priest as a mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). Yes, Reformation Christians were taught that every believer was a

believer priest unto God. They were also taught that, contained in the “royal” priestly duties was service to the world in the proclamation of the gospel. But still, the truth of collective worship as believer priests was suppressed. Church leaders still maintained that only a special class of priests could publicly offer worship. The church was still silenced before God. Unfortunately, this is not at all what God had originally intended. New Testament priestly worship is not only individual and personal, but also public and collective in the life of the gathered church. William MacDonald writes: “This sacrifice of praise should be both individual and collective. The latter—collective worship—in which believers are at liberty to take part in public praise, has been practically eliminated by the stereotyped, controlled services of our day. The result is a generation of dumb (non-functioning) priests—a state of affairs nowhere contemplated in the Scriptures.” (4) Christians should never take lightly the preciousness of this doctrine to the heart of God, nor its great personal cost to Christians throughout history. Unforturately, there are many well-meaning churches which still suppress the liberty and heart-felt worship of multitudes of believer-priests. It is still a small special class that lead in worship and prayer while large numbers of believer-priests sit silently. Nevertheless the simply beauty of priestly worship is still practiced, often by small groups of Christians in far-flung corners of the world.

Simplicity of the New Testament Believer Priesthood

The priestly worship of ancient Israel was characterized by elaborate ritual, dress, and ceremony. The Jewish priests were obligated to wear designated headdress, outer garments, and undergarments. There were special

days for worship, there were ritual laws for worship, and there was a designated place for worship. How different and how simple is the worship of believer priests in the New Testament! There are no vestments, no holy days, no one central geographic place for worship, no ritual laws, no special class of priests. However, this worship is no less beautiful and no less affecting to the heart of God. From the earliest days of the first believers in the book of Acts up to the present day, believers have enjoyed collective worship in utmost simplicity. T. E. Wilson (1902-1996), drawing from his experiences as a missionary in central Africa, describes the simple beauty of New Testament believer-priesthood. He labored eight years in the Chitutu region of Angola before he saw the first fruits of his gospel labor—three Chokwe young men came to a saving knowledge of Christ and were baptized. Immediately, after the baptism of these young men, it was the desire of those who were gathered for the baptism to remember the Lord in the breaking of the bread. The wine for the occasion was purchased from a Portuguese trader in a settlement about five miles away; the bread was baked in a hole in the earth lined with hot ashes. The meeting room was a simple open-air wooden shed with a grass roof and a bare dirt floor. At the first breaking of bread seven gathered together to remember the Lord, four white missionaries and three Africans. At this simple service, the newly saved and veteran believer-priests offered their hymns of praise and their prayers of worship in both the Chokwe and Songo languages. Despite these inconveniences, in those early times of remembering the Lord in the breaking of the bread, the Lord”s presence was very real and most precious. (5) May we resist the conventions of popular Christianity and stand for the truth of the believer-

priesthood which was framed in the eternal counsels of God and purchased through our Lord”s death upon the cross. May a new generation of Christians be raised up who might join with Martin Luther and the early Chokwe Christians in saying—Upon this truth will I stand as an immovable rock.

Endnotes (1) Andrew Miller, Miller’s Church History, (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1986), p. 998 (2) William Hoste, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, (Scotland: John Ritchie, 1988), p. 67 (3) W. E. Vine, Dictionary of New Testament Words, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1980), p. 212 (4) William MacDonald, Christ Loved the Church, (Kansas City, KS: Walterick, 1956), p. 58 (5) T. E. Wilson, Angola Beloved, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967), p. 157

