

# *Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God*

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## *The Doctrine of God—Table of Contents*

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## *The Doctrine of God*

### *I. The Name of God*

In Biblical usage names are not given without purpose but are used descriptively. For example, Adam gave names to the animals in accord with their nature. He also gave a name to his wife appropriate to her co-equality as the image-bearer of God. Frequently the Bible gives the meaning of a name and the reason for its being assigned to a person (Gen. 3:20; 4:1; 5:29; Matt. 1:21). On other occasions names were changed or a surname was added to indicate a new function or relation (Gen. 17:5). Another example is Jacob's name, which means "supplanter", being changed to Israel which means "one who strives with God" (Gen. 32:28). Simon's name was changed to Peter after his great confession of the identity of Jesus (Matt. 16:18). We also know that Jesus received a name that is above every name (Phil. 2: 9-10).

We gather from this that the name of God reveals who He is. Giving a name to someone or some thing in the oriental context of the OT meant having superiority over that person or thing; thus, Adam named the animals rather than the animals naming him. Adam named his wife because she was taken from him and not the other way around and because she was to be in submission to him as his helpmeet. (He was not superior to her as a fellow image-bearer of God.) But who can give a name to God? This question begs yet another question: Who is superior to God, and who is qualified to describe God? The answer is: No one. Therefore, God must give Himself a name. Thus, in the name of God we have the self-revelation of God. God is telling us in Scripture who He is; as the Psalmist says, "As is Thy name, O God [Elohim], so is Thy praise to the ends of the earth" (Ps. 48: 10).

It is important to understand that only God can name himself. In pagan religions, the worshiper is supposedly enabled to exercise control over the gods or demons by using their names—names which originated with men—in incantations. Whenever a witch doctor in Africa is employed to call down a curse upon another person, he makes use of the spirit world of demons and assumes control of these demons to accomplish his own purposes. Animistic religions are intrinsically (fundamentally) man-centered since the purpose of worship is essentially to get what you want from the gods, not to discover what they want from you. And since most religions have no self-revelation of the gods, there is very little that worshippers may know of their pagan deities except through subjective experiences of divine displeasure or approval. The gods are either happy with you or angry with you on the basis of your performance. Carl F. H. Henry observes that without the self-revelation of God in Scripture, false religions can only "stammer God's true Name."

Apart from special revelation, mankind in sin articulates [pronounces] the divine Name in an alphabet of false gods (Ashtaroath, Judges 10: 6; Baal, Judges 2: 11; Chemosh, Num. 21: 29; Dagon, Judges 16: 23; and so on through Zeus, Acts 14: 12)—a panorama of pagan divinities that biblical theology exposes to the lash of divine wrath in prophetic-apostolic denunciation (Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Vol. II., p. 171).

Even many people who profess to be Christians are really not worshipping the God of the Bible, but are modified animists, attempting to use God to provide personal achievement, peace, affluence and psychological self-esteem. They have no intention of examining the self-revelation of God in the Scriptures to find out what He requires of *them*. The most important thing is what they require of *God*. If He delivers what they want, they will "worship" Him only as the means to an end—personal fulfillment and happiness. For such people, the name for God is "Money" (or "Mammon", the god Jesus talked about repeatedly [Matt. 6: 24]), "Power", "Influence", "Success", "Sex", "Happiness", or any hundred other names.

The story of Balaam (Numbers 22-25) indicates in no uncertain terms that God cannot be manipulated to do what He does not wish to do. We may call upon Him humbly in supplication and petition, but we may not and cannot use His name as a means of controlling Him or obtaining our selfish desires, for such a use of God's name would be equivalent to taking His name in vain, a violation of the third commandment (Ex. 20: 7). Henry continues:

Nowhere does systematic theology, as a discipline of study, move nearer the heart of the Bible than when it expounds the revealed names of God. For salvation-history discloses not merely that the God of the Bible *also* possesses names, as if to say that in this respect the gods of the pagan religions have no special advantage, but that the living God is truly known only where he introduces himself by name, and that *everywhere else God is either inadequately named or misnamed*. Insofar as names for the one true God are legitimate, they are disclosed to mankind through God's own initiative attested in the biblical revelation. Without vital interest in the revealed names of God, therefore, no theology can claim to be authentically biblical; biblical theology and lively interest in God's names stand or fall together (p. 172, first emphasis his; second emphasis mine).

We will learn shortly that God gives himself *many* names, but the Bible also talks about the singular name of God (Ex. 20: 7; Ps. 8: 1; Ps. 48: 10; 76: 2; Prov. 18: 10). "In such cases," says Berkhof:

"the name" stands for the whole manifestation of God in relation to His people, or simply for the person, so that it becomes synonymous with God. This usage is due to the fact that in oriental thought a name was never regarded as a mere vocable [a unit of sound rather than a unit of meaning], but as an expression of the nature of the thing designated (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 47; partially quoted in Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. II, p. 173).

Henry refers to this use of a name to denote (stand for) being or nature as the "ontological intention" of Scripture (See Gen. 3: 20; 4: 1, 25; 5: 29; 16: 11; 25: 25-26) in which names are used as units of meaning or substance (ontology). Adam's naming of the animals in Gen. 2: 19-20 is another example and demonstrates the "inherent relation between logic and life and language. Not only does it imply a connection between reason and reality, but it also supplies hints of a theistic view of language" (Henry, p. 174). Henry's statement may be taken enthusiastically as a rebuttal (argument against) to many modern and postmodern views of language which claim there is no real correspondence between language and reality. The importance of names in the Bible, and their ontological intentions, proves that language is rooted in the reality of God and creation, and that the whole of creation is given as the self-communication of God.

## **II. OT Names of God**

When we examine the Scriptures, we find not one name for God, but many names. Why is this so? It is necessary for God to give Himself many names because of the infiniteness of God's nature and the finiteness of human understanding. We cannot grasp the wonder and diversity of God in one simple name, but we need many names to provide us a fuller, more comprehensive, revelation of God. Even if He were to give himself ten thousand names, we could not grasp Him fully, but with each name we are given progressive revelation of God's nature.

We may also say that God has not obscured (hidden) the unity of His divine nature in an excessive multiplication of names, but has assigned Himself just those which would make Himself adequately known among His people throughout the earth. Although possessing many attributes, God is one God, and too many names would have confused His unity with the plurality of pagan gods. The ancient Babylonians had thousands of divine names for their gods, fifty for the god, Marduk, alone. Re, the Egyptian god, was the "god of many names". In many ancient religions, the true name for god was left a mystery to be shared by only a small number of elite worshippers. By way of contrast, every Israelite knew the name of

God, and it was his duty to call upon the name of God and to make His name known among the heathen (Henry, p. 177, citing von Rad).

The universality of God's reign, and His name, was made known among the Israelites through the prophets who envisioned a worldwide kingdom in which all the nations and peoples of the earth would "stream" to "the mountain of the house of the Lord" (*Yahweh*, the covenant name for God; Isa. 2: 1-4 and Micah 4: 1-3). All the nations would lay down their weapons and submit to the law going forth from Zion (Jerusalem). The kings of the earth who defy the rule of *Yahweh* would be forced to abdicate (surrender) their thrones to the king whom God had chosen and installed on Mt. Zion (Ps. 2) to the end that God's word to Moses would be fulfilled, "But indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14: 21). World history is the unfolding of God's plan to bring this goal to completion through the rule and reign of Jesus Christ, the great "I AM" (*Yahweh*) incarnate in human flesh (John 8: 58). It is Jesus whom God the Father highly exalted "and bestowed on Him the *name* which is above every *name*, that at the *name* of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2: 9-11).

The names of God in the OT are learned in progressive stages of salvation history, and certain names are prominent at different points in this history (See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments*, p. 76). This does not mean that the use of a particular name is discontinued as new names are added. As Henry explains, "Later divine disclosure does not annul [do away with] the force and significance of earlier names, for God does not deny himself in the progressive revelation of his names. He can be properly addressed by the earlier or later names. . . . For the several names of God are the way in which the full Name of God is made known to us" (pp. 182-183).

#### **A. *EL or Elohim***

This is the simplest name for God which refers to the overwhelming majesty of God. The main thought is the Mighty One who is behind creation (Gen. 1:1; Psalm 19:1; Nehemiah 9:32). The word is used in contrast to that which is human (Ezekiel 28:2; Numbers 23:19). The plural form *Elohim* occurs 2550 times in the OT and is the first name that appears for God in Scripture. Though it is plural, it is generally treated as a singular noun and uses a singular verb form. The plural form in the Hebrew usage is the plural of majesty, and in no sense is *Elohim* to be confused with a polytheistic pantheon of gods common to pagan worship. *Elohim* is the God above all other gods, the God of all power and might, the God behind all creation but separate from creation (Gen. 1:1). Although the plural form is not proof of the Trinity, it is not wrong to suggest that the triune nature of God is at least implied in the plural (Morton H. Smith, unpublished syllabus on Systematic Theology, pp. 107-108).

There is much significance in this name for practical godliness. We pray to a God who is elevated above this world and creation. God is not affected by the limitations of creation, nor can He be controlled and manipulated by the circumstances of creation such as the forces of nature (1 Kings 19:11-12). The word *Elohim* indicates that pantheism, the belief that God is in every human being and in every tree, etc. is mistaken. God is not in His creation or part of creation. God is also not affected by the changing circumstances caused by sinful human nature (Isaiah 45:5, 21-22).

There are variations of the name *El* which give different shades of meaning to the name.

#### **B. *El Elyon and El Shaddai***

The meaning is “the Most High God”. The root meaning of the word is “to go up” and is used of persons and things to show their exaltation. When applied to God it is a reference to the exalted God. In Gen. 14:18-20 we find the word used in connection with Melchizedek and Abraham. In this episode Abraham refused to receive the spoils of war from the king of Sodom since this would be an insult to God by allowing a wicked king to make Abraham rich. The name of God must not be confused with the gods of the Sodomites. He alone was the Most High God.

In Psalm 91:1 the name is used with another name for God, El Shaddai. While El Elyon conveys the idea of God as sovereign ruler and controller exalted inaccessibly above the universe, El Shaddai conveys the idea of God as the mighty destroyer who is all powerful. The verse almost seems like a contradiction in terms. How can we take refuge in a God who dwells inaccessibly on high and who is the overpowering destroyer? How can the inaccessible God become accessible? According to the Psalmist, this inaccessible God makes Himself accessible to His people for in the next verse, the word Yahweh is used which is the name which especially reveals God as a God of grace. Also, how would God be a shelter to us if He was not God Almighty, separated from His creation and never controlled by creation? We could never take shelter in a God who was weak like we are and who could not avoid the changing circumstances of time.

El Shaddai is thought to be a good connecting link between Elohim, the God of nature and creation who is separate from creation, and the name Jehovah (Yahweh) the redemptive name for God. With El Shaddai we have a God who comes down (condescends) to overpower the forces of nature in the service of grace to His people (See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 96 and Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 102). In other words, God is almighty in the service of grace. The psalmist sees all the benefits of God as Creator, the Almighty One, and El Shaddai, the one able to destroy, yet one who protects. All these attributes come together in the God who is the God of grace. God is able to come to the aid of His people; He is also disposed or willing to come to our aid because of His grace.

It is significant that Elohim is from the word *alah* which means “to be smitten with fear”. Thus, God is the object of fear or one to be dreaded (Bavinck, p. 100; Berkhof, p. 48). Allah is, of course, the Muslim name for God and this singular designation of Allah as one to be feared or one to be dreaded casts a black cloud over the whole religion. There is certainly a strong element of truth in this designation of God. He is high, holy, and inaccessible to the one who is sinful and under his wrath. But this exclusive name for God obscures the fuller revelation of God in His other names. He is also El Shaddai who overpowers the forces of nature in the service of grace. We need many names for God to get the more completed picture of who He is and what He has done for His people.

Other names for God which include forms of **EI** include the following:

***El Olam***, everlasting God which is contrasted with the brevity of man (Ps. 90:2-12).

***El Roi***, God who sees all in contrast with man who sees only partially (Gen. 16:13).

### ***C. Yahweh***

#### ***1. The active presence of God***

The second name used in Scripture for God. It occurs first in Genesis 2:4 and is the most frequently used name for God, occurring some 6,823 times in the OT. The NT equivalent of Yahweh is Kurios which is also translated “Lord”. Yahweh is especially used in the revelation given to Moses in Exodus (Ex. 3:6, 13-15; 6:2-3). Some theologians like to refer to it as the covenant name for God. Henry Krabbendam refers to Yahweh as the name of



God's active presence (*Christian Doctrine*, unpublished syllabus, p. 31. See also C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Vol. II, p. 219). In Ex. 3 Moses asks what he is supposed to say when the Israelites ask him what God's name is (that is, "What is His reputation?"). It had been 400 years since they had heard from God. God says to Moses, "I am Who I am." In other words, "In spite of what they think about my presumed absence all these years, I am present with them in their sufferings just as I was present with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As a matter of fact, I never left." As Krabbendam points out, the ten plagues against Egypt certainly proved God's point.

## 2. *The aseity of God*

The name Yahweh also expresses the aseity of God—the absolute being of God independent of all else. The root meaning of the name is "to be". This is in contrast to all other so-called gods which do not exist and in contrast to all creation which receives its being *from* God. All other being has its source in God, but He has being in Himself and has no source in anything other than Himself (Jn 5: 26). God *is*; everything else *becomes*. Everything in the universe came into being and had a beginning, but God never had a beginning; He just always *was*. When Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (Jn. 14: 6), He was declaring His self-existence with the Father as well as the independent, uncreated character of that life. Henry has noted that the juxtaposition (placing side by side) of the verbs "was" (*ginomai*) and "am" (*eimi*) in Jn. 8: 58 highlight the difference between created life and unbegotten life. Abraham *came into being*, but Jesus is the eternal "*I Am*" (*God, Revelation, and Authority*, Vol. II, p. 228).

The aseity of God is also implied in Isa. 41: 4 when God rhetorically asks, "Who has performed and accomplished it, calling forth the generations from the beginning?" He then answers His own question, "I, the Lord [Yahweh] am the first, and with the last. I am He." The connection of this verse with Rev. 1: 8 and 1: 17 is unmistakable (Compare also Isa. 43: 10, 13; 48: 12; 51: 12 with Jn. 8: 18, 24, 28; 13: 19; 18: 5, 6, 8). There is no justification, then, of limiting the meaning of Yahweh to active presence alone while excluding any connotations (suggested meanings) of "being" or "essence" (Henry, pp. 220-221). God's active presence in redemption is an expression of who He is ontologically (pertaining to being). The future promise to Abraham that God "will be" (future tense) God to Abraham and to his descendents is realized in His present manifestation (appearance) to Moses: "I am that I am" (present tense) (Compare Gen. 17: 7-8 with Ex. 3: 14).

## 3. *The immutability of God*

This name also declares the immutability of God; that is, His unchangeableness. We will cover this more in depth later. One possible translation of Yahweh is: "I will be what I will be." In other words, "What I was yesterday, I will be tomorrow." Otherwise, we would never know what to expect from God nor would we be able to count on God's help in times of crisis. This was, in part, the purpose of the divine manifestation of the name of God to Moses. If we may paraphrase the meaning, "Moses, go tell My people that what I *was* to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I *am* also to them and forever *will be* because I never change in being or in purpose." Jesus says reflectively of Himself, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, who *is* [present] and who *was* [past] and who *is to come* [future], the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

The Hebrew tense allows for I AM either the past or the present or the future, or all three; the New Testament preempts all these options in its identification of Jesus Christ as the unveiled glory of God.... (Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, p. 229).

Yahweh is and continues to be what He always was, the covenant-keeping God who fulfills His promises and never changes His ultimate purpose. Everything else is changing around

us, and we may at times feel as if change is swallowing us up, but God never changes; He is the steadfast rock of our salvation (Ps. 19: 14).

#### 4. *The redemptive name of God*

Yahweh is also the redemptive name of God in the sense that it is the name which becomes the primary name of God used in Israel's exodus. In Exodus 6:2-3 God tells Moses that He had not made Himself known to the patriarchs by the name Yahweh. This poses an interpretive problem in that the name Yahweh had been used some 164 times in Genesis (e.g. 14:22; 15:7; 24:3; 32:9) before the exodus event. The resolution of this apparent discrepancy is that God had not appeared to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in the character or nature of Yahweh but only in the nature or character of God Almighty, or El Shaddai. The *redemptive significance* of the name, Yahweh, was not known until the exodus event when God redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage. After the exodus the use of Yahweh jumps to 1800 times from Exodus through Joshua compared to only 125 times for Elohim in the same period (Morton H. Smith, pp. 110-111). Bavinck explains the apparent contradiction by saying that we do not find an explanation of the name, Yahweh, by the Lord himself until Exodus 3. Furthermore, he says:

A long period of time is necessary to prove God's unchangeable faithfulness; a person's faithfulness is not proved at once but in the long run, especially in seasons of distress. This was just the case with Israel. Centuries had elapsed since the time of the patriarchs; Israel was being oppressed and was in distress. Now God comes and says: "I am that I am, Jehovah, the One who keepeth faithfulness forever, the God of the fathers, your God also now, and your God forever." At this time, God gives an entirely new meaning to an old name, a meaning which before this time would not have been understood. Hence we read in Hosea 12: 9 and 13: 4, "I am Jehovah thy God from the land of Egypt" (*Doctrine of God*, pp. 106-107).

By using the name Yahweh in connection with the patriarchs, we understand it as the revelation of God in relationship to His people. Theologians refer to this attribute of God as His *eminence* whereas El Elyon, the exalted God, refers to His *transcendence*. Theologians also refer to Yahweh as the *proper* name for God in that it is a name which was never used of any other God, unlike Elohim (Ex. 12:12; 15:3; Isaiah 42:8; Hosea 12:5; Ps. 83:18) (Smith, pp. 111-112; Henry, p. 210). It is also the last name for God revealed in the OT. No new names are added after this one.

Jesus identified Himself with the Covenant-keeping God of Presence in all the "I am" passages in John. In John 18:5-6 when Jesus asked those who had come to arrest Him whom they sought, they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." He then said, "I am." At this, his attackers fell to the ground at the power unleashed in the name. (Translators insert the word "he" in the verse but it is not in the original text. The answer is simply, "I am.") Other "I am" passages in John should also be noted. John's Gospel, more than the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) links the identity of Jesus with Yahweh of the OT (Jn 4, 6, 10, 15).

In the middle of difficult circumstances, God seems at times to show up too late and seems often inconsiderate of time and circumstances. He waited 300 years after Joseph was dead to reveal Himself openly to Israel even though we know He was always there. God waited 2000 years after His promise to Abraham before sending His son incarnate in human flesh to fulfill this promise. We may be going through some struggles which seem to be hell on earth, and it may appear that God doesn't care. What do we do during this waiting period? Do we determine what is true based on what we see, or do we believe that God is the covenant-keeping God, the God who is always present in our sufferings and trials even when He doesn't seem to be? The Apostle Paul was keenly aware of the seeming discrepancy (lack of agreement) between what we see on the surface of things and what the Word of God says, and he warns us not to judge reality merely by what we see. What we see is only temporal, but what we do not see is eternal (2 Cor. 4: 18). Just as the enslaved Israelites could not see

God, so we cannot see God. But He is there just the same and is actively accomplishing everything necessary for our salvation.

#### ***D. Compound Names which Include Yahweh***

Sometimes Yahweh occurs with another name for God. In these names the Scriptures give us an overview of the self-sufficiency of God who *was, is, and will be* everything His people need.

##### ***1. Yahweh-Sabaoth***

This means Lord of Hosts (1Sam. 3:1-11; 17: 42-47; 4:3-4; 4:10-11). If we examine the common thread that holds these episodes together we will find the sufficiency of God in the context of human failure and weakness (Smith, p. 115).

Hannah failed to conceive and bear children, something Hebrew women dreaded like the plague since the name of the family was preserved through bearing children. She cries out to God as the Lord of Hosts. Possibly, the hosts refer to the angelic hosts who serve God night and day doing His will (Ps. 148:2; 103:21). In Hebrews 1, the writer warns the Hebrews not to make too much of the angels and certainly not to worship them as some of the Hebrew Christians at that time were doing, because the angels are ministering spirits to the elect (Heb. 1:14).

In 1 Sam. 4:3-4, Israel attempts to manipulate God into giving them victory by taking the ark into battle. Hophi and Phineas, two wicked priests, represented the main problem, the wickedness and lack of repentance of the nation. Israel was defeated again and the ark stolen. The lesson they should learn from this defeat is that it is Yahweh alone who is sufficient for them and He will not give His glory to religious symbols, even the ones He has ordained.

In 1 Sam. 17:42-47, we find Israel cowering in the bushes because everyone was afraid of the giant. Israel had failed to conquer the Philistines through lack of faith. David does not approach Goliath in the spirit of self-confidence but in reliance upon the all-sufficiency of God who alone is the answer to Israel's weakness. The battle with Goliath is not David's private battle but a battle with blasphemy against God.

This name is popular among the prophets of the OT, being used 88 times in Jeremiah, 14 times in Haggai, 55 times in Zechariah, and 25 times in Malachi (Smith, p. 115). The prophets are continually confronting Israel for their sin and unbelief; in other words, their failure. They trusted money, comfort, and the help of other nations, but they would not trust in Yahweh-Sabaoth alone. When Isaiah receives a vision of God sitting on His throne, he is terrified at his own sinfulness in the presence of a thrice holy God. The angels attending the throne call out, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

The name reminds us that God will come through for His people in the midst of moral failure and defeat and difficult times. However, we must learn to call upon Him in humility, total dependence, and repentance. When we call upon the Lord of Hosts, we should do so as Hannah, who was helpless to do anything about her barren womb. We may also call upon Him as Lord of Hosts as David did who stood before Goliath, whose armor weighed almost as much as David and who had only one vulnerable spot between his eyes that wasn't protected. This was truly a hopeless situation, but David was relying on God alone. "The battle is the Lord's".

##### ***2. Yahweh-Jireh***

The Lord will provide. We read about this name in Gen. 22:1-18. Abraham has only one son by Sarah whom she bore in her old age when neither she nor Abraham should have been able to have children. Now God tells Abraham to kill Isaac as a sacrifice. It didn't make much sense, humanly speaking, but Abraham trusted God implicitly (without question). God knew what was in Abraham's heart, but He wanted Abraham to know what was in his own heart. Would Abraham pass the test? For that matter would Isaac pass the test as well? He, too, was tested in this episode since he was old enough and strong enough to resist Abraham's request, strong enough to carry the wood upon the mountain for the sacrifice. (He could possibly have been 18 to 20 years old by this time. See Leupold, *Genesis*). Yet, he willingly lay down upon the wood to be put to death.

You can see in this episode a type of Christ who willingly went to the cross, as well as the willingness of God the Father who sent His only begotten son to die for the sins of His people.

When Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb," Abraham said, "God will provide (Yahweh-Jireh)." We may ask what kind of test this was. Was Abraham being tested to see whether he would sacrifice his son, or was he being tested to see whether he understood the covenant promises? Remember God said to him in Gen. 12, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Why did Abraham not show extreme emotional trauma in this episode, and why did he saddle up his donkey the very next day after God told him to kill Isaac as a sacrifice? God did not specify *when* to do it. And why did Abraham say to his servants on that dreadful day, "Stay here with the donkey, while I and the lad will go yonder and *we* will worship and return to you"? (22:5) How could Isaac return if he was dead?

Hebrews 11: 17-19 answers these questions for us. Abraham believed the covenant promises of God so implicitly (without question), that he believed that even if he killed Isaac God could and would raise him from the dead. Hebrews tells us Abraham received Isaac back as a type, that is, a type of Christ. Christ is the lamb for sacrifice which is provided by God; no other sacrifice will do, not even Isaac. The sacrifice must be of divine origin and of divine essence, even Jesus Christ the righteous one.

Even so, God is our provider. Not only does He provide everything we need in our physical lives but also everything we need for our salvation. "He who did not spare His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things (Rom. 8:32; see also Phil 4:19 and 2 Cor.1:20)?"

### **3. *Yahweh-Shalom***

The Lord is peace. We find this name in Judges 6. The Book of Judges is a history of the long cycle of disobedience, repentance, and deliverance of the nation of Israel. God had given them most of the land of Canaan as recorded in the Book of Joshua, but they had grown complacent and had not continued their conquest as far as God intended. Furthermore, because the enemies of God were still in the land, these enemies had been successful in getting the Israelites to worship their false gods. Because of their unfaithfulness, God had given them over into the hands of their enemies to be disciplined. After some time of persecution, they would repent and cry out to God for help, and He would send someone, a judge, to deliver Israel from oppression. After their deliverance they would remain true to God for some time, but later would slip back into their sinful behavior and idolatry. The story of Gideon is one of the cycles in the Book of Judges.

After the people are oppressed by the Midianites for seven years (6:1), they cry out to God for relief and God sends them a prophet who tells them why they are being disciplined (7-11). Then the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon to let him know that God had chosen Him to

deliver His people (6:12-18). God assured Gideon that He had given his peace to him and, as a result, would bring peace to Israel (6:23-24). But first things first. Gideon must be tested to see if his resolve to follow the Lord is real. He must first tear down the altar of Baal at the risk of his life (6:25-27). Gideon obeys and the rest is history. He and a small army of 300 soldiers defeat 120,000 Midianites, an impossible task except for the help of the Lord.

God did grant peace to Israel, but the price of peace is repentance and obedience. They had lost that peace when they decided not to make war with God's enemies. They wanted peace on their terms and not God's. The prophet's message in 6:7-11 reminded them that there could be no peace as long as they permitted idolatry. Gideon's obedience in tearing down the altar of Baal indicated his earnestness not to make peace with evil, which was a symbolic act for the whole nation.

The story may remind us of another one in Numbers 25 when some of the men of Israel took Canaanite women as wives, an act which was forbidden by God since these nations were idolaters. When the son of a very prominent leader in Israel brought home a Midianite woman in the sight of all Israel, Phineas was filled with rage for the honor of God and killed both the man and his wife. As a result of his zeal, God gave Phineas the covenant of peace (25:12). The word for "peace" is the same word used in Judges 6:24.

The lesson for us in Judges 6 and Exodus 25 is that there can be no peace with God unless there is war against evil. When we are complacent or at peace with sin in our lives or in the church, we can have only little or no experience of God's peace. Isaiah 26:3 says, "The steadfast mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You." If we are steadfast in our trust and obedience to God, we will experience His peace, but we can have no peace with God if we are stubborn in our sin and refuse to repent (Psalms 32 and 51). The NT also talks about having God's peace. Philippians 4:6 tells us to "Be anxious for nothing, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This is the NT equivalent of Isaiah 26:3. Peace is an attitude of the mind toward the faithfulness and truthfulness of God. If we trust God we will obey Him and have peace. If we distrust God, we will seek our happiness elsewhere, and we will doubt His wisdom and law as a guide for our lives. In such circumstances life will prove to be anything but peaceful.

#### **4. *Yahweh-Nissi***

The Lord is our banner. In ancient times a standard or banner was placed upon a tall pole with a bright, shining ornament at the top which glistened in the sun. Often this image was that of a god whom the army worshipped and was taken into battle to give the army courage. The pole was long enough so that the image at the top could be seen in full view of the army as it fought. Banners aroused emotions and loyalty to a cause, a nation, or one's god (See L. M. Peterson, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, pp. 462-463).

In the battle against Amalek (Exodus 17:8-16), the banner of Israel was Moses' staff and that staff represented the help and power of God against the enemies of Israel. His staff had been used before to deliver Israel from its enemies. It was turned into a serpent in Egypt which swallowed up the serpents produced by the Egyptians. It was the staff used to perform many of the plagues of Egypt, and it was the staff which struck the rock in the wilderness of Sin to get water. The refrain, "And Moses stretched forth his staff" is repeated many times in the wilderness wanderings of Israel, once when God divided the Red Sea.

Joshua is told in verse 9 that Moses would be standing with the staff of God in his hand as Israel fought Amalek, and we learn that as long as Moses held the staff high, Israel prevailed

but when he let it down, they began to lose. Finally his arms became so tired that a stone was placed under him and Aaron and Hur stood on each side of him each holding one end of this staff.

God clearly was teaching Israel that victory over Amalek was the result of God's intervention alone, not Israel's strength. Amalek served to represent all the enemies of God, and so, we are to understand the words of verses 14-16 as the final and decisive defeat of everyone and everything opposed to God and God's people. War against evil will never cease until God makes all the enemies of Christ as a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 10:12-13. You will learn more about "holy war" in your notes on Deuteronomy.)

