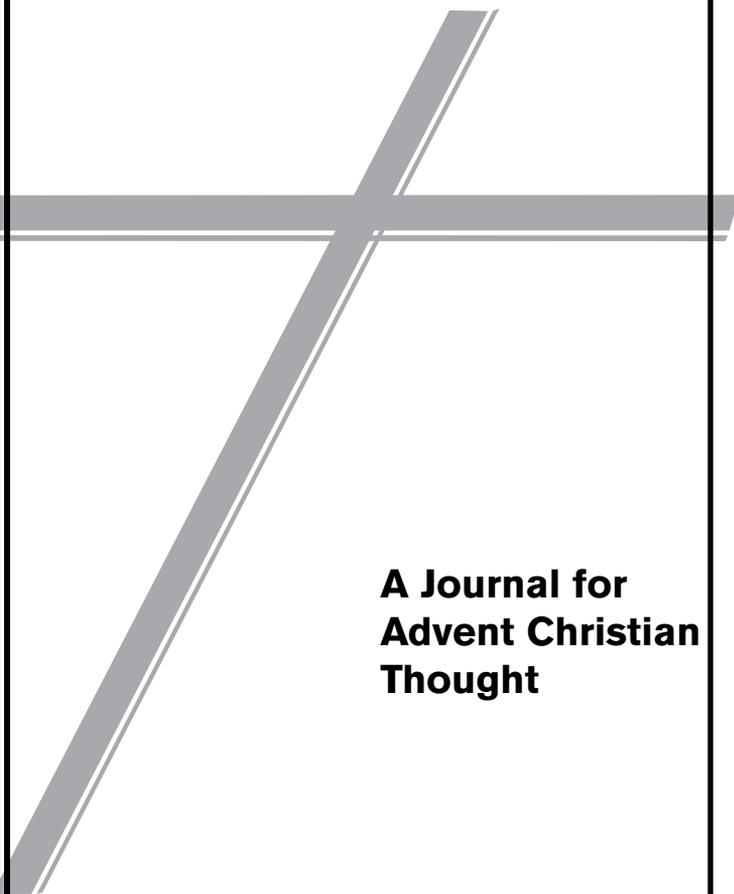


HENCEFORTH ..



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HENCEFORTH ...

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KNOWING OUR STUFF

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

If there is anything worse than ignorance, it is planned ignorance. When a store hires employees who know nothing about the products they sell, the customers feel frustrated. When people come to church and are left feeling that its members know nothing about God or the Christian faith, they feel justified in walking away from God. We Advent Christians should be impressing others with our knowledge of biblical and spiritual things.

I was overseeing an elder's training class this morning. One of the students was leading the discussion, and the others were quite familiar with the subject, so I did not need to do much talking. But a few times the class looked my way when they needed to clarify the meaning of words in the original biblical languages, which were mentioned in the class workbook. Of the eight men at the study, I was the only one with a knowledge of the biblical languages. The others really appreciated having someone present who could verify or clarify what they were reading in their textbook.

Churches should have experts, too. All too often, our churches put down spiritual knowledge and expertise as an evil thing. Those who dare to learn some special skill in the area of exegesis or a little theology are branded as prideful Pharisees. But when a church prides itself on its ignorance, it is in no shape to witness to the world of God's truth.

The world is looking for that truth. Society today is filled with people who know nothing, and dare not suggest that they know anything. Our churches need to be made up of believers who know things and have the courage to testify of what they know.

The apostle Paul criticized the leaders of his own people because their theological ignorance had kept them from seeking Christ. He said "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God,

but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."¹ The Jews had refused to learn beyond what they already knew. Their understanding of righteousness ended at the Law of Moses. They refused to allow the person and teachings of Christ to inform them.

Paul invested in the Gentile believers, and they listened to his teaching. As a result, they were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another."² That is how Christians and Christian churches should be. We should know our stuff. Knowledge of the faith is not all that being a Christian is about, but lack of knowledge is not a virtue.

¹ Romans 10:2-4 ESV.

² Romans 15:14 ESV.

Jefferson Vann is an elder at the McAlpin AC Church in Fla., and Relevant Church in Va. He and his wife, Penny, serve ACGC Department of World Outreach as Asia Pacific Area Director and Global Training Coordinators.

KNOWING WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT

by Rev. John T. Gallagher

My aerobic exercise is primarily cycling. But there is a 5K event I want to participate in on Christmas Eve, and as the days get shorter it is hard to squeeze in the time to ride, so I revert to running in the park where there are lights for early morning runs. I went out and ran last week (about 3 and 1/4 miles). My knee paid for it all that day and the next. It was time for a new pair of running shoes.

I did my research, and a friend recommended a brand I had never heard of — Hoka. More research — adnauseum. Yeah, I'm one of those people who does a great deal of research before I buy. The shoe is hard to find, and I refused to order online without trying the shoe on in comparison to some other options. I ended up driving all the way to Charlotte, N.C., to a shoe store that had this brand.

I had already looked at and tried on some other shoes at some of the larger sports stores — well known names. What amazed me was the ignorance of the sales people. They knew little to nothing about running shoes. They didn't know what shoe was best for overpronation or under. They couldn't really help with a shoe that is best for a knee problem. They basically sold shoes. They could have just as easily been employees for McDonalds who were filling in for the day.

I was immediately struck by the store I went into for these shoes. It was strictly for runners. Everything they sold was for running — not basketball, not to look good and belong in GQ — running. The person who helped me was an ultra-marathon runner. He knew everything about the shoe and gave me a bit more insight than Hoka's actual website. I came home with the shoes, and, because their service was so good I will be a repeat customer when the time comes.

It seems to me that churches are a lot like sport shoe stores. Many try to be like the “big name” sports stores. They do not have to be big churches to do this. These are churches that try to cater to every need, or at least more needs than they should. They offer a relationship with Jesus Christ but leave it to you to do most of the investigating and research. They believe in what they do. They are filled with good people who love the Lord. They, at times, bring into what they do a sense of the presence of God. But it is not quite enough ...

In contrast, there are churches that are much like a sports shoe store that is strictly for running. They are focused on what God has called them to do. They seek to lead others into a personal relationship to Jesus through faith. But they do so from be-

ing an ultra-marathoner spiritually. This church has people who are regularly in the presence of God, and he is dynamically working in their lives. They provide ministry and services that rest on the moving of the Spirit of God rather than human motivation. The person who walks into such a church becomes “a repeat customer” because there is a deep sense of “these people KNOW what they are talking about.” It is more than just having church.

I want to build such a church. I want to be part of such a church. I want you to do all you can to help the church you are part of to be such a place. I want those of you who are looking for such a church to not give up.

So, I want to give a shout out to “The Charlotte Running Company.” And, I want to give a shout out to you and me to be part of building a “Charlotte Running Company” church.

Rev. John Gallagher serves as the pastor of the Savannah Chapel Church in Bishopville, S.C.

WILL YOU DO THE WRITE THING?

by Dr. Thomas S. Warren II

Every year I receive a box of books (about 24 in all) that I have agreed to read and critique for a Christian book judging organization. I love to read so this is not a big deal. For some it would be, as I have to read them within about three months. I actually look forward to reading the books, but I must admit that most of the books really aren't that good. At times, I wonder just how the book was ever published. I say this knowing that I am not the best writer in the world either, but I am being asked to give my opinion of what an author has written.

In the end, one author in each category (and there are many) is dubbed the winner. They receive some prizes and significant recognition at the annual conference/banquet, which is held in Hollywood.

I must admit that would be quite an honor, but more importantly, for me it's all about the content of the book. Writing is an amazing vehicle for communication, and yet, in many circles, little of it is done or at least done well. Some will tell you that we are moving away from the written page (on paper), and before too long we will do everything digitally. I don't know about that, but it seems there is still plenty of room and time for actually writing books about significant issues, regardless of how the end product looks and feels.