The Songs of Redemption

True praise is always born of a great experience. Bondage and deliverance, suffering and victor--it is in these times that God's hand molds, shapes, and refines us and our song of praise. The refiner's crucible does not only remove the dross, but also brightens the metal. Out of the furnace of bondage and then in to redemption, the children of Israel learned to bow in holy worship. We read, "Israel saw the great work which the Lord did and believed the Lord. Then sang Moses and the children of Israel" (Ex. 14:31-15:1). As worship filled their hearts, praise filled the camp like the morning mist. Exodus 15 is called the song of Moses; but it might rightly be called the song of the Lord's redemption, for redemption is its cause and the praise of God is its object. When the Lord in His compassion redeemed the children of Israel they burst forth in the first song of scripture—indeed it would also be the last song recorded in scripture (Rev. 15). Although the two songs are not identical, they are strikingly similar. In both songs the Lord is preeminent and sovereign. He is the Lord who renders judgment upon His enemies and is victorious as a "man of war". Yet He is also the object of reverent worship by the redeemed of both testaments. They sing, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 15:3), and again, "Who is like thee among the gods"glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders" (Ex.15:11).

The Two Redemption Songs Compared

Exodus 15 | Revelation 15

The Plague Judgments | 10 plagues of judgment | 7 plagues of judgment Enemy Defeated | Pharaoh & his captains | The beast and number of his name Titles of Christ | Lord, Man of war, my God | King of the saints, Lord God Almighty Position of the Redeemed | Standing on the edge of the Red Sea | Standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire Position of Christ | King: "Lord shall reign forever" | King: "Thou king of the saints"

The Song's Spiritual Necessity

There is a spiritual requirement in singing rightly unto the Lord. The word of God gives us the divine pattern—one must be saved in order to sing. One must know deliverance from the horrible pit and the miry clay in order to have the new song upon his lips. He, in whom this is a reality, is transported from out of the mire and into the choir of the King. We find this principle at work in the Lord's deliverance of the children of Israel through the Red Sea. Exodus 14:30-15:1 states, "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day and Israel saw that great work which the Lord did and the people believed the Lord"then sang Moses and the children of Israel". Therefore, the first principle of worship is that only a saved company can bring spiritual worship which is pleasing and acceptable to the Lord. When the noted agnostic Robert Ingersoll died, the printed notices read, "There will be no singing." Look not for hymns, praise and spiritual songs among agnostics and skeptics; for without Christ, without God, and without redemption, there is no song to sing. However, the psalmist records in Psalm 40:2-3, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon the rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto out God."

The Song's Spiritual Focus

Spiritual worship must also have a spiritual focus. It is possible for the eye to rest on him and the heart not to be bowed in holy worship. In Exodus 15 the writer, Moses, brings the object of his song before our attention forty-five times, using titles or pronouns such as, "Lord", "He", "Him", "Thee", "Thou". Moreover, while focusing upon Israel's Deliverer, Moses traces the three-fold manner of the Lord's redemption. He writes that the Lord "triumphed gloriously" (15:1), that the Lord was "glorious in power" (15:6), and that the Lord was "Glorious in holiness" (15:11). A true worshiper is ever struck by the manner in which the Lord saves. Isaiah 53:12-54 records, "He bore the sin of many", but also notes, "and made intercession for the transgressors." This then leads to "Sing, O barren, thou who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud." (54:1)

The Song's Spiritual Content

Not only did the children of Israel sing unto the Lord but they sang about the Lord. Men and women of God are deeply moved to worship by the holy character and works of the Lord. Awe and reverence grip us in the presence of God's greatness. The singers glorify God's triumph (15:1), His strength (15:2), His victory (15:4), His power (15:6), His holiness (15:11), His redemption (15:13). His superiority over all the Egyptian gods is extolled in the words, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (15:11) However, strangely absent is the theme of our own blessings. So much of self was forgotten amid the glories of the Almighty God. Where the Holy Spirit is fully in control,

the desires of the heart and the worship of our lips will seek to tell forth the praise of Him alone. May we strive to know more of His "wonders", may we seek to praise him for His "fearfulness", and may we be more occupied with Him who is our "song".