Numbers 21 gives us another illustration of a banner. We have already discussed it in our survey of Numbers. Israel was again grumbling at Moses because there was no food and water, and God responded by sending poisonous snakes into the camp. Some of the people died because of snakebites, and God instructed Moses to fashion a serpent of bronze and place it on a long pole so those who were dying of the poisonous bite could look to the bronze serpent and live. This bronze serpent on a pole was another banner for the people of Israel. Jesus, 1300 years later, gave us the sign of His banner to which we could look for salvation. He said in John 3:14, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life." What, then, is our banner? It is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ high and lifted up for all to see. This is the banner we look to for deliverance and victory over all our enemies including the greatest enemies of all, the devil and our sinful flesh. Paul tells us "but in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

### **5. *Yahweh-Tsidkenu and Yahweh-Mekkodishkim***

The first term is Yahweh-our-righteousness. We find this designation for God in Jeremiah 23:1-6. The contrast is being made in this passage between the future Messiah, the righteous branch of David, and the unfaithful shepherds of Israel who should have shown the way to God but didn't. He is speaking about the priests and false prophets of Israel who failed in their task of leading Israel into the path of righteousness. The people were also sinful, but the Bible always places more responsibility on those who are supposed to be spiritual leaders. Those who are pastors and lay readers in the church take upon themselves greater responsibility to be good examples to the flock as those who will give an account of themselves to God (Hebrews 13:17). In Israel the king was also given the task of being a shepherd to the people. David's sin against God in his adultery with Bathsheba was especially heinous in God's sight which is why God had to punish it so severely.

In stark contrast to these would-be shepherds, God would raise up a righteous Branch of David who would reign wisely as king, who would do justice and righteousness in the land (vs.5). He would save Judah, and in His days Israel would dwell securely. He would be called "The Lord our righteousness."

The second name for God is "The Lord our sanctification" and is closely related to the first. We find this name in Exodus 31:13 and Leviticus 20:7-8. Jesus fulfills both of these needs in our lives. He is both our righteousness and our sanctification. In 1 Cor. 1:30 Paul says, "But by His [God's] doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." In 2 Cor. 5:21 he said, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." In these two verses we have these two names for God fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ (See also Smith, p. 117).

### **6. *Yahweh-Rapha***

The Lord who heals (Exodus 15:26). God promised the Israelites that if they would seek Him they would not be afflicted with many of the diseases which afflicted the Egyptians. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus healed the sick, made the blind to see, the lame to walk, even raising the dead to life. Most importantly, He was the healer of sick souls lost in sin. He is our healer today, and even when we die, yet shall we live if we trust him as our Savior and Healer (Jn. 11: 25).

### **7. *Yahweh-Raah***

The Lord my Shepherd (Psalm 23). In this psalm, many other names for God are implied.

Verse 1: “I shall not want.” Yahweh-my Provider

Verse 3: “Leads me in paths of righteousness.” Yahweh-my Righteousness

Verse 4: “Thou art with me” Yahweh-shammah, the Lord is there.

Verse 5: “Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Yahweh-shalom, the Lord is Peace.

Verse 5: “Thou hast anointed my head with oil.” Yahweh-Rapha, the Lord who heals.

The main idea in the passage is that we depend on our Good Shepherd for *everything*. The Good Shepherd is incarnated in the Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself the name, “Good Shepherd” (John 10: 11).

### **8. *Adonai***

This name comes from a word whose root meaning is “master”, “ruler”, or “owner”. It can also mean “lord”. A wife may use it of her husband. When used in connection with God, the word speaks of His sovereign power (Ps. 97:5; Joshua 3:11; Isaiah 6:1). It is used 340 times in the OT (Smith, p. 112).

## **III. *New Testament Names of God***

### **A. *Theos***

This is the most common name for God in the New Testament. It is simply translated “God” and is the common NT equivalent of El or Elohim. It is applied to Christ as well as the Father as a reference to deity (John 20:28; Romans 9:5). The word occurs over a thousand times in the NT.

### **B. *Kurios***

Kurios is found some 600 times in the NT. It is derived from a word whose root meaning is “to be strong”. Jesus uses this term of God the Father with the idea of sovereign lordship and rule over the world of men (Luke 10:21 and Matt. 11:25). Kurios also carries the full weight of the OT name of Yahweh as Paul makes plain in Philippians 2: 9-11. Peter does the same thing in Acts 2:36. In Revelation Jesus is mentioned as the king of kings and Lord of Lords (17:14; 19:16).

### **C. *Pater***

The NT word for Father used in Matt. 6:9; 11:25; John 17:25; 2 Cor. 6:18. In the Lord’s Prayer we are taught to pray to our Father as an indication of intimate relationship between God and His people. In the church age, God still may be called by all the names used for

Him in the OT. He is still the exalted One, the all-powerful One, the One who provides, etc. but Jesus now directs our attention to a name which endears us to God as a loving heavenly Father who cares individually for each and every one of us and knows us by name. This thought is especially highlighted for us in Galatians 4:5 and Romans 8:15 in which we are told that we can now address God as “Abba, Father” or “Daddy” (a familiar and more intimate term for “Father” in Western culture which is the equivalent of “Tata” in Uganda). We are His adopted children and He is our adopted Father not because He is compelled to be, but by His sovereign choice, and with this self-revelation of “Father” He welcomes us into His family.

God is also referred to as the Father of Israel (Deut. 32:6 and Isaiah 63:16). Israel is referred to as His son (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; Isaiah 1:2). However, the richness of this paternal relationship of God with His children is brought to full development only in the NT after the completion of Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Soteriologically (pertaining to the doctrine of salvation) there is a distinct difference between the fatherhood of God to the Israelites, some of whom were not saved, and His fatherhood to true Christians, all of whom are saved, a distinction which appears to be brought to the forefront in Romans 8 and Galatians 4.

Reference to adoption in Romans 8: 15 appears to be the culmination (a reaching of the highest point) of the argument Paul begins in Romans 6: 1. Based on the doctrine of justification by grace through faith apart from the works of the law which Paul expounds from chapters 1-5, it would appear that a believer’s practical conduct did not matter. The more he sins, the more the grace of Christ is highlighted in contrast to his sin. But such thinking is at serious odds with the practical effects of justification by faith and the union of every believer in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The death of a believer with Christ guarantees his death to sin as a dominating influence in his life (Rom. 6: 2, 7); therefore, the believer is to consider himself dead to sin as a way and manner of life (v. 11).

Then in v. 14, Paul likens the condition of being “dead to sin” and “freed from sin” to being “under grace” and “not under law.” While in 6: 1-13, Paul’s confidence that the believer will not live in sin is grounded in his union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, his confidence in v. 14 is grounded in the fact that the believer is not under law but under grace. Thus, union with Christ and being under grace and not law are the same condition. To what law does Paul here refer, to the moral law in general or to the Mosaic Law in particular? For all practical purposes, it doesn’t matter which way we interpret it as long as we concentrate on the moral precepts of the law and not the ceremonial and civil legislation unique to the nation of Israel. The Mosaic Law is the formal codification (written into a code) and inauguration (the beginning of an administration) of the eternal moral law of God as a legal administration. The work of this law (excluding the ceremonial elements and civil elements) is written on the heart of every person, believer and unbeliever alike (Rom. 1: 18-32 and 2: 14-15) and is “the rule of duty that binds the conscience as an expression of the will of God” (Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 205). When one is under this law, he is obligated to keep it as the terms of his salvation: “Do this and you will live” (Lev. 18: 5; Dt. 30: 15-20). The alternative is also true: “Don’t do this, and you will die.” For this reason, the law is a fearful enactment of God’s condemnation of sinners symbolized by the manner in which it was given on Sinai in the midst of “a blazing fire”, “darkness and gloom”, “a whirlwind”, “the blast of a trumpet”, etc. which terrified everyone who witnessed it (Ex. 19: 12-17, 20: 18-19; Heb. 12: 18-21). The whole nation of Israel was placed under this law for the didactic (used for teaching) purpose of showing them that they could not keep it, and thus, could not secure their salvation by means of it. An alternative means of salvation was conveyed (made known) to them through a system of sacrifices which depicted the future sacrifice of Christ. In this way, they could be temporarily forgiven by grace through faith until such a time when

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these temporary, rudimentary (elementary) sacrifices could be perfected or completed in the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 8-10). By showing Israel that they could not be saved through law, God showed everyone else—the Gentiles—that keeping the law was not a viable (workable) means of salvation. If the Covenant inaugurated through Moses (the Old Covenant) didn't provide the final solution for the Jews, neither would it work for the Gentiles (Gal. 2: 15-16; Acts 15: 10).

Through faith in Christ and union with Christ, the Christian is no longer under law as the means of being accepted by God—a means which is unattainable. Therefore, he is no longer under a covenantal system which produces the craven fear of God who judges him for his constant failure. Not being under the law, but under grace, has the same effect as being in union with Christ because the two conditions are identical. The practical effect is that sin will no longer be the master over one who is not under law. Conversely (in opposition to this), the one under the law will be mastered by sin and under the dominion of sin. Why is this so? The answer is given in Romans 7 which is the exposition of Rom. 6: 14 (See Hodge, *Romans*, p. 218 and Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 6*, p. 182). To be under the law is to be under the administration of a legal system of salvation which requires perfect obedience (Lev. 18: 5 with James 2: 10). Furthermore, although the law informs us of what God requires, it does not provide us with the resources we need to obey it. The law is weak through the sinfulness of human flesh (Rom. 8: 3) and does not accomplish the task of reforming the sinner into a saint or the saint into a better saint. This is no fault of the law, but fully the fault of the sinner or the believer (Rom. 7: 12-13).

The utter sinfulness of sin (7: 13) is demonstrated by the fact that the perfectly good law of God, far from making us holy, has the exact opposite effect of inciting the sinner (stirring him up) to sin. Whenever the sinner hears the commandment of God, his reaction to it is not love for God and the desire to keep it, but the desire to sin in the precise sense which is forbidden in the commandment (7: 8-9). Comparatively, when the mother says to her child, "Don't touch those cookies!", she simply stirs up his desire to eat them. But the law has the same effect on the believer apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul, the Christian, "joyfully concur[s] with the law of God in the inner man", but "see[s] a different law in the members of [his] body, waging war against the law of [his] mind, and making [him] a prisoner of the law of sin which is in [his] members" (7: 22-23). The very thing he wishes not to do, he does, and the very thing he wishes to do, he fails to do (7: 15-16).

Just as Paul has taught us in Romans 1-5 that the law will not justify us, he teaches us in Romans 7-8 that the law will not sanctify us or reform our sinful nature. For this reason, he teaches us in 7: 1-4 that the believer has to die to the law and be married to Christ "that [in order that] we might bear fruit [righteous fruit] for God." Marriage is a legal relationship, and this relationship forms the analogy for one's legal relationship to the law. This relationship has to be dissolved through the formation of a new relationship with Christ which is also a personal relationship of love. It is only Christ who will set us free from the "body of this death" (v. 24), the body of sin which gives in to the power of sin. Simply knowing what is right and what is wrong will not help us.

What then will help us? Paul says in 8: 3-4 that what the Law could not do because it was weak through our flesh, God did through the gospel—through the sending of His son as a sacrifice for sin. The Law (or law) could not make us holy (Rom. 7), but God through Christ sets in motion the method of our sanctification as effectively as He does the method of our justification. Through the gospel, "the requirement of the Law" is fulfilled in us who walk according to the power of the Spirit and not according to the flesh (8: 4). This verse is the equivalent of 7: 4 where Paul says that we are "joined to another [Christ]...that we might bear fruit for God." The life-giving power of the Spirit which accomplished the resurrection

of Jesus from the dead is the same indwelling power which is given to Christians to “give life to [our] mortal bodies” (v. 11). Through the Spirit we are “putting to death the deeds of the body” (v. 13). We are being led by the Spirit (v. 14) who overpowers our natural, sinful tendency to be stirred up by the law and, instead, produces in us a delight in the law of God (Ps. 1: 2).

This brings us up to Rom. 8: 15. The Holy Spirit given to the believer is not the Spirit of a slavish and fearful disposition which dreads God as the condemning law-giver. He is the Spirit of adoption which produces in our hearts the disposition of trusting children who cry out, “Abba! Father!” and who “bears witness with our spirit [the human spirit] that we are children of God” (vv. 15-16). This disposition (mental attitude) was not altogether lacking in the OT dispensation, but when present, it was not the product of the Law which said, “Do this and live.” Rather, it was the product of the promises given to Abraham given 400 years before the Law. As Calvin notes (II. XI. 9):

Scripture calls the Old Testament one of “bondage” because it produces fear in men’s minds; but the New Testament of “freedom” because it lifts them to trust and assurance. So Paul states in the eighth chapter of Romans: “You did not receive the spirit of slavery again unto fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, through which we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” ....

But suppose that our opponents object that, among the Israelites, the holy patriarchs were an exception: since they were obviously endowed with the same Spirit of faith as we, it follows that they shared the same freedom and joy. To this we reply: neither of these arose from the law. But when through the law the patriarchs felt themselves both oppressed by their enslaved condition, and wearied by anxiety of conscience, they fled to the gospel. It was therefore a particular fruit of the Old Testament that, apart from the common law of the Old Testament, they were exempted from those evils. Further, we shall deny that they were so endowed with the spirit of freedom and assurance as not in some degree to experience the fear and bondage arising from the law. For however much they enjoyed the privilege that they had received through the grace of the gospel, they were still subject to the same bonds and burdens of ceremonial observances as the common people.

Hodge interprets Romans 6: 14 in the following way (Romans, p. 206):

We are not under a legal dispensation, requiring personal conformity to the law, and entire freedom from sin, past and present, as the condition of our acceptance; but we are under a gracious dispensation, according to which God dispenses pardon freely, and accepts the sinner as a sinner, for Christ’s sake, without works or merit of his own. Whoever is under the law in the sense just explained is not only under condemnation, but he is of necessity under a legal or slavish spirit. What he does, he does as a slave, to escape punishment. But he who is under grace, who is gratuitously [graciously] accepted of God, and restored to his favour, is under a filial spirit. The principle of obedience in him is love, and not fear. Here, as everywhere else in the Bible, it is assumed that the favour of God is our life. *We must be reconciled to him before we can be holy; we must feel that he loves us before we can love him* (emphasis mine).

The last statement deserves careful attention. Reconciliation with God, and consciousness of reconciliation, is the precondition of holiness. This is so because holiness of life grows only from love to God. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Love inevitably produces obedience. Conversely (on the contrary), it will be impossible for one to love God if he senses that he is under God’s wrath and condemnation. He may obey through fear alone, as a slave his master, but this is not gospel holiness. Where there is no love, neither is there obedience. The slavish spirit of those who are depending on legal obedience for their salvation is contrasted in Romans 8 with the filial spirit of a son who loves his father. And as Calvin has asserted, the nature of the Old Covenant did not encourage this spirit although there were some who experienced it by embracing the promises made to Abraham. It is the New Covenant which produces and encourages the climate and atmosphere of a family in which obedience can most readily grow.

This appears also to be the teaching of Galatians 4. In that passage, the state of those under the dispensation of Law is not essentially different from that of a slave (vv. 1-3). Paul does not deny the sonship of Israel, but he describes this sonship very much like the state of Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com—July, 2012

servitude (John Brown, *Galatians*, p. 77), and it cannot be denied that the state of sonship under the law is quite distinct from the present state of sonship in the New Covenant. Those who were under the law, though sons, had not received the full benefits of sonship reserved for those under grace. Christ redeems “those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (v. 5). Clearly, sonship is conditioned upon the redemptive act of God in Christ, a condition which believers in the Old Covenant awaited but never fully “received”, experiencing it only in types and shadows. Their state was one of immaturity which required the use of tangible, earthly representations suitable for children who must be taught conceptual truth through their senses (Brown, p. 79).

The “elemental things of the world” (v. 4) were the system of external observances and ordinances imposed during the Mosaic dispensation “to serve as a substitute for that enlightened spiritual, habitual, service of God, which nothing but a clear revelation, accompanied with a full effusion [pouring forth] of divine influence, could have produced” (Brown, p. 79). In other words, since the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth (Jn. 16: 13), had not been given in full measure, more tangible methods were used to teach spiritual truth. These methods, although designed to teach the true religion, were in themselves somewhat restrictive and burdensome, and the state of the Jews under their tutelage (education) is described as one of “bondage” (v. 4; see also Acts 15: 10). These consisted of frequent washings and purifications, continual sacrifices, annual journeys to Jerusalem, etc. The state of Christians under the New Covenant, taught by the indwelling Spirit, is much simpler and does not require the external ordinances of the Mosaic system with the exceptions of the covenant sign (baptism instead of circumcision) and the Lord’s Supper (instead of the Passover and the vast array of other ceremonial observances).

It appears that the sonship described by Paul in Romans is the distinct state of believers from that of unbelievers while the state of sonship in Galatians is the difference in full-grown sons in the New Covenant and that of infant sons in the Old Covenant. In the words of Brown (p. 80):

It describes not the state of saints as opposed to sinners; but the state of saints under the Christian dispensation in contrast with that of saints under the Mosaic dispensation.

Now, in what does that state consist? In the possession of a larger portion of knowledge of the character of God as father, in a higher measure of filial love and confidence towards Him, and in a system of religious observances in their simplicity and spirituality suited to this extended knowledge and improved character. Under the Christian dispensation there is a much clearer revelation of the character of God as “rich in mercy and ready to forgive,” “just, yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus,” than under the Mosaic.

## ***D. Jesus (Jesus Christ)***

### ***1. The incarnate manifestation of God***

We have already noted above Jesus’ identification with the great “I am” of the OT, but it is necessary to develop this name as the name of the incarnate (in the flesh) manifestation of God. The Apostle John tells us that “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (Jn. 1: 18). The word “explained” can be translated, “showed the way.” Jesus, the incarnate Son of God showed us the way to the Father, and when the disciples of Jesus looked into the face of Jesus they looked into the face of God (Jn. 14: 8-10). In the first and physical creation, the Creator-God illuminated the world through the spoken word (Gen. 1: 3), and in the second creation, He illuminates the world again through the Word made flesh—Jesus Christ. God, who cannot be seen, condescends (places Himself on a lower level with man) to reveal His glory in the face of Christ, who can be seen (Compare Jn. 1: 1-9 with 2 Cor. 4: 6; 5: 17).

There are many who have insisted that Jesus never made the claim to be God, but this claim was made for him by His followers who developed the mythology of Jesus over a period of time. Such a theory can be taken seriously only if we do not take the NT seriously. Jesus said, “And he who beholds Me beholds the One who sent Me” (Jn. 12: 45), and also that He “manifested Thy [God’s] name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world. . . . (Jn. 17:6). When He said, “I and the Father are one,” the Jews once again scrambled to the rock piles to fetch stones and kill Him because through these words He made Himself out to be God (Jn. 10: 30; 33). One simply cannot read the Gospel of John and miss Jesus’ self-conscious identification as God. We will return to this subject later in our study of Christology.

## ***2. The name exalted above all other names***

By humbling Himself to the point of death on a cross, Jesus earned the exalted reward which is now bestowed upon Him by God the Father who “bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2: 9-11). It should be noticed that “every” knee shall one day bow before Jesus. No rational creatures in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth are excluded from this requirement. This includes the angels and departed believers “in heaven” and the demonic forces in the “heavenly places” (Eph. 6: 12). It includes every believer and unbeliever “on earth” and every unbeliever whose spirit is now in hell without his body. When those who are now dead are given bodies at the final resurrection, those bodies (both saved and condemned) will bow before the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ (See also Rev. 5: 13). The homage done to the Son in the final judgment is the fulfillment of God’s oath to Himself in Isa. 45: 23: “I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance” (See also Ps. 2).

## ***3. The exclusive name by which men must be saved***

Standing boldly before the religious leaders of the Jewish nation, the once fearful Peter boldly proclaimed that by the name of Jesus Christ a lame beggar had been healed; and, likewise, “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 8-12). Through this proclamation, Peter is reflecting upon the exclusive claims Jesus made for Himself when He said, “I am *the* way [not *one* way among many], the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (Jn. 14: 6).

The angel of the Lord instructed Joseph to call the baby conceived in the womb of Mary, Jesus, “for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1: 21). The name Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Yehoshua (Joshua) who saved the Israelites through the conquest of Canaan. A different conquest is now in view—the inward conquest of sin.

### ***E. Son of Man***

The title, “Son of Man” occurs 32 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 26 times in Luke, 12 times in John, 7 times in Acts, once in Hebrews, and twice in Revelation—94 times in all in the NT. In all of the uses except Jn. 12: 34; Acts 7: 56; Heb. 2: 6; and Rev. 1: 13; and 14: 14, the title is used by Christ himself. The generally accepted meaning of the phrase is the lowly humanity of Christ distinguished from His deity, but much more is implied (C. W. Carter, “The Son of Man”, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. V., Merrill C.

Tenney, ed., p.485). Carter offers seven characteristics of the divine-human character of Christ which are implied by the term “Son of Man” according to its usage.

1. ***Christ’s Messiahship***—Examples of this usage are found in Matt. 16: 27-28; 18: 11; 19: 28; and Matt. 24: 30.
2. ***Christ’s Incarnation***—In John 3: 13, Christ’s unique humanity is expressed to Nicodemus by the fact that Jesus, the man who had descended to earth is also one who had been in heaven. He was uniquely capable of representing God to man and man to God, thus accomplishing reconciliation.
3. ***Christ’s Dependent Humanity***—Luke 9: 58 and Matt. 8: 20 especially come to mind to express the humility of Christ who owned no earthly possessions and depended on the charity of others during His ministry.
4. ***Christ’s Authoritative and Redemptive Mission***—Christ had the authority to forgive sins and He came to seek and to save the lost (Matt. 9:6 and Lk. 19: 10).
5. ***Christ’s Total Redemptive Victory***—John 3: 14, in the context of John 3: 13-17, implies the completed, successful mission of Christ to save the “world.”
6. ***Christ’s Universal Lordship***—The Messianic reference found in Daniel 7: 13 is quoted by Jesus in Matt. 26: 64; Mk. 13: 26; 14: 62; Lk. 21: 27; and Rev. 14: 14.
7. ***Christ’s Final Judgment***—Matthew 13: 41-42 and Matthew 19: 28.

Perhaps the most intriguing question is: Why does Christ prefer this designation of Himself above any other? In the OT, references to man are commonly negative. The prophet Isaiah likens man to the grass of the field which quickly withers and fades (40: 6-8; Isa. 51: 12). David, a king, but also a psalmist who knows his proper place, reflects upon the mortality of man by describing him as “a mere breath” whose “days are like a passing shadow” (Ps. 144: 3-4). Job is even much less flattering (understandably so), calling man a “maggot” and the son of man a “worm”. The American pop culture, which glorifies man through self-esteem seminars and books, would not appreciate such demeaning comments, and it attempts to eliminate God by replacing Him with man. Ironically, all efforts to do so have resulted in a schizophrenic (separation from reality) confusion which vacillates (moves back and forth) between the celebration of man’s greatness (especially movie stars, singers, and athletes) and his self-destruction (including wars, genocide, abortion and euthanasia—the killing of old people). Only in the Bible do we discover the compass which gives us true direction.

In Psalm 8, David marvels at the heavens, the work of God’s hands, and then wonders why God has given such attention to the creation of man, a mere speck in the universe. God has made man “a little lower than” Himself. Some older translations use “angels” rather than God (Elohim), but this translation ill-suits the context (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, pp. 104, 107). David refers back to the creation of man in the Genesis account in which he is given dominion over the earth and the privilege of multiplication (Compare vv. 6-8 with Gen. 1: 27-28). Angels were never told to rule over the earth, nor were they given the command or the ability to multiply for the purpose of filling the earth with the image-bearers of God (Richard Pratt, *Designed for Dignity*, p. 8). Angels are explicitly given a status lower than man even after the fall since they are “all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1: 14). Man was made a little lower than God by virtue of his image, and the function bestowed upon him is a consequence of this image. Through the fall he fell miserably from this intended design, which is why he receives such bad “press” in so many passages of Scripture. Nevertheless, man has not completely lost this image or his function, and we are reminded of this in Ps. 8.

Most importantly, we should be reminded of the reason why Christ became incarnate in human flesh. God never changed His mind about the destiny for which He created man—to rule over His creation. Christ has come, and through His obedience, death, and resurrection Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com—July, 2012

He has now elevated mankind once again to his rightful purpose of dominion and honor. By faith, man reclaims his destiny as God's vice-regent over the earth under God. The kingdom which comes in the "clouds" (Dan. 7: 13) is the kingdom of men who are ruled by the "Son of Man", the one who has identified with men in their misery and death, their weakness and humility, but who is now and ever shall be exalted at the right hand of the throne of God.

### ***F. Holy Spirit***

This name is not commonly included among the names of God in systematic treatments (e.g. Berkhof and Bavinck), but it is, nevertheless, one of the names of God appearing often in the NT. For that matter, it is a name which is also found in the OT (Ps. 51: 11; Isa. 63: 10-11). In Isa. 63: 10, the personality of the Spirit is attested to since He is one who can be grieved. The Spirit's work will be covered later, but the following OT references to the Holy Spirit may be consulted (Gen. 1: 2; 6: 3; Job 33: 4; 33: 14; Num. 11: 26; and Ps. 139: 7).

As you can see, the Holy Spirit is very much in presence in the OT, and salvation would not have been possible without Him. However, the terms used in the NT to denote His presence and activity justify the opinion that "Holy Spirit" is primarily a NT name of God. Consider the following:

**1.** Contrary to the provisional (not final) giving of the Spirit in the OT, Joel prophesies that He will be given in full measure some time in the future (Compare Num. 11: 26-29 with Joel 2: 28). This promise is fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost and is recorded in Acts 2: 16-21 in which Peter declares that Joel's prophecy has been fulfilled in their presence.

**2.** The fullness of Spirit which characterizes Jesus' ministry is a foreshadowing of the giving of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (Jn. 1: 32-34; Matt. 3: 11, 16; 4: 1; 12: 18, 28). Jesus is the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and would be given the Spirit without measure (Jn. 3: 34; See Leon Morris, *John*, pp. 246-247). Furthermore, as Jesus is given the Spirit by the Father without measure, He in turn grants the Holy Spirit to His disciples and the gifts of the Spirit to His church (Jn. 16: 7; 20: 22; Lk. 24: 49; Eph. 4: 7-11). John 20: 22 has been variously interpreted. Some scholars believe that Jesus actually bestowed the Spirit on this occasion; others believe that His statement only anticipates the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost and is commemorative (in memory of) of the breath of life in Gen. 2 and symbolic of the re-creation in Christ (C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Vol. VI, pp. 374-375). A later statement by Jesus after His resurrection and before His ascension strongly supports the latter interpretation. In Luke 24: 49 Jesus tells His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they are "clothed with power from on high." Shortly before Pentecost and immediately before His ascension, He tells them that they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from the time He was addressing them (Acts 2: 5). He uses the future tense ("shall be baptized") which would not be suitable if they had already received the Holy Spirit on the previous occasion of Jn. 20: 22.

**3.** The Spirit could not be given to God's people in full measure until Jesus accomplished His mission and ascended to the Father (Jn. 7: 39). His substitutionary atonement, burial, resurrection and ascension had to be complete before He could "send" the Holy Spirit. He specifically tells His disciples that He must "go away" before the Spirit comes (Jn. 16: 7), another proof that His statement in Jn. 20: 22 only anticipated the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost and was not the actual bestowal of the Spirit.

**4.** The Holy Spirit is the completion of all the promises given to the OT saints which now belong to the NT saints. Jesus tells the disciples to wait for the "promise of My Father" (Lk. 24: 49), and this "promise" is clearly identified in Acts 2: 38-39 as the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ's Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com—July, 2012

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1: 11) and Christ is the “yes” and “Amen” of all the promises of God (2 Cor. 1: 20). Christ Himself said that the disciples would be better off when He ascended to the Father and sent the Spirit to teach and comfort them (Jn. 16: 7).

Further evidence could be given to support the conclusion that the NT age is the age of the Spirit who is sent by the Father and the Son to empower the church with knowledge, gifts, adoption, and the blessings of sanctification (Jn. 14: 26; 16: 12-15; Rom. 8: 13-15; Phil. 2: 13).

#### ***IV. The Attributes of God***

Another name for the attributes of God is the *perfections* of God (Krabbendam, p. 32). In our study of these attributes it is important to understand that these do not exist separately from one another as if we could isolate each one from God until we were able to determine His core essence. God is not a combination of various attributes, and He cannot be dissected to discover what He essentially is. This is known as the *simplicity* of God. He does not have attributes added to His essence, rather God *is* His perfections or attributes. If we were able to somehow subtract even one of God’s perfections, He would no longer be God. For example 1 John 4:8 says “God is love.” If we were able to subtract love from God, would He still be God? He might still be a “god” in some religions, but He would no longer be the God of the Bible. The Bible also says God is all-knowing (Psalm 139:2). Would God be God if He did not know everything? Again, He may be suitable to some people without this perfection, but He would no longer fit the description of the Bible. What if God was all-knowing and love, but He was not all-powerful. That is, He loved us and wanted to save us, and He had a good plan to save us, but He just didn’t have the power to do so. Would He still be God? I hope we can see from these examples that God must be all these things to be God.

We should also understand that none of God’s attributes compete against one another. We know that God is holy and just. God is also love. But how can a holy and just God love dirty, smelly sinners like us? This was the problem that Martin Luther struggled with. It would appear that the holiness and justice of God would prevent Him from loving us, but we know that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” The simplicity of God means that He can love sinners and be just and holy at the same time. It also means that He can still be just without “winking at” or casually dismissing our sin as a doting old grandfather would dismiss the sins of his grandson as boyish mischievousness. God hates sin and He judges sin. Because He is holy He must punish sin, ultimately, without mercy. How then can we be at peace with this holy God? Martin Luther discovered the solution to this problem in Romans 1:17 which says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. By punishing sin in the person of Christ, God could both be a just and holy God (Rom. 3: 26—“just and justifier”) and be a loving and merciful God at one and the same time.