I have noticed or at least made an observation about my own denomination that I want to share. We do have books that have been written throughout our history. Much of what has been written has been more about our history or our theological beliefs. Little has been written by our own authors about life issues or ministry matters that would be helpful and encouraging for all to read, especially young pastors and leaders coming up in the ministry.

I have often wondered, why? I know plenty of people who are experienced and bright. Why don't they write and use their gift to bless the life and ministry of others? Or more to the point, I want them to write and be used by God to make a difference for the advancement of the kingdom of God. I am not the greatest writer, but I am committed to writing, and by God's grace he will use my thoughts and experience to bless, encourage and equip others to do the same.

Dr. Sam Warren serves as the Director of Nurture for Advent Christian General Conference.

HAVE WE FORGOTTEN?

by Miss Dawn Rutan

The movie “The Lion King” is an interesting allegory for life. As I’m sure you remember, Scar arranges for the death of Mufasa, and then convinces Simba that it is his fault and that he should run away rather than face the penalty. We’ve been deceived by our own sin or the sins of others, and we run from God and hide because of shame and guilt (like Adam and Eve). We do our best to forget the past and move on with life. We may even be living the good life (like the prodigal son) at least for a time. But eventually God breaks through our defenses and finds us where we’re hiding (not that we can ever really hide from God).

One scene from the movie comes to my mind fairly often. Simba, out in the wilderness and far from home, has a vision of his father. King Mufasa says to him, “You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me.” How often does God say the same thing to us? We’re children of the King of kings, heirs of the kingdom, and yet we’re living in the wilderness like orphans. Forgetful wilderness living has several characteristics we could focus on. I’ll highlight just a few.

1. Lack of obedience. It was sin that caused Adam and Eve to hide from God in the garden, and sin begets sin. If you’re hiding from God out of fear, what is the likelihood that you’re seeking to do his will? How can you even seek his will if you don’t want to seek him? The two go hand in hand. James writes, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like” (1:23–24). I suspect many churches are full of people who hear the Word regularly but are not inclined to seek the Lord. They may be doing the “basics” of the Christian life, but they don’t care to be in intimate relationship with the Father, perhaps out of fear of judgment, or fear that God will rock them out of their comfortable little boat.

2. Lack of growth. The apostle Peter explains, “For whoever lacks these qualities (faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, stead-

fastness, godliness, affection, love) is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins” (2 Peter 1:5–9). Paul David Tripp writes, “They have lost sight of their identity in Christ, so they do not realize the resources that are theirs. Because of this, they fail to live with hope, faith, and courage” (“Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands,” 262). Though we have a Father who forgives us readily (1 John 1:9), it’s easy to forget that we are forgiven. Memories of the past bring up the same feelings of guilt and shame, and we get stuck in the mire all over again. When that happens, the opportunities for growth are limited. It’s kind of like the student who gets so torn up by the test he failed that he doesn’t pay attention to the new material being taught. We can’t live in the past, but some of us certainly try to.

3. Lack of joy. When Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, they lost the intimate communion they had with the Father. Work became toil. Life wasn’t the same joyful, carefree existence they’d had before. When the prodigal son left home, he may have had some fun times until the money ran out, but pretty soon he was yearning for what he’d left behind. Whether you’re consumed with shameful memories or yearning for the “good ol’ days” (or both), you aren’t enjoying the blessings that are available for today.

Having wandered through some wilderness experiences (hopefully not for 40 years like the Israelites), I’d share a few recommendations:

1. Remember who God is. As our Creator, Redeemer and Father, he knows us better than we know ourselves, and he loves us anyway.

2. Remember who you are in Christ. We are forgiven, loved, chosen, adopted, heirs and children of God. We can “approach the throne of grace with confidence” (Hebrews 4:12) because of what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross.

3. Forget the past and move forward in obedience. As the writer of Hebrews put it, “Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus ...” (Hebrews 12:1–2). And in Paul’s words, “For-

getting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14). This kind of forgetfulness is the result of having the right focus. Only when we’re focused on God can the past fall away and stop tripping us up. Focusing on Christ also enables us to discern the truth and avoid future deception so that we may “be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil” (Romans 16:19). As soon as we take our eyes off of Christ and focus on self or others we’re likely to veer off the right path.

It would be nice if once you became a Christian the road was straight and smooth with guardrails to keep you going the right direction. But instead, we go over mountains, through deserts and maybe even under oceans. Some of the obstacles are of our own making when we wander off the road. Some are created by the enemy to divert our attention. But all are allowed by the Father as means to bring us to greater reliance on him. *Lord, let us fix our eyes on you today and every day!*

Dawn Rutan serves as Director of Finance for ACGC.

PROLEGOMENA: IS IT GREEK TO YOU?

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

The Reason

Christianity is a lifestyle as well as a profession. The apostles in the New Testament modeled that lifestyle and encouraged their readers to follow their examples. They believed that people could be won to Christ because of the sheer attraction of a righ-

teous life lived in the backdrop of a sinful world. But these same apostles insisted that to reflect true Christianity, their readers had to do more than just “walk the walk.” They also had to “talk the talk.” They had to know what they believed, and be able to communicate that faith to the watching (and listening) world.

Peter made this clear when he encouraged his readers to *“always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”* (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). Behind this instruction is the assumption that Christianity is not only a lifestyle that can be lived and a religion that can be chosen, but it is also a worldview that can be explained. The apostles did not ask their followers to believe some incredible and illogical philosophy that required a leap of faith and a commitment to that which they could never hope to understand. They expected every convert to accept their teachings based on the correspondence of those teachings to the Scriptures upon which those teachings were based and the convert’s own experience.¹

Since the Christian worldview is based on the unchanging truth of the Bible and backed up by real experiences, the doctrines that proceed from that worldview should be explainable and defensible. The true Christian should know what she believes, why she believes it, and why she does not believe the opposite. She should never hide behind ignorance pretending to be toleration. This is when she might have sincere convictions, but is hesitant to challenge others who disagree with her, because she fears she might not be able to prove her case.

A Christian generation who values tolerance above truth is like a rescue worker who throws out a life preserver, but then fails to hold firmly to it. Those who are drowning and need assistance will (of course) grab on to the chance for life. But as they continue floating out to sea, they realize that the assistance was only pretense. We are living in such a generation. We should

¹ This was also the approach the apostles took when sharing their faith with unbelievers. When on trial before the Roman governor Festus, Paul appealed to him by saying “What I am saying is true and reasonable” (Acts 26:25).

not be surprised when the lost decide to try some other solution rather than grasp our ungrounded traditions. The problem is not with Christianity itself, but in our generation's weak grasp of it.

The purpose of the following pages is to help today's Christians get a firm grip on the faith they profess. A Christian should not only be able to affirm the statement of faith of his church, but he should also be able to explain it.² If someone opposes him, he should feel confident enough in his position to engage in healthy debate. This confidence should come from his familiarity with the issues of the debate, not from debating skills or dominant personality.

One of the tools that has helped Christians of past generations keep their grip on their faith is systematic theology. Systematic theology is the discipline that formulates comprehensive answers to the questions we all have about God, and those ultimate issues that he (and the rest of the universe) cares about.³ It comes with its own language: a set of categories and terms that help systematic theologians compare each others' ideas. The categories and terms serve as a grid to help us evaluate the accuracy of our individual answers.

The primary categories used in this book are often called the loci of systematic theology. Each locus serves as a heading under which several major questions are posited and then answered. The following chart represents how those loci will serve as the kind of scaffolding upon which this book will be built.

Locus	Content
Prolegomena	This category answers questions about the task of systematic theology itself, other kinds of theology, and the ground rules for doing systematic theology.

² Charles Hodge said that the task of the believer who does systematic theology "is to take (scriptural) facts, determine their relation to each other and to other cognate truths, as well as to vindicate them and show their harmony and consistency. *Systematic Theology*. Online:http://www.dabar.org/Theology/HodgeVI/Int_C01.htm.

³ John H. Leith insists that "Christian theology must ... be written in dialog with culture and with an awareness of living religions." *Basic Christian Doctrine*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 18.