Train Up a Child

“Train up a child in the way that he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” —Proverbs 22:6 Our children may be the only earthly asset, transformed by the spiritual investment of time and effort, that we can take with us to heaven. The Scriptures urge us to strive and to labor in training up the children the Lord has given to us. Parents are called to equip themselves for the struggle in holding unflinchingly to the Word of God.

The Warning of Proverbs 22:6

The proverb before us has been a treasured promise to many who have competed in the arena of child rearing. Many a seasoned saint, disheartened by the parental battle, has fallen upon its softness. Yet, this proverb may be viewed as a dual-sided coin—one side containing a promise and the other a warning. We are first warned that by the neglect of this precept, if a child is not trained in the way he should go, he will be nevertheless trained. He will be trained by the precepts and principles of the secular world, molded further by his own selfish and undisciplined desires. For this very reason the apostle Paul exhorted first century Christians “Be not deceived: Evil company corrupts good morals” (1 Corithians 15:33). This unspiritual “training” will ingrain in him thought patterns and habits that will turn his thoughts and desires away from the things of God when he is older. Many a Christian, even those well along in their walk with Christ, have been plagued by the “training” of ungodly thoughts, memories, and experiences instilled in them when they were young. The

warning in this proverb should stir the thoughtful parent to more caution in the shaping and protecting of the young minds and lives entrusted into his care. Two ways lie before the child—the way he would go, headlong into a life of sorrow; and the way he should go, a path which leads to “fullness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore.” Worldly tolerance and lax permissiveness represent two ends of a cord pulled tightly, choking the spiritual potential of a young life. The failure to protect and instruct children may lead to irreparable spiritaul damage. Scripture is unmistakably clear that raising a child is a full-time and solemn responsibility. The careless neglect of a child when he is youngwill only result in a heart full of sorrow and pain when the is older.

The Promise of Proverbs 22:6

We must never forget that there is also a promise contained in this important proverb. The hopes of two generations rest upon this wise precept. Firstly, there is the generation of when he is in the way he should go; and then there is the generation of when he is old. When we consider this solemn fact, it should not surprise us to see great emphasis laid upon the idea of training in godliness. So very much in the Christian life and spiritual service hinges upon the training one has received in his childhood. The word “train” at the outset arrests our attention as we consider the meaning of this proverb. The Hebrew word translated “train” in our English Bibles is a rare word; it is used only three other times in the Old Testament. It is variously translated in the Bible as “to start up” and “to teach”. But the most accepted meaning of this word among Bible scholars is to “dedicate”, to set apart for a particular purpose or

goal. It is of note that the same root word is used in its noun form for the feast of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication. (1) Unless we are dedicated to training a child in the principles, truths, and examples of the Scriptures, we leave him utterly helpless.

Caution Concerning the “Christian” Parenting Industry

Over the last ten or fifteen years sincere Christians parents have been hindered in their efforts by a new movement within the evangelical church. The present day “Christian” parenting industry does little to equip parents in this training effort. It unfortunately harms this effort by feeding parents’ fears that if they err in any way with their children, they might seriously damage the child forever, causing his character or behavior to be evil. By fueling such concerns, they persuade parents to march lock-step with the psychology-laced programs, signing up for parenting seminars year after year. All too often, sincere parents become so totally dependent upon the so-called parenting “experts” that they are unable and unwilling to think for themselves. Frequently, these programs and seminars produce more confusion and doubt than help for struggling parents. These parents soon begin to regard child-rearing as a mine field strewn with dangers; one wrong step and you risk deep-seated and long-term emotional and psychological damage to your child. These parents become utterly dependent on “pop” child-psychology programs that map out their every step, and they refuse to deviate from the plan, including those areas of the program that have no basis in Scripture. Unfortunately, these parents are willing to defy both common sense and biblical principles for the sake of following a popular parenting program. This