Failure to understand the simplicity of God has caused some to use one attribute of God against another attribute. For example, people have done all kinds of sinful things in the name of love. Some parents have refused to discipline their children when they disobeyed, claiming that they loved their child too much to spank them. The Bible says, however, that “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Prov. 13: 24). There is no exegetical reason to eliminate a literal rendering of “rod” in this verse, although it can imply a variety of things. The Bible says God’s love does not compete with His justice and God is known to discipline His children severely (Hebrews 13)! He truly loves His children, but He also loves righteousness and holiness. On the other hand are Fathers who show little affection for their children but are harsh disciplinarians who provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6: 4).

Another example would be a young man who asks his girlfriend (who is not his wife), “If you love me you would have sex with me.” If his girlfriend is wise she will say, “If you really loved me, you would not ask me to sin against God by having sex with you outside of marriage.” (If she is very wise, she will also get herself a new boyfriend.)

Having said that we cannot separate God’s attributes from one another nor force them to compete with one another, this does not mean that we may not suppose that there is one attribute of God which seems to be the most important. The holiness of God may very well be the center or hub of all the other attributes. It is the only perfection of God that is mentioned three times in succession (Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8). It is also the only perfection that can be combined with the other perfections (Henry Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine* p. 34). There is a holy wrath and a holy love, but there cannot be a loving wrath and a wrathful love. We may be able to liken the holiness of God to the light coming into a stained-glass window. The various colors and prisms in the window reflect different perfections in the window, but it is the light which brings out their beauty so clearly. In the same way the holiness of God clarifies or enhances the beauty of His love for sinners, His wrath against sin, His immutability (unchangeableness) of purpose to save His elect people.

According to Henry Krabbendam, it is preferable in the study of God’s attributes to start with God’s revelation of Himself in Scripture and then group several of these attributes together as closely as possible. Before he does so, he makes the point that man attempts to shun the attributes of God which are legitimately transferable to man such as holiness and patience (the communicable attributes), while at the same time attempting to grab those attributes of God which are reserved for God alone such as His all-knowingness or His all-powerfulness (the incommunicable attributes). This is of course due to the fact that man wants to be his own God (Krabbendam, pp. 33-36).

***The following outline is taken from Krabbendam’s Christian Doctrine (unpublished class syllabus), excluding D. The Goodness of God and the Problem of Evil. Numbering and lettering of the outline has been modified. Much of the content of “The Attributes of God”, including some scripture citations, is also taken directly or adapted from Krabbendam, Christian Doctrine, pp. 32-43.***

***A. The Focus upon the Essential Nature of God in Contrast to His Creation (Krabbendam, p. 33) (Incommunicable Attributes)***

### ***1. The Aseity of God***

God is the source of His own life. We discussed aseity with regard to the name Yahweh, “I am who I am.” God is totally independent of all else. He is totally self-contained and self-determined. He does not depend on anything outside of Himself for His own existence, but everything else depends on God for its existence. (John 5:26; Romans 11:33-34; Daniel 4:35; Romans 9:19; Ephesians 1:5; Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 40:18-25; Ps. 50:12; Acts 17:24-25)

### ***2. The Infinity of God***

God has no “boundaries to his being” (Krabbendam, p. 33). Infinity is that perfection of God by which every attribute of his being is without measure or quantity.

**a.** He is infinite in His understanding (Psalm 147:5; Romans 11:33-36).

**b.** He is infinite in regard to time (eternal). God has no ending because He has no beginning. Time for the creature is measured by the celestial bodies of the sun and moon which God made, but God is not subject to time and He, Himself, created time. (Gen. 1; Psalm 90:1-4; 102:25-27; Deut. 33:47; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Tim. 1:17).



c. He is infinite in regard to space. This is known as God's immensity or His omnipresence. He is present in every point of space with His whole being. (1 Kings 8:27; Isaiah 66:1; Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 7:48-49; 17:27-28; Psalm 139:7-10)

### ***3. The Immutability of God***

God cannot change either in His being or His word. God is perfect in every way; therefore, if He changed He would become imperfect (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 102:27; 1 Sam. 15:29; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Some passages seem to indicate a change in God (Jer. 18:7ff; 1 Sam. 15:11; Ex. 32:14). The immutability of God does not mean that there is never any change in God's *relationship* to man, but only that God's *being* doesn't change. As we saw in Exodus 32, God's relationship with Israel changed when Moses became their intercessor or mediator. Sometimes the Bible describes God in human terms in order for us to understand him. In Genesis 6, when the Scripture says that God was sorry He had made man, it doesn't mean God admitted to a mistake by making man, but that God was very grieved at the miserable sinner man had become, even to the point of disgust. This gives us an approximate understanding of what was going on in the mind and heart of God at the time. God speaks with us as with babies because His thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts and His ways higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9).

### ***4. The Incorporeality of God***

God is Spirit and does not have a body like man (John 4:24; Deut. 4:12, 15). God is invisible (John 1:18; 1Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16). It would be inconceivable for God to have a visible form and to continually hide it from us especially since man is so prone to create images of God to "aid" his worship of God. According to Exodus 20 and Deut. 5, any such images are expressly forbidden since the nature and attributes of God do not lend themselves to visible, material expression. All such visible images distort the self-revelation of God because they inevitably fail to depict (picture) God's many attributes. This is evident in the golden calf (or bull) of Ex. 32 which may in some way depict the power of God but not his long-suffering or love. If we want to know who God is and what He is like, we do not need to look for Him in physical form. He has told us what He is like in the Scriptures.

What then are we to make of the passages of Scripture which speak of God as if He had a body? Sight, hearing, and smell are all ascribed to God (Ex. 3:7; 6:5; Lev. 1:9). He speaks of His face and back when Moses asked to see His glory (Ex. 33:23). He saves Israel by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm (Deut. 26:8). All of these references are efforts to describe God in human terms. They are called anthropomorphisms and are not given to us by Scripture writers to imply that God has a body but to express a redemptive activity of God or an attribute of God. Expressions which ascribe to God human emotions are called anthropopathisms.

## ***B. The Focus upon the Essential Nature of God in His Authority over Creation*** ***(Krabbendam, p. 33) (Incommunicable Attributes)***

### ***1. The Supremacy of God in Providence (Omnipotence)***

In our study of Elohim we said that God is the Creator who is separate from and over His creation. God is in control of His creation. He is supreme in His plan, His will, His decisions, His actions, etc. (Krabbendam, p. 33) (Psalm 2; 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Job 23:13-14; Psalm

115:3; 135:6; Proverbs 16:9; 21:1; Daniel 4:35; Isaiah 46:10; 45:7; some citations taken from Krabbendam). This is another way of saying that God is omnipotent or all-powerful.

These verses bring up many questions which are difficult to answer. For example, Proverbs 16:9 says that “The mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps.” Are we to understand that when a murderer decides to take another person’s life, God is still in control of the situation so that the murder takes place exactly as God intended? In Proverbs 21:1 we read that the Lord has sovereign control of a king’s heart and moves it any way He wishes. Does this mean, then, that when Diocletian, the Roman emperor had thousands of Christians mauled to death by wild animals, God was in control of his heart? Was God in control of Idi Amin in his murderous rampage against the citizens of Uganda? We will deal with such questions in more detail later when we study the decreed will and the preceptive will of God. The short answer to these questions is: yes. God is always in control of good and bad situations. If He wasn’t, He would not be God and our eternal destiny would be uncertain since someone (an evil ruler, or the devil himself) could overpower the purposes of God in saving His people. Remember the simplicity of God. He is not God without all of His attributes. We are left with a mystery which none of us can fully understand. Suffice it at this point to say that God’s control of sinful situations is not the same as saying that God is blamable for such sinful actions. God handles sin sinlessly. Evil men plan wicked schemes which God permits, and which God has even ordained before the world began (Ephesians 1:11), but this does not mean God is ever the author of man’s evil (James 1: 13).

It is quite another question to ask whether God causes evil in another sense. What about natural disasters like hurricanes and tsunamis which can kill thousands of people, including small children? God is in control of the weather, too; so how can we reconcile God’s omnipotence with His goodness? We will postpone this question for another time.

## **2. The Supremacy of God in Knowledge (Omniscience)**

There is nothing that God does not know. He is omniscient or all-knowing (Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 139:1-16; John 21:17; Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). Sometimes the knowledge of God in Scripture means intimate love. When we encounter foreknowledge we are to understand this as intimate love in advance (Krabbendam, p. 34). Therefore, in Romans 8:29-30 those whom God loved in advance He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His son (that is, to be made holy like His son). This foreknowledge of God eliminates any hint of God predestinating us on the basis of foreseen merit, works, or value on our part. Just as He did not choose Israel on the basis of merit, He also did not choose us on the basis of merit (Dt. 7: 7; Rom. 9: 11).

Incidentally, the foreknowledge of God rules out anything which is contrary to that foreknowledge. If God knows everything in advance, then whatever is known is certain to happen, otherwise it is not truly known. (To illustrate, if I *know* the roof of this building is going to fall in, then you had better be heading out the door. If it does not fall in, then I did not *know* what I said I knew.) Isaiah 46:10 tells us that God can declare the end from the beginning, which means that He can also declare everything in between the beginning and the end. This knowledge rules out the possibility of things happening by chance. The Bible does not speak of chance but God’s sovereignty by which everything happens according to His will, even when dice are rolled in a gambling game (Proverbs 16:33) or a soldier draws his bow and shoots at random to execute God’s judgment against a wicked king (1 Kings 22:34).

When John says “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1John 1:5), this is a reference to the omniscience of God. Under cover of darkness things are invisible and not noticed. With God everything is visible and in plain view because with Him there is no difference between darkness and light (Psalm 139:11-12).

Although the omniscience of God is an incommunicable attribute, knowledge is communicable. Man is given knowledge by virtue of being created in the image of God. He was created in knowledge, righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Col. 3:10). We learn from Romans 1:19-21 that even fallen man has the knowledge of God from the observation of creation, but this knowledge has become distorted through man's disobedience and ingratitude (Romans 1:21-23). In justification and sanctification, God renews man to a true knowledge, righteousness and holiness which means he is restored progressively to God's original purpose for manhood. The end result of this restoration is glorification in which believers will be finally and comprehensively (completely) transformed to the image of Christ. We will explore this more thoroughly in our study of anthropology—the doctrine of man.

### ***3. The Supremacy of God in Wisdom***

Closely akin to knowledge is wisdom, but there is a difference. There are many intelligent people in this world who are not very wise, and their miserable lives prove it. Wisdom is the best end and the best means for reaching that end (Krabbendam, p. 34). It is the appropriate application of knowledge (Psalm 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Daniel 2:20; Romans 16:27).

God's wisdom is revealed in creation (Proverbs 8:28-30) and in redemption which the Bible says is a new creation (Rom. 11:33; 1Cor. 1:18-31; Eph. 3:10). Paul tells us that the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing. Yet, God has made foolish the so-called wisdom of the world which was not able through its wisdom to come to know God. It was well-pleasing to God and a stroke of perfect wisdom to save His people through the foolishness of preaching the gospel. Christ crucified on a cross is foolishness to cultured Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews, but to those who are effectually called of God it is the power and wisdom of God. In other words, God's "foolishness" is wiser than men's so-called wisdom.

God's wisdom is also revealed in His providential ways with his creatures, particularly humans, who do not always appreciate how God works things out in their lives. The story of Job is a long lesson but a valuable one in which God permits great suffering in Job's life for no particular fault of his own. Job wishes to argue with God that this suffering is not justified. He wants God to prove justifiable cause for His treatment of him (13:3, 15). After God hears all the speeches of Job's friends, most of which miss the whole point, God answers Job in Chapter 38 through 41. In this passage we see the wisdom of God in creation and providence in which He rules and reigns over His creation in a wise and understanding way. In the end God never really justifies His actions in Job's life; He doesn't have to. Job finally gets the point that God works His will out in our lives to accomplish purposes which are incomprehensible to us in order to magnify His own glory. In short we do not have to understand everything that happens to us; we simply have to submit to the wisdom of God in bringing it to pass (Job 23:13-14; 42: 1-6).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that the light coming into a man's eye is comparable to his understanding and perspective on life. When his perspective is bad, and his interpretation of life is wrong, then even the light coming into his eye is nothing but darkness. He does not know how to see things and interpret things properly. Light, therefore, is a metaphor for one's understanding. In God there is no darkness, only light, so God's interpretation about everything is absolutely perfect. We do well, then, to let God interpret life for us rather than coming up with our own interpretation, a mistake which was the ruin of Adam and the whole human race.

The same comment which was made with regard to knowledge can be made with regard to wisdom. The infinite wisdom of God is an incommunicable attribute, but wisdom itself is something God wishes to give to His redeemed humanity. This is why God gives us the

Scriptures, so we can be wise unto salvation, and so we can be wise in our relationships with our fellow man.

***C. The Focus upon the Essential Nature of God in His Interrelationship with Creation (Krabbendam, p. 34) (Communicable Attributes)***

***1. God's Moral Conduct in Relation to His Creation***

***a. Holiness***

The word “holy” or “holiness” in the OT is used in reference to God’s ethical separateness from his creation. His ethical character or holiness is untouched and unmarred by the sin of His creatures. Holiness may be the “hub” of all the other attributes of God or the attribute of attributes (Krabbendam, p. 34). Isaiah 6 and Rev. 4 speak of the Seraphim standing before the throne of God. Revelation mentions four of them, and all day and night they say “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.” This reminds us of the name Yahweh which means, “I am who I am” or “I will be who I will be”. In this sense, the holiness of God is connected to His aseity or His independence. God is exalted infinitely above His creatures in His holiness. There is none like Him and nothing to compare Him to. Holiness is not something God possesses; it is something He is. Holiness is not a standard originating outside of God to which God must conform; it is a perfection of God Himself. This is why God tells His people in Leviticus 11:44 that they are to be holy because He is holy, a commandment which Jesus repeats in Matt. 5: 48 (See also 1 Peter 1: 15-16).

The vision of John in Revelation 4 must have been a wonderful encouragement to believers living at the time John wrote (about 90A.D.) as well as those who would endure the cruelty of Rome in the centuries to come. Though there had been no general persecution of the Church under Nero in 68 A.D., many had been put to death. According to tradition, Peter and Paul had died during this time. John’s revelation could have come during the persecution of Domitian (81-96 A.D.). The persecutions of the church under Trajan (98-117 A.D.), Marcus Aurelius (162 A.D.), Septimus Severus (193-211 A.D.), Maximus the Tracian (235-238 A.D.), and Decius Trajan (249-251 A.D.) were yet to come (Rousas J. Rushdoony, *World History Notes*, pp. 85-87)

The Revelation to John gave Christians the courage to proclaim Jesus as the only Lord in the face of certain death by gladiators and wild beasts. It was a revelation like this of the Lord on His throne who is thrice (three times) holy which gave the young woman Perpetua, who had just given birth to a new baby, the courage to face the executioner on March 7, 203 A.D. As she stood before a lustful Roman crowd, stripped naked and her breasts dripping with milk, her wealthy family members held her new-born child in front of her saying, “Pity your child!” All she had to do was denounce her faith in Jesus as the supreme Lord and declare that Caesar is Lord. Her wealthy family could easily have saved her from execution (Rushdoony, p. 85). She refused to deny her faith because Jesus had said that whoever loved son or daughter, father or mother more than Him was not worthy of Him. Sometimes it is difficult for us, who are not facing persecution, to truly grasp the meaning of such a passage.

The vision of the Lord given to Isaiah likewise left the prophet in awe and terror (Is. 6). There are many preachers and so-called prophets today who are claiming to have visions of God and who expend considerable time, energy, and money on TV boasting about them. Their boasting is in stark contrast to Isaiah’s experience. He said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined!” (v.5). In other words, “I am going to die since no man can see a holy God like this and live!” Then he goes on to say that he is a wretched sinner living among a whole nation of

wretched sinners. Isaiah saw himself in a hopeless predicament. How could his life be spared, and how could he continue as God's prophet in such a sinful state? How could the lives of Israel be spared when God was so unspeakably holy? Again, it is the same problem Martin Luther experienced when he could not understand how God could love him when he was so sinful and God was just and holy. The answer for Isaiah comes in verses 6 and 7 when one of the seraphim (angels) comes to him with a burning coal from the altar and puts the coal to his mouth to purify his lips—an assurance of complete purification and forgiveness. "Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."

Jonathan Edwards, a great American theologian of the 1700's, argued that someone who has not learned to love God for His holiness has not learned to love God (Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 34). Someone who loves God only because God is loving him (perhaps through material blessings or good health) may not be prepared to love God when "God is sharpening the knife of His providence on his bones"—that is, when things are getting tough, when his wife is sick and his children are hungry, or when he loses his job (Henry Krabbendam, *The Epistle of James—Tender Love in Tough Pursuit of Total Holiness*, page unknown). He will be tempted in such a predicament to say, "Why me?" But when a person learns to love God for His holiness alone, he will learn to say in such situations, "Why not me?" (Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 34).

The holiness of God should help us to realize that as sinners we have no just claim on God for any good thing. We are like dead corpses coming out of the grave after our flesh has already started to rot off the bones; worms are crawling out of our ears; and the stench of our death is more than anyone can bear (Krabbendam, p.36). As we emerge from our spiritual graves, the natural reaction of anyone would be horror. God's reaction is mercy and love. He proceeds to put His arms around our rotting corpses and adopts us into His family. Only when we see ourselves as rotting corpses of sinful failure and rebellion against a thrice holy God can we understand that God does not have to justify His actions.

Other passages which can be reviewed are Exodus 15:11; Rev. 15:4; Ps. 89:35; 103:1; 145:17; and Rom. 7:14. As we have said before, holiness is the attribute of attributes in that it provides the hub or center of all the others, the light coming through the stained glass window.

### ***b. Righteousness***

Righteousness and holiness belong together (Eph. 4:23-24), and they are different ways of looking at the same thing. Righteousness is the *practical expression* or outworking of the *inward quality* of holiness. Holiness is the state of being pure while righteousness is doing something in conformity (agreement) with that purity. From the human side our righteousness is practice which is in conformity to the law of God. We may reasonably ask to what law God must be conformed. The answer is that God always acts in conformity to His nature which is holy, and He never does anything inconsistent with the perfection of holiness. Thus, God is not and need not be under any law, not even His own law. God incarnate (Jesus) voluntarily placed Himself under the Law by being born under the Law (under the authority of the Law) and under the curse of the Law against sinners (Gal. 4: 4-5; 3: 13). Now that He is risen to the right hand of God the Father, He is no longer under the Law or its curse.

Perhaps it will help to distinguish various aspects of God's righteousness. First, God establishes a moral government in the world and imposes just laws upon mankind. This is known as the *rectoral justice* of God. This fact is illustrated in the story of Israel and the giving of the Law upon Mt. Sinai. But the moral law of God is applied as well to the Gentiles, although it is not given to them in codified (written as a code) form. In Daniel 4 we

find out that Nebuchadnezzar became insane for seven years because he did not humble himself and give God glory. In Daniel 5, we find that Belshazzar, probably the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, had his kingdom taken away because his rule did not conform to God's standards. He had been weighed in the balance and found wanting (5:27). This essentially ruins the common theory that government leaders don't have to execute justice in accordance with Biblical standards. Most of them don't, but they will one day be judged accordingly, just as Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were judged.

Secondly, there is the righteousness of God in the distribution of rewards to those who keep His moral law. This is known as the *remunerative* justice of God and is illustrated in the blessings pronounced in Deut. 28 and the final reward mentioned in Rom. 2:6-10. See also Psalm 58:11 and Heb. 11:26.

Thirdly there is the *retributive* justice of God which is the righteousness of God in measuring out punishment upon those who violate His law. This is also illustrated in Deut. 28 in the curses pronounced and in Romans 2:6-10 and 2 Thes. 1:8.

Whether He hands out reward or punishment, God will be absolutely fair in all his dealings with men because He is righteous. He is holy, and He cannot do anything in practice contrary to the demands of that holiness (Deut. 32:4). (For further clarification, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 74-75).

### **c. Truth**

God is truthful in His inner being, and this truth finds expression in His word and in all His relationships with people (Deut. 32:4; 1John 5:7; Rom. 3:4). In John 14:6 Jesus said He was "the way, the truth, and the life". He is the only way to get to the Father simply because every other way is a lie. On the night Jesus was betrayed, He stood before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Having been schooled in the philosophical skepticism (doubt) of his day, Pilate questioned the existence of absolute truth (Jn. 18: 38), and failed to recognize that absolute truth was staring him square in the face in the person of Jesus Christ.

Writing over a century ago, Charles Hodge commented prophetically upon the philosophical skepticism which has now run its course in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century European and American culture (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 437).

The truth of God... is the foundation of all religion. It is the ground of our assurance that what He has revealed of Himself and of his will, in his works and in the Scriptures, may be relied upon. He certainly is, and wills, and will do, whatever He has thus made known. It is no less the foundation of all knowledge. That our senses do not deceive us; that consciousness is trustworthy in what it teaches; that anything is what it appears to us to be; that our existence is not a delusive dream, has no other foundation than the truth of God. In this sense, all knowledge is founded on faith, i. e. [that is], the belief that God is true.

Fundamentally, the truth of God is related to His word. "God is true," Hodge says, "because He really is what He declares Himself to be...." We can depend on Him because there is no difference between who He is and what He says about Himself. In the same way, we can trust our senses (sight, touch, smell, hearing) because all the Biblical literature is written with the assumption that God is not deceiving us with sensual perception which isn't real. The world is really what God says it is in His word.

God's promises also cannot fail, and in this sense His name, Yahweh (I AM THAT I AM) is His claim to truth. Speaking to His Father in His high priestly prayer, Jesus said, "Thy word is truth," and He confidently asserted that while heaven and earth as we know it will pass away with time, His words would not pass away (Lk. 21: 33). Thus, as John Murray notes, truth in the Bible is not merely contrasted with that which is false, but that which is temporary (*Principals of Conduct*, p. 123).

It is not without significance that Satan's first temptation directed to man was to doubt the integrity (truthfulness) of God. God had told Adam that on the day he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die (Gen. 2: 17). But Satan countered with, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3: 4-5). Adam's ruin results from his failure to take God at His word, and instead, to believe the "father of lies" (Jn. 8: 44) who dared to call into question (impugn) the truthfulness of God's word. The same failure has now been propagated (reproduced) throughout the history of man who continues to believe Satan rather than God. And once the integrity (truthfulness) of God is questioned, the very foundation of man's integrity is eroded by the torrential rains of relativism (truth changes with time and circumstances).

It was the strategy of skillfully framed and designed attack upon man's integrity by eliciting [drawing out] distrust in the integrity of God. Man's integrity is dissolved when God's veracity [truthfulness] is questioned. The way of integrity for man is unreserved commitment to God, totality [sic] trust in his truthfulness (Murray, p. 126).

Once God's word is questioned, there remains no standard of truth to judge men's words, and the very concept of truth becomes a wishful myth. It is not surprising that business transactions in America which were once commonly conducted by a simple handshake in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are now complicated with legal language which only lawyers can translate. Truth has given way to legality which can be supported in a court of law not necessarily according to what is true, but according to legal precedent or history. Since there is no belief in the possibility of absolute truth, truth is defined pragmatically (practically) as "what works"—that is, what brings the best results to me as an individual.

As the foundation of truth erodes throughout a society, the fabric of that society erodes with it. Society cannot last without the institution of marriage, and marriage cannot last without truth. Unfaithfulness in marriage is nothing less than a breach of contract to be faithful to one person until death. Adultery, therefore, is a lie. The infrequency of divorce in Uganda is not necessarily an optimistic indicator of marital strength since the AIDS epidemic is horrific (horrifying) evidence that marital faithfulness (and truthfulness) is lacking.

Justice cannot be served without truth in the courts, and judges who distort the truth by taking bribes destroy the people's confidence in getting a fair verdict. When bribery is commonplace, it destroys the incentive of creative entrepreneurs (businessmen) to invest capital (money) in risky ventures which may be stolen through fraud. Land contracts can mean nothing in a culture where land titles are commonly falsified and stolen through manipulation of the legal system. A corrupt legal and business climate is also barren ground for the cultivation of economic prosperity which can only come with the investment of private capital and a strong confidence in private ownership. Governmental corruption—another name for lying—is also the reason that billions of dollars of foreign aid to Uganda and other African countries has not benefited the common citizen. Foreign aid has been siphoned off by political leaders to foreign bank accounts and to purchase expensive cars and property both inside the country and abroad.

Furthermore, a legal system which is ignorant of and indifferent to Biblical law cannot hope to distinguish between right and wrong. This is blatantly evident from the consistently pro-death rulings of the US Supreme Court since *Roe vs. Wade* (1973) and the legalization of abortion since. Exodus 21: 22-23 mandates the death penalty even for accidental abortion, but a legal system which ignores Biblical law has no standard but social convention. The Ugandan court system has imitated the relativism of the US courts by granting amnesty to many military generals who have perpetrated (committed) the atrocities of northern Uganda. The result in Uganda and America is lack of trust in the ability of the judicial system and the

highest courts of the land to administer justice according to truth. In Uganda this lack of trust has manifested itself in the anarchy of mob justice measured out to thieves who are caught in the act and executed. Just recently in Kampala, an accused thief was murdered by a mob for stealing a cell phone. In America frustration over the inability to stop abortion legally has resulted in the very highly publicized case of Paul Hill, a professing Christian, who murdered an abortion doctor and his body guard. He was recently executed in prison for his crime. Such frustration is understandable, although the activity of such frustrated people is inexcusable.

It goes without saying that education cannot exist without truth for there is no foundation or reason for studied research if the goal of truth in the sciences and other disciplines is unattainable. Educational credentials are also bogus (fraudulent) if degrees are not earned honestly but are attained through cheating or bribes. In a society where fraud is commonplace on the campus, the critically ill patient coming under the surgeon's knife may legitimately wonder whether his doctor has obtained medical credentials through diligent study or through fraud.

All truth is God's truth, and truth is possible in society because God has given us the direction to truth in His word. Biblical study is, therefore, the queen of all the sciences because the Bible lays the foundation upon which all other truth can be known. This is implied in 2 Cor. 10: 5. "We are destroying speculations [reasoning based on human opinions] and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." "Every thought" may include every thought about science, technology, history, medicine, and every other discipline on earth since God created all knowledge, and no knowledge is possible without the revelation of God.

#### **d. Wrath**

This is the anger of God in the exercise of His justice against sin and unbelief (Psalm 90:11; 95:8-11; Deut. 32:43; Heb. 3:11; Eph. 5:5-6; Rom. 1: 18). Given the existence of sin in the world, wrath is an essential part of His *retributive* justice. We can see from this attribute that God is not without emotion. He is justifiably angry that men will not do as He requires, especially when obedience is in their best interest. He becomes even angrier when those who hear the immeasurably gracious offer of the gospel refuse that offer (Heb. 12: 25). No one enjoys being insulted, especially God; thus, when God measures out the justice due the wicked, He will not do so as a passionless executioner, but as a Holy God who is personally offended (Luke 20:9-18).

We may ask, is this a *communicable* attribute? Does God wish us to have wrath? It all depends on what we mean. Paul tells us to put away all wrath and anger (Eph. 4:31), and James tells us that the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Yet, Paul in the same fourth chapter of Ephesians tells us, "Be angry, and yet do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your anger (vs. 26)." If being angry at *any* time was a sin, Paul would have said so. Instead, he tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger or not to let anger consume us or control us, in which case, we have sinned. Anger is a natural, emotional reaction to what we perceive to be an injustice. Sometimes we have been ill-treated and are justifiably angry, and at other times we only imagine we have been ill-treated. Either way, we react the same way; we get angry. Paul tells us in such cases not to take revenge but to leave room for the wrath of God. God is better at bringing justice than we are.

Particularly we are to avoid prolonged wrath and anger which is the result of injustice done to us personally. Most of our anger is selfish and not the result of our zeal for God's honor. In contrast to our selfish anger is the wrath of our Lord Jesus when he cleansed the temple on



two different occasions. One of those is recorded in John 2:12-16. On that occasion He paused and made a whip to drive out the money changers who were taking advantage of those buying animals for sacrifice. Jesus' anger was not the result of taking personal offense at the money changers, even though He could have done so since He was God. His wrath was the result of His zeal for His Father's house or the honor of God. Jesus was legitimately angry because God's honor was violated. As children of God we have the right and the duty to become angry when God's honor is violated; there is something wrong with us if we do *not* become angry with sin and injustice in the world. We may even become involved in legitimate efforts to minimize such injustices. It has been said before that the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men (or good women) to do nothing. Great evils have been fought by a single individual who became angry enough to do something about human injustice and willful denial of God's truth (Remember Martin Luther who pitied the masses of common people being led astray by their own church leaders.) Much of the injustice in the world is tolerated by "good" men who have insufficient anger. It is questionable whether those who do not hate sin can truly love goodness. God demonstrates His goodness through His wrath against sin, and so should we.