Locus	Content
Bibliology	This category answers questions about how God has revealed himself, especially about the nature of his written revelation: the Bible.
Theology Proper	This category answers questions about who (or what) God is, what he is like, and how he compares to the rest of the universe.
Anthropology	This category answers questions about who humanity is, the things that unify us (like our nature and destiny) and the things that make us unique (like race, gender, social and economic status).
Hamartiology	This category answers questions about the moral flaws within the fabric of humanity and their effect upon the universe. These questions include the origin, consequences and remedies for what the Bible often calls “sin.”
Christology	This category answers questions about who Jesus Christ is, what he taught, and the relationship he has to believers and unbelievers.
Pneumatology	This category answers questions about who and what the Holy Spirit is, what he does, and how the world and the Church is affected by his presence.
Angelology	This category answers questions about the other spirit beings who populate the universe, including Satan and the demons, as well as the elect angels who have remained loyal to God.
Soteriology	This category answers questions about what God has done to rid the universe of the sin problem, and what he is doing now in the lives of believers to get them ready for the sinless universe he plans.

Locus	Content
Ecclesiology	This category answers questions about who and what the Church is, how the Church differs from the world, and our role within it.
Eschatology	This category answers questions about our destiny as believers, the return of Christ, and the ultimate fate of the lost.

The apostles encouraged their readers to have an answer available when questioned about their faith. Today believers have the same need: to be able to explain their faith in terms that match the questions people ask of them. In Peter’s day, some of those questions came from government or religious officials who attacked and persecuted Christians. We may experience those kinds of questions as well.⁴ But our hope is that most of the questions come from people who are interested in our faith because they are interested in us. Either way, the questions should not be ignored. They are our opportunities to testify of our relationship with Christ through faith.

One way to form adequate responses to the world’s questions is to compare our answers to those of other believers. This is one of the major reasons for systematic theology as a discipline. By studying the theological systems of others, I can ensure that my own system is not lacking any vital component, and that it is both biblically accurate and experientially relevant.

There is no good thing in this world that does not have its opponents. Systematic theology has certainly had its share. The evolutionary atheist, for example, regards all religious talk as irrelevant and a bi-product of primitive minds. He sees any

⁴ A recent trend that comes close to this is the publishing of books that deny that Jesus was who the church says he was. These books include fiction, like the popular Dan Brown’s *Davinci Code*.(NY: Doubleday, 2003) and lesser known nonfiction works like Barry Wilson, *How Jesus Became Christian*. (NY: MacMillan, 2008), which argues that Paul reinterpreted the Jewish sayings of Jesus according to his own mystical vision, inventing Christianity.

attempt at a comprehensive theology as a waste of time and a deterrent to what really matters in life — true intellectual and social progress.⁵

The industrial pragmatist agrees, not because theology is primitive, but because she sees it as a distraction from what really matters in life (which can be anything from self-actualization to cold hard cash).

The religious mystic also takes sides against systematic theology, because he seeks an experience of the divine that cannot and should not be explained. He thinks that explanations only get in the way of what really matters in life — the magical encounter.⁶

Curiously enough, some of the most ardent attacks against systematic theology come from Bible believing, church-going evangelicals. Some churches have been hesitant to hire trained pastors, fearing that a study of systematic theology at college and seminary would ruin them, making them incapable of just teaching the plain truth from the Bible. These same people would never dare go “under the knife,” allowing an untrained surgeon to operate on them, yet they think that professional training of any sort is harmful for the preacher. They have more in common with the religious mystic than they would care to admit.

There is some truth in each one of these objections to the task of systematic theology. Some of the doctrines we have defended through the centuries are the products of human preju-

⁵ So the science fiction author Robert A Heinlein seems to imply when he argues that theology is “searching in a dark cellar at midnight for a black cat that isn’t there.” “Theology Quotes” Online: <http://en.thinkexist.com/quotations/theology.html>.

⁶ Acts 8 tells the story of a Samaritan named Simon who wanted to purchase the experience of laying hands on the people and them receiving the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him. His name became synonymous with trying to purchase a position of ecclesiastical leadership (Simony). He is also a good example of the religious mystic, who is more interested in “show” than in “know.”

dice and tradition, rather than divine revelation.⁷ A good systematic theology has to dig deeply into the theological assertions of the past to make sure that their source is God's Word. Often the Church has been satisfied with its profession simply because it protected the status quo. We owe Darwin, Marx and Stalin and the like an apology for giving them good reasons to side against us. It is not that evolutionary atheism is right — but the traditional Church was not entirely right either.

The industrial pragmatist steps up to the plate with her own agenda, and convicts the systematic theologians of the sin of irrelevance because they don't play her game. Life is a chance to work hard and make your own way in life, and all these theologians want to do is fuss over the meanings of the words in some obscure ancient documents. But, to be fair, she has a point as well. There is more to life than the constant pursuit of knowledge — even religious knowledge. Jesus criticized the Jewish leaders because they had their noses in the good book, but failed to look up when the Holy One himself walked by. He told them “*You search the Scriptures because you believe they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!*” (John 5:39 NLT). The last thing systematic theology should do is keep us from living life, and in that regard the industrial pragmatist is right. But living life consists of so much more than getting on top, or dying with the most money.

The religious mystic is not concerned with explaining things. He just wants a relationship with the spirit world that works — that gets the job done. In that respect he also is a pragmatist. His beef with systematic theologians is that we are always trying explain what everybody knows is a mystery. If God were knowable, he would not be God. Systematic theologians present a God who can be contained within the confines

⁷ So *Leith* argues that the “first task of theology is always to maintain the integrity of the faith itself.” 18. Thus Protestants are hesitant to adopt the Catholic practice of judging every Scripture or new teaching by what they call the analogy of faith, that is, “in the context of the one, whole, and indivisible faith of the church.” Gerald O. Collins and Edward Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 8. Protestants see this as backward thinking. The theology of the church — any church — should be judged by the Scriptures, not the other way around.

of a creed, or a doctrine. To the religious mystic, that is ridiculous. They are partly right. Most of our definitions of God are nowhere near accurate.⁸ Yet since God has revealed himself and given us the capacity to explain what we experience, it is not impossible to explain that experience. In fact, it is the only way for us to compare the various experiences that human beings have had and claimed to be divine.

Last at bat is the Bible-believing evangelical Christian who is hesitant to listen to a professionally trained pastor. Perhaps he thinks the Holy Spirit refuses to work through a preacher who picks up a book now and then. Maybe he feels it is safer for his teacher to just open the Bible, point his finger at a passage, and then let the Spirit take over. He does not need to be confused by anyone else's views on the good book. He should just let God work through him.

It is interesting that the authors of the Bible itself did not have that attitude. If anyone would have been justified with this attitude it would be those authors of the Bible whom the Holy Spirit personally moved to speak and write God's Word. Yet these authors were constantly quoting each other, and showing through logical argument and correlation that their words were true. The biblical authors were the first systematic theologians, and we do well to follow their example.⁹

⁸ Romans 11:33-34 "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (RSV). The Adventist revivalist H. L. Hastings pointed out that the Bible does contain many mysteries, and these cannot be fully understood even by Christians. But he also shows that the Bible contains many duties, which are not as hard to understand. He asserts that "the duties of the Christian may be performed, while many of the mysteries are but dimly seen." *Fireside Readings*. (Boston [by author], 1896), 15.

⁹ Warren Wiersbe illustrates this when he explains that the "Gospel writers recorded the historical facts of our Lord's suffering and death. It remained for the writers of the New Testament Epistles to explain the theological meaning of this event." *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), Mt 27:27. W. MacDonald and A. Farstad state that Romans is "as close to a systematic presentation of Christian theology as will be found in God's word" because it addressed the issues that the Roman Church faced by integrating the teachings of Christ and the Old Testament in his answers. *Believer's Bible Commentary*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), Ro 1:1.