current trend should be a great concern to us all. For centuries godly Christians have studiously avoided current fads of the day and sought to use biblical principles of child-training to great benefit. One of the most godly mothers throughout the annals of church history must undoubtedly be Susanna Wesley. This mother of John and Charles Wesley, who gave birth to 17 other children while assisting Samuel Wesley in his duties as a minister of the gospel in Epworth, England, would often pray as a young woman, “Lord, make my life count…” Heaven alone will record the full answer to this earnest prayer. But it was her sons, John and Charles Wesley, along with George Whitefield, who lit the fires that would be called the First Great Awakening in England and in the American colonies. This spiritual revival would be the cause of thousands coming to Christ and the establishment of many churches. If John Wesley and Charles Wesley lit the fire of this great revival, surely Susanna Wesley was used of God to strike the first match by her spiritual rearing of these two men of God. How did she train up a child in the way he should go? What biblical principles did she use in the raising of her family? Susanna Wesley used the following rules of child training: 1. Subdue self-will in the child and thus work together with God to save his soul. 2. Teach him to pray as soon as he can speak. 3. Give him nothing he cries for, and only what is good for him if he asks for it politely. 4. To prevent lying, punish no fault that is freely confessed, but never allow a rebellious, sinful act to go unnoticed. 5. Commend and reward good behavior. (6) Strictly observe all promises you have made to your child. (2)

Parenting and Godly Fear

Parents who have been the most committed and earnest about child training have usually seen the most spiritual blessing. These parents who have been filled with the holy desire to see their children love and reverence God, have made their children's spiritual training their passion. High on their list of biblical priorities for their children is the reverential fear of God in their lives. Godly reverence is the sacred awe of God's holiness. It is the respect and humility that results in godly and reverent worship in the presence of the Almighty God. Godly reverence also involves the proper fear of God's displeasure. True faith acknowledges God's right to chasten, His right to punish and to judge because of sin. Scripture properly warns us that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). These godly parents have seen the danger of presenting God as always gentle, meek, and mild, to the exclusion of His attributes of justice, wrath, and righteous anger. The absence of a full presentation of God's attributes frequently results in a careless and flippant attitude towards God. C. H. Spurgeon's godly parents, John and Eliza, were eager to train their son in righteousness and the fear of God. As a young child, they read to him the Christian classic Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. Spurgeon once mentioned to a friend that during his lifetime he had read Pilgrim's Progress over 100 times, but that his love for this book and Christ first came from his mother's loving spiritual influence. She would awaken the family by the singing of hymns every morning, and each evening young Charles Haddon would hear her close the day by praying for the salvation of all seventeen children in the family by name. As a young man, his mother offered him a penny for every Issac Watts' hymn that he could memorize and recite

perfectly. Soon he had memorized and recited over 100 hymns. Spurgeon later recounted with a smile that his mother reduced his wages from a penny per hymn to a farthing “so not to ruin him by the love of money”. His mother knew that the rich spiritual truths and the skillful phrasing of these hymns would have lasting spiritual value in his life. Spurgeon recounts the great impact his godly parents and grandparents had upon his life, but he writes that the reverential fear of God made the most lasting impression. Later in his life he would write, “Sin, whatever it might be to other people, became to me an intolerable burden. It was not so much that I feared hell as that I feared sin, and all the while I had a concern for the honour of God’s name.” (3) As he neared the end of his course, C. H. Spurgeon stated that the person who made the most significant spiritual contribution to his life was his mother, Eliza Spurgeon, and that he longed to be reunited with her. Eliza Spurgeon would doubtless agree with Solomon, that “training up a child in the way he should go” contains a great promise but also a solemn warning. May we be “trainers” of children, that when they are old they will walk in the right way—and that they in turn may become “trainers” themselves of the young lives entrusted into their care.