This kind of wrath is a communicable attribute coming from a holy God who hates injustice and falsehood. He has even inspired the writers of Scripture to give us examples of such wrath in the Psalms. These are called *imprecatory Psalms* (Ps. 139:21-22; 119:104, 128, 163; 129:5; 3:7; 58:1-11). Care must be taken how we apply these Psalms in the New Covenant. We engage in "holy warfare" not with human weapons but with spiritual weapons (Eph. 6). It is righteous to pray for the destruction of the wicked, but our preferred means of their destruction is conversion, not execution. Every wicked sinner who repents is destroyed by being crucified with Christ. He is made into a new person by being resurrected with Christ to newness of life, in which case he is not the same man he was; the old man has been destroyed through crucifixion. No human being is so wicked that he is beyond the hope of the gospel, even Joseph Kony, leader of the LRA. It is preferred that we pray for his conversion to Christ and his willingness to be executed for his crimes against the thousands in northern Uganda. We may also pray that if God is unwilling to change his heart that He will have him killed in battle or assassinated by his own men as a just punishment for his crimes. We should be angry because of the atrocities in north Uganda. To be indifferent is a sin.

The following verses on the wrath of God should also be consulted: Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1Thes. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; Rev. 6:16, 17; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15. After reading all these verses, would anyone doubt that God is angry?

If there is any doubt, we need only to look to the cross of Christ where God exhibited His wrath against sin by putting His only begotten son to death. The horrors of the crucifixion as well as the torture of Christ which came before the crucifixion have been realistically depicted in a recent film produced by Mel Gibson, "The Passion." After a severe scourging, Christ was barely recognizable and covered with His own blood. The whip used to flog Him was made of leather straps with sharp bone fragments tied to the end. As the whip came off His back, flesh was ripped off his body, possibly exposing some of His bones. Crucifixion itself was a slow and excruciating death ending in the dislocation of shoulders and suffocation.

Anyone hoping to be excused for his rebellion against God is confronted with the horror of the crucifixion in which God turned His back to Christ. Christ Himself recognized the Father's rejection and cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27: 46) Hell itself, repeatedly described as a place of "outer darkness", a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 24: 51), is the unspeakable and ultimate manifestation of the wrath of God which burns infinitely and indefinitely against the idolatry of man who demands to be

his own god. Hell is unspeakable because it is incomprehensible to mortal minds that God's wrath is so immeasurable that He would punish men eternally.

## **2. God's Goodness to His Creation**

### **a. Liberality**

God bountifully provides for His creatures (Psalm 145:7, 9, 15-16). The purpose of God's kindness is to lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). His means of showing kindness is through nature (Matt. 5:45) and through the kindness shown by others who share his image (Matt. 5:43-48). Every kindness shown to man is the reflection of the liberality of God to His creatures. Failure to imitate God's kindness indicates that we are neither His adopted sons nor His sheep (Matt. 5:45; 25:31-46). Take note of the fact that the judgment of the righteous and the wicked in Matt. 25 is not grounded upon what they professed, but what they did or didn't do. Faith without works is dead (James 2: 17).

### **b. Mercy**

When man fell in the garden, his sin started a downward spiral of moral failure which resulted in the miserable condition of the whole human race. Sin is the reason we have wars, famine, disease, poverty, and natural disasters. (We will discuss the age-old problem of evil below, but if anyone wonders why we experience natural disasters like hurricanes, drought, tsunamis, and earthquakes, I would reply that the biggest wonder is not that these disasters happen, but that they do not happen more often given the sinfulness of man.)

Mercy is God's goodness in relieving man of the miseries of this life, all of which are the result of the entrance of sin into the world. The following verses should be consulted: Heb. 4:16; Luke 18:13; Ps. 57:10; 103:17; Ex. 33:19. A Biblical illustration may help. When Jesus was preaching in Galilee (Matt. 9:35-10:1), He looked out among the multitudes and felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Upon seeing this pitiful sight, He then instructed the disciples that the harvest was plentiful but there were too few workers to gather it. Then he told them to pray that God would send out more workers for this harvest. Mercy is not simply pity. Very often we see heart-wrenching examples of human misery, and we do nothing about it. We may see a lame man begging on the side of the street and feel great pity for him but clutch our wallets very tightly. Such pity does no good to anyone (James 2: 15-16). Jesus did more than pity the masses; He tells the disciples to join Him in prayer so that their distress could be relieved. But He also does more than just pray about the problem; He sends his twelve disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons (10:1). Mercy, then, is pity plus action.

Another story which demonstrates mercy (pity plus action) is the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37. The Samaritans were literally hated by the Jews because they were half Jew and half Gentile, the result of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles in Palestine, something forbidden in the Law because of the influences of paganism. Jesus teaches this parable to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (10:25-29), but it serves our purposes here. The beaten traveler left beside the road for dead was by-passed by his Jewish kinsmen, one a priest and, another, a Levite (not a priest but one who had temple duties). Both of these men should have known something about mercy, but in the interest of saving their own skin and not being inconvenienced, they passed by the man. Then along comes a Samaritan, who knew that on any other day the Jewish traveler would despise him. He shows mercy to the beaten man by bandaging his wounds and putting him in an inn at his own expense. Jesus asks, "Who then is the neighbor?" The answer is obvious—the one who showed mercy on the beaten man, the one who not only pitied the man but took action to save his life.

This is how God shows mercy to us, who are dead in sin and unable to deliver ourselves from our miserable condition even to understand it. God pities us and takes action by sending His Son into the world to die for our sin and then sends the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand what His Son did. He also sends Christians out into the world to share the good news with others, to feed the hungry, heal the sick, and generally to improve the lives of millions through the mercy and love of Jesus Christ. Mercy is not merely feeling sorry for people, but taking action to relieve their suffering.

### *c. Love*

Love and mercy go hand in hand, because love is the source of mercy. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son...” Had God not loved the world, He would not have shown such mercy. This appears to be the meaning of Ephesians 2:4, in which mercy is the result of the great love with which God loved us.

Two Hebrew words are translated *love*. One is found in Deut. 7:7 and is the word *chashaq* which means *to be attached to or to cleave to, to delight in*. It is the bond of fellowship which in Deut. 7:7 God establishes between Himself and Israel. The second word is *ahab* which means *to breathe after, to long for or desire strongly*. It is found in Deut. 7:13 and also describes the way we should love God (Deut. 6:5). Putting these two terms together, we understand that love is a desire to be united with the one loved and a delight when that union is accomplished (Krabbendam, p. 35). We can see, then, that the love of God for us, which includes the elements of delight and strong desire, is similar to the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man. If a man truly loves a woman, he does not see her only as the object of his sexual gratification. Within marriage such sexual gratification is both good and necessary, but much more is implied in true love. If he really loves her, he wants to spend the rest of his life with her, and he wants to be joined to her in marriage and to cherish her the rest of his life. Before this union is fulfilled in marriage, he is somewhat impatient that he cannot spend almost all his time with her, because he delights in her presence with him. This is the love of God for His people, which includes not only action but emotion. God’s love is not distant. He wants to be with us and us with Him, and He will not be satisfied until that love is ultimately fulfilled in the presence of all his people with Him in the new heavens and new earth. This is also the kind of love we should have for God (Deut. 6:5). Until the day of consummation, death for the believer is the only means of realizing the ultimate presence of God (See Ps. 116: 15; 2 Cor. 5: 6; Phil. 1: 21-23).

In the NT, the word most commonly used for God’s love is *agapao* and is the word used in John 3:16. The noun, *agape*, is found in 1Cor. 13, quite possibly the most complete description of Biblical love found in the Bible. The kind of love God demonstrates in giving His son (John 3:16) is the same kind of love described in 1Cor. 13, so we do well to pay careful attention to this description. In the first three verses of the chapter, Paul tells us that without this *agape* love, we are nothing. This is so even if we claim great achievements for ourselves: speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy, great knowledge, strong faith and generosity. One can even die as a martyr and still fail to have the kind of love Paul is talking about in this chapter. (One may die as martyr not out of love for God but to achieve fame for himself.)

Beginning in verse 4, Paul begins to give us a description of the love that God has for us and the love we ought to have for one another. Throughout the passage love is personified or treated as if it was a person. Love is patient—it endures the ill treatment of others and does not easily give up on people. Love causes us even to be kind to those who treat us poorly (Matt. 5:43-48) and does not seek revenge (Rom.12:14-21). Love is not jealous of the success of others, but rejoices in their success. Love is not boastful or arrogant—love is not concerned with exalting itself or drawing attention to itself. It is not interested in the praise of Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com—July, 2012

men. It is not prideful or interested in being served by others, but in serving others (Phil. 2:3-8).

Love does not act in an unbecoming way toward others; that is, it does nothing of which it ought to be ashamed. It does not act disgracefully, dishonorably, or indecently; and in keeping with this, love does not seek its own or exploit other people for its own ends. It does not use people to get something out of them. Instead, love is always on the giving end of things, seeking whom it may bless and help. It is not easily provoked meaning that love is not “touchy” or easily offended by the mistakes of others, but is willing to overlook many grievances (1Pet 4:8). The very next statement is that “love does not take into account a wrong suffered” meaning that it does not keep ongoing records of the wrongs it has suffered from other people so as to hold them accountable in the future. Rather, it is forgiving.

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness but only in the truth. This means that love does not enjoy hearing about the moral failures of others as a means of feeling superior to others and rationalizing its own failures. (It does not enjoy gossip.) Love only rejoices when it hears about the moral successes of others which are consistent with the teachings of the Word of God. This is why rejoicing in unrighteousness is contrasted with rejoicing in the truth, the moral truth of the Bible. Truth in the Bible always has a moral element which is why the purpose of knowledge is not the stimulation of the intellect, but godly behavior (1 Tim. 1: 5).

In verse 7, love bears all things, or it could be translated “covers” all things. This could mean that love bears or suffers in silence the ill treatment of others without airing its grievances in public. It does not make a public show of someone’s sins against it, but endures this sin quietly. The following statement reinforces the idea of enduring injustice quietly: “love believes all things.” It is always ready to extend to the wrongdoer credit for difficult circumstances which may have led to his wrongdoing. This does not imply that love is gullible and believes anything and everything it is told; only that it always gives the benefit of the doubt. (A person is innocent unless proven guilty, and even if guilty, his difficult circumstances may have contributed to his fall.) In short, love attempts to believe the best in people, not the worst. Following this idea, Paul says that love hopes all things or is optimistic about people rather than pessimistic. It has an unbounded faith and optimism about the power and grace of God to change people. With this hope it never gives up on people but confidently waits on the grace of God. (This does not mean that love is naive in the face of obvious and persistent impenitence.)

Love endures all things which has a slightly different meaning from enduring the ill treatment of others found in the word “patient” (v. 4). Another word is used which means to endure difficult circumstances. It is a military word with the idea of enduring the assaults of an enemy and is used here with reference to enduring suffering and persecution (see 2 Tim. 2:10). Love not only is patient with particular persons, but with the suffering and persecution which comes generally from a fallen humanity bent on pleasing itself at the expense of others.

Finally, love never fails. It is not designed or adapted only to our present state of existence as are the spiritual gifts of prophecy or knowledge. These gifts are only partial and incomplete until the “perfect comes” (most likely the second coming of Christ). Love will never become outdated or obsolete in the greater scheme of things in God’s ultimate plan for His elect humanity. The love which has been eternally expressed in the Trinitarian love of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit for one another and for His creation will continue to be expressed in the new humanity created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:17).

The chapter should make all of us extremely uncomfortable. Who can love like this? Only God can, but we are supposed to. Knox Chamblin notes the staggering requirements of this chapter in *Paul and the Self: Apostolic Teaching for Personal Wholeness*, pp. 216-217).

For most of us, the love portrayed here is an aspiration [something hoped for] rather than an experience. The appeal of these verses is like that of a lofty mountain. We stand in silent awe before its majesty and long to scale its heights, but then we realize how earthbound we are and how ill-equipped to climb. We know the shape of love; but we also know ourselves and how far short of the actuality we fall. Love itself “never fails” (13: 8), but we do, and often.

Significantly, love itself sits for this portrait. Paul does not say that “Christians suffer long and are kind,” or that “believers do not envy and do not boast.” It makes sense to replace “love” with “Jesus”: “Jesus was not proud or rude or self-seeking or easily angered.” But when we substitute our own names, we can hardly speak the words; we hold our tongues for shame. We are aware of persons from whom we are alienated, toward whom we feel envy and resentment, whose wrongs toward us we keep recorded with a view to getting even. “We know in part, we prophesy in part”—and we also love in part. It is far easier to write about love than to put it into action.

Another thing which should be noted is that the love of God is freely given and is not given because of any external necessity upon God. God was not forced to love us because of external circumstances which were imposed upon Him or because He saw something lovable in us. He loves us simply because He is love (1 John 4: 8, 16). Our love for God is different in that God has given us every reason to love Him. While God loved us in spite of ourselves as sinners (Romans 5:8), we love God because He first loved us and gave His son as a sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4: 10, 19). Horizontally, we may love others the way God loved us, unconditionally without strings attached. After all, He has commanded us to love our enemies who have no just claim on our love (Matt. 5: 44). Especially, we should love our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we are united together in the same body (1 John 4:11; John 15:12; Gal. 6:9-10).

Biblical love for one another is the defining characteristic of true Christians which identifies them as being the disciples (learners) of Jesus Christ. Our knowledge of the Bible need not be flawless, but what we do know must express itself in a genuine love for all people, especially other Christians (John 13:35). Lack of love means that we have not learned enough of Jesus, and a serious deficiency in love means that we are not true believers. If we cannot love our brother standing right in front of us, how can we say we love God whom we have never seen (1John 4:20). The entire letter of 1 John is an excellent place to begin in any study of the love of God for us and our love for God and others.

#### *d. Grace*

If mercy is the goodness of God in relieving the misery of fallen sinners, grace is the goodness of God in granting favor to sinners who deserve the very opposite of His goodness. A classic text on grace is found in Ephesians 2:1-10. Having said in verse 1 that we were dead in sin, Paul goes on to describe what that means. We were under bondage to Satan (vs.2) and to the sinful lusts of the flesh (vs. 3) and were children of wrath (vs. 3). In other words there was nothing about any of us which deserved the love of God. Everything we *did* and everything we *were* deserved just the opposite of his love, which is His wrath.

The phrase in verse 4, “but God”, is one of the most amazing statements in the Bible. The condition of wretched sinners (vv. 1-3) ruled out the likelihood of any goodness coming from God’s direction, and nothing but His wrath should have been expected. “*But* [instead of wrath] God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ...” Then in a parenthesis Paul says, “(by grace you have been saved)...” as if to indicate that the very definition of grace is found in the previous five verses. He repeats it again in verse 8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Even the faith necessary to believe is itself a gift. Anything given on the basis of merit is a wage, not a gift. But the Bible says salvation is a gift, not a wage, which rules out the possibility of salvation being earned on the basis of merit (Rom. 4: 4-5).

Salvation is by grace from beginning to end with even the requirements of repentance and faith being sovereignly and graciously provided. As Augustine once said, “God give me what you require, and require what you will.” He recognized that we have nothing to give God, even repentance and faith, unless they are first provided by God’s hand.

Before we leave this subject, we must distinguish between *special grace* and *common grace*. Special grace has been described above and is God’s redeeming grace to elect sinners. Does God demonstrate grace to those who are never saved? The answer is: yes. We have already seen that God is good to all His creatures by giving them sunshine and rain and food in due season (Matt. 5:45; Psalm 145:15). The very air that men breathe is the gift of God’s grace since sinful, rebellious man has no claim on anything from God. Common grace must be seen within the scope of God’s special grace to His elect. Without God’s purpose to save every one of His elect (2 Pet. 3:9), He would come with a quick and decisive judgment upon mankind (Rev.6:1-11). Thus, the wicked are preserved in this world only through God’s patience toward His elect.

It is also common grace which operates as a “restraining order” upon sinners to keep sinners from being as outwardly wicked as they would be otherwise. Not everyone is a murderer, thief, rapist, adulterer, etc. in outward practice. Were it not for God’s common grace, there would be no hindrance to man’s sinful appetites and capabilities, and life on earth would be hell. All of man’s “goodness” is the result of God’s common grace working in his life and conforming him at least outwardly to the law of God. This is why it is often difficult to discern the difference between a true Christian who is one inwardly and an unbeliever who lives and governs his life similarly to a Christian. He may be faithful to his wife, respected in the community, generous to the poor, and so on. Inwardly, he is full of dead men’s bones. This was Jesus’ characterization of the Pharisees, who could see through their outward righteousness to a heart alienated against God (Matt. 23: 27).

In Romans 2:14-15, we learn that even unbelievers have the work of the Law of God written on their hearts in the sense that even unbelievers have a conscience which is pricked or wounded whenever they do something they believe is wrong. Many unbelievers have a very sensitive conscience especially if they live in a culture which is strongly influenced by the Christian faith. This sensitivity to the law of God, or conscience, has its source in common grace. It is not saving grace and will not give the sinner new life as will special grace which brings the spiritually dead to life. Basically, common grace is “the embalming fluid” (Krabbandam, p. 36) which keeps the dead corpse from stinking so bad until it is buried. All sinners stink. Even redeemed sinners stink. Some sinners stink worse than others, but God applies the embalming fluid of His common grace upon unredeemed sinners so they do not stink (or sin) as much as they would otherwise.

Civil government in any society is a measure of common grace in that civil government is given to restrain the evil done by extreme members of society (Rom. 13). Furthermore, any kind of civic or social organization which accomplishes any social good demonstrates common grace. Relief agencies such as the Red Cross, Food for the Hungry, etc. whether or not they are led by Christians, are the blessings of God’s common grace operating in a fallen world and making it better than it would be if these agencies did not exist. As we said earlier, common grace must be understood within the scope of special grace since there would be no common grace without special grace given to God’s people. Christians make the earth habitable for everyone else not only because they act as salt and light in the world, but because God blesses the world and preserves it on their account.

Common grace is also the explanation for the wonderful gifts of intellect, creativity, and ingenuity given to mankind. Great advances in science and technology have resulted from the research of men who do not even acknowledge the existence of God, much less worship Him. It is ironic that the kindness of God which should lead to repentance (Romans 2:4) is actually used by man to build his own empire in defiance of God. The descendents of Cain, who killed his brother Abel, appear to be more culturally advanced than the descendents of Seth, the godly line who replaced Abel. They were the first to build cities, practice animal husbandry, and develop musical instruments (Gen. 4: 20-22).

The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) was built by people who knew how to put stones together with mortar. They were culturally advanced, but they used their technology to “make a name for themselves” so that they would no longer be under God’s sovereignty (11:4). Every advance in science, technology, art, or even medicine without Christ becomes a hindrance to man’s repentance for the simple reason that such progress fosters pride. Man comes to the conclusion that he no longer needs God when he can achieve so much without Him. He concludes wrongly that all his achievements are accomplished independently of God, not knowing that God only lets him succeed in order to bless His elect people and to glorify Himself. Just as the wealth of the wicked is stored up for the righteous, so the wealth of the world’s technology is reserved for the enjoyment of the righteous (Prov. 13:22b). It all came from God’s mind in the first place, and it will return to God as praise. When the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, they lived in houses they did not build, drank from wells they did not dig and ate grapes from vineyards they did not plant. The wealth of the whole land was waiting for them (Deut. 6:10-11). So it will be at the end of the age when the meek inherit the earth (Matt. 5: 5).

#### *e. Patience*

This is God’s goodness in delaying the punishment of unrepentant sinners (Krabbendam, p. 36). We may wonder why God waits so long in bringing the world to judgment, given the wretched state of mankind. However, if we could see world history in a glance like God can, we would realize that the world is no worse now than it has been in the past. As a matter of fact, it is better today because of the influence of the gospel. God has exercised tremendous restraint in delaying His judgment of the world. When he appeared to Noah the whole earth was filled with violence, but He waited 120 years before He sent a world-wide flood (Gen. 6: 3, 10). There has never been a world-wide catastrophe since then, only localized catastrophes which remind us that judgment is still coming upon the unrighteous. When that will occur we do not know, but we do know that God’s patience is for the purpose of gathering His elect people from all over the earth and from different periods of time (2 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 24:31; Luke 13:27).

In Col. 3:12-13 we find that the patience of God is a model for our patience with others (the “pattern”, Krabbendam, p. 36). Just as God forgave us, we should be forgiving of other people. Those who are forgiven will be forgiving people. Those who are unwilling to forgive others prove that they have never been forgiven (Matt.18:21-35).

#### *f. Faithfulness*

This is the goodness of God in keeping His promises and dealing with man in a predictable way (Krabbendam, p. 36). The following passages should be consulted: Deut. 7:9; Lamentations 3:22-23; Heb. 10:22-23; 6:10; 1 Thes. 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 2:13.

The story that should come to mind is the story of God’s appearance to Moses in the wilderness in Ex. 3 in which God gives himself the name Yahweh as an indication that He had not forgotten the nation of Israel even after 430 years. He was the God of Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob and He had never forgotten the promises He had made to them. A woman could more easily forget her nursing child than God could forget His people, even when they are in a state of rebellion (Isa. 49:15).

Church history can help us to understand God's faithfulness. During all the years of corruption in the Church when church offices were being sold for money, some popes and bishops were living immoral lives, and money was being stolen from the ignorant and poor through the sale of indulgences (tickets to get out of purgatory), God was faithfully preserving for Himself a remnant of believers who would declare the truth of the gospel and hand it down to generations of Christians. Were it not for His faithfulness, the Church would have been lost centuries ago, and you and I would also be lost. Yet God was simply keeping His word to Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed, including Ugandans and Americans. Following this line of thinking, the study of covenant theology is a long case study in the faithfulness of God. We can count on God to do everything He said He was going to do and more (Eph. 3:20).

#### ***D. The Goodness of God and the Problem of Evil***

If God is good, then why does evil exist? Some people attempt to get God off the hook by claiming that God is good and wishes to eliminate evil, but He is not able to do so. This is the position taken by an American Jewish Rabbi, Harold Kushner, who wrote a book entitled, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. In his analysis of the book of Job, whom God called a righteous man, Kushner claims that although God sympathized with Job's suffering and wanted to do something about it, He couldn't. This of course gets God "off the hook". He is a good God, and apparently Kushner preferred a good God to one who was all-powerful, but not good enough to remove the existence of evil.

Yet, we should take inventory of the price Kushner pays for a good God. This God is also powerless just like we are who often find ourselves, our friends, and our families in the midst of terrible suffering, but we simply cannot do a thing about it. But who really wants a God like that? If God is powerless, or even if He is not all-powerful, what *good* is His *goodness*? In times of distress, we should rather seek the help of someone who may not be a good person but who is able to help us. Better to be on the surgery table with a doctor who is competent than one who is only compassionate and has "good bed-side manners."

On the other hand, if we take the position that God is good *and* all-powerful, we are forced to deal with the question of *why* there is so much evil in the world. If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He stop it? We will not presume to answer a question like this when hundreds of years of theological scholarship have not been able to solve this mystery, but the following theories will be presented.

#### ***1. Best-Possible-World Explanation of Evil***

One attempt to answer to the problem of evil was that of the philosopher, G. W. Leibniz, who reasoned that this is the best of all possible worlds (John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 157-159). Christian theologians have used this argument, as does Krabbendam (*Christian Doctrine*, audio section), and there is certainly some merit in the argument.

The argument goes something like this: If the purpose of God in creation and the fall of man (including man's miserable condition) is to reveal the perfection of His being, then a fallen, evil world is the best means (perfect means?) of doing so. God's being consists in His attributes or perfections including His infinity, His power, His immensity, His omnipresence, omniscience, etc. (that is, all His incommunicable attributes) plus His love, patience, mercy, wrath, holiness, etc. (that is, all His communicable attributes). We have also noted that holiness may be the hub of all the other attributes. We may ask: How could God demonstrate



all His perfections in a sinless world? How could He demonstrate mercy without His wrath and judgment against sin? How could He demonstrate His power over mankind without rebellious sinners (Rom. 9: 17)? How could He demonstrate His compassion for the hungry without poverty? How could He manifest His holiness without the unspeakable sinfulness of mankind?

However, John Frame has questioned the logic of this solution (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 158).

But does a perfect world logically require the existence of evil? God himself is perfect, but there is no evil in him. And, according to Scripture, the original creation contained no evil (Gen. 1: 31). Was it imperfect for that reason? The consummate new heavens and new earth—that is, the ultimate perfection of the created order—will also be without evil (Rev. 21: 1-8). As for the earlier example, suffering may be necessary for the exhibition of compassion, but it is not necessary for the existence of compassion in a person. God has always been compassionate, even when there was no one for him to show compassion to.

Frame continues his rebuttal by saying that God did not create only perfect beings in the original creation. Adam was sinless but not perfect: (1) because he was alone and God said that this was “not good” and, (2) because he was “untested” and had the potential (possibility) for sin. In heaven, God’s image-bearers will not have the potential for sin, and this is undoubtedly an improvement over Adam’s condition. Obviously then, the new heavens and earth occupied only by believers who cannot sin is a better world than one with fallen sinners and angels. Therefore, the world we live in is not the best of all possible worlds that God could have created. A better world without sin and misery is waiting for us. Earlier in his argument, Frame observes,

Why should the display of God’s power and good name require the employment of that which is totally opposed to everything that God is? Cannot God display his power without contradicting his goodness? Cannot God display his name without making little babies suffer pain? How can a good God, through his wise foreordination, make someone to be evil, even when that God hates evil with all of his being? How can he do that, even to display himself (p. 152)?

## **2. Free-Will Explanation of Evil (Frame, pp. 159-163)**

Another argument for the existence of evil is that of free will. Evil exists because evil is the rational choice of Satan and mankind. This free choice, it is maintained, is in no sense determined or under the control of God, and He cannot be held accountable for something He has no control over. We will discuss free will later in our study of anthropology. For now, it is sufficient to say that the Bible does teach that man makes real choices in life. Adam, who was not created a fallen sinner, was able to make the choice between good and evil. For a time (how long a time we do not know) he chose the good which is defined as what God said was good. Then Adam chose evil—defined as that which God said was evil.

After this free choice, although man was still in the image of God, he was no longer able to choose between good and evil apart from the inward work of God’s grace. Romans 8: 8 explains that unbelievers (“those who are in the flesh”) are not able to please God. They hate the true God (8: 7) which implies that everything they do is sin—even their prayers and sacrifices (Prov. 15: 8; 28: 9; see also Jer. 13: 28) since the “god” they pray to or sacrifice to is a god of their own making and not the true God. Sinful men still make real choices, but the choices are no longer between good and evil, but between one form of evil and another (Rom. 3: 10-18). The Bible teaches that God looks at more than the outward act when judging men’s deeds. He also looks at the heart to see whether their motives are pure. Even when the deed is outwardly good, it may have been done for the wrong reasons, rendering the supposedly “good” deed an evil deed (Prov. 16: 2). To sum up the problem, unbelievers can’t do anything which pleases God, thus, they are not “free” to make good choices, only bad ones. The only freedom the Bible knows is freedom from sin (Jn. 8: 32).

But aside from this misunderstanding of freedom, theologians who use the free-will defense for the problem of evil fail to account for the multiplied passages in Scripture which clearly establish the sovereignty of God rather than the sovereignty of man. Even man's sinful, rational choices are ordained by God. Sinful men make plans, but it God who directs his every move to accomplish His sovereign plan (Prov. 16: 9). Pharaoh determined at one point to let the Israelites depart from Egypt, but the Lord hardened his heart so that He could display His sovereign power as superior to the false gods of Egypt (Ex. 14: 4; Rom. 9: 17). The Bible says that "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21: 1). In the case of Pharaoh, God turned the heart toward the evil of not letting Israel go in order to accomplish the higher purpose of displaying His glory to all the nations.

One would also think that the very worst choice a man could make is to crucify the Son of God on a cross. If God could fail to have any control over man's choices, it would be this choice. Yet we find that even this ultimate of wicked choices was pre-determined by God (Acts 2: 23). It should be noted in this verse that man is responsible for his choices and actions even though they are determined beforehand by God. He does not escape responsibility because of God's sovereignty, something which the Apostle Paul strictly reinforces in Romans 9: 19-20: "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" The sinful choices which men make, though controlled by God, are clearly not made because man is voluntarily yielding to His control. Their evil choices are borne out of their evil hearts, and God is not to be blamed for them. Pharaoh chose to keep Israel as his slaves, and Israel chose not to believe the promises of God in the Abrahamic Covenant. Faith is a gift of God, and God sovereignly chose to withhold that faith from Pharaoh and from Israel (Eph. 2: 8).

But it is significant, as Frame notes, that Paul does not in Rom. 9 present the ultimate reason for the division of the human race between believing and unbelieving as human choice, but in God's free choice in election (Rom. 9: 11). Human choice is never given in Scripture as the answer to evil.

### ***3. Character-Building Explanation of Evil (Frame, pp. 163-164)***

This explanation was used by the church father, Irenaeus, who said that evil exists in the world in order to build godly character in people. Man was created in a state of moral immaturity which required a certain measure of pain and suffering to correct. It is true that suffering builds character, and that even Jesus, the God-man, "learned obedience through the things He suffered" (Heb. 5: 8), but the theory has certain serious flaws.