Doing systematic theology well requires both the writer and the readers to have a common expectation when some key terms are used, so some preliminary definitions are in order. Here are a few terms that are going to be used throughout this book, and how those terms will be used:

A **text** is a passage of Scripture that will be referred to as a means of making or supporting an argument. Some texts will be considered **normative**, which means that those texts are the ones anyone should use to prove his point as it relates to the question at hand. For example, John 10:10 is a normative text for Christology, since it describes Christ's role as the Good Shepherd. It is not, however, a normative text for Angelology, since it cannot be proven from the **context** that Jesus was referring to Satan. The context is the larger passage, and the background of the text, each of which helps the reader understand the purpose of the text originally.

A **doctrine** is a group of interrelated assertions that are made in conjunction with a particular question. One doctrine can be used as evidence for another, as long as both doctrines are independently attested to by the texts of Scripture.¹⁰ Doctrines themselves are the result of human effort, and are never considered inspired or authoritative in the same sense as the texts of Scripture are. In this book, every doctrine is related to a higher category, or locus. As previously mentioned, the loci serve as headings under which several major questions are posited and then answered.

These essays are part of a book, which will be titled "An Advent Christian Systematic Theology." The title reflects the fact

¹⁰ This is why Michael Scott Horton in "Theology Quotes" insists that "Theology, not morality, is the first business on the church's agenda of reform, and the church, not society, is the first target of divine criticism." Thomas S. Warren II has pointed out that many within the church are simply pressured into adhering to a particular doctrinal position having never "studied the issue at all." *Dead Men Talking*. (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2005) 42. We trust those pastors, teachers and family members to give us right information. But if they are deceived, that trust is misplaced. It is better to put our ultimate trust in God himself, and search his Word for truth.

that the author is part of an Evangelical Protestant denomination that has doctrinal positions and distinctives. As would be expected, some of the chapters in the book deal directly with those doctrines that have been developed and promoted by that tradition. Most of the chapters, however, deal with doctrines that Advent Christians share in common with the wider Evangelical community. All Evangelicals should appreciate most of what is said in this book, but it is asking too much for even most Advent Christians to adhere to all of its positions.

The Promise

Sitting on death row in a Roman jail, Paul penned one last letter to his spiritual son and fellow missionary, Timothy. He told him about what God purposed *before the ages began* and revealed through Jesus Christ, *who brought life and immortality¹¹ to light through the gospel* message that had been Paul's focus since the Damascus road (2 Timothy 1:9–11). For Paul, this message was worth living for, and worth dying for. It was the promise of a resurrection to a permanent life. It was hope beyond the grave. The real reason for this temporary life is the chance it gives us to attain to that permanent one.

Reading the Bible with this in mind helps us understand its purpose as well. If you just read the Bible as a group of stories and sayings in which people and nations happen to bump up against God, you are missing this central point — the one Jesus brought to light. It is the message within the message, and it can be summarized thus: God has zeroed in on a few temporary mortal beings all over this planet (and throughout time) and has promised by his grace to change them into immortal beings.¹²

¹¹ “Life and Immortality” is most probably an example of hendiadys, meaning “immortal life.”

¹² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, in *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. (Manila: OMF, 1997), 79–81 talk about the three levels of Old Testament narratives. The bottom level is the individual stories, the middle level is the story of Israel as a nation, and the top level is redemptive history. It is that top level to which I refer.

If you have ever been reading a newspaper or magazine and run across the name of someone you know, you probably got more interested in the article rather quickly. That explains why Christians can read the Bible many times during their lifetimes, and still be enthralled by it. It is not just a bunch of old stories and laws. It is the story of how our God reached down into the fabric of time and space and granted us a precious inheritance — the gift of eternal life.

I. From A Great Beginning to A Disastrous End (Genesis 1–7) 4175 – 2519 B.C.¹³

God starts out his story with two perfect places: a heaven filled with glorious spirit beings and an earth filled with good creatures of all kinds, under the dominion of two human beings who rule the planet as God’s representatives. Soon disaster strikes. Some of those glorious spirit beings rebel against God, siding with Satan and refusing to honor God as their creator. Satan takes an unauthorized trip to earth to spread his rebellion there, convincing Adam and Eve to trust their own judgment rather than God’s commandment. God had warned his creatures not to sin, because it would change their nature (making them mortal), and destiny (causing them to eventually die).¹⁴ The next few centuries tell the consequences of sin in the world, eventually making it a world so corrupt and violent that God had to destroy it with a flood. The symbol of the believer’s inheritance that stands out in this period is the Tree of Life. Although humanity lost access to it through sin, Christ gained it back for us on another tree — the cross of Calvary.

¹³ The 10 Old Testament eras reflected here are adapted from Constance M. Reynolds, *A Journey of Promise*. (Makati City, Philippines: Church Strengthening Ministry, 2003). The titles for them are my own. All dates are estimates based on the genealogical and historical references in the Bible.

¹⁴ Both warnings are implied by the phrase *מוות תמות*, usually translated “you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

II. From A Family Saved to A Civilization Cursed (Genesis 8–11). 2519 – 2086 B.C.

One symbol of eternal life in this era is the ark, through which God chooses by his grace to preserve the lives of the animals and Noah's family. He could have destroyed everyone and recreated, but he wants to redeem, not destroy. When the following civilization at Babel seeks to build a monument to its own power in unity, God scatters them by confusing their language. This resulted in the linguistic and ethnic nations that cover our globe today. God wanted this scattering to occur because the civilization he plans to resurrect will be multinational and multicultural.

III. From God's Man to God's Plan (Genesis 12–46) 2086 – 1871 B.C.

In the previous era, God had cursed all humanity in order to spread his promise to all the earth. In this era God blesses and calls one man to be the channel through which that promise would come. The lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph reveal that God wants to protect them and provide for them because from their lineage an even greater man of promise would come. One symbol of eternal life in this era is the ordeal of Abraham on Mount Moriah. Here God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, but out of compassion provides a substitute instead.

IV. From a Suffering Nation to a Suffering Deliverer (Genesis 47– Exodus 14) 1871 – 1441 B.C.

The concept of the substitute shines through in this era as well, not only in the Passover lamb, whose blood had to be prominently placed outside the homes of the Israelites,¹⁵ but also in

¹⁵ No one knows for sure what word was implied by the blood being placed on the top and sides of each doorframe (Exodus 12:7). But the placement would produce a very visible sample of the Hebrew letter ח (*Chet*). My guesses are that the letter stood for either חסד (*chesed*), the word for mercy, or חיים (*chaim*), the word for life.

Moses himself. He had to choose to suffer as an Israelite rather than deny his people and destiny. This prince of Egypt became a suffering servant and a type of the Messiah as a Suffering Servant who is to come. And, like that Messiah to come, much of Moses' suffering was at the hands of the Israelites themselves.

V. From Egypt to Canaan (Exodus 15–Joshua 3) 1441 – 1401 B.C.

This era is marked by two similar miracles — the crossing of the Red Sea as the Israelites leave Egypt, and the crossing of the Jordan River into Canaan 40 years later.

Perhaps one of the clearest “hints” God gives during this era of his future plans of an inheritance of eternal life is the water he supplied for the nation from a rock. Moses was told to do this once, and God provided the water that his people needed to live. But later, when God told Moses to speak to a rock, he struck it again. God was not pleased, and Moses lost the chance to enter into Canaan himself. By striking the rock twice, Moses disrupted the hidden message that God had provided. That rock was a symbol of Christ, who would be struck (crucified) to provide life for his people.

Most of the time in between the two crossings was spent by the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, trying to survive their freedom. God gave them all they could ask for: his presence, his provision, his priests to intercede for them, and his prophet to tell them what he wanted. But for most of them, God's grace was not enough. The road to Canaan was littered with the bleached bones of those who had been delivered without being changed. But the next generation — the one that grew up in this environment — was prepared for the next stage of God's plan for his people: the conquest.