Endnotes (1) Robert Alden, Proverbs, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), p. 160 (2) William MacDonald, Believers Bible Commentary, Proverbs, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 847 (3) Rodney Thomson, Prince of Preachers, (Sarasota, FL: Christian Soldiers, 1999), p. 7

Working With Children

In the late 1850's the well-known evangelist D.L. Moody organized the largest Sunday School in Chicago. Upward of 1,000 children from all over the city would make great efforts to attend. One day a young boy making his way to Moody's Sunday School, walked past several other Sunday Schools. A minister who was watching came out to him and sternly said, "Young man, why do you walk so far to get to Sunday School?" The young boy replied, "Sir, it's because they love a fellow over there."

Today in the year 2000, there is a great and urgent need to "love a fellow." There should be an urgency in winning children to Christ. Children are today's spiritual investment and tomorrow's eternal dividend. Yet children are increasingly found to be unwanted, mistreated, and abused at an alarming rate. A few years ago the Office of Child Health reported that 600,000 to 1,200,000 are sexually exploited and abused every year in America. Since 1970, the teenage suicide rate has increased 44% and 76% of teenagers use alcohol on a weekly basis. Of these, 50% will be drunk in a two-week period. 1 What are we doing to reach out to children for the cause of Christ? Do you believe that elementary school-age children or even younger can be genuinely saved? Do you believe this generation of out-of-control high school students can turn to Christ? This has been a great stumbling block for many Christians and Christian workers. Yet if we are to be faithful to the Word of God, we are to make every effort to reach all ages for Christ, and especially young people. William Kelly wrote, "It

matters not if it is a child of ours, or that of another. Do we claim this child for the Lord? What is His feeling for a child? He is great, He is mighty; but He despises not any. Our Lord looked upon children with what interest! They are objects of the Father's love, for whom He gave His Son, and whom the Son came to save. Each has a soul: and what is its value?" 2 Today, Bible clubs are proving to be an effective ministry in reaching out to needy children. Bible clubs are being established at an unprecedented rate in America. According to the National Network of Youth Ministries, there are currently 10,000 Bible clubs meeting across the nation. Many of these clubs meet on public high school and middle school campuses. There are 50 high school Bible clubs that meet in Long Beach, CA, alone and thousands of others nationwide. Throughout the nation, school-based Bible clubs have been growing rapidly, mirroring what trend-trackers like Gallup have called "a nationwide spiritual revival."

In 1984, the U.S. Congress passed the Equal Access Act, sweeping legislation which gave Bible clubs the same status as other non-curriculum clubs, such as Students Against Drunk Drivers and Young Republicans. According to this bill, students are allowed to invite guest speakers, use the public announcement system to alert students to meetings, and put on special events. These clubs must be student-led and initiated, must meet when other non-curriculum clubs meet (at lunch time or before and after school), and cannot discriminate against students based on political, philosophical, or religious distinction. Initially, many schools, especially those in the northeastern states, denied students these rights. However, in June 1990, the

U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Equal Access Act as constitutional.

Unfortunately, this has not brought an end to court challenges to this law. Doug Honig, the public education director for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has said that the ACLU is very wary of religious clubs at public schools. This attitude led the Renton, Washington, school district in 1993 to forbid Lindbergh High School students from praying and studying the Bible before school, citing the state constitution, which forbids religious activities on school property. However, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Equal Access Act took precedence over state law. 3 Battling on the frontlines for the cause of Christ along with the thousands of public school-based Bible clubs, are many church Bible clubs and outreach ministries. These evangelistic clubs are winning thousands of children and are training a new generation of young people to be fearless witnesses for Christ. Some of the better known national ministries are Awana, Word of Life Bible Clubs, Pioneer Clubs, and BCM International. These clubs have proven to be effective in reaching children of all ages in inner-city regions, rural areas, and in suburban neighborhoods. However, smaller assemblies and some larger assemblies have found these larger national ministries to be cost prohibitive. There are fees which range from $700 to $1,000 per year. These fees permit an assembly to use copyrighted material, contribute to overhead costs, and support the ministry’s missionaries or area representatives. In addition to yearly fees, there are other expenses such as uniforms, handbooks, student workbooks, conferences and leadership training. Some assemblies will also find it difficult to gather

together the large number of workers needed to effectively run these programs. It is often suggested that there be one trained worker to every three or four children enrolled in the program.