Adam was not created in an immature state, and there is nothing in the Scriptures that indicates the need for suffering in his life to produce moral maturity. He was created morally good and would not have had to suffer had he not sinned. It is also an undisputed fact that many sinners suffer who never come to repentance or moral reform. Far from building character, suffering makes them more sinful and more bitter—a sad fact of the history of humanity. Thirdly, Frame argues, the complete sanctification of the believer in heaven will not take place through suffering, as the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory maintains, but through God's gift of grace.

### ***4. The Indirect-Cause Explanation of Evil (Frame, pp. 165-166).***

This one is commonly used by Reformed theologians, including Gordon Clark. The argument presents God as the indirect cause of evil but not the direct cause. God is the ultimate cause of murder, but He is not the one who directly sticks the knife into the victim's heart. His plan for the universe included evil, but Satan, not God, tempted Eve to sin (James 1: 13). God

planned for me to write these notes on Systematic Theology before I was born, but He is not to be blamed for any mistakes in my thinking.

However, as Frame points out, responsibility for an action is not removed by being indirectly involved. If I hire someone to murder my enemy, I am just as responsible for the murder as the person who actually carries it out. God is not some organized “Mafia boss” who hires others to do His dirty work while He remains insulated from the crime. The truth of the matter is that God could, if He would, prevent any evil from taking place. This argument does not answer the question: Why doesn’t He prevent evil if He is able to do so?

The argument also does not explain human suffering which is caused directly by God. No man can produce an earthquake, hurricane, or draught. Only God can be responsible for such things directly, not indirectly, unless we claim that God has no control over the weather! And while we can explain these things as God’s means of judging sin, we cannot explain why young children are allowed to suffer just as much, and more, than adults during such events.

### ***5. The ex Lex Explanation of Evil (Frame, pp. 166-168)***

This means that God is “outside the law”. And certainly, there is some truth to the claim that God is not under His own law in the sense that man is. Men are not allowed to steal, but since God owns everything anyway, He can take away what He has given without being accused of stealing. He can also kill because He also owns man’s life which is itself a gift of God.

However, the law of God is also a reflection of the character of God. God says, “Be holy, as I am holy.” These are not idle words, and God would sacrifice His own integrity if He acted in ways which were inconsistent with His own law. If He forbids us from causing human suffering, how is it that He can permit others to cause suffering or that He himself can cause it directly through natural disasters like hurricanes, draughts, and earthquakes?

### ***6. The ad Hominem Defense (Frame, pp. 168-170)***

We have indicated this as a defense since it does not pretend to give an explanation for the problem of evil. When an unbeliever objects to the existence of evil in the world, this defense simply meets the unbeliever on his own grounds. By his own admission there is no God in the world. Granting his own presupposition (assumption) for the sake of argument, we may simply ask how he can account for the difference between good and evil in a godless universe. Without God, who defines good and evil for us, how can there be any distinction between good and evil? If he objects that social convention defines good and evil, we may simply object that the majority opinion of society cannot establish absolute right from wrong, and that from one culture to another we would observe certain differences between what is considered right and wrong. As Frame perceptively observes (p. 169):

If the believer faces the problem of how there can be evil in a theistic world [a world where God exists], the unbeliever faces the problem of how there can be either good or evil in a nontheistic world [a world where God does not exist]....

Unbelievers must surely not be allowed to take their own autonomy [authority] for granted in defining moral concepts. They must not be allowed to assume that they are the ultimate judges of what is right and wrong....An if the unbeliever insists on his autonomy, we may get nasty and require him to show how an autonomous self can come to moral conclusions in a godless universe.

While helpful as a general defense of the Christian faith, this argument does not really answer the question of evil. It is called an ad hominem argument because it is an argument directed against the person rather than toward the issue itself. Just because the unbeliever has no answer to the problem, we have not thereby answered the problem ourselves.

### **7. The Biblical Response to the Problem of Evil—Part One (Frame, pp. 171-179)**

There are many unanswered questions in the Bible which God does not bother to explain. How did Satan, who was a created angel, become evil? Why did God foreordain the fall of Adam and Eve into sin? Why did God allow righteous Job to suffer? By not providing us answers to these questions, God tells us something. He tells us that He is not obligated to explain Himself and what He does. This is one of the key features of the book of Job. Satan wagers a bet with God that if God takes away Job's blessings, he will deny God and curse Him to His face (Chps. 1-2). God accepts Satan's challenge, and in a sense, God sets Job up for the slaughter allowing Satan to take away his children, his wealth, and his health.

Job never curses God, but he does challenge God to a debate (23: 1-7). God must be forced to justify His treatment of Job; He owes Job an explanation. But an explanation never comes in the entire book; rather, Job is rebuked for demanding one. God goes to great lengths in correcting Job's misunderstanding, or lack of understanding, of the Creator-creature distinction. Job can no more understand why God treated Him as He did than he can understand how God created the world (Chps. 38-42), and Job finally admits that God's ways with man is a mystery that is too deep for him (42: 3-6).

Many questions arise from the book. Why did God agree to Satan's wager? Certainly God needed no proof of Job's faithfulness, and He had nothing He needed to prove to Satan. And what was Satan doing in heaven? Why did God allow Him any access in the first place? These and many other questions get no answers from the book. We do find out that whenever God is challenged to a debate, He always wins. No sooner than He is accused of injustice, He turns the tables on His accuser and makes him squirm. We are allowed to ask God honest questions: Why did this happen? But we are not allowed to ask them irreverently and with accusing language, because He is God.

Other questions come up in the NT. Is God just in choosing Jacob rather than Esau (Rom. 9: 11)? Is God just in judging Israel for unbelief when He sovereignly withholds the very faith necessary for their blessing (Rom. 9: 1-16)? The entire discussion in Romans 9 assumes that faith is a gift of God, and never once in the chapter does Paul say that Israel is rejected ultimately because of their own free choice. They are rejected *ultimately* because of *God's* free choice, who "will have mercy" on whom He wills to have mercy and "hardens" whom He will.

Frame summarizes this section by saying, "God, as sovereign Lord, is the standard of his own actions." By what other standard could God's actions be judged, for there is no other standard higher than God? The perceptive student can see that we have come back to the same justification for the authority of God's actions as that of His word, the Bible. Just as there is no other higher standard to judge the Bible than the Bible, there is no higher standard to judge God's ways with men than God himself. Therefore, He is to be trusted implicitly (without question) without any explanation. To be sure, the heroes of the faith mentioned in Heb. 11 would have liked for God to explain why they were going through so much suffering. Their situation was much worse than ours on this side of the cross since they lived, suffered, and died without seeing the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah. They were much more in the dark than we are about human suffering. After all, it was through the suffering of Christ that God saved the world.

Hebrews 11: 1 tells us: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." This is essentially part one of the Biblical response of the problem of evil: How can God still be good and allow evil to exist? Answer: Because God says He is good and does not allow man to challenge this claim.

### **8. *The Biblical Response to the Problem of Evil—Part Two (Frame, pp. 179-190).***

In the second part, Frame shows us how God's goodness is vindicated through a new look at history. God allows human suffering to be spread out over a long period of time which accounts for much of the mystery of evil in this world. Two thousand years passed between the promise to Abraham and the coming of the Redeemer. Why did God wait so long to send the Messiah? And why has He waited so long between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ?

Certainly a great part of the problem of suffering lies in the fact that our suffering is drawn out in time. We cry out to God, and he does not seem to hear. Or, rather, he in effect tells us to wait and wait and wait.

Scripture tells us a great deal about this waiting process. It shows us how God's people are tested by the passage of time over and over again. But it also shows us, again and again, how God brings the waiting periods to an end, vindicating himself and ending the sufferings of his people (p. 180).

The following examples are given: There is no word from God to Israel from the death of Joseph until the exodus event, a period of over 300 years. Moses, hand-selected by God to deliver Israel, must wait 40 years in the wilderness before he is allowed to come back to Egypt. The wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land lasts 40 years because of Israel's faithlessness and disobedience. Even after Joshua brings the people into the land, they fail to completely conquer it thus exposing themselves to idolatry and earning a vicious cycle of God's judgment (Judges). God graciously provides the people with judges concluding with the prophet Samuel and later a king after His own heart, David. Yet, because of the failure of Solomon, who allowed the influence of false gods, and his son Rehoboam who accepted unwise counsel, Israel is divided and suffers under the poor leadership of ungodly kings—with a few notable exceptions in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Even the Promised Land does not completely fulfill God's promise to Abraham and the unending requirements of animal sacrifice indicate that full atonement for sin has not been achieved. The blood of mere animals cannot take away the guilt and penalty of sin; and thus, the consciences of the people were never fully cleansed and at ease with the holy God who had delivered them (Heb. 10: 1-2).

Throughout the OT period there exists the apparent contradiction between justice and mercy. How can God show mercy to a sinful and rebellious people? To do so would sacrifice His justice. Yet how can God not show mercy if He fulfills His promises to Abraham that through him all the nations will be blessed? How can a "just" God be a "justifier" of sinful people? The resolution comes in the person of Jesus Christ. Through the sacrifice of Christ, God can not only judge sin, but He can show mercy to His people and fulfill His promises to Abraham. He can be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3: 26).

Frame concedes that this historical perspective does not answer all the problems. It does not answer the question of why children suffer malnutrition or die in violent storms. However, it does offer us hope that the same God who resolves the problem of justice and mercy in the past can also resolve the problem of evil in the present day. The apparent contradiction between God's justice and mercy in the OT seemed to be an impossible problem of good and evil. God took His time in resolving it, although He could have resolved it immediately. And just as this problem is ultimately resolved in Christ after so long a waiting period, we can expect Him to resolve other problems of evil—but not immediately. He will do so in His own good time, and we must wait for the answer even as the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 had to wait for the fulfillment of the promise in Christ.

From this historical perspective, we have the “lens” through which we can partially understand our present experience of suffering. As God used evil in the past to accomplish the “greater good” of demonstrating the glory of His justice and mercy, He can do the same today. God uses evil for various purposes. He uses it to discipline His children and promote holiness (Heb. 12; Ps. 119: 67, 71; Rom. 8: 28-30), to warn unbelievers of the wrath to come (Lk. 13: 1-5; Jn. 5: 14), to bring sinners to himself through the suffering of His saints (Col. 1:24), etc. And once again, we have to see at least some merit in the previous argument which says that many of God’s perfections are demonstrated through the existence of evil. Christian churches and relief organizations throughout the world daily demonstrate the love and mercy of God by relieving human suffering. Again, this is not pretended to be a final answer to this problem. It is truly a mystery, and we must wait for the final answer.

## ***V. The Holy Trinity***

### ***Introduction***

The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD affirmed the true deity of Christ against the Arians. The Council of Constantinople in 381 AD affirmed the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD set forth the true humanity of Christ and the two natures of Christ in one person. Historically the doctrine of the Trinity was developed over a long period of time through the diligent study of many godly and learned Christians some of whom lost life and limb for their faithful stand on the word of God. Their labors were not in vain and were well-worth the sacrifice since this doctrine has staggering implications for every aspect of the Christian life individually and socially.

Logically speaking, the doctrine of the Trinity is the only basis for love. From eternity, God the Father loved the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Son loved the Father and the Holy Spirit and the Spirit loved the Father and the Son. God has always existed in the context of a family, and there is and always has been mutual love all around. His love for Himself is so great that it spilled over into the creation of the world, and He decided to create man in His own image so that there would be mutual love between God and man. The love within the Trinity is, therefore, the foundation of love in all human relationships. This is only one application of the doctrine of the Trinity; there are many others which make the study of the Trinity one of the most profitable studies in systematic theology.

### ***A. The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament***

The Trinity is not fully or even clearly revealed in the OT, but awaits its revelation in the NT. However there are hints of this doctrine in the OT revelation, and this should be expected since God has been eternally the Triune God.

In Gen. 1:2, we find the Spirit of God “moving over the surface of the waters” during the creation of the world (see also Ps. 33:6; 147:18). In Gen. 1:26 God says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, according to *our* likeness.” Some of the clearest references to the Trinity are Isa. 61:1; 63:9-12 and Ps. 33:6. In the last passage, the word for breath is the word *ruach*, the same word which is used for Spirit in Gen. 1:2. In the Isaiah 61 passage there is a clear distinction made between the “Spirit” and the “Lord” and “me”. In Isa. 63, the distinction is between “He” and “the angel of His presence” and “His Holy Spirit”.

Further evidence for the Trinity is found in the many appearances of the angel of the Lord to many prominent figures in the OT. This angel is seen as one who is distinguished from the Lord but also identified with Him (Gen. 16:6-13; 18-whole chapter; 21:17-20; 22:11-19; 28:13-17 and 31:11-13 read as a unit; Ex. 13:21; 14:19; 23:2-23; 32:34; Judges 2:1-14; 6:11-24; 13:2-23). In Isaiah 9:6, the promised Messiah is to be called the “Mighty God”, and in

Isaiah 40:10-11, He is described as the “Lord Jehovah” who comes as a Shepherd feeding His flock. The incarnation of Christ is already predicted in Isa. 7:14 and 9:6.

In Joel 2:27-29, God promises that one day He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, which indicates a clear distinction between the person of the Holy Spirit and the “Lord your God” in verse 27. The Spirit is mentioned in many other passages as well as the source of courage (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 1Sam.11:6), the source of physical strength (Judges 14:6; 15:14), the source of knowledge and wisdom (Job 32:8; Isa. 11:2), the source of holiness (Ps. 51:12; Isa. 63:10), and the source of prophecy (Num. 11:25,29; Micah 3:8). He is related to the Messiah (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). These are just a few of the references to the Holy Spirit.

Krabbendam (p. 38) points out that Isaiah 40-66 is organized along Trinitarian lines. The promises of the Father (40-41; 45-48), the work of the Son (42-43; 49-58), and the work of the Spirit (44; 59-66).

In Matt. 22:41-45, Jesus uses the OT passage of Ps. 110:1 to prove His own deity. The Lord (that is, Jehovah) was saying to David’s Lord (that is, Christ), “sit at my right hand...” In Jesus’ mind there was evidence in the OT itself to indicate distinctions of persons in the Godhead.

### ***B. The Doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament***

Allusions to the Trinity are found throughout the NT: Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 8:6; John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:3; Matt. 1:18; 4:1; Mk. 1:12; Luke 1:35; 4:1, 14; Rom. 1:4.

The birth and baptism of Jesus supports the doctrine of the Trinity (Matt. 1:18-25; 3:16-17; Mk 1: 10-11; Lk. 1:35; 3:21-22). The teaching of Jesus also affirms the Trinity. He speaks of the Father (Jn.2:16; 4:24; 5:17, 26; Matt. 11:27). He is the eternally begotten and beloved Son of the Father (Matt. 11:27; 21:37-39; John 3:16). He is equal to the Father in power and glory (Jn. 1:14; 5:26; 10:30). The Holy Spirit qualifies Christ for His task as Messiah (Mk. 1:12; Lk. 4:1, 14; Jn. 3:34). Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter whom He will send from the Father (Jn 15:26). In the Great Commission, Jesus says that all authority has been given Him and that His disciples should make other disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Notice He says, the “name”, not the “names” (Matt. 28:18-20). Not only are the three distinct persons mentioned in this one passage, but Jesus implies that all three constitute one name; that is, they share in the same essential essence.

Jesus makes mention of the Father and the Spirit throughout His conversation with His disciples shortly before His death as recorded in John 13-17. A listing of these references is as follows: chapter 13 (verses 31-32); chapter 14 (verses 1-2, 6-7, 9-13, 16-21, 23-26, 28, 31); chapter 15 (verses 1-2, 8-10, 15-16, 21, 23-24, 26); chapter 16 (verses 3, 5, 7-15, 17, 23, 25-28, 32) chapter 17 (the whole chapter). John 17 records the high priestly prayer that Jesus prays for His disciples. For those who claim that God only appears as the Father in the OT, the Son in the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit in the NT epistles but not all three at the same time (a heresy which is called modalism), we may ask: To whom was Jesus praying in this prayer? And if the Holy Spirit did not exist at this time, why did Jesus mention Him constantly in this prayer? Does Jesus pray to Himself, and does He send Himself to the disciples? He said specifically that He was *going away* and was sending the Helper to take His place (Jn. 16: 7).

The apostles place the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on equal position with one another (1 Cor. 8:6; 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Thes. 2:13-14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1John 5:4-7; Rev. 1:4-6). The question arises why Jesus seems to place Himself in a subordinate position to the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 6:38) and also seems to place the Holy Spirit in a subordinate position to

Himself (Jn. 16: 13-15). The answer to this question can be found in what theologians call the Economic Trinity.

### ***C. The Distinction between the Ontological Trinity and the Economic Trinity***

#### ***1. The Ontological Trinity***

The ontological trinity pertains to the being of God. All three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are absolutely equal to one another in being or essence. In other words all three are equally God and all three possess all the attributes which we have discussed. The Son is in no sense inferior to the Father, nor the Spirit inferior to the Father and the Son. They are all the same in substance and equal in power and glory. It is in this ontological sense that we must understand Jesus' statement, "He who has seen me has seen the Father". He was not blurring the distinction between the persons of the Trinity, but drawing attention to their shared being or essence.

The relationship between the Father and the Spirit can be seen in 1 Cor. 2:10-11. According to Louis Berkhof, this passage implies "not that the Spirit is the same as the self-consciousness of God, but that He is as closely connected with God the Father as the soul of man is with man" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 97). As only the spirit of a man can know his own thoughts, so only the Spirit of God can know the thoughts of God. This same idea comes up in Rom. 8:26-27 in which God is said to know the mind of the Spirit who intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We also find in Phil. 2:12 that the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the believer is identified as the work of God.

The relationship of the Father to the Son is expressed in many places in the Scriptures. When Philip asked, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us", Jesus responded, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?" (John 14: 8-10a). He also said, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30; see also Jn. 17:21; 15:23).

We have no statement from Jesus to the effect that He and the Holy Spirit are one, but this fact is established later in the epistles. On the other hand, Jesus was confident that the disciples would be better off after His departure since the Holy Spirit would come to indwell the disciples (Jn. 16:7). He was just as confident that the Holy Spirit would continue the instruction of the disciples which He had begun (Jn. 16:12-15). Both Peter and Paul call the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of Jesus" (1Pet. 1:11; Phil. 1:19; Rom. 8:9). The "Spirit of God" and the "Spirit of Jesus" are used synonymously (represent the same Spirit) in Romans 8: 9.

Paul is much more to the point in 2 Cor. 3:17 saying, "Now the Lord is the Spirit..." Commenting on this verse Charles Hodge says, "Christ is the Holy Spirit; they are one and the same. Not one and the same person, but one and the same Being, in the same sense in which our Lord says, 'I and the Father are one.' It is an identity of essence and of power. Christ is the Holy Spirit, because, being the same in substance, where Christ is, there the Spirit is, and where the Spirit is, there is Christ. Therefore this same apostle interchanges the three forms of expression as synonymous, 'the Spirit of Christ,' 'Christ', and 'the Spirit.' Rom. 8: 9, 10" (*1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 450). If the Father and the Son are one in essential being (ontologically), and if the Father and the Spirit are one in essential being, and if the Son and the Spirit are one in essential being, it follows that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are essentially one *God*, not three *Gods*. This is known as the ontological trinity.

#### ***2. The Economic Trinity***



The economic trinity refers not to the essential *being* of the three persons of the trinity but to their respective *functions*.

### ***a. God the Father***

Even though all three persons share the same essence, there is a logical order or priority which is expressed in their particular function in the plan of creation and redemption. The Father is logically first in that He is neither “begotten” nor does He “proceed” from the Son or the Spirit. Repeatedly the Scriptures present the Father as the sending agency of the Son (Matt. 21:33-46; Lk. 4:43; 9:48; 10:16; John 3:34; 4:34; 5:30, 36-38; 6:29,44,57; 7:18,28; 11:42; 16:28; 8:42; 17:3; 17:18,21,23,25; 20:21; Acts 3:26; Gal. 4:4; 1Jn. 4:9). He is also the sending agency of the Holy Spirit, a function He shares with the Son (Jn. 3:34; 14:16, 26; 15:26). The sending function of the Father is extremely important to our understanding of the love of God especially in light of some teaching that the God of the OT is the harsh, uncompassionate God of wrath while the Son is the compassionate, loving God of the NT. In the economy of redemption, Jesus makes it crystal clear that the Father took the initiative to send the Son and the Holy Spirit to save men from their sins. “For God”, that is, God the Father, “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son....For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.” (Jn. 3:16-17)

Jesus also makes it clear that He did not come to do His own will but the will of the Father. He also says that the will of the Father is to save every single individual which is given to Him by the Father, and that every single individual who believes in the Son will receive eternal life (Jn. 6:38-40). We can see clearly then that the Father takes the initiative in our salvation and that Jesus was not forced to persuade an unloving, unwilling Father to save His people. If one carefully studies the OT he would never conclude that God was somehow reluctant (hesitant) to save His people.

In the economy (work) of redemption it is the good pleasure of God the Father to send the Son and to reveal the Son to sinners (Matt. 11:26-27; Jn.3:16-17; Eph. 1:9), to predestine us to be conformed to the image of His Son and to adoption as sons (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5), and to elect or choose us according to His foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:4). Jesus Himself ascribes the kingdom of God to the Father in the Lord’s Prayer in Matt. 6:13, and Paul tells us that one aspect of Christ’ rule as king is to hand over His kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

### ***b. God the Son***

We have already discussed the fact that the Son proceeds from the Father and is the only begotten of the Father. Some theologians would place this relationship of being begotten of the Father and proceeding from the Father within the ontological trinity, but others, like Krabbendam, would place these relationships within the economic trinity (p. 39). We will take the latter view for it seems the Scripture writers are attempting to use these relationships to establish the particular *functions* of the trinity rather than the *being* of the trinity. Jesus’ procession from the Father, as well as the Spirit’s procession from the Father, have more to do with their function than their being.

In Paul’s address to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, he mentions the fact that Jesus was begotten of the Father to prove that God had fulfilled His promise of a Messiah to the Jewish fathers and their children (Acts 13:33). In doing so Paul quoted Ps. 2:7. In Jn. 15:26 the sending of the “Helper” from the Father and the Son has reference to the Day of Pentecost in which the Holy Spirit is sent with power upon Jesus’ disciples. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost has reference to His function and not His essence or being.

The passage in Ps. 2:7 brings up the question of how Jesus can be the *eternal* Son of God and at the same time be the “*begotten*” Son of God. After all, the text says, “*Today* I have begotten You....” not “*Eternally* I have begotten you....” Again we have to interpret this verse economically, not ontologically. In His *being* Jesus shares the same glory of the Father before the beginning of the world (Jn. 17:5; Heb. 1:3; Jn. 1:1-2, 14), yet there was a definite time appointed for Him to become incarnate in human flesh, to die, and to be resurrected from the dead. If we consider His birth, life, death, and resurrection together as a single salvific (salvation) event, then they are all part of God the Father’s *installation* of Christ as the Messianic King prophesied in Ps. 2.

We have a hint of this installation in Luke 3:22 at Jesus’ baptism, in which the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus and a voice comes out of heaven and says, “You are my beloved Son, in You I am well pleased.” When a new king of Israel was anointed as the nation’s representative, he was “born” into a new relationship of sonship with Yahweh. Being the eternal Son of God, Jesus did *not* enter into a new relationship with God, but on the *day* He was anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit, He began His work on earth as the promised Messiah. When this happened the words of the Psalmist are echoed in Lk. 3:22 by the Father, “You are my beloved Son....” (F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 276).

It should also be noted that when Samuel the prophet anointed Saul and David as the first and second kings of Israel respectively, the Holy Spirit came upon them (1 Sam. 10:1, 10; 16:13). Later the Spirit departed from Saul, but of David (who was a type of Christ) it is said, “...and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David *from that day forward*.” The Spirit never departed from David as He did from Saul and, of course, the Spirit was never to depart from Jesus as the Son of David and heir to the throne of David. Putting all this together, then, we interpret the words “Today, I have begotten You” as a reference to the *installation* of Jesus in time and on earth as the promised Messianic King by God the Father. Jesus has always been God’s only begotten Son from eternity, but in real time and space (earth), He *became* the Messianic King promised by the prophets in the OT. In no sense whatever does Jesus owe his origination, source, or being to God the Father. If this was the case, He would then have a beginning and would not be God, as the Arians and modern day Jehovah’s witnesses maintain.

We have mentioned already that Jesus participates with the Father in sending the Holy Spirit (Jn. 15:26, and other passages) which is part of His redemptive function. There are other redemptive responsibilities which Jesus fulfilled which made it necessary for Him to function in a subordinate role to the Father. It should be emphasized that this subordinate role was voluntary and in no sense forced upon Him against His will by God the Father. We should remember His words in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt. 26:39). Functionally, Jesus submitted Himself and His will to God the Father. He was sent *from* the Father to do the *will* of the Father (Jn. 6:38). It is only in this economic sense that we can understand such passages as John 10:29 and John 14:28 in which Jesus speaks of the Father being greater than He is. In terms of *being*, this would contradict everything we have noted in the NT and the OT about the deity of Jesus Christ and His equality with the Father, but in terms of *function* such verses make perfect sense. Certainly it was a subordinate role for Jesus to become incarnate in human flesh. Such an incarnation was certainly a humiliation for the Son of God when we consider that in His humanity He was subject to fatigue, disease, sorrow (Isa. 53:3), temptation (Matt. 4), torture, (Matt.27:27-31), death, and worst of all, separation from God (Matt. 27:46). God the Father did not die on a cross; God the Son did.

Philippians 2:5-8 is another difficult passage which can be understood only in terms of Christ’ functional subordination to the Father. Liberal theologians have used this text to

prove that Jesus was not divine, but merely a man. This could not be further from the truth. According to the best interpretation of verses 6-7, Jesus did not cling to His *privileges* as God but “emptied” or divested Himself of those privileges in order to carry out His redemptive function. In order to be tempted as we are, He had to become a man. In order to become the second Adam and represent the human race, He had to become a man (1 Cor. 15:21-22). In order to die, He had to become a man. And in order to come before God as our High Priest, He had to become a man (Heb. 4:14-15). As God only, He could do none of these things because God cannot be tempted, represent the human race, or die. Only the God-man could do these things as He humbled Himself by becoming a man and subjecting Himself to the Law and its curse in order to bring us to God. In doing all these things, Jesus functioned in a subordinate role, but it is important to note that there is never a hint in Scripture that He fulfilled this subordinate role “kicking and screaming” against His will. Just like Isaac who was His type in Gen. 22, the Lord Jesus did the will of the Father willingly and without resistance, a fact which will be very important in our application of the Trinity for the Christian life.

In the economy of redemption, reconciliation, mediation, redemption, grace, wisdom, and righteousness are ascribed to the Son (Matt. 1:21; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:10; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1Pet. 1:2; 1Jn. 2:2). It should also be noted that as the Father sent the Son, so also does the Son send us, His disciples, into the world (Jn. 17:18; 20:21; Lk. 24:44-49). The Father and the Son send the Spirit to enable us to believe and to carry out God’s mission in saving the world. God is a missionary God! The church did not invent missions or missionaries; God did!

### *c. God the Holy Spirit*

We have already noted that the Holy Spirit is a *person*, not an *it*. We will wait for another time to go deeper into His personality; it is sufficient at this point to say that He is active in creation (Gen.1:2); He can be grieved, insulted, and quenched (Eph. 4:30; Heb.10: 29; 1 Thes. 5:19); He communicates the Word of God to us (Heb. 10:15; Rev. 2); He is the means by which Christ gives gifts to the Church (1Cor. 12) and much more.

As we have noted before, the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son (Jn. 15:26; 16:7; 14:16) to accomplish His particular role in redemption. Functionally, the Spirit is subordinate to the Father *and* the Son, a fact which comes out clearly in John 16:13-15. This is an amazing statement and helps clear up many errors involving the work of the Spirit. First of all, the phrase, “when He...comes” indicates that in the plan of salvation, the coming of the Spirit was at a point in time. This does not mean that He had a beginning or that He came for the first time at Pentecost since He was also active in creation and actively present with the people of God in the OT. His presence was necessary for the salvation of anyone in the OT. However, Jesus indicates a future time for the Spirit’s coming which is distinct from His presence and work thus far (see also 16:7). Remember also that the prophet Joel speaks of a future time in which the Spirit will be poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28), a reference to Pentecost in Acts 2.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit will continue the teaching ministry of Jesus and will go beyond what Jesus taught His disciples during His time on earth (16:12). Thirdly, the Spirit will not innovate; that is, He will not teach anything which is not in keeping with the truth which Jesus had already taught. He will teach whatever He hears from the Father and the Son (verses 13, 15). Fourthly, the Spirit does not come to “steal the show” from the Father and the Son, as some misguided preachers would have us to believe. He does not come to glorify Himself, but the Son. This does not mean He does not glorify the Father also since the Father is glorified in the Son. In other words, the Spirit does not draw attention to Himself; His sole purpose is to draw attention to the Son (verse 14). One can see that careful attention to this Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com—July, 2012

one verse can help us to avoid many extremes of the charismatic movement which has sometimes emphasized the work of the Spirit while deemphasizing of the work of the Father and the Son. The United Pentecostals are the most extreme, being modern day modalists who deny the existence of the Trinity and claiming that God existed as Father in the OT, Son in the Gospels, and after Pentecost exists only as the Holy Spirit—never as all three at the same time.