VI. From Conquest to Kingdom (Joshua 4–2 Chronicles 10, Job, Psalms – Song of Solomon) 1401 – 926 B.C.

The next 475 years see the emergence and development of Israel as a nation — even as a superpower. In spite of the fact that

God is clearly for his nation, they constantly fail him. They struggle internally, failing to keep their covenant with God that had been mediated by Moses, as is evidenced by internal violence, corruption and idolatry. They also struggle against the surrounding nations, who seek to oppress and control them. One symbol of the believer's inheritance of eternal life that appears in this era is David himself. David is not the sinless Messiah promised, but he is a symbol pointing to his greater son, who will be. David expressed belief in his own resurrection and predicted the resurrection of the Messiah when he said, "because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10, Acts 2:29–32). One of the catalysts that moved this nation into political and social greatness is their belief in a God who would not allow their death to be permanent. He would remember and resurrect.

VII. From Division to Disaster (1 Kings 12–22; 2 Kings 1–17; 2 Chronicles 11–32; Obadiah; Jonah; Amos; Hosea; Joel; Isaiah; Micah) 926 – 722 B.C.

God could no longer tolerate the idolatry and violence in Israel, so he caused the nation to divide into two: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. He appealed to both nations through prophets, but neither nation would listen. God eventually sent the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom (Israel), but continued to protect Judah, appealing to them to repent, or suffer the same fate as their brothers. This is a very important era, because it reveals that God has plans that go beyond the establishment of a single nation among mortals. He wants to bring eternal life, through a resurrection, to all nations. We see this in the messages of warning and the appeals for repentance to Israel, Judah, Assyria, Edom, Babylon, etc. that come from God's prophets. The prophet Jonah, whom God sent to the Ninevites, symbolizes God's resurrection to come when he is swallowed by a whale, then regurgitated three days later (1:17; 2:10). The prophet Joel predicted a day when Jews will lead people to call on

the name of the Lord and be saved (2:29–32). This was fulfilled 8 ½ centuries later at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21).

VIII. From Disaster to Disintegration (2 Kings 18–25; 2 Chronicles 32–36; Isaiah (cont.); Zephaniah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Jeremiah) 722 – 586 B.C.

As previously mentioned, God continued to protect Judah, appealing to them to repent, or suffer the same fate as their brothers. This era is a monument to God’s patience, because most of the time Judah proved no more faithful than Israel had. Many in Judah were convinced that in spite of what happened to their brothers up north God would never allow them to be overrun, taken captive or driven into exile by their enemies. The prophets, however, took the coming disintegration of Judah as a given and began to predict not only the fall of Jerusalem, but a time of restoration and return to the land afterward (Zephaniah 3:11–20). By emphasizing the fall of Judah, and then its restoration, the prophets were hinting at God’s plan for a resurrection unto eternal life for believers. The period ends with Babylonian armies swarming in from the north, destroying Jerusalem, and taking the survivors captive.

IX. From Death to Resurrection (Jeremiah (cont.); Lamentations; Daniel; Ezekiel) 586 – 538 B.C.

The prophets during the Babylonian captivity witnessed the death of their nation at the hands of the Babylonian empire and had to admit that it was God’s will. Yet they also believed that was not the end of the story. The miracles in the lives of Daniel and the other Jews in captivity and the fulfilled predictions showed that God was still in control, not only of his people, but also of the other nations and their destiny. The prophets appealed to God to remember his people, and to bring them back to the land that he had promised eternally to their ancestor Abraham. God intended to do just that — and even more. The prophets would foretell the restoration in

language that clearly portrayed the belief in a physical resurrection (Jeremiah 50:17–20; Daniel 12:1-3; Ezekiel 37:1–14).

X. From Cyrus to Christ (Ezra – Esther; Haggai – Malachi) 538 – 4 B.C.

A decree by the Persian king Cyrus allowed the Jews scattered throughout his empire to return to their homeland, and rebuild their cultures and communities. The Jews who returned vowed never again to offend God by practicing the idolatry that characterized the nations around them. They were characterized by a commitment to their God and their land and an expectation of a coming Messiah who would forever rid them from foreign domination. While God was restoring Israel as a nation, he was also protecting them from their enemies. Behind the stories in Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther where God intervenes to protect his people from extermination is the fact that Israel must survive because Christ must come from that nation. More is at stake here than simply the survival of a nation. God is protecting the one through whom he will bring life and immortality to light.

XI. From Christ to the Church (Matthew – John; Acts 1) 4 B.C. – 30 AD.

At first Jesus' ministry appears to be no more than a taking over of the Jewish revival began by John the Baptist. His disciples are Jews, the people he targets are Jews, and he is proven to fulfill the prophecies pertaining to the Jewish Messiah. But before long, it becomes quite evident that the salvation Jesus is offering is deliverance from sin for the whole world (John 3:16). Jesus died on a Roman cross after being condemned to death by Jewish leaders. But that death was not the end of Jesus of Nazareth. After three days in the tomb, he was raised to life. But his was more than a resurrection; it was a resurrection unto eternal life. After showing himself to believers, he ascended with a promise to empower them to take his promise of eternal life to the nation.

XII. From Promise to Fulfillment (Acts 2 – Revelation) 30 A.D. – ?

The Holy Spirit, in which the Church was immersed at Pentecost, was that empowerment. He leads the Church in following God's call, like Abraham did — by faith (Romans 4:12–13). He helps believers accept Jesus as their deliverer (Galatians 3:9). He leads them to apply the death of Christ as their atoning sacrifice (Hebrews 9:14). Once they have crossed over, he is God's presence, provision and priesthood enabling them to get through the wilderness of this life (Galatians 3:2; Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:27). He teaches believers how to live victorious Christian lives (Revelation 2:7).

After death, believers will remain asleep until Jesus Christ resurrects them at his second coming. Jesus will literally reign with resurrected believers as his agents, restoring this earth to its intended glory, removing the evidence of Satan's rebellion, and destroying all Christ's enemies (1 Corinthians 15:24–26; Revelation 20:6).¹⁶ The New Testament urges everyone to accept God's offer of eternal life through Christ: "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17 NIV).

The Important Thing

The preceding section demonstrates that there is more than one way to do theology. Systematic theology is organized by categories reflecting the questions people ask about God.

¹⁶ Thus the entire story of Israel in the Old Testament — from Abraham's call to the restoration under Cyrus — is a similitude for the salvation God offers the believer in Christ. I am not arguing for an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. These Old Testament stories reflect true events, which must be accepted as historical facts. However, those events are so orchestrated by God that they match realities in the life of every believer. That helps to explain passages like 1 Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 11.

But chapter two was organized by chronology, tracing God's promise of eternal life by resurrection through 12 eras of biblical history, from Genesis to Revelation. The section serves as a crude example of biblical theology, which can be defined as ... "a discipline within Christian theology which studies the Bible from the perspective of understanding the progressive history of God revealing God's self to humanity following the Fall and throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. It particularly focuses on the epochs of the Old Testament in order to understand how each part of it ultimately points forward to fulfillment in the life mission of Jesus Christ."¹⁷

Both biblical theology and systematic theology are helpful ways of getting the big picture, helping people see the relationships between all the various things told and taught in Scripture. Sometimes one approach works better than others, but what matters most is the message itself, not how we package it. That is the attitude Paul had when he commented on some preachers who were preaching just to make things more difficult for him. Regardless of their reasons, he said, "the fact remains that the message about Christ is being preached, so I rejoice" (Philippians 1:18 NLT). Perhaps instead of complaining about all the different preachers, doctrines, churches and denominations that exist, we should be thankful that God has not limited himself to just one way of getting the gospel message out to a dying world.

Unfortunately, however, some approaches to doing theology begin with presuppositions that determine beforehand what the message will ultimately be. The danger in these ways of theologizing is that they tend to bring their ideas to Scripture, rather than deriving their ideas from it. Specifically, these approaches redefine Scripture so that it agrees with 1) their own theological systems, 2) their own experience or preference, 3) their own problems.

¹⁷ Wikipedia, Biblical Theology. Online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_Theology (cited September 13, 2008).