Despite these costs and requirements, many assemblies have found these national ministries to be effective and worth the cost to the local assembly. These ministries make the centerpiece of their efforts memorization of Scripture and Bible teaching targeted to specific age groups. This primary goal is supported by kid-tested games, unique crafts, friendly competition, and the sensible use of incentives—usually badges and uniform pins.

How can believers interested in reaching children for Christ go about this important task? What are some keys to an effective evangelistic children's ministry in the local assembly? Whether the ministry is directed to the public school setting, a national ministry program, or simply a sincere effort by the believers in the local assembly, there are important principles many have found helpful.

1. One of the most important principles in youth ministry is to build into your program a "high touch" element. By this, it is meant to get involved in the lives of the young people, talk to them, and schedule time in the program for them to talk to you. Allow them to see that you care about them in such a way that they can feel and hear the love of Christ for them. This is the "they love a fellow" principle of D.L. Moody that made his Sunday Schools so effective.

2. If possible, involve parents in helping children with Bible memorization, handbooks, and special work

projects in the home. This serves a two-fold purpose: it exposes an unsaved parent to the Scriptures and it allows a parent to see the power of the Word of God in a child's life. In our weekly Bible club, we award bonus points to younger children if they can memorize the books of the New Testament. Recently one unsaved mother asked if we could record the A.P. Gibbs song of "The Books of the Bible" on a cassette tape to help her four-year-old daughter memorize the books of the New Testament. She has been thrilled to see the spiritual progress in her children. This no doubt has served to further open this mother's heart to the gospel.

3. Use excellent Bible teaching materials. Well-prepared and doctrinally sound lesson materials are essential to a well-run children's ministry. Word of Life Bible Clubs and Awana have excellent material and are faithful to the Scriptures. Young people seem to thrive on them and evidence great spiritual benefit. However, this material cannot be used separately from membership in the national ministry. BCM International also has exceptional material and their material can be used as desired. Material can be ordered at BCM International, Inc., 237 Fairfield Ave., Upper Darby, PA 19082. Gospel Folio Press also has excellent material very suited to Sunday School or church-based Bible clubs. Call 1-800-952-2382.

4. Use incentives to motivate young people to dig further into the Word of God. The proper use of incentives is a tremendous way to encourage children in the things of the Lord. One child in our afternoon Bible club has recited numerous Bible verses including all of Psalm 23, the Ten Commandments, the books of the Old Testament, and the books of the New Testament. In our

group, points are awarded which earn a pizza party or a prize of a Christian book. We have found in ten years of working with children that the kind of incentive is not important. The awarding of expensive prizes is really not necessary; children find greater satisfaction in the sense of accomplishment and recognition among their peers and in the eyes of their parents than in expensive prizes.

An evangelist was once asked how many were saved at a certain meeting. He replied with a gleam in his eye, hoping to press his point, “Two and a half souls were saved.” The inquirer replied, “Do you mean to say two adults and one child?” “No,” he said, “I mean two children and one adult. The two children have their whole lives before them to serve the Lord; an adult has only half a life left.”

Truly, children are not the future of the church, but the present. Children properly trained and rightly encouraged can win others to the Lord and foster a winsome effect on others for the cause of Christ. Winning children to Christ must not be taken lightly, for this effort lies so near to the heart of God. Serious Christians should carefully and prayerfully consider how to best minister to the children of believers and children that do not know the Lord. In so doing, we will honor the admonition of our Lord, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 19:14).

Endnotes:

1. Fred Green, Office of Child Health, Washington, DC, quoted in USA Today, April 5, 1992

2. William Kelly, Lectures on Matthew, (New York, New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1926), p. 377

3. Joy Thompson, Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Sunday, June 11, 1995 -->