Having said this we should not go to the opposite extreme of emphasizing the work of the Father and the Son to the point that we grieve the Spirit by failing to give Him due credit in the work of salvation. There are three persons in the Godhead, not two, and without the Spirit's work, there would be no salvation. As we have said, the Spirit takes on a subordinate role in salvation which includes regeneration, sanctification, communication of the love of God and the benefits of salvation, distribution of spiritual gifts, and the renewal of the Church (Titus 3:5; Jn. 3:5; Jn.14:16; Rom. 5:5; 8:15; 14:17; Gal. 4:6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:30; Rev. 1-3) in addition to the ones already mentioned. His task is a humble one in that it requires the Holy Spirit to take up residence inside the believer (Rom. 8:9-11; Eph. 2:12). The work of the Spirit further demonstrates the humility and nearness of God—humility, in that God would condescend (stoop down) to live in sinful creatures; nearness, in that He is never far off, but right inside of us.

As with Christ, so it is with the Spirit. There is no indication of tension in the Godhead concerning who would perform what functions. There was no positioning for power, prestige or supremacy. The Trinitarian doctrine called circumincession teaches that in the work of the Trinity, neither the Father, Son, or the Holy Spirit work independently of one another but always with one another. Where one is at work the other two persons are also at work, but not in such a way that the distinct personality of each person is swallowed up in the one essence (This comment leads us to the discussion of the unity and diversity of God, a subject with profound implications for the family, society, government, and every other relationship in life.)

#### ***D. Unity and Diversity in the Godhead—Practical Implications of the Trinity***

The beauty, wisdom, and uniqueness of the Christian faith are found in the unity and diversity of God. No other religion comes close. Either there is monotheism (one god) without the necessary diversity of the three persons (Islam), or there is polytheism without unity (Eastern religions). With God, we have not only one God, but three persons. The oneness of God does not swallow up the tri-personality of God and the tri-personality of God does not swallow up the unity of God. The essence of God is not lost in any of the three persons nor is the distinct and self-conscious personality of each person lost in the one essence. This is understandably a difficult doctrine, but is one that is clearly taught in Scripture.

##### ***1. The basis for love in all human relationships***

As we said previously, the Trinity is the basis for love in human relationships. God did not create man just to have someone to love since He has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a community of mutual love (Jn. 17:22-26). As we can see from this passage, the Father and the Son loved each other before the world was made. Also, we know that since the fruit of the Spirit is love, etc. (Gal. 5:22), then the community of the Holy Spirit with the Father and Son is a community of love (see also the following verses: Gal. 5:25-26; Eph. 4:1-3; Phil. 2:1-2; Col. 1:8; Rom. 5:5; 15:30). When we love other people (truly love them), our love is a mirror of the love of God within the Trinity. It is not by accident that Christianity is known for its charity and evangelism throughout the world. They are rooted in the nature of God who loves *Himself* perfectly with all His holy attributes and wishes mankind to share in

that perfect love just as each person of the Trinity has shared in that love from all eternity. God did not create us because He was lonely and needed someone to love, but He created us because it would bring more glory to Himself to have billions of His image bearers reflecting the Trinitarian love of God in their relationships with one another.

## ***2. The basis for the proper functioning of the family***

The Bible makes it clear that marriage is not a democracy with two equal votes. If it were, how would disputes between husband and wife ever be settled? The responsibility of headship is given to the husband (Eph. 5:22; 1Cor. 11:3). The passage in 1 Corinthians is especially instructive in that it gives explicit reference to the economic trinity. The headship of the man over the woman is based on the fact that God is the head of Christ. Christ came to earth not to do His own will but that of the Father (Jn. 6:38). He was functionally subordinate to the Father, yet His worth, dignity, and essence was equal to the Father. The wife is equal in worth and dignity to her husband because she, too, is made in the image of God, an image which defines her *essence* (Gen. 1:27). However, her *function* is subordinate to her husband, and she is to be submissive to him because Christ was submissive to His Father. This does not make her any less important than her husband, just as Christ is not less important than the Father. Because of her dignity as fellow image-bearer of God, the husband would be wise to consult with his wife on the many difficult decisions which come up in the family. At the same time, the wife should be willing to submit to her husband's final decisions because he is in authority over her as her "head".

A husband's headship, furthermore, is not a club which can be used to beat his wife into submission. Christ does not beat His church into submission but loves His church and sanctifies her so she will be holy and blameless. Christ loves His church as He loves Himself and sacrificed Himself for His church. In like manner a man who loves His wife loves himself (Eph. 5:25-30) and will sacrifice himself for His wife's sake. When Christ was crucified, the crown He wore was not made of gold but thorns, and the crown husbands wear in the home as the head is not a golden crown of privilege, rank, and self-indulgence but the crown of self-sacrifice and self-denial (J. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 197). Consider also that God is the Head of Christ (1Cor. 11:3), and it pained the Father to send His Son to a cruel death on the cross and even more to turn away from His Son when Christ took upon Himself the sin of the world (Matt. 27:46).

Biblical headship always involves sacrifice and pain because such headship is ultimately for the good of the one who is under submission. Even the death of Christ was not only for our good but for Christ' good since by that self-sacrifice "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus 'every knee should bow' of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). Self-sacrifice is also for the good of the husband who gains for himself the approval of his heavenly father and will most likely gain a much more godly and submissive wife.

Children in a family are also created in the image of God; they are, therefore, one in *essence* with their parents. Being such, they are not the property of their fathers but are given to their parents as a stewardship for only a limited period of time. ***Functionally***, they are under the authority of their parents. The authority structure of the home is based on the authority structure of the Trinity. The father is head of his children, and the mother derives her authority over the children from her husband. As the marriage is not an absolute democracy with equal votes, the same can be said of the family. The children do not act independently of their parents but under their authority. Any society (like the US) which diminishes parental authority through legislation (e.g. allowing teenage girls to get abortions without

parental consent) is on the way to anarchy. Anarchy is also imminent when parents, particularly fathers, do not teach their children submission to parental authority which is the basis for submission to other forms of authority—governmental, occupational, and, most importantly, the authority of God.

### ***3. The basis for social justice and the protection of civil rights***

The state (the one) does not have a separate *essence* (ontology) from its individual citizens (the many); thus, the interests of the state must not be allowed to deny the individual liberties of its citizens, the many. Thus, the Trinitarian formula protects individual rights and provides the basis for democracy.

In Nazi Germany, Adolph Hitler determined that the Jewish race was a morally inferior people responsible for the problems of Germany. For the sake of the Arian race (the one), He exterminated 6,000,000 Jews (the many). Before Hitler began exterminating Jews, He exterminated old people and retarded people (the many) who were considered useless to society (the one). He would load them onto trains with the pretense of sending them to government-sponsored nursing homes, afterwards sending them to death camps (C. Everett Koop and Francis Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, pp. 65-67).

In China it is against the law for parents to have more than one child, and forced abortions are common. Supposedly, the state does it for the good of the country because of over-population. Again, the interests of the state (the one) are perceived as more ultimate than those of individual citizens (the many).

### ***4. The basis for the proper functioning of the church***

In the church there should be harmony in the one and many spheres and in the authority structures simply because there is harmony in the Trinity. Each member of the church should respect the gifts and talents of every other member (1Cor. 12; Rom. 12). Quarreling among the members and their church leaders should cease because of the example of Christ Jesus who considered the interests of others more important than His own (Phil. 2). Pastors should respect members as those who are in the image of God to perform certain tasks in Christ's kingdom for the glory of God (1Pet. 5:1-4); and members of the church should respect their pastors as those who are given spiritual authority over them for their good (Heb. 13:17). Each of the individual members of the church (the many) do their part for the sake of the whole body (the one), and the whole body takes care of each individual member.

## ***VI. The Works of God***

### ***Introduction***

The works of God are sometimes referred to as His decrees. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, which is the catechism of many reformed denominations, says this of the decrees: "The decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." It is difficult to cite just a few verses to support this doctrine since it is found throughout the pages of Scripture, but Eph. 1:4, 11 and Romans 9:22-23 are classical passages. It is important that we closely relate the works or decrees of God to His purpose, as found in Eph. 1:11. God is not capricious (without reason) but does everything with a purpose. His purposes are often hidden (Deut. 29:29), but they are in operation whether we notice them or not. As we approach this subject of God's works, it is well that we do so with an attitude of utmost humility lest we set ourselves on the throne of judgment above God. There are many things taught in the Bible

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which do not seem reasonable to us. We should not be too hasty in jumping to conclusions, but admit that God's thoughts and ways are infinitely higher than our thoughts and ways (Isa. 55: 8-9).

One thing which should be understood is the relationship of God's counsel to His providence. We have briefly looked at God's providence and defined it as His control over every aspect of His creation, including people (see p. 14 of your notes). We can go further by saying that whatever God *decides* to do in His counsel, He actually *does* in His providence. Another word for counsel is plan. Whatever God plans to do is most certainly accomplished in providence. Unlike the plans of man which are often thwarted by circumstances outside his control, God's plans cannot be thwarted because they are never contingent on anything but His own will. "What His soul desires, that He does." (Job 23:13)

This fact immediately brings up the problem of sin in the universe. Can we say that sin is also the plan of God or should we say that God never planned for sin to take place? If we take the position that human sin was also in the plan of God, we are confronted with the question: is God then the author of sin? If we take the position that sin came into the world apart from the plan of God, then we are confronted with the question: did man somehow thwart God's perfect plan by introducing sin, and does God really have control over His universe if sin can be introduced without His plan? Either position leaves us with difficult questions; however, the second position leaves us with a God who is not really sovereign over His universe because some things can happen not according to His plan which means that they occur by the will of Satan or by the will of man, or by something else. If this is true then either Satan is sovereign or man is sovereign. Or possibly, God, man, and Satan are fighting it out to see who is going to win in this universe. It is apparent from experience that man is not sovereign because he is plagued every day with events and situations outside of his control. Besides, our answer to this question should not be taken from human experience which has been proven over and over to be fallible. Our answer comes from the word of God in the Scriptures which leave us in no doubt about who is in control (see Job 1 and 2).

Another option is that neither God, nor man, nor Satan is in control. No one is in control; we are all governed by chance or fate or natural laws. Many who have rejected the supernatural have subscribed to such views. We are all simply the passive victims of an impersonal universe and we have to take whatever comes. It doesn't take long to point out the futility of such views. A universe governed by chance is a contradiction in terms since chance, or fate, cannot *govern* anything. In a world of chance there is no predictability which means there is no more reason to take the stairway out of a three story building than to simply jump out the window. There is also no more reason to eat meat than to eat poison. Obviously, even among those who say we live in a universe of chance there are none who can live consistently with such a view. If they did, they would not live very long.

For those who believe in the sovereignty of natural laws (the laws of physics, biology, chemistry, etc.), we might ask them how they came into existence. How does chance produce predictable physical laws? Either we believe in a personal God who created a world with purpose and meaning, or we believe in the existence of an impersonal universe which somehow sprung into existence with natural laws already in place, but one which offers us no reason to believe that we have any meaning in the scheme of things. If we refuse to believe that God is controlling things, both good and bad, we are left with alternatives which are far worse.

Since we believe that God is in control, let's set forth several points from Scripture concerning the matter of sin.

1. First, God's plan includes the sinful acts of man (Acts 2:23; 4:28). It should be agreeable to all of us that the most sinful act which has ever occurred in the history of mankind was the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, this very act was according to "the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God", and Jesus was put to death by men who did "whatever your [God's] hand and your [God's] purpose predestined to occur." It is clear that the crucifixion of Jesus was not some unexpected turn of events, but God's plan from the beginning. Jesus was the lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world in the eternal counsel of God.
2. Second, it is equally clear from the above texts that although God sovereignly controls man's actions, man is still responsible for those actions. Notice especially Acts 2:23. Jesus was delivered up by the plan and foreknowledge of God, but "you nailed [Him] to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death." There was no one in the crowd that day who would object that they couldn't stop themselves from killing Christ because they were just doing what God predestined to occur and therefore were not responsible. Man's will is under no external compulsion to sin. He just does so by the act of his own will which is governed by his own sinful nature. Man is a free agent in this sense of the word "free". Man is free in the sense that he makes choices about what to do with his life. He is under no external compulsion from God to sin, which would make God the author of sin. We will learn later that such freedom is not true freedom in the Biblical sense which is the ability to do what is right, not the ability to do what we want. Nevertheless, it is true freedom to act without external constraint, without which there could be no responsibility for sin.

An interesting interplay between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is found in Acts 27:14-36. An angel had informed Paul that God had granted him the safety of everyone on the ship, yet unless these same people stayed on the ship they would perish in the sea. In other words God's sovereignty and man's responsibility go hand in hand. This is called primary and secondary causes. The primary cause of every event is the will of God, but God generally works through the instrument of secondary causes or means to accomplish His will. In John 6:37 Jesus said that all whom the Father gives Him (primary cause) will come to Him, but it is also true no one will come to Jesus without believing in the gospel message (secondary cause; Romans 10:14). God elects some to salvation, but He does so through the secondary means of the preaching of the gospel.

3. Third, it is appropriate to say that God's sovereignty is the *reason* man is responsible. If God was not sovereign, man would not have anyone to whom he is responsible, but since God has the right to man's obedience, man is obligated to comply with God's demands.
4. Fourth, it is clear from Scripture that God is never the author of sin. He tests us with a view to developing holiness, strengthening the believer, and producing faith, but He never tempts us (James 1: 13). If we are honest with ourselves (and we often are not), we will admit that in every sin we acted freely and without external compulsion. We choose to sin because we like to sin. Why else would we sin? Just because God allows us to be exposed to temptation is no reason to blame God when we fail. If a parent places a fresh loaf of bread on the counter and tells his child not to eat any of it, the parent is not at fault if the child snitches a piece while the parent is not looking. He was told not to touch it. Is it the parent's fault because the bread was within the child's reach? It is true that the parent could have prevented the child from disobeying him by keeping constant watch over the bread, just as God could prevent the sinner from disobeying Him because He is all-powerful, but this does not make God responsible for the sin. Man chooses willingly and freely to sin and cannot in any way attribute his sin to God.

5. Ultimately, the problem of sin is an incomprehensible mystery. God could have created a world in which man could not sin. He could have prevented the temptation of Satan which
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led to man's sin. It is reasonable for us to conclude that God chose to permit sin to come into the world because only a sinful world could provide a suitable stage upon which God could display the riches of His grace. After all we would not know grace if we were not undeserving sinners. For a further discussion of this see page 18.

### ***A. The Work of God in Predestination and Election***

In predestination God determines the final destiny of every member of the human race, whether heaven or hell, salvation or damnation. Out of the mass of humanity, God chooses some to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and sanctification by the Spirit (1Pet 1:2). Others He permits to go their own way in their willful rebellion. The first are the recipients of electing grace. The second are left alone in their sin and are the objects of reprobation. The focus in Scripture is not the reprobation of the unbelieving but the salvation of the elect. All of us were in rebellion against God (Eph.2), but God in His mercy decides to rescue *some* of us from eternal damnation. The mystery of it all is not that God did not save *everyone*, but that God saved *anyone*.

#### ***1. Election in the Old Testament***

Election and predestination is not just a NT concept but permeates the entire history of redemption. In the OT God did not choose Egypt, the Canaanites, the Babylonians or the Medes and Persians. He chose, instead, the Israelites, not because they were better or more numerous or more talented than all other nations, but because He loved them unconditionally (Deut 7:6-8). He began His election of the nation of Israel with Abraham in Gen. 12 when He called Abraham out of idolatry (Joshua 24:1-2). His covenant with Abraham receives formal inauguration in Gen. 15 and is reconfirmed in Gen. 17 and 22. Through Abraham, the nation of Israel is chosen from among all the inhabitants of the earth. One would think God would choose the nation of Egypt instead, with all its cultural and educational superiority to Israel but this was not the case. The election of Israel is reconfirmed in the Mosaic Covenant and Israel is informed of God's purpose for them. They are to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for God's own possession.

The election of Israel is confirmed in a covenant context with curses and blessings (Deut. 8 and 28). To remain in covenant obedience is necessary, especially the avoidance of idolatry (Lev.18:4). If the national covenant is abused, national judgment will come as a consequence (Amos 3:2). Just because Israel was chosen according to God's promise to the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), that did not mean that they were chosen without consideration of their obligations to believe, obey, and repent (Isa. 1:10-20; 5:1-7). It should be kept in mind that out of the estimated 2 million Hebrews coming out of Egypt in the exodus, only two, Caleb and Joshua, made it to the Promised Land. This does not mean that these two were the only true believers in all of Israel. Moses did not make it to the Promised Land either, and certainly he was a believer. However, the record of the NT and the OT indicates that a small minority of the elect nation were true believers; by far the majority were apostate unbelievers (Heb. 3:12-19; 1 Cor. 10:1-13; 1Kings 19:15-17; Gal. 4:21-31; Rom. 10; 11:1-10) Further evidence is the history of Israel and Judah which were taken away into exile for apostasy; the prophetic literature which warns Israel of coming judgment; many of the parables of Jesus which indicate that God will take the kingdom away from Israel and give it to the Gentiles, particularly Matt. 13.

These passages are only a few of those which could be cited to prove that the election of Israel as a *nation* did not guarantee the election of *each individual* in the nation. Personal faith was not an option, but an absolute necessity. Throughout the OT revelation, God

indicates that He is saving for Himself a remnant *according to faith*. We find traces of this remnant in 1 Kings 19:15-17; 2 Kings 19:30-31; Jer. 31; Isa. 10:20-22 quoted and interpreted by Rom. 9:27-33; Rom. 11; to mention only a few. But we are not to conclude that election is ultimately based on foreseen personal faith, but purely God's choice. It is through faith that election proceeds to its final result in personal salvation, but faith is not the grounds for election. The apostle Paul traces the remnant concept all the way back to Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau in Romans 9. His analysis in this chapter proves that while the secondary cause of Israel's rejection was their own disobedience, the ultimate, primary cause of anyone's election is grounded in God who shows mercy on whom He shows mercy (Rom. 9:15-16).

From the beginning of Israel's election as a nation, God never intended to save every single individual in the nation any more than he intended to save Ishmael or Esau. Not all those who are descended from Israel are the true Israel nor are all the physical descendants of Israel heirs to the promise God made to Abraham (Rom. 9:6-9). Circumcision, the OT sign of the covenant, symbolized the removal of the sinful flesh from the believing Israelite. While circumcision was required of all Israelites and their children, its administration did not imply that the removal of sinful flesh from the hearts had actually occurred which is why Moses and Jeremiah admonished Israel to circumcise their hearts and not their flesh (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26). Paul makes it very plain that Abraham was justified by faith before he received circumcision, not after, meaning that justification by faith in Christ did not at all require physical circumcision (Rom. 4:1-10). His point is further made in Galatians 1-4 in which he argues that membership in national Israel through covenant circumcision never guaranteed that one was a child of Abraham, a distinction which belongs only to those who belong to Christ through faith (3:29).

The above evidence serves the purpose of demonstrating that membership in an elect nation did not guarantee the blessings of the covenant nor does membership in the institutional church guarantee such blessings. In the New Covenant we baptize our infant children as an indication that the promises of the covenant are promised to them as well as adult members conditional upon personal repentance and faith. There is continuity between the elect nation in the Old Covenant and the elect Church in the New Covenant. But there is also continuity between the curses and the blessings in the old as well as the new. "Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." (Heb. 11:6) Constantly the Church is warned in the NT not to imitate the wicked practices of the nation of Israel (1 Cor. 10). Almost the entire book of Hebrews is a warning not to fail to enter the Sabbath rest of God through unbelief (Heb. 4). If an Israelite who set aside the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two witnesses, how much more will a church member be punished who sets aside the New Covenant by rejecting the only sacrifice available for sin (Heb. 10:26-29).

After surveying the OT references to the fall of Israel and how the nation continues to fall under God's judgment in the NT, we may be tempted to conclude that God is through with Israel and has rejected it as a nation. Such is not the case. In Rom. 11:29 Paul informs us that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, that is, they are never revoked or totally lost. It appears from Romans 11 that a spiritual renewal lies in store for Israel as a national entity. This does not mean that they will achieve world domination or national prominence, but that there will be a spiritual awakening among the Jews to the end that thousands upon thousands of Jews will turn to their promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. Time will not permit an exegesis of this passage, but it does serve our purpose to look at another OT passage which would appear to predict the spiritual renewal of which Paul speaks in Romans 11.

In Jeremiah 31 the prophet speaks of a better day for the nation of Israel, a day in which the law of God will no longer be written merely on tablets of stone but on human hearts. This writing of His law on their hearts will constitute a new covenant with *Israel*, a covenant which is not limited as the covenant made with Israel as they came out of Egypt, a covenant which they broke. The New Covenant will be more pervasive (wide-spread) in its effect upon Israel than the Old Covenant in that many more people will turn to the Lord when the New Covenant is embraced (Jer. 31:34). It is interesting that this New Covenant is mentioned in Heb. 8 as the New Covenant inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. This New Covenant promised to Israel is the same covenant which is given to the Gentiles and predicted in Gen. 12 when God tells Abraham, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Both Jews and Gentiles now share the same covenant in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile; all are one in Christ Jesus. Even today many Jews are embracing their Messiah, as did the apostle Paul, but as a nation, the Jews continue to remain outside the blessings of the New Covenant.

Romans 11 seems to indicate, however, that just as the Gentiles were blessed by the apostasy of the Jews, they will be blessed even more by the salvation of the Jews (v.12, 15). Many scholars believe that a world-wide revival of the Jewish nation will basically turn the world upside down for Christ, something which has never before been witnessed in the history of the world. The conclusion is that God has not totally and finally rejected His physical people, the Jews, but has a wonderful future ahead for them.

## ***2. Election in the New Testament***

What has been said thus far about the election of Israel sets the stage for what we discover about election in the NT. Just as with Israel election in the NT is in a covenantal context. This time the covenantal context is not a nation but the Church of Jesus Christ. No one has ever been elected *in himself*. All who are elected are elected only *in Christ Jesus*. Ephesians 1:4 says that we are chosen *in Christ* before the foundation of the world. We are also made alive together *with Christ* (Eph.2:5) and have been raised up *with Christ* (2:6). We are given by the Father *to Christ* (Jn. 6:37). In His high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus limits His prayers of intercession to those who have been given to Him by God the Father (v.9). He specifically does *not* pray for the rest of the world, but *only* for those given Him according to John 6:37, those who will most definitely come to Him in faith and who are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

The passages which can be pressed into service to prove the doctrine of election are too numerous to be cited here, but some of the more classical texts will be mentioned with a brief explanation.

1. Ephesians 1 and 2 have already been covered in your notes.
2. Romans 9. God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were ever born and before they had done either good or bad; therefore His choice was decidedly not based on human merit. Emphatically, Jacob was chosen before he was born in order that the purpose of God according to His choice (election) might be established. This choice is not based on works but purely on the gracious calling of God (v.11). God will have mercy on whomever He pleases and He will harden whomever He pleases (v.15). Pharaoh himself was raised up to a place of power for the sole purpose that God might demonstrate His power against him (v.17). To the human mind this does not appear to be fair, but only because the fallen human mind still thinks God owes something to the human race and can only operate within the boundaries set for Him by the human mind (v.9). Such is not the case at all, since God made the universe and is not accountable to anyone for His actions. It is clear that Paul makes no attempt to defend God for choosing some and hardening others. He simply says, “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?” (v.20)

- 3.** John 10:1-30. In this passage Jesus does not die for the goats, but for the sheep (v.11). The Jews, particularly the Jewish leaders, did not believe in Him because they were not His sheep (v.26). Jesus' sheep hear His voice and follow Him, but if you are not a sheep you do not hear His voice and do not follow Him (v.27). In v.28 Jesus says He gives eternal life to the sheep, which means He has not given eternal life to those who are not His sheep which would include the Jews who are present in this discourse.
- 4.** Matthew 11:25-30. Jesus explicitly thanks the Father for hiding "these things" (the gospel) from some who consider themselves wise and revealing them to others (babes or insignificant people from the world's point of view). He also says that no one can know the Father except the Son and whomever the Son wishes to reveal the Father. Obviously, the Son does not wish to reveal the Father to everyone or else His statement would be unnecessary. We are also aware that there are many today who have never even heard of Jesus Christ.
- 5.** Acts 13:48. Who among these Gentiles believed Paul's message. The answer is those who were "appointed to eternal life".
- 6.** 1 Cor. 1: 26-29. Once again, we are not chosen on the basis of some merit of our own, but on the basis of God's gracious choice "that no man should boast before God." (v.29)
- 7.** John 15:16. Technically we did not choose Christ, but Christ chose us. Our choice of Him is based on His choice of us.
- 8.** 1 Pet. 2:7-9. Those who are disobedient to the word stumble over Christ who is the stone which the builders rejected. Peter follows this statement with the words, "...and to this doom they were also appointed." Following this Peter says of Christians that we are a chosen race, etc. It should be noted that some are appointed to eternal life in Acts 13:48 and some are appointed to eternal doom in 1 Pet. 2:8.
- 9.** Acts 16:6-10. It should be evident that if the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from entering Asia and Bithynia, the people who lived in these regions would not have the opportunity to hear the gospel. By sending them into Macedonia instead, God makes a choice to bless the Macedonians with the gospel while withholding it from the Asians and Bithynians. Those who claim that everyone on earth has the same opportunity to believe or reject Jesus Christ as their savior make such claims against the obvious fact that there are many who perish without ever hearing of Jesus Christ, just as these people in Asia and Bithynia did in Paul's day. It is clear that God favors some nations over others. Europe and America received the gospel long before Subsaharan Africa, and Subsaharan Africa received it before Papua New Guinea. There are still some 5000 languages which do not have a translation of the Bible. If God favors some nations with the gospel and withholds it from others even for centuries, it is also true that He favors some individuals over others who live in these respective nations. Luke 10:1-16 should be studied in this connection. Those nations or individuals which have heard the gospel and rejected it will be judged more severely than those who have never heard it, because they sin against greater light.
- 10.** Acts 11:18. Repentance is a gift of God, and without it there can be no genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Many people never repent which simply means that repentance was never given to them as a gift from God.
- 11.** Proverbs 16:4. An illustration of this verse is found in Romans 9:17.

**12.** Revelation 13:1-8. All will worship the beast whose names have not been written in the book of life. And when were the names excluded or included into this book? The answer: from the foundation of the world. Compare Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3.

**13.** John 12:37-40. Self-explanatory.

**14.** Luke 22:31-34. Jesus prayed for Peter so that his faith would not ultimately fail. Why didn't Jesus pray for Judas so that *his* faith would not fail? We are not told.

**15.** 1 Samuel 2:25. Eli's sons were corrupt and Eli rebuked them, but they would not listen to his rebuke. The secondary reason they would not listen to their father is their own hardened, sinful hearts. The primary reason they would not listen is the will of God, who "desired to put them to death."

We could easily multiply verses which teach election. We will conclude with some which emphasize the ultimate *purpose* of God in election. The reason God elected Israel is to have a holy nation, a kingdom of priest for His own possession. This has always been His purpose and continues to be His purpose. Peter echoes Ex. 19:6 in his epistle indicating that the NT church is the fulfillment of God's desire to choose a people who would be a royal priesthood and a holy nation. The word "holy" is important. God did not simply want a people; He wanted a *holy* people. In many places in which election is mentioned in the NT, it is mentioned in connection with its purpose which is the ethical holiness of the people who are thus elected.

In Ephesians 1:4 which we have already cited, Paul says that we are chosen in Christ before the world began "that we should be holy and blameless before Him." Peter writes his first epistle to those "who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ...*" (1 Pet. 1:2) Again, the purpose of the foreknowledge of God in election is that we be sanctified (set apart for holiness) and by this sanctification be enabled to obey Jesus Christ. In his second epistle, Peter exhorts us to make our calling and election sure by practicing faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. In other words, we should have little encouragement about our election if we are not living lives which demonstrate the work of the Holy Spirit within us? Encouragement of our election comes when we are walking in the light.

Likewise in 1 Thes. 1:4 Paul has confidence in the election of the Thessalonians because of "your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father." The Thessalonians had also become "imitators of [Paul and his companions] and of the Lord". (v.6) Because of all these positive indicators Paul had confidence in God's choice of them for salvation. God's purpose to call to Himself a holy people is also indicated in Romans 8:29 which says that those whom God "foreknew He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son", which means that we are predestined and elected to conform to the ethical holiness of Jesus Christ in all His communicable attributes.

All of the evidence indicates that God is not on Plan B with His church since His Plan A with Israel failed. God is still on Plan A and never needs a contingency plan because He never fails to accomplish His goals. His purpose for His church is the same as His purpose for Israel, and the church is just the continuation of the remnant of Israel into the new eon (age) of the New Covenant. The true people of God in the OT (the remnant) and the true people of God in the NT are the *one* people of God in the Church.