Theological Systems

There are a few particular doctrinal issues that seem to polarize Christians. The question of God's sovereignty and human freedom in election, predestination and ultimate salvation is one such issue. Usually one is inclined to answer that issue from a Calvinist perspective, emphasizing God's sovereignty, or an Arminian perspective, emphasizing human freedom. Some seem to have found mediating positions between these two apparently opposed concepts. Perhaps they have, but most of us cannot help but take one side and defend it. Yet, even as we do that, we realize that there are many good scriptural proof-texts that speak against the position we choose to defend. That fact should warn us against using our own chosen theological system as the means of measuring the validity of a statement in Scripture.

Another problem about theological systems is that they tend to define biblical terms in such a way that only those who have knowledge of the system understand how the terms are being used. For example, the terms *rapture*, *tribulation* and *millennium* are all legitimate theological terms deriving from biblical texts and concepts. Yet, some theologians are hesitant to use the term *rapture* because it has become so connected with the adjective *secret* due to the influence of dispensational futurist systems that to use the term would seem to imply acceptance of that position. Likewise, the term *tribulation* is so connected to the concept of a seven-year period where the Church is supposedly absent from the world that some of us are hesitant to use the term, lest we be associated with that presupposition. The term *millennium* is a legitimate theological term reflecting the 1,000-year period mentioned in Revelation 20. This term as well has become so connected with a view concerning Israel that using it takes a great deal of explanation if one does not hold the view that Christ will reign as king of ethnic Israel during this time. One of the dangers of theological systems is that they tend to narrowly define these biblical terms, and anyone using the terms feels obligated either to agree with the system as a whole, or oppose it. That is unfor-

tunate since systems tend to be *mostly* correct, but each of them contains a blind spot or two.

Personal Experience or Preference

What people believe tends to limit and shape their experiences and choices, but their experiences and choices also have a profound effect upon their beliefs. For example, some believers are happy in churches that are more formal, liturgical — what has been called *high church*. People with these experiences and preferences tend to adapt theological beliefs that correspond with those preferences. For example, they will tend to hold to a stark contrast between the clergy and the laity. Their views concerning appropriate worship will lean toward the *practiced* rather than the *spontaneous* variety. Others are more comfortable in the *low church* structure, which is less formal, and provides more room for spontaneity. These tend to adapt theological beliefs that correspond with those preferences as well. This is a rather mild example of how one's experiences and preferences affect his theology.

A more extreme example can be found in the teachings of *gay theology*. Those inclined toward homosexual behavior have been with us for ages, within and outside the church. But in the past few decades homosexuals have demanded recognition as equals, both in the political realm and in the church. Traditionally, the church has regarded homosexual behavior as willful sin and excluded homosexuals from fellowship on that basis. Yet proponents of gay theology defend homosexual acts as proper, and gay marriage as an alternative lifestyle that God recognizes and blesses.¹⁸ These new theological positions are forcing the church to grapple

¹⁸ For summaries of tenets of gay theology, and conservative evangelical responses to them, see Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement*. (Eugene Or.:Harvest House, 1996); Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

with the issue of whether homosexuality is a sin that warrants exclusion. Some churches seem to be taking their cue from the politicians and promoting tolerance as the supreme virtue. Others are taking a hard-line approach and preaching against homosexuality. Still others are desperately searching for balance. Unfortunately, with issues like gay theology, balance is an illusion.

Personal Problems

As stated above, experiences have a profound effect upon a person's beliefs. This is especially so if the experiences have been negative. This accounts for the fact that some do theology from the standpoint of the oppressed and focus on their oppressors as the target of their theologizing. Examples of this kind of theologizing include Black Liberation Theology, the various kinds of leftist liberation theologies, and radical feminist theologies. These various movements share a number of traits in common:

- They identify with a marginalized group within society. For example, Anthony B. Pinn formulated his biblical research on suffering specifically because of the suffering felt in the African-American community. He did this because he “was and continue to be anxious to speak a liberating word to black sufferers.”¹⁹ To be fair, the process of contextualization requires a certain amount of identification with those to whom we proclaim the biblical message, but this kind of identification tends to present the marginalized as the focus of the message itself.
- They focus on the sins and shortcomings of another group, which they target as the oppressors. They do not tend to focus on the sins and failings of the marginalized group. Thus Tatman complains that “if I tried to join a conversation at the Vatican about mass, my words would go unheard ... because I am a feminist lesbian.”²⁰

¹⁹ Anthony B. Pinn, *Why, Lord?* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995), 10.

²⁰ Lucy Tatman, *Knowledge that Matters*. (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 23.

It is the theological and social conservatives that take on the role of tyrannical oppressors, denying Tatman the right to engage in theological discussion because of her marginalized status as a feminist lesbian.

- If they appeal to Scripture, it is usually apart from its original context and select only those passages that foster their point of view. Thus the New Testament is a story of political struggle against unjust economic oppressors. This can be seen in Nadeau's description of The Filipino liberation theology movement as tracing "their history back to the earliest resistance movements against the Spanish and late American colonization of the Philippines, and to the time of Jesus Christ and the early church that stood defiantly against social injustices."²¹ Thus any social injustice revealed in the New Testament becomes an argument for a post-capitalist restructuring.
- They adopt and redefine traditional theological terms like atonement, redemption, sin and reconciliation to serve a socio-political purpose, rather than a traditionally theological one. Thus Hanway writes his "A Theology of Gay and lesbian Inclusion" to "equip you, Christian warrior of the Gospel of peace, to stand against those who use the Bible to resist change — even that change of which our Lord would approve."²² But when we evangelical Christians reject homosexuality we are not using the Bible to resist change, we are defending the Bible's right to define human social limits because God knows what is right and wrong. The true gospel of peace was written to homosexuals as well as thieves and liars — and it speaks of a peace with God that is obtained only through repentance of sin, not acceptance of it.

²¹ Kathleen M. Nadeau, *Liberation Theology in the Philippines*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), ix.

²² Donald G. Hanway, *A Theology of Gay and Lesbian Inclusion*. (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006), ix.

Evangelical Christians recognize the importance of turning from sin and responding to God's free grace. That is why we cannot afford to be sidetracked on issues that draw people's attention away from their personal relationship with God, which begins with conversion. The important thing in our theologizing is not that it stays contemporary, but that it stays focused on God and his unchanging message.

The Necessity

Developing a good theology is not a waste of time. In fact, it is not too drastic to say that theologizing is the necessary first step in pleasing God. The author of Hebrews implies this when he says "*without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*" (11:6 NIV). Notice that this verse states twice that faith is a necessity for those who would please God. First, it states that without faith pleasing God is impossible. Then it restates that fact by saying that anyone who approaches God *must believe*.

The author of Hebrews then defines that faith by positing two propositional truths that make up its basic content: 1) The God of the Bible exists, 2) He responds to those who seek fellowship with him. The heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 all began with those two propositional truths and lived their lives according to what those truths implied. While it was their faithfulness to God that made them examples for others to follow, it was their faith in God that made that faithfulness possible. The use of the subordinating conjunction *o[ti* with the infinitive *pisteu/sai* specifically defines the nature of the faith being discussed, eliminating the possibility that saving faith can be reduced to mere dependence or trust in a person. That faith was not merely an ambiguous feeling of dependence, it was affirmation of two specific doctrines — two propositional truths.

Those two truths serve as foundations for all the propositional statements made in systematic theology, because they lead

to questions that are only answered in God’s Word, and those questions are broad enough to cover the entire theological grid.

God Exists		God is a Rewarder	
• How has he revealed himself?	Prolegomena Bibliology	• Who does he reward?	Angelology Anthropology Ecclesiology
• What does God reveal about himself?	Theology Proper Christology Pneumatology	• How does he reward?	Soteriology Eschatology

Some theologians, however, are not content with this view of how God reveals himself. The Catholic Cardinal Avery Dulles suggests that God has ultimately revealed himself not through words or doctrines, but through symbols that contain more meaning than the words could ever convey. These symbols (like the cross, the Eucharist, baptism) are needed to supplement the doctrines because God continues to speak through the symbols, apart from what he has revealed in Scripture.²³ The problem with this view is that the symbols tend to take on content of their own, aside from what is revealed in Scripture. That content can even be (and usually is) contradictory to God’s Word, and the devotee is forced to reject the direct teachings of Scripture in order to embrace the “deeper meaning” of the symbol.