It is appropriate to ask why we do not find a remnant of the church mentioned in the NT since it is obvious that not all who are members of the institutional church are the elect. This can be answered in two ways. First, the church is never defined in terms of a national or even an institutional entity in the NT. The Greek word for church in the NT is “ecclesia” which means called out ones, those who have been effectually and savingly called out of the world into the grace of God the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Whenever Paul addresses the churches in his epistles, he generally addresses them as “saints”. They are considered saints unless their lifestyle proves otherwise. Likewise, the children of believers are considered as members of the covenant and are also considered as saints. One cannot help but notice that in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 instructions are given to children just as they were in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 6. Unless they prove otherwise by their disobedient lifestyle, they are considered members of the covenant community. A full discussion of this concept must be reserved for our study of ecclesiology, covenant theology, specifically infant baptism.

At any rate there is no prophetic warning of a remnant of the church per se. However, there is sufficient warning in the Scriptures to anyone who is heedless in his behavior. The purpose of the entire book of Hebrews is to warn professing Christians not to return to the types and shadows of the Mosaic Covenant (Old Covenant) and thereby cast aside the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. There are numerous warnings in both epistles to the Corinthians warning them of sinful abuses in the church which must be corrected. In 1Cor. 10 Paul even warns them not to follow the evil examples of the Israelites who incurred the wrath of God and died by the thousands in the wilderness. In 1Cor. 5 we cannot forget that Paul instructed the church to excommunicate a man living in incest with his step mother and to treat him as an unbeliever unless he repented. From a Roman jail Paul warns those in Philippi to beware of people who claim to be Christians but “whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” (Phil. 3:19)

We can see from these examples that there is never any assumption made in the NT that everyone living within the external covenant community of the church is a true believer. Many are benefiting from the external privileges of the church without partaking of the internal benefits of the Holy Spirit. As we read the OT prophets, we are struck by the similarity of OT Israel with today’s visible church in any country. At the end of the age when Jesus comes back in judgment, He will separate the wheat from the tares, a separation which we are unable to make due to our inability to discern the human heart (Matt. 13:24-30). More will be said about the visible and invisible aspects of the church in our study of ecclesiology.

### **3. *Objections to the Doctrine of Election***

#### ***a. It is not fair to elect some and not others.***

This would be true only if God was obligated to save us. He is in fact not obligated to do anything. It is not as though the whole mass of humanity is waiting anxiously for God to save them. As a matter of fact the mass of humanity has no interest in salvation at all. The only reason some *do* have an interest is that God in sovereign grace changes their hearts to repent and believe. The real question should not be why He doesn’t save *everyone*, but why He saves *anyone*.

#### ***b. If someone desperately wants to be saved, he can’t unless he is one of the elect.***

If one truly and genuinely wants to be saved, his desire to be saved proves that he is one of the elect. Only the elect want to be saved. Caution is necessary just as we have stressed earlier. A person may want to escape the pains of hell, but he may not want salvation from the dominion and power of sin in his life. Salvation comes as a package deal. A person who only wants an insurance policy against hell but not holiness of life doesn't really want salvation. Remember that election is election unto holiness.

***c. The doctrine of election teaches fatalism.***

Fatalism means that the world is governed by chance, something we have already said is a contradiction in terms. How can chance govern anything? Quite the contrary, election says that everything is governed by an omnipotent, personal God.

***d. If men are predestined for salvation, there is no need to evangelize and preach the gospel.***

This is one of the most common objections to this doctrine. What must be understood is that God not only predestines the end (the salvation of the elect), but the means to the end (the preaching of the gospel). The same Jesus who said "all that the Father gives me shall come to me" also said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life..." (Jn.6:37; 40) Everyone who is given to Jesus will also believe in Jesus, and no one who comes to Him can bypass believing in Him. It was no less than Jesus Himself who gave us the great commission to go into all the earth and make disciples of all nations (Matt.28:19). Election does not render evangelism unnecessary, but guarantees its results.

Church history has born evidence of the fact that some of the greatest evangelistic effort has been carried out by those who believe that God is mighty to save. The ultimate reason anyone believes our gospel is that they were predestined to believe it before the foundation of the world. When we as evangelists are convinced that God has His elect people out there somewhere, we are encouraged to evangelize knowing that results will come (Acts 18:9-10).

In every event, God foreordains not only the *end* but the *means* to the end. A story will illustrate this point. A certain man was caught in a flood which threatened his farm and even his own life. He was a very devout Christian who believed that if God wished to save him He could do so. As the flood waters rose, he made no attempt to escape, but quietly sat on his porch and waited for God to rescue him. Finally some neighbors came by in a four-wheel-drive truck to evacuate him. He refused to go, saying that if God wanted to rescue him He would do so without their help. As the waters rose, a sheriff and his deputy came by in a boat pleading with the man to get in the boat and move to safety. The man's response was the same. The waters rose so high that he finally had to climb on top of his house to escape the currents. In the last minute a rescue helicopter came by to evacuate the stubborn man to safety. Again he refused saying, "If God wants to save me He can do it without anyone's help." As to be expected the man drowned and went to heaven. He was very confused at the outcome of events and discussed his confusion with God. "Why did you not save me?" he asked. God gently replied, "I sent a neighbor with a truck, a sheriff and his deputy with a boat, and a rescue helicopter with a full crew to save you, and you refused my help three times." Clearly, this Christian had not learned that God works through ordinary means most of the time and not miracles. He also saves men not by sending them visions but by sending them people with a message. Without evangelism, no one will be saved (Rom. 10:13-15).

***e. The doctrine makes us robots.***

Can any of us who are believers claim that our minds, hearts, and wills were not alert and active when we were saved? Did any of us come to Christ against our wills and better

judgment? None at all. Of all those who reject the gospel, would there be any who claimed they wanted to believe the message but could not because of some mysterious force of God's sovereignty preventing their repentance and faith? We cannot explain the sovereign election of God and man's responsibility to repent and believe, but it is clear that man is not forced against his will either to believe or disbelieve.

On the other hand, a world governed by fatalism and chance (a contradiction in terms) makes all of us robots. Throughout man's life he is influenced by forces beyond his control. He is born into a nation and culture which he did not select, a nation or culture which is either influenced by the Christian faith or predominantly pagan. Depending on his inherited culture, he either has a good opportunity of hearing the gospel or a very poor opportunity. He is born into a family in which the Christian faith is openly taught or decidedly rejected or even openly opposed. He had no part in the selection of his family, whether it was Christian or pagan, rich, poor or middleclass. He also had no choice in the intellectual ability genetically transferred to him by his parents. If those abilities are modest or poor, he has limited choices about what to do with his life, and he cannot choose to become a doctor or engineer with such limited intellectual ability. Even if given superior intellectual gifts, if his family is poor, it is questionable whether he will be able to cultivate those gifts without the financial resources to do so.

We could go on and on with examples of how one's circumstances exert a tremendous amount of control over his life. If such circumstances are merely the result of blind fate or chance, then life is troublesome, indeed, and our only "choice" is to go through life accepting the fact that we make no "choices" freely. Either we are controlled by an impersonal universe of chance or by a personal, omnipotent God who is powerful enough and wise enough to create a universe in which He is determining the end of all things yet in which man has the *freedom to make real choices*. Take your pick.

***f. Unbelievers should not be held responsible for their unbelief, since they were not the elect.***

The mystery of man's responsibility and God's sovereignty can never be fully resolved in the mind of man. However, men clearly choose according to their own desires and natures. No one has to force a cow to eat grass against its will and no one has to persuade a pig to wallow in the mire. They do these things because such activities are natural to them and they desire to do them. A sinner does not have to be forced to sin or to reject the gospel. It is in the nature of man to sin and to reject the gospel, and if anyone could interview a sinner already in hell, he would not say he was in hell because he was not one of the elect, but because he rejected the gospel or because he rejected the light of creation which pointed to the creator God.

Loraine Boettner, a reformed theologian of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gives an illustration to clarify this point. He says that he goes to a prison with 200 men incarcerated for their crimes. He makes a provision for their pardon, and now they are permitted to walk out of their cells and go free. The cell doors are thrown back, but not a man moves. They of their own will choose to remain prisoners. Through energetic persuasion 150 of these men are convinced that life on the outside is better than life on the inside, and they make the choice to leave prison for the free world. He does not make any attempt to persuade the other 50 prisoners to leave their prison cells, and they forego the opportunity to be free. Who then is responsible for the 50 remaining in bondage? Certainly it was not the man who was able to obtain their pardon, who was under no obligation to persuade anyone to leave their prison cell. Certainly it was not the guard who opened the cell doors of all 200 prisoners. Each prisoner could have walked free, but only those who were persuaded to do so actually made use of the opportunity. This is electing grace. Those who choose to come to Christ must be



persuaded by the Holy Spirit to walk free from their bondage. Freedom is offered to others who do not wish to be free, but that is no fault of God, but their own sinful resistance to the kind offer of salvation, an internal resistance for which they are fully responsible.

***g. The doctrine contradicts other passages of Scripture which seem to teach the opposite.***

This is of course the most powerful argument against election because it appeals to the Bible. Below are just two of the passages cited to refute the doctrine of election.

1Tim. 2:3-4; Ezek. 33:11. In our attempt to explain these passages we first need to distinguish between the two different kinds of God's will. One is the **decreed** will of God and the other is the **revealed** will of God. The **decreed** will of God has to do with what God has purposed to take place or decreed to happen. This would include every event that has ever taken place including the sinful acts of men. The history of mankind and the universe as a whole is the unfolding of the decreed will of God. It is clear that not everything which God decrees is in agreement with God's holiness. This is truly a mystery, one which we have discussed before and will not repeat here. Then we have the **revealed** will of God which pertains to the moral obligations He requires of all mankind. It is God's rule of life which He desires for all men to follow.

As we reflect upon these two wills, we begin to understand that God does not command (revealed will) everything He decrees (decreed will), and He does not decree everything He commands. God certainly doesn't *command* murder, but He does *decree* that murder should take place. (If He does not decree the existence of murder, then murder is outside God's control.) Also, God does not decree that every single individual repent and believe, even though He commands that they do so.

In 1 Tim. 2:4 Paul says God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." It is also a well-known fact that all men do not get saved; therefore what God desires (His revealed will) He does not bring to pass by an act of His decreed will. Other passages teach us that God withholds the truth from some and hardens some in their sin (Matt. 11:27; Romans 9, 11). Ezek. 33:11 reveals the same truth as 1 Tim. 2:4. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Their death is not an occasion for God's joy, and He would much rather they repent and avoid His wrath (His revealed will). Yet it is also true that God *desires* to display His glory through the punishment of the wicked and the salvation of the elect (Rom. 9:17, 22-23) and he desires to display His righteous justice against sin. Only by understanding the distinction between decreed and revealed will can we avoid accusing the Scriptures of a contradiction.

Another way of dealing with 1Tim. 2:3-4 is by attention to the words "all men". The context of this verse is that Paul is instructing Timothy and his congregation to pray for kings and all those who are in authority to insure the peace of the church and the accomplishment of its mission. The "all men" could therefore refer to all *types* of men and not all men *without exception*.

#### ***4. Conclusion to the Doctrine of Election and Predestination***

One of the primary features of this doctrine is that it exalts God and puts man in his proper place. Too many presentations of the gospel leave God standing at the door of a man's heart begging to get in. Meanwhile a defiant man stands on the other side of the door confident that he has the key to let God in if he wants to or to keep him out. If and when he gets ready for God he can summon Him at his convenience and dictate the terms of the arrangement. This doctrine proves otherwise. God is the one who holds the key to the door, and He can open the door if and when He pleases or leave it locked if He pleases. Now the tables are

turned. Man is on the other side of the door (a prison door) and if he is to be free from his prison he must implore (beg) God to unlock the door and let him out. In other words man must cast himself upon the mercy of God to forgive him of his sins and rescue him from His wrath. If he does so, he proves himself to be one of God's elect.

## ***B. The Work of God in Creation***

### ***Introduction***

Without the work of God in creation the work of God in redemption is meaningless. If we are merely the products of impersonal evolutionary forces at work over billions of years, then we owe God nothing, and God's demands for obedience and full allegiance make no sense simply because He does not exist. For this reason, the work of creation comes first in the Bible. It sets the stage for every requirement God makes of man. The purpose of this part of our study is to show that there is no division between the "real world" of physical things and the "not so real world" of spiritual things. The Bible teaches that both the physical and the spiritual are equally real and that there can be no contradiction between the two since God made both of them. God "rules among the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth" and is willing to share His omnipotence with no one.

Without a literal understanding of the creation of Adam and Eve, there can be little if any appreciation for the second Adam, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ came to restore what was lost in the first Adam and to take his place as our federal head, one who represents us before God the Father. All the references to the first Adam and the second Adam in the NT are confusing at best and misleading at worst if there is no historical first Adam. And if there is no historical first Adam in Genesis, but only a mythological figure, then the historical meaning of Jesus Christ is undermined and we are left in our sins. Francis Schaeffer, a leading theologian and philosopher of the twentieth century, maintained that the gospel has little meaning in the modern world for people who do not believe that "in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We should do more as evangelical Christians to begin our evangelism with the book of Genesis rather than the New Testament.

For some time now, liberal philosophers and theologians have mistakenly, and more often than not purposely, moved theological and Biblical studies into an "upper story" which has no connection with the "lower story" of where we live and work as humans. The way this works out practically is that it is all right to believe whatever you want to believe in the upper story of spirituality, but what you believe in this upper story has no verification or practical application whatever in the "real world" of matter and physical laws. Christ was not really God; He did not rise again from the dead, etc; but if you want to believe such myths, and if it makes you feel better to believe such things, then go ahead. In other words, you can believe whatever you want to in the upper story because it makes no real difference in the lower story. In philosophy this is known as dualism (two distinct worlds which are "worlds" apart with no connection between them).

The Bible knows nothing of a dualistic universe in which there is this unbridgeable gulf between the physical and the spiritual. The incarnation of God in Christ indicates that God entered the historical world of space and time to redeem what He had created as "good". He is not a cosmic "clock maker" who creates the world, winds it up to start it ticking, and then backs away and has nothing more to do with it. Rather, God creates the world and never takes His hands off of it for one second. In the words of the hymn writer Isaac Watts, "Jesus shall reign wherever the sun does its successive journeys run." Jesus' reign includes every place on earth which receives sunshine, which is everywhere on earth. Sir Francis Bacon said that God has written two books, Scripture and nature, and that these two books agree

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with one another because they came from the same hand. It is true that the Bible is not a book of science; nevertheless, it is true in all it says about everything, and it speaks at least in principle about everything.

The failure of most modern science to take Genesis seriously, especially the flood in Gen. 6-9 has resulted in pure speculation about the origin of the universe and the geological record. The entire theory of evolution (which is not even a good theory) is a cosmic philosophical attempt to get rid of God. If man can somehow come up with a reasonable explanation of how the world with all its diverse forms of life got here, then he will no longer need the explanation of a Creator. The conclusion of his reasoning is the goal for which he has been reaching since Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden, to be his own god.

***For the following survey of Genesis 1-11, I am indebted to Dr. Douglas Kelly of Reformed Theological Seminary from whom much of the content and outline has been taken directly or adapted (Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, unpublished class syllabus).***

### ***1. The Type of Literature in Genesis 1-11 (Kelly, p. 40)***

The language of Gen.1-11 is Hebrew historical narrative. There are other types of Hebrew writing styles (genres) including poetry, apocalyptic literature, etc.; but the style in these and other chapters of Genesis is decidedly historical narrative. It was written as history, not mythology. There are poetical accounts of the creation in the Bible, notable examples being chapters 38-41 of Job and Psalm 104. When we compare these poetical accounts with Genesis, the differences with the Genesis account are easily noticed. For one thing, the Hebrew parallelism found in Hebrew poetry is absent in the Genesis account.

Genesis 1-11 especially is treated as allegorical and non-historical by liberal theologians. Ironically, and with some measure of poetic justice, these are the very chapters favored by the NT writers and none other than Jesus Himself. There are over 100 quotations or direct references to Gen. 1-11 in the NT and every one of these chapters are mentioned somewhere in the NT. Every one of the NT writers, without exception, refers somewhere in his writing to these chapters. Six times Jesus quoted from one of these chapters or referred to some event or some Biblical character from them. He refers to each of the first seven chapters during His NT ministry. It is also true that in all the references from Jesus and the NT writers there is no hint that they regarded anything in these chapters as anything but factual history.

### ***2. The Outline of Genesis 1-4 (Kelly, p. 41)***

For those who wish to find the discrepancies or contradictions in the Genesis account, an appeal is made to the seeming differences in the account of Genesis 1 and 2. The following is an effort to show the inherent harmony of these two chapters.

Chapter 1 through chapter 2:3 is the account of creation. Chapter 2:4 through chapter 50:26 consists of the history of the generations or the family tree. To be more specific, 1:1 is the general account of the whole creation. Genesis 1:2-31 gives us the details of creation ending with the crown of creation, man, being created on the sixth day. In 1:31, another summary statement is made, “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” Chapter 2:1-3 gives another summary statement of creation followed by the history of man in 2:4 through chapter 4. The spotlight in the Genesis account turns from the whole universe to one small part of the creation, man, and maintains this emphasis throughout the rest of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The Hebrew mindset was not linear or purely chronological, and this must be kept in mind to interpret Genesis correctly. The writer goes back and forth between summary statements to details and back to summary statements and back again to details. Genesis 2 is not a different account of creation, but a different focus in

creation which shows the manner in which man was created and the dominion given to him by God. The detail of this dominion is a subject reserved for the study of Genesis itself. It is sufficient to say here that there are not two to three accounts of the creation, but only one account with different emphasis being given in various places in the Biblical account.

### ***3. Absolute Creation (Kelly, p. 41)***

Two kinds of creation are presented in Genesis, primary and secondary creation. Primary creation is presented in 1:1 in which God created everything without the use of preexisting material. The NT speaks about primary creation in Heb. 11:3 which says that “what is seen was not made out of things which are visible” and Romans 4:17 which speaks of “God who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.” Other examples of primary creation are found in 2:4. Secondary creation is found in Gen. 1:7, 16, 26; and 2:7, 19, 22. In all these examples God formed something from material which was already in existence from the primary creation. In other words God made all the necessary materials in the primary creation and then used these materials to create other things, including man and woman.

In terms of the beginnings of the universe there are really only two options: absolute matter or an absolute God who created matter. Either God is eternal or matter is eternal. In scientific law there are two laws of physics which are important in the consideration of our subject. The *law of the conservation of energy* teaches us that nothing is now being created or destroyed, but only changed from one form to another form. The second law teaches us that in all the changes that are going on in the universe the direction of change is from order to disorder. This is called *entropy* which is the tendency for all the available energy in the universe to be transformed eventually into heat energy which cannot be transformed back again into anything else. What this means is that the whole universe is suffering a slow but inevitable heat death unless God intervenes to stop it. According to the law of conservation of energy which says that matter and energy is neither being created nor destroyed, there must have been some initial power to put matter into existence which is no longer in operation today (that is, no longer producing matter and energy). This law supports the idea of a Creator who at one point in time created matter and energy (which are actually considered the same thing in physics) but is no longer creating matter and energy. Therefore, even the professing atheist must agree that at one point in time some external power had to act upon the universe and that the First Law of Thermodynamics was not in existence at the time this happened. Secondly, according to the second law (entropy) all this matter and energy will eventually dissipate into heat irreversibly. If this matter and energy is eternal, as evolutionists claim, then it would already have dissipated into heat given the assumed age of the universe. If the world of matter and energy is billions of years old as they claim, then there has been plenty of time for the universe of matter and energy to “run down” and expend itself, much like a fire used for cooking. Unless fuel is added to the fire, the fire will go out.

Think of it this way. If a person builds a house, he uses materials and energy to build it. If he never does anything else to the house by way of maintenance, the house will eventually fall into disrepair. The roof will begin to leak; the wood portions of the house will rot and so on. If left to itself for thousands of years, even a brick house will eventually be reduced to a pile of rubble hardly recognizable as a house. This represents the first and second laws of thermodynamics, as they are called. The materials and energy to build the house represent the law of conservation of energy. Since nothing more is ever done to the house, no more matter and energy are created. And since matter and energy are not destroyed, but only changed, the materials and energy of the house are not destroyed but are changed into another form. The tin roof eventually rusts and the components of metal are returned to the ground in

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other forms. The wood rafters rot and through microorganisms are changed into soil. With unlimited time, even the bricks degenerate into inorganic particles which are nothing more than the clay from which they were constructed. The second law (entropy) is demonstrated by the fact that without a fresh input of matter and energy from an outside source (the original owner or another person), the house will fall to pieces and all the matter and energy expended in building it will be lost as heat energy as the wood rots, the metal rusts, and the bricks (which took a lot of energy to make) fall apart.

Every thing in the universe illustrates these two laws. The human body eventually grows old or sick and dies. When the body is eaten by microorganisms in the grave, much of the matter of our bodies is lost as heat energy. The rest becomes soil. Scientists even tell us that the sun is burning itself out and no longer gives off the heat it once did. If the sun was as old as some scientists say it is, it would have burned out long ago. In other words, the universe itself is dying, but it will last long enough for God to accomplish His purposes with it until Jesus returns to restore the universe to its original, eternal purpose (Rom. 8:18-25).

The First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics, which we have been discussing, pose a difficult problem for the evolutionist. The Law of Entropy (the second) is especially thorny since no one has ever been able to explain how it is possible that the direction of evolution is from chaos to order when the second law proves the direction of any physical or biological system in a closed universe (one without God) is always from order to chaos (remember the house illustration above). Evolutionists insist on genetic mutations (changes in genes) taking place within the DNA structures of animals enabling some to adapt to changing environmental conditions. (For example, owls developing large eyes to enable them to hunt at night without fear of larger predators.) The fatal flaw in their theory of genetic mutations is that over 99% of genetic mutations are unfavorable, harmful mutations which *reduce* the organism's ability to survive rather than *enhance* such ability.

They then insist on maintaining that favorable adaptation takes place by chance rather than by intelligent design. It just happened rather than being caused by an infinitely wise Creator. But what is the *chance of chance* producing the universe and all the biological and physical diversity in it? What is the chance of producing a dictionary by allowing groups of chimpanzees to sit at typewriters for three hundred years? And what is the chance of producing a Boeing 747 by blowing up a junkyard of automobiles with dynamite? Does any one want to bet their paycheck on such a possibility? Yet, in the evolutionary scheme, there are no chimpanzees and no dynamite, just chance and billions of years for chance to do something intelligent.

#### **4. The Manner of Creation**

Some evangelical scholars have attempted to reconcile the Genesis account with evolutionary and geological theory by introducing a long segment of time into verse two which says, "And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep..."

According to these scholars a long period of time lapses between verse two and verse three (a gap) which gives time for evolution to take place. Verse two presents the earth in a chaotic (confused) condition, not something "very good" which is presented in verse 31. Everything was dark and all the materials of the earth were in a condition of disorganization, nothing like what we see in v. 31. Some people believe that in v. 3 through v.31, God allowed the process of evolution to take over to produce the diversity in plant and animal life we see today.

Other evangelicals believe that God created the world in v.1 and that He judged the world in v.2 because of Satan's rebellion. The world was created good and demonstrated organization, but was cursed when Satan rebelled and degenerated into a dark and disorderly mass of material. We know that Satan is a fallen angel (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), but we have no

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historical record as to when he fell with other fallen angels. Some speculate that this was the time. However, the theory that he fell here in v.2 is pure speculation. There is no indication of this anywhere else in Scripture nor is there any indication of the presence of evil here in Genesis one. Man did not sin until chapter 3 and there is no proof in the Bible that the earth was cursed for Satan's rebellion. The earth was cursed for man's rebellion (3:17-19), and every person of the human race was cursed for Adam's sin because he was the federal head or representative of the human race (Romans 5:12-14).

A better explanation is that God imposed organization and symmetry upon the created world after He made the mass of materials. Only in v. 3 did God begin to organize this mass into a beautiful creation suitable for man's habitation and suitable to reflect His glory. Again, to use the illustration of building a house, suppose a builder took all the materials necessary to build a house and dumped them onto the building site. For the sake of the illustration, let us say that he did not put the bricks in one place, the sand and cement in another, the gravel in another, the wood in another and so on. Instead, he just put all the materials into one huge pile mixed up together without any order whatever. This is something of what we find in verse two. Later, the builder began to sort through the jumbled mass of materials and construct an organized building. This corresponds to what God does beginning in v. 3. The physical universe is not evil in v. 2, just incomplete. There is absolutely no evidence in the text of a violent world and the survival of the fittest.

In verse 3, God introduces energy into the disorganized mass. Just as molecular forces hold the molecules of matter together, light is introduced to hold the matter of the universe together. Dr. Henry M. Morris, a noted creation scientist, says that in v. 2 the physical world was a "watery matrix throughout the darkness of space", almost like a dark room filled with mud and vapor. The water and the land masses were not divided. We might think of it as a big soup which may be the reason some evangelicals like the gap theory since evolutionists also speak about a "primordial soup" from which life sprang into being. Morris even maintains that in v. 2 the earth did not even have a spherical shape, since it was "formless". This is most likely since there were no gravitational forces present at the time to hold this watery matrix into a sphere (Kelly, p. 45).

In the last half of v. 2, according to Morris (quoted by Kelly, p. 45), the Holy Spirit begins to introduce energy into the created mass. Remember we said that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in the creation of the world. Here, the Holy Spirit begins to move or hover over the surface of this watery mixture of materials inserting energy into them. As Kelly says, "The picture you have is the Holy Spirit in a wave motion on the material transmitting all this energy, with its law and pattern and structure, into that material." Morris says that "It is significant that the transmission of energy in the operations of the cosmos is in the form of waves – light waves, heat waves, sound waves, and so forth....Waves are typically rapid back and forth movements and they are normally produced by the vibratory motion of a wave generator of some kind....It is most appropriate that the first impartation of energy to the universe is described as the 'vibrating' movement of the Spirit of God Himself."

In verses 3 and 4 light was created. It is interesting that the first mention of light is in connection with the spoken word of God, which is quite in keeping with the fact that "God is light." The light not only dispersed the darkness, but it also separated the day from the night and introduced "orderly patterns of day and night." Notice the text, "And there was evening and there was morning, one day." (v.5) This implies that the earth was now rotating on its axis with gravitational forces in effect with a source of light on one side of the earth even though the sun was not yet created. Furthermore, the presence of light, according to Morris, implies the existence of electromagnetic forces and all the nuclear forces holding

matter together. Thus, the existence of light implies that the energizing of the physical world is complete, and the world is a “harmonious physical whole” (Kelly, p. 47).

### **5. Six Day Creation**

What has been said thus far would indicate that I hold to a literal six-day creation. I would not say that those who hold to an older age of the earth or a creation which took place over a longer period than six literal days are not evangelical Christians. However, we do think such an interpretation presents many problems.

One of those problems we have already mentioned which is the style of writing we find in the creation account, historical narrative. Another problem with a non-literal approach is the normal meaning of the word “day” in the OT. The word “yom” normally means 24 hour day or the daylight portion of a 24 hour day. Occasionally it is used with reference to an indefinite time (Judges 21:25), but “never as a definite period of time with a specific beginning and ending.” The context will generally give us a clue that the literal meaning is not intended as in Judges 21:25 and 2 Pet. 3:8. In Exodus 20:8-11 the commandment to rest on the seventh day is based on the fact that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. This commandment would have made little sense to Israelites who believed that the creation account was only an extended allegory or poetic account of creation.

The fact that the days are regulated by cycles of light and darkness which are eventually the function of the sun gives us a clue that “day” in Genesis 1 is speaking of a literal day. Repeatedly we read, “and there was evening and morning, the first [or the second, third, etc.] day.”

Again there are other viewpoints offered by conservative evangelical scholars who do not hold to a literal six day creation. For example the word “day” obviously does not mean a literal 24 hour day in Gen. 2:4. It is possible that the phrase “morning and evening” refers to periods of time and not to a literal morning and evening. However, the weight of the evidence appears to favor literal days and one wonders whether other theories have arisen in an effort to accommodate the prevailing scientific community’s fondness for the theory of evolution. Kelly notes that not until the Enlightenment was there ever a debate among theologians over the literal meaning of “yom” in the Genesis account. We probably would not be having these debates among evangelical scholars if such a theory had never shaken the world of scientific scholarship with so little tangible evidence to support it.

#### ***a. The First and Second Day—Separation of Firmament from the Waters (Kelly, p. 49)***

On the first day God separated the light from the darkness. On the second day, the earth was rotating and above the earth there was still a mixture of gases and water which made up a thick mist which could not be easily penetrated by light. Clear air for breathing space was not yet there and so the earth was not yet inhabitable for man. The firmament was this thick mixture, like a dense fog upon the earth which would permit sight of objects only a few feet away. Then God caused a division between the water on the earth and the water above the earth. Clouds were suspended in the sky and the firmament became a “thin out-stretched space” or what we call the atmosphere. The waters above the earth were a vapor canopy or tent maybe hundreds of miles thick existing far out into space which was transparent enough for light to shine through. Although transparent, it consisted of vast quantities of water which God would later use to cause a world-wide flood.

Christian scientists believe this thick vapor canopy would have been ideal for sustaining vigorous life forms on earth, including dinosaurs and huge plant life. The vapor would also have filtered harmful solar radiation from the sun which causes the aging process. This is

why people before the flood lived longer than they do today. During the flood this canopy was removed which means that man is now exposed to harmful radiation which speeds up the aging process and death. Methusaleh is said to have lived to be over 900 years old (Gen.5:27) which indicates a protective covering over the earth and also that the human body was “built” for long life on earth. Death has come into the world because of sin, not because God’s design of the human body was defective.

With the flood this vapor canopy condensed in the form rain which flooded the entire earth in a matter of forty days and forty nights (7:4). This was no ordinary rain since such a vapor canopy has never since existed over the earth. Not only this, but the “fountains of the deep burst open” (7:11) which means that the water reservoirs below the earth’s surface burst open through fractures in the earth’s crust in the same way that volcanoes erupt. This activity, along with torrential rains for 40 days and nights, would have allowed the entire earth to be covered with water.

***b. The Third Day—The Seas are Collected in One Place, Dry Land Appears, Plant Life Appears (Kelly, p. 51)***

Thus far we have seen two divisions take place: the division of light from dark and the division of the waters above the earth and the waters on the earth. Now on the third day another division takes place, the division between the waters on the earth from the dry land (v.9-10). This implies two things. First, it implies that until the third day waters covered the earth; and second, it implies the architectonic building of mountains and the corresponding creation of subterranean caverns under the earth’s surface and deep ocean depths capable of holding all the water running off the earth’s surface. As the mountains rose up, the basins of the oceans sunk deeper. In this way the continents of the earth were formed.

Although Psalm 104 is a poetic description of the creation, it still reflects the reality of what happened in the creative activity of God. In v. 6-9 the Psalmist says that waters were covering the earth as a garment. At God’s rebuke the waters fled (corresponding to “Then God said” in Gen. 1: 9), the mountains rose, the valleys sank down, and a boundary was set so that the waters could not return over the earth. Many smooth rock formations we see today were formed by billions of gallons of water rushing over rocks on the third day of creation, a process which would possibly take thousands of years under present conditions of erosion. We know that God could have created the world any way He wanted. He could have created it in one second rather than days, but the Biblical record implies a process instead which took place over the space of six days. God used natural geological laws to continue the process of creation, laws which were activated at His command.

Even today earthquakes cause the pushing up of the earth’s surface. On February 20, 1943 a volcano was born in a cornfield 180 miles west of Mexico City. The cornfield suddenly began producing a dense cloud of smoke. By the second day a cone of cinders had reached an altitude of 100 feet and continuing explosions of lava and rock raised the peak to 450 feet in two weeks, 930 feet in eight months and 1350 feet by 1952. By then the surrounding villages of Paricutin and Parangaricutiro had disappeared under the debris. The incident was reported in the National Geographic Magazine in Feb. 1944 (*The World That Perished*, John C. Whitcomb, Jr.). Whitcomb, a creation scientist, also informs us that rocks which have been taken from volcanoes known to be only 200 years old have been dated at 100 million to 10 billion years old by typical radioactive dating procedures. This should warn us to be more skeptical of the popular tendency to date the earth at billions of years old without more substantial evidence.

Geological dating methods are known for their unproven assumptions and circular reasoning. For example, for the uranium method of dating rocks to be valid, one would have to know Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com—July, 2012



how much uranium was present in the rock as well as how much lead was in the rock from the beginning (since uranium degrades into lead). Only God knows how much lead was present in the first place, since no one was there to observe the exact amounts. However, modern geologists assume that a certain amount of lead and uranium was present and then they assume a certain rate of degradation from uranium to lead. This assumption of a constant rate of degradation is highly questionable since volcanoes and other such catastrophes (floods) are known to cause a rapid change in the geophysical conditions of the earth. The dating method, then, is based on two assumptions which cannot be proven. There is actually a third assumption made, namely, that no other deposits of lead and uranium took place from the time the rock strata originated until the time it was dated, yet another unverifiable assumption considering the deposits made by volcanoes and floods.

Plant life was also created on the third day (v.11-12). These were not seeds but full grown plants capable of yielding seeds (v.11) just as Adam was a full grown human rather than a baby. As the smooth boulders mentioned earlier have the appearance of age, many things created during the six days have the appearance of age. Some of the trees created on the third day would have been hundreds of feet high and would have appeared to have been a thousand years old. But it is not as if God is trying to deceive us since He has told us in His word how He created the world. If we refuse to believe the data provided in Scripture, we deserve to be in the dark about the world we live in.

It should also be noticed that plants and trees yielded “seed after their kind” (v.12). Apple trees did not produce bananas and tomato plants did not produce beans. Each plant has its own DNA structure (genetic structure) which is unique to that plant and is the information which the plant uses to reproduce itself. The Bible indicates that “like produces like”, not something else. For the same reason, dogs produce dogs and cows produce cows, not something else. According to evolutionary theory, changes occurred in the genetic material of animals and plants (mutations) over a process of millions of years which made possible the diversity of species in the animal and plant world. Small microscopic organisms in the sea gave rise to larger, more complex organisms, and sea creatures gave rise to reptiles; reptiles to birds; and so forth. Man himself is thought to have arisen from some type of primate similar to himself.

There is absolutely no evidence from the fossil record of any transitional life forms which proves the evolution from one species to another. Much diversity has taken place *within* species (horizontally) but not *from one* to another (vertically). For example, there are many different types of dogs, but they are still dogs. There are no transitional fossil forms from an earlier primate to a man, even though many such forms have been enthusiastically promoted and later found to be frauds, much to the embarrassment of the so-called scientific community. It is also embarrassing that the fossil record is the main “proof” of the division of the various geological periods of history especially since this “proof” is based on as many assumptions as the uranium method mentioned above. Evolutionists generally determine the age of rock layers (strata) by the types of fossilized animals found in the layers (especially since the uranium method is so unreliable). The process of evolution (from lower species to higher species) is used to determine where these fossils should be placed in the time-table of rock formations.

### ***c. The Fourth Day—Sun, Moon, and Stars in the Firmament (Kelly, p. 53)***

Since the first day light had been created, but only on the fourth did God create the heavenly bodies to govern that light (v.14-19). Where did this light come from? The Bible says that God is light. God does not need the sun and moon to produce light; He just chooses to do so. Revelation 21:23

tells us that the New Jerusalem has no need of the sun or moon because the glory of God illumines it and its lamp is the Lamb of God. This doesn't mean that it doesn't have a sun or moon, but that it doesn't *need* them for light.

Undoubtedly, the stars were created at the same time with their light paths already reaching the earth, again, giving the appearance of age. Light is part of the secondary creative activity of God in which He rearranges materials which He had already created during primary creation. Notice that the words "Let there be light" in v. 3 and 14 and the word "made" (asah) v. 16. The word "made" is distinguished from the word "created" which indicates primary creativity without preexisting material.

***d. The Fifth Day—Life in the Seas and the Skies (Kelly, p. 54)***

During the second, third, and fourth days, God rearranged what He had already made on the first day. There is a difference between the word "made" in v.6 and 17 and the word "create" in v. 1, 21, and 27. On the fifth day God brings forth something which had not been there before even in another material form. The evidence from v. 21 is not in agreement with evolution which teaches that life evolved slowly in the primeval ocean in response to electrical discharges (lightning). The indication here is that the oceans suddenly swarmed with life newly created, and the skies swarmed with birds.

Along with their creation, the birds of the sky and the creatures of the sea received the blessing of God to be fruitful and to multiply, a blessing we will see again later on in the creation of man.

***e. The Sixth Day—Life on Earth and the Creation of Man (Kelly, p.55)***

It is interesting that God made (asah) the land animals but He created (bara) the creatures of the land and sea. Morris indicates that along with the creation of the sea creatures and birds was the creation of the principle of conscious life or the soul. This principle of the soul was created on the fifth day for all sea, sky, and land creatures which made it unnecessary to mention it again on the sixth day. The formation of land creatures consisted of new organization of preexisting materials (asah) and was not different from God's making of the sea and sky animals. Again, the word create (bara) is used in v. 21 only because of the creation of the life principle or soul.

It is helpful at this point to compare 1:21 with 2:19. In that verse it is said that "*out of the ground* the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky...." This verse gives us greater detail than 1:21 as to the manner of God's secondary creativity of both land and sky animals. He formed them "out of the ground" thus using existing materials in their formation. So we understand from this that the primary creativity of God is directed in v. 21 not toward the physical bodies of the sea and sky creatures but to the animating, living principle of the soul which is also given to the land animals although "create" (bara) is not mentioned in v. 24-25.

It is important to note here the lack of evolutionary struggle, the survival of the fittest or any such thing in the Genesis account for those who wish to hold to a theistic evolutionary model. Such a model says that God created the materials necessary for life but allowed the process of evolution to take over afterwards, which in essence is a kind of deistic approach to creation (God made the clock, wound it up, and then stands back and lets things happen on their own). There is no hint of death or animals struggling against one another for survival. There is no evidence of animals eating other animals or of sickness and decay of any sort. It is a perfectly good earth.

We also notice in 2:19-20 that the animals were brought to Adam to be named with no indication that the animals or man were afraid of one another. In fact we are specifically told in Genesis 9:2 that the fear of animals for man was introduced after the flood. No longer was his dominion over the animal world complete, and they would no longer yield obedience to him as they had done before when he named the animals. Fear of man would hold them at a distance, the “cattle” or domesticated animals being the only exception. This lack of fear in animals before the flood helps to explain the fact that gathering and storing such animals on the ark during and after the flood was not as impossible as it may appear.

At any rate, the evolutionary model cannot be reconciled with the Biblical one here in Genesis which doesn't show any signs of violence among the animals themselves and between man and animals. It should also be noted that according to the evolutionary model, millions of years passed on earth with the animal kingdom ruling the earth without man's presence, and many of the species became extinct before man evolved from lower forms. This model does not reconcile with the Biblical account of man being the crown of creation and being given the task of ruling over the animal kingdom as God's vice-regent. We may also ask how we may reconcile the extinction of many species of animals before violence was imposed upon the creation by man's rebellion. We have already seriously questioned the introduction of Satan's rebellion in v. 2 and Biblically there is no evidence that the world was ever subjected to hardship by this rebellion. It was man's rebellion which caused the ruin (1Cor. 15:21), not Satan's.

With the sixth day we come to the high point of creation, the creation of man. With the dividing of light and darkness, the waters below from the waters above, the separation of land from water, creation of plant and animal life, the earth is now suitable for man's habitation. It is clear from the account in 1:26-30 that man is not another animal. Though he shares the physical makeup of the land mammals, he alone of all created things is made in the image of God. This is but one thing unique to his creation. There are other differences noted in this text and others.

- 1.** Man alone is created in the image of God. We will discuss this later in the Doctrine of Anthropology (man). It is sufficient at this point to say that man occupies a unique position of importance in the created order to exercise dominion over creation as God's vice-regent or ruler (1:28-30).
- 2.** Up till this point in creation, God simply commanded something to be created and it was. Now God enters into consultation (Calvin) with Himself which appears to be a Trinitarian consultation. In other words the creation of man is a special event in the work of creation.
- 3.** The word “create” (bara) which denotes the primary creativity of God is used three times in one verse (v.27). Smith quotes Gerhard Von Rad as saying, “It occurs three times in the one verse to make it clear that here the high point and goal has been reached toward which all God's creativity from verse 1 on was directed”
- 4.** Being formed of dust from the ground was not unique since God brought forth other animals from the ground (2:19). But of no other living creature is it said that “God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (2:7).
- 5.** The death penalty is given to anyone who murders another man, and the reason given for this severe penalty is that man is the image of God (9:6). An attack upon man is an attack upon God Himself whose image man bears.

In examining the Biblical data, one wonders how the Christian evolutionist (who believes God used evolution to create the world) determines when man became the image of God.

Was it when he was a one celled amoeba, or was this distinction given to him after his ancestors became primates with opposable thumbs? Just when did man become the image of God in the evolution of man? This should be a thorny problem for the Christian who wishes to hold onto evolutionary dogma especially when the Bible indicates an immediate bestowal of this distinction upon man.

By way of application, the Biblical data should shed much light upon how human beings should interact with one another in society. For example, it has relevance upon the atrocities in northern Uganda and the foolishness of those who are calling for peaceful negotiations with the Lord's Resistance Army and amnesty for the murderous participants who surrender to the government. Man is not an animal and he cannot be treated as an animal by those who are murdering people in northern Uganda nor by legislative leaders or church leaders who are calling for amnesty (forgiveness of criminal offenses). Those who have been killed are not so many cattle; they are human beings who are made in God's image and their blood is crying out from the ground for justice (Gen. 4:10; Num. 35:30-34; Deut. 21:1-9). God chose to protect Cain from execution (Gen. 4:15), but only God can do this, not man. The purpose of government is to administer justice and by doing so to protect innocent life (Rom. 13). By forgiving murderers, the government goes far beyond the jurisdiction given to it by God, a jurisdiction which does not include forgiveness, but only justice. Only time will tell whether Rwanda will survive the genocide of 1994 if the thousands who took part in the genocide are "forgiven" and never brought to justice.

It would be difficult to overestimate the damage the theory of evolution has done to mankind. The massacres mentioned above are only two examples. The value of human life is cheapened by a view of man which does not recognize his dignity as the image-bearer of God. Only occasional use of the death penalty for murder pollutes the land with the innocent blood of the victims and calls down the wrath of God upon a whole nation. The United States is a prime example with liberal courts "legislating from the bench" and destroying the constitutional right to live by handing down sentences for murder which minimize its seriousness and granting mothers the right to murder their unborn babies with impunity (with no sentence at all).

The increase of violent crime in a supposedly civilized society is not only the result of leniency by the courts emersed in evolutionary thinking, but the consequence of decades of evolutionary teaching in public schools and universities. If man is only another animal, why should his life be so sacred? Indeed, there are evolutionists and environmentalists who are far more concerned about the mountain gorillas in southwest Uganda than the masses of displaced Africans living in refugee camps. After all, there are very few gorillas by comparison which should be protected at all costs. When hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were being massacred in 1994, relatively little was said about it on the national news media, but if an endangered species had been the victim of mass slaughter, the event would have dominated the news throughout the world.

When the school murders took place in the US in Colorado, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Mississippi a few years back, school leaders and national leaders were asking the question, "How could this happen?" This was the wrong question. The real question should have been, "Why isn't this happening more often given the fact that for decades we have taught our school children that they are nothing more than sophisticated animals?" When we cheapen life by not telling the truth about the dignity of man, bad things happen. The right to an abortion is the law of the land in the US which has costs over 40 million lives, and euthanasia (the convenient killing of old people) is just around the corner if godless humanism has its way.

It should be of interest to Africans that many slave traders in the North and slave holders in the South before the Civil War in the US did not believe that the black man had a soul and was not truly human. The conditions these slaves suffered during transportation across the sea to be sold are beyond imagination as well as their ill-treatment as slaves by many southern slave holders. On the other hand there were many other slave holders in the South who were devout Christians (though misinformed and mistaken about the slave issue) who built balconies in their churches for the slaves to attend church services and hear about the good news of Jesus Christ. They were concerned for the eternal souls of their slaves, many of whom became sincere Christians in spite of their slavery (Man meant evil against them, but God meant it for good. Gen. 50:20) The difference between these slave holders and their abusive counterparts was their view of man.

In a political and social environment based on the theory of evolution, there is no foundation for justice, equity, and mercy. It is the survival of the fittest or the law of the jungle in which those who are more powerful have the right to conquer and exploit those who are weaker. Might makes right. Any totalitarian State can justify itself and the exploitation of the masses with evolutionary theory. In order for the human species in a certain country to survive and prosper, they would argue, a special informed elite class (or individual) is needed who knows what is best for the rest of the population. The ignorant masses must be forced to yield to their (or his) superior wisdom or else be eliminated for the common good. But where the Christian faith is adequately taught and practiced, the dignity of every man is emphasized, regardless of color, nationality, tribe, income, education, physical health, etc. No matter what his status, he is seen for who he is, the image-bearer God.

One can see that a firm foundation for life and society can be built only upon a Biblical doctrine of creation which includes the dignity of man. Creation also provides a firm foundation for science which would be able to avoid much dead-end “research” and the “chasing of many rabbits” if it were faithful to text of Holy Scripture. Once again, the Bible does not claim to be a textbook of science. However, it speaks truthfully about every subject in the universe in principle and gives us a framework from which to begin our investigation.

## **6. Conclusion**

It would require a separate course to adequately survey the scientific evidence against the theory of evolution, which is always presented as a fact beyond question. One wonders why the theory has enjoyed so much success in light of the predominant weight of evidence against it. The theory has not only survived in the intellectual community and in popular opinion, but has thrived. It has succeeded even in ridiculing Christian creationism to the point of silence in the classroom and market place of ideas and practice (Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 57). University professors are in danger of losing credibility and tenure by subscribing to such an antiquated view of origins and reality.

The only way to understand the success of evolution is to see it as the apostate religion that it is. As we said earlier, evolution is the best way man has discovered how to get rid of God and enthrone man to his rightful place as god. The real problem is not an intellectual problem but a spiritual one which deals more, much more, with the heart than the intellect. “From this perspective it appears that the suppression of God’s truth, as part of man’s total depravity, is one of the most attested facts of history, and at the same time the one that is fought and denied most!” (Krabbendam, p. 58).

### ***C. The Work of God in Providence***

We have already discussed providence briefly in our study of the attributes of God (p. 14). Now it is necessary to discuss this more thoroughly especially since the doctrine is fundamental to our understanding of God, ourselves, and life in general. The work of providence is God's most wise and holy governing of all His actions and His creatures (Westminster Shorter Catechism). The work of providence naturally flows out of a Biblical view of creation. Contrary to Deism which teaches that God has a hands-off approach to His creation, providence teaches us that God has the most intimate relationship to His creation from the beginning.

Everyone has some view of providence to make some sense of the world. Too often, their understanding of providence is fundamentally flawed. The Graeco-Roman view of the ruling principle of the universe was fate, an opinion which is too much in prevalence in our own day. This view was popularized in the US in a song which had as its repetitive chorus "whatever will be will be; the future is not ours to see". This is true to a point. The future is not ours to see, but God does see the future because He planned it. Because of this plan, man's life is not controlled by the ruthless forces of the universe which are constantly breaking out against man and ruining his life. The Christian faith delivers us from fate or luck and puts our lives safely in the hands of God who knows what He is doing with our lives and the lives of others. For the unbeliever, providence puts his life in the hands of an angry God who demands repentance and faith.

#### ***1. The Scope, Extent, and Purpose of Providence***

Is there anything outside God's interest or control? The Bible says no. Ephesians 1:11 says that God "works all things after the counsel of His will." Jesus describes this providence in more tangible terms by saying that God the Father feeds even the birds of the air (Matt. 6:26) and that an insignificant sparrow cannot die without the involvement of God's providence (Matt. 10:29). If His providence involves sparrows, how much more does it include human beings (10:30-31)?

For God's children, providence includes everything which happens to them both good and bad all of which moves believers closer to their predestined purpose. And what is that purpose? The Bible leaves us in no doubt—to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-30). The good is not man-centered happiness, but God-centered transformation or holiness (Krabbendam, p. 60). Remember our discussion of the purpose of election. We are chosen in Christ Jesus that we should be holy (Eph. 1:4). Anything short of this holiness is short-sighted and man-centered and not worthy of election or providence. As we discussed earlier (p. 17-18 of your notes) a Jewish rabbi wrote a book in an attempt to explain "why bad things happen to good people". His solution was to strip God of his sovereign providence over creation. God would love to help us out but often can't. Paul's explanation is to say that "in the final analysis no 'bad' things can happen to 'good' people (Christians), ever!" (Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 60) In effect, Christians can't lose, at least in the long run. We can make many mistakes through bad judgment and outright, conscious disobedience, but even our disobedience is included in God's governing providence over our lives.

Our sinfulness has many uses in God's benevolent providence. Personal sin exposes our weaknesses and shows us the need for total dependence upon God. It has the sanctifying effect of destroying pride and arrogance and increases our sensitivity to potentially tempting situations which we should avoid. It is only in light of this benevolent promise that we can

sincerely thank God for everything that happens to us (1 Thes. 5:16-18), even the sorrow which is caused by our own sinfulness. Notice that Paul tells us to give thanks for “everything”. The phrase, “this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”, can have two meanings. First, it can mean that thanksgiving is in order because everything that happens is God’s will for us. In light of Rom. 8:28 everything has its ultimate purpose in making us holy people. Second, it could mean that the act of giving thanks, praying without ceasing, and rejoicing always is God’s will for us. That is, it is God’s will for us to be thankful, prayerful, joyful people. Either interpretation is possible with the latter interpretation being preferred. However either interpretation supports the idea that thanksgiving, as well as prayer and rejoicing, are all founded on the fundamental truth that God is in control, and blind fate is not. If chance rules, why pray? And why rejoice if life is just a game of dice? Why should we give thanks for everything which happens to us if many of these things, especially the consequences of sin, are outside God’s control?

We should be able to see from this line of questioning and from the Scriptures that providence is the basis for all joy and thanksgiving. This is why joy and thanksgiving are not suggestions but commands. In light of God’s eternal purposes to conform us to the image of Christ and to give us a glorious future with Him in the new heavens and new earth, we should “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4; also a command). “It is good to rejoice in spite of the circumstances (Hab. 3:17-18), it is better to rejoice *in* the circumstances (Phil. 1:4, 18). It is best to rejoice *because of* the circumstances (James 1:2)...joy is a feeling of heartfelt exultation vis-à-vis [in light of ] a good that has been received or is anticipated, while thanksgiving is a feeling of heartfelt appreciation for such good.” (Krabendam, *Christian Doctrine*, p.60)

As we can see, joy is not an unthinking giddiness which some interpret simply in emotional terms. The Bible is not so unreasonable to expect us to have a smile on our face when we lose a loved one, suffer extreme financial loss, or groan under the weight of a wasting physical disability. Rather, joy and thanksgiving are the result of a well-thought Christian realism. In the face of tragedy, the Christian preaches the gospel to himself and reminds himself that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to [him].” (Rom. 8:18). These are words spoken by someone who had been beaten almost to death, shipwrecked, imprisoned, starved, betrayed by friends, slandered by enemies, and who suffered most of his life after his conversion—the apostle Paul.

## ***2. Providence and Secondary Causes***

God can accomplish His purpose *without* means, *beyond* means, or even *in spite of* means. Ordinarily, however, God accomplishes His work of providence *through* means or secondary causes. We covered this somewhat in our discussion of election. God elects some to salvation and consigns others to reprobation (leaving sinners to themselves). The means of bringing our election to fruition in salvation is the preaching of the gospel and repentance and faith. The means of reprobation is the willful rejection of the gospel and the inherent (natural) rebellion of sinful men. In the same way, the actions of sinful men are often God’s appointed means of accomplishing His providential will.

Examples of this fact are numerous in the Bible. When Joseph was sold into slavery by His brothers (Gen. 37), God used their sin, and the sin of the Midianite slave traders to bring Joseph into Egypt. In Egypt, Joseph was the slave of Potiphar whose wife developed a physical lust for Joseph which resulted in his being falsely accused of rape (Gen. 40). This was also sinful, but the false accusation brought Joseph in contact with the cupbearer and baker of the king of Egypt while in prison. (Cupbearers and bakers were two of the most trusted positions in the whole kingdom because of their potential for poisoning the king.)

These two men had dreams which Joseph correctly interpreted (Gen. 41). The cup-bearer forgot Joseph for two years and did not remember to mention his name to Pharaoh. This forgetfulness was selfish and sinful, but after two years Pharaoh had a dream which Joseph was able to interpret, and this was the occasion of Joseph becoming the second most powerful person in Egypt (Gen. 41).

Through his administration, Joseph not only saved Egypt from starvation but also his father and the whole tribe of Israel. When Israel died, Joseph's brothers were convinced that Joseph would have them put to death for selling him into slavery. His response to his brothers' fears is a classic text on the providence of God in using the sinful acts of His creatures to bring about His will (Gen. 50:19-20). It is clear from his response that Joseph's brothers freely and maliciously mistreated Joseph by following their own evil desires ("you meant evil against me"). It is equally clear that God was directing each step of their malicious treatment to bring about the salvation of His people ("but God meant it for good"). The same can be said for the sin of the slave traders, Potiphar's wife, and the cupbearer.

Would anyone suggest that any of the sinners in this story did not act freely and according to their own desires? They truly did so. And would anyone suggest that all along the way God was orchestrating (directing) every event and every sin to accomplish His purpose in saving His elect people from starvation? Truly this is obvious throughout the story.

This is only one story illustrating God's providence over the sinful acts of men. We could spend months exploring others, but there is one which should not be passed over. This is the story of Esther, a story in which the name of God is not even mentioned, but whose work of providence is written on every page. Time will only permit a simple listing of events which appear at first glance only accidental but upon closer examination are clearly the logical steps to the climactic ending of the story.

1. Queen Vashti's refusal to appear before the king's drunken guests (Chp. 1).
2. The advice of the king's counselors to remove Vashti from her throne as queen (Chp. 1-2).
3. Esther, a Jew, becomes the new queen (Chp. 2). (Her actions in becoming queen are sinful.)
4. Mordecai, her uncle, saves the king from an assassination attempt and his efforts are recorded in the chronicles of the kings (2:21-23).
5. Haman plots to rid the kingdom of the Jews (Chp. 3).
6. Mordecai learns of Haman's plot and notifies Esther. Esther plans to intercede for the Jews (Chp. 4-5).
7. Esther plans a banquet to trap Haman and plead for the Jews (Chp. 5).
8. Haman plots to have Mordecai hanged because of his refusal to bow before Haman (Chp. 5).
9. The king cannot sleep and reads the dull chronicles of the kings to make himself sleepy (Chp. 6). Of all the places he could have turned to in the book, he turns to the record of how Mordecai uncovered a plot to assassinate him.
10. Mordecai is honored at the expense of Haman's humiliation (Chp. 6).
11. Haman falls into Esther's trap, but also falls into a trap of his own. He is hanged on the gallows built for Mordecai (Chp. 7).
12. The Jews are warned of the coming attempt to destroy them and those who wished to destroy them are themselves destroyed (Chps. 8-9).

The story, which is historical, serves to show that nothing takes place by accident; everything has its cause in the will of God who ordinarily uses secondary causes to bring His will to pass. The crucifixion of Christ was the predetermined plan of God, yet it was carried out at the hands of godless men (Acts 2:23). Herod and Pontius Pilate did what God predestined to occur, namely, to refuse to protect Jesus from the Jewish religious leaders and to hand him over for execution. Once again, this most heinous of acts was carried out by men acting in



full freedom and according to their sinful desires, but they did only what God had purposed for them to do before the world was made (Acts 4:27). This verse is an illustration of Prov. 21:1 and is a further proof of the fact that His providence is universal over the actions of men, even powerful men (see also Dan. 4:34-35).

As we saw in Acts 27, God promised Paul the safety of everyone on the ship, but the men had to stay on the boat for that promise to be fulfilled. Abraham had to be willing to sacrifice Isaac in order to receive the blessings of the covenant (Gen. 22).

### **3. *Other Acts of Providence***

God's providence is displayed in number of other ways as well. He cares for His creation (Matt. 5:45; 6:25-30; Ps. 145:15-16). Every activity of man in preserving his own life or the lives of others is the secondary result of God's primary intervention in time and space to preserve His creation. He also preserves His creation (Heb. 1:3). The planets remain in orbit around the sun and blood in the human body continues coursing through his veins and arteries only because the laws of nature obey the will of God. *All* things are upheld or operate by the word of His power. There is an intimate relationship between God and His creation without which the universe and mankind would cease to exist.

### **4. *The Necessity of Prayer***

If God has already planned out everything in advance, why pray? It is hoped that the student who has carefully read the preceding pages can answer this question for himself. Prayer is necessary in the administration of the providence of God for the same reason the sailors in Acts 27 had to stay on the boat. This was the God-appointed means by which God would save their lives. Prayer is the God-appointed means by which He brings His will to pass. Jesus Himself says so, for He teaches us to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy *kingdom come, thy will be done*, on earth as it is in heaven." Is it not inescapable that God's kingdom will, indeed, come on earth? And is it not also true that His will, will inescapably be done on earth? Would anyone who believes in His sovereign power wish to deny these things? Certainly not. However, Jesus commands us to *pray* for such things. Let us not accuse Jesus of sending us through the motions of prayer just as a spiritual exercise which has no real effect on future events. Christians have a vital part to play in seeing the kingdom of God and the will of God realized on earth. Humbly, we should understand our part to be only the secondary means to the end and God's part to be the primary, ultimate means to the end. Nevertheless, our part is important. It is also a great privilege, the greatest privilege we could ever be given on earth. Cooperating with the providence of God, our prayers change the hearts of kings and presidents, heal diseases, stop wars, and rescue lost sinners from an eternity in hell. If we had greater faith in the power of prayer to change the world through the providence of God, we would pray more often.