Evangelicals are not immune to problems in this area either. Sometimes the desire to affirm others who hold different doctrines leads the person in the pew to think that it does not matter *what* one believes as long as he believes *something*. Such thinking tends to downplay the role of propositional truths and dilute faith into mere opinion. Faith that is mere opinion cannot address the relativism and pluralism of modern culture, because it is a part of it.

²³ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*. (NY: Orbis, 2001). “The doctrinal approach, though sound within certain limits, needs to be supplemented by the symbolic ... ” 205.

For example, biblical faith does not just believe in God the Creator, it understands that God created (Hebrews 11:3). The difference between these two statements is that one can be a mere label, while the other is a proposition related to historical fact. While it may sound religious to affirm that one believes in God the creator, it makes no specific affirmation as to who that God is, nor how he created. It is a safe kind of statement to make in a pluralistic society because it leaves room for the hearers to interpret it, adding any details they like, affirming the statement. Such a statement may be politically correct, but it is theologically deficient.

Theologizing can be compared to translating. When translating a speech or document, the translator has to serve the interests of both the originator of the words and the audience who is to hear/read the translation. She (the translator) has to first understand the ideas communicated by the original, and then she must convey those same ideas in the language of the target audience. She has done her job when the originator is satisfied that his ideas have been expressed without adding to or taking from them. But she must also use words that can be understood by the target audience. Only when both of these goals are achieved has she translated well. So it is with theologizing. Only when we have communicated God's thoughts in the words of our contemporaries have we successfully completed the work.

Every modern translation of the Bible has to maintain a balance between verbal accuracy, and contemporary relevance/readability. The groups who work on these translations develop philosophies of translation to govern their approach to the work and to maintain consistency. For example, the makers of the "NET Bible" wanted to "capture the best of several words: readable and accurate and elegant all at the same time."²⁴ The makers of the "New American Standard Bible" aimed for verbal accuracy, but in their 1995 revision "when it was felt that word-for-word

²⁴ *NET Bible: New English Translation*. (Biblical Studies Press, 2003), vii.

literalness was unacceptable to the modern reader, a change was made in the direction of a more current English idiom.”²⁵ The makers of “Today’s New International Version” likewise sought the same balance. On the one hand, “the first concern of the translators has continued to be the accuracy of the translation and its faithfulness to the intended meaning of the biblical writers.”²⁶ On the other hand, they felt that contextualizing the Bible’s message in the modern gender-sensitive era required the “elimination of most instances of the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns.”²⁷

Conscientious theologians are seeking to maintain the same balance, so change is to be expected. As theologians learn more about the content of the Bible through background and linguistic research, doctrines should change to reflect that accuracy. As theologians keep their fingers on the pulse of modern society, doctrines should change to reflect that relevance. The struggle to maintain relevance in the modern context while being true to the original ancient message explains why systematic theology is an ongoing task.

It also explains why believers should not be satisfied with simply following and defending their denominational traditions. Such traditions are helpful if they steer people toward the Bible as God’s message to humanity. They can be harmful if they simply take the place of the Bible. Jesus criticized the religious leaders of his day because “*for the sake of (their) tradition (they) have made void the word of God*” (Matthew 15:6 ESV). Part of what that meant is that over time the theologians of Christ’s day had so narrowly defined how to obey God that the *intended message* of the Scriptures had been lost. Modern theologians are in danger

²⁵ *New American Standard Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), ix. *The English Standard Version* (ESV). (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001) has a similar philosophy of translation.

²⁶ *NIV: Today’s New International Version*. (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 2005), iv.

²⁷ *TNIV*, vi.

of the same mistake if they do not carefully examine their own presuppositions.

The reason theologizing can be done at all is that when our doctrines reflect that *intended message* of the Bible, they prove to be consistent with what the whole Bible affirms. Preachers who carefully exegete their texts discover this all the time. They find, for example, that what the prophet Joel told the inhabitants of Judah in the 9th century B.C. explains what God would be doing in the next centuries and is consistent with what the Bible reveals about God’s plan.

Prediction	Fulfillment
<i>“I will remove the northerner far from you” (2:20).</i>	The Babylonians who invaded and exiled Judah were displaced by the Medes and Persians.
<i>“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (2:25).</i>	The Jews were allowed to resettle Palestine and rebuild it.
<i>“I will show wonders ... and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (2:30, 32).</i>	Jesus came to the Jews, demonstrated God’s power and gave his life to bring spiritual deliverance to them.
<i>“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (2:28).</i>	The Jewish believers at Pentecost were empowered to spread the gospel to the nations.

Therefore, when theologians read the fifth *“I will”* statement, promising a time when God gathers all the nations in judgment (3:2) they rightly conclude that God is not finished fulfilling his promises he made through this Old Testament prophet. God’s track record of keeping his promises, together with the similar language used in Joel 3 and Revelation 16 and 19,²⁸ leads

²⁸ Notice, for example, the motifs of warfare (Joel 3:9–10; Rev. 16:14), gathering of the nations (Joel 3:11–12; Rev. 16:14, 16; 19:17, 19), the sickle/sword (Joel 3:13; Rev. 19:15), and the winepress (Joel 3:13; Rev. 19:15).

theologians and preachers to assume that God will fulfill this last promise of Joel at what the New Testament calls Armageddon.

True theologians dare to get into the details of texts like this because their faith understands that God is who he says he is, and he will do what he says he will do. Their task is to properly interpret what God has said in his Word, and pass on that knowledge to their contemporaries. When someone forsakes that message, and instead promotes some other means of knowing God (like a symbol or an esoteric experience) that person has ceased to be a true theologian and has skipped the vital Hebrews 11:6 step in pleasing God.

The Balance

Theology is an academic discipline, and no academic discipline is totally free from ethical standards. As in athletics, the rules determine whether someone has succeeded. Breaking the rules can disqualify even the fastest runner. Good theology places equal weight on the accuracy of the message and the integrity of the messengers. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 4:15, where he encourages Christians to speak the truth in love.

Keeping the message accurate.

The discipline of hermeneutics helps theologians stay true to the message originally intended by God and the Bible's human authors. It incorporates the tasks of exegesis (drawing out what the text says) and contextualization (communicating that meaning accurately to today's audience). These are the same tasks that keep the preacher of the gospel on target, and the theologian has the same goal.

Some Hermeneutics Questions

Background Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do I need to know about the culture that the original authors and audiences shared?
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Background Questions Continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I need to know about the history that the original authors and audiences knew? • What are the differences between the background of the text and that of myself and my readers/students?
Word Study Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the text of my translation match the meaning of the words in the original language? • How is this term used by this particular author? Do other biblical authors use the same word differently? • Has the text of my translation added or subtracted words compared with the original? Why?
Theological Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What major loci are affected by the text? • What issues are being addressed and questions answered? • How does this text compare with others on the same topic? • How does this text compare with others by the same author?
Application Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What changes (or commitments not to change) does the author suggest should be made by his audience? • What changes (or commitments not to change) should I make as a result of applying this text? • What changes (or commitments not to change) should my readers/students/church make?

Jesus commended John the Baptist for preaching the truth (John 5:33). For Jesus, it was not important that John's ministry

was popular and influential; what mattered was John's message. It did not need to be new. It had to be true. The temptation to come up with some new teaching is very real for the theologian and must be guarded against. God has provided the Bible as the source and standard for our theological teaching. It should be the source for every idea we proclaim and the standard by which we measure every idea we hear.

Keeping the messengers authentic.

The other side of the balance that must be maintained for good theology is maintaining the integrity of those who teach and preach the message. While it is true that "given no other evidence, we should be able to tell by the rhetoric of the preacher whether he or she is legitimate"²⁹ people have a right to hear God's word from messengers who reflect his character. This principle is reflected in other Scriptures as well. "Ezra had devoted himself to the study *and observance* of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (Ezra 7:10 emphasis mine). Jesus said that "whoever *practices* and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19 emphasis mine).³⁰ Paul told Titus to "Let everything (he does) reflect the integrity and seriousness of (his) teaching" (Titus 2:7 NLT). By doing so, Titus would draw attention to his teaching and authenticate it. If he were to live an ungodly life, he would have turned people off to his words.

Jesus had warned against apostasy and false teachers who would emerge from within the established church and lead many astray (Matthew 24:10–11). The way believers can tell the difference and avoid being deceived is that those truly abiding in Christ will produce fruit (John 15:5). Fruit is results: the results that Jesus produced were to be the results his disciples would produce.

²⁹ David M. Brown, *Transformational Preaching*. (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm Publishing, 2003), 243.

³⁰ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2002), 650.

The Fruit of Jesus' Ministry

Power	People
<i>Answered Prayer</i>	<i>Changed Lives</i>
<p>“So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me” (John 11:41–42 ESV).</p>	<p>“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13 ESV).</p>

The world did not have to wait long for this apostasy to appear. Already by the time the epistles were being written it was beginning to happen among those New Testament churches. Peter explained their strategy: they lure people to their teachings by 1) appealing to their natural desires, 2) promising a freedom from sin that they themselves do not possess, and 3) entangling them in worldliness while distancing them from the gospel of righteousness through knowing Christ (2 Peter 2:17–22). He warned his readers to “take care that (they were) not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose (their) own stability” (2 Peter 3:17). It was obvious from his letters that false teaching would go hand in hand with an immoral lifestyle so that his readers would be able to identify the theological errors by observing the ethical ones.

The author of Hebrews also linked these two aspects of apostasy. He warned against “an evil, unbelieving heart, leading (his readers) to fall away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). He reminded these Jewish Christians of their ancestors “whose bodies fell in the wilderness” because of their disobedience (Hebrews 3:17–18). To claim to follow the God of Abraham yet fail to obey his instructions manifests a dangerous imbalance.

Paul warned Timothy of an apostasy yet to come in history (2 Timothy 4:1–3), but he commanded Timothy to apply

this truth by keeping a close watch on himself and his teaching (2 Timothy 4:16). By staying true and maintaining a godly witness he would preserve that balance that qualifies believers as representatives of Christ and his kingdom.

The Task

All human responsibility can be summarized by three universal commands, and each of these commands has to do with relationship. The command to love God wholeheartedly (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37–38; Luke 10:27) summarizes the responsibility that all humans have toward their creator. It is the greatest commandment because it stems from the greatest of all relationships. It is also very difficult to obey this commandment since the sinful human nature limits one's capacity to love God as he should and tends to redirect genuine love towards self or other lesser beings. Becoming a true Christian involves reestablishing this vertical relationship with God and nurturing it for the rest of one's life. The ultimate outcome of this reestablished relationship is what Christians call worship.

The second greatest commandment is that which results in reciprocal love among all human beings (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19; 22:39; 1 John 4:21). The scope of this command is just as universal as the first. No human being has the right to segregate his love by choosing to love himself more than others, or to isolate a segment of humanity to whom he will manifest love and ignore or hate the rest. Human nature also makes it difficult to obey this command since it is motivated by self-interest and tends to foster chauvinism and prejudice. Becoming a Christian involves a radical adjustment of those kinds of attitudes towards others and results in reconciliation and unity on the horizontal level.

Defining Discipling: A look at the Great Commission

The third greatest commandment is in some respects just as universal as the others, but in other respects it is limited or particular. Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) was only

given to believers whose repentance had already restored the two relationships indicated by the first two commandments. In other words, by restoring their devotion to God and their love to humanity they had already become true disciples of Christ. But Jesus required that these disciples reproduce themselves, and that is where the commandment becomes universal. The scope of the command to make disciples is all nations (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47), the whole creation (Mark 16:15), or the world (John 17:18). Thus a true Christian cannot be a universalist. He must see a clear distinction between disciples and non-disciples and be committed to infesting the planet with others like himself.

Rick Warren indicates that “The Great Commission is your commission, and doing your part is the secret to living a life of significance.”³¹ Discipling is one of the God-given purposes that drive Christians. But not all Christians understand what making disciples entails. Many are frustrated because their church attendance and involvement do not seem to make the kind of impact on the world Jesus’ Great Commission suggests they should.

A careful look at the Great Commission text shows that the frustration is appropriate. Jesus was very specific in his commandment as to what the result would be and as to how his disciples should go about the task. Unless she is accomplishing the task Jesus commanded, using the means he implied she should use, the Church has no right to claim obedience to the Great Commission.

After You Go MAKE DISCIPLES By Baptizing By Teaching

There is only one command in the text: Jesus commands his disciples (and the Church that would follow them) to reproduce themselves by continuing the discipling process that Jesus

³¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 304.

himself began. Although most translations take the word “go” as a command as well, it is best taken as an adverbial participle that simply explains the fact that the disciples are presently in Galilee (cf. Matt. 28:16) and would need to go to Jerusalem and await the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:8) before they began their mission to the nations. When functioning as a time marker, an adverbial participle in the aorist tense refers to action taken one step before that of the main verb. Thus, I translate the term “after you go.”

The other two adverbial participles in the text are best understood as marking the means whereby the command will be carried out. This is actually very helpful, as it provides the church with a way of determining if discipling is actually being done. Discipling involves both baptizing and teaching. If these two terms are interpreted in a minimalist fashion, it would seem to imply that almost every church is fulfilling the Great Commission.

A more accurate understanding of these two terms (baptizing and teaching) comes from reviewing how they are used in the gospels. The quintessential baptizer was John the Baptist. He established himself as a prophet, proclaiming the message of the coming Messiah to the people of Israel, and leading them to repentance and commitment to the Messiah’s coming kingdom (Matt. 3:1–12; Mark 1:2–8; Luke 3:1–18; John 1:6–8, 19–28). The quintessential teacher in the gospels was Jesus himself. In fact, the term was used as a title for his ministry (Matt. 23:8, 10; Mark 10:38; Luke 7:40; John 13:13, 14). Before his atoning death, most of his ministry was focused on the nurture and development of his 12 disciples.

The task of the Church, then, is to testify the gospel of Christ’s kingdom in a variety of ways until it leads people to acceptance of the gospel and commitment to the kingdom, as demonstrated by the public act of the believer’s baptism. But that is only one-half of the equation. The outcome of this baptizing (what we usually refer to as evangelism) is the convert. The church must teach these converts to assure that they are nurtured in their faith and trained in their works, so that all of Christ’s commands

are obeyed, and an accurate witness to his person is reflected. The outcome of this teaching (what we often call discipling) is a reproducing Christian. Since both of these activities are mentioned by Jesus as comprising the means by which discipling is done, both must be incorporated into the work of every church. When one of these means is overemphasized to the exclusion of the other, the result is inadequate discipling.

Inadequate Discipling: Communicating Alone

For example, if a church feels it can fulfill the Great Commission by merely “getting the gospel out” and new means of doing this emerge historically, the church might be tempted to discard its old tried and true methods like cross-cultural missions:

“With the new information technology (of the twentieth century), however, Christians did not have to leave home to fulfill the Great Commission; they could send a telegram, set up a radio station, gain access to television air time, develop satellite telecommunications networks, or establish a ‘home page’ in cyberspace.”³² Such thinking leads to inadequate discipling precisely because it confuses merely one aspect of discipling with the whole process. While it is true that the mass communication methods of the 20th and 21st centuries will enable the church to do many things more efficiently, they can never replace “leaving home” and the incarnational work that implies. Discipling requires the exchange of lives, not merely the exchange of information.

Inadequate Discipling: Evangelism Alone

Neither has the church accomplished the whole task when she has merely converted a significant portion of the world’s population to Christ. There are some who are convinced that the church has made a major dent in the task because there are now a number of confessed Christians in most of the non-Western people groups around the globe:

³² David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 540–541.

“The ‘Great Commission’ found in Matthew 28 has shaped our evangelical movement as much as any passage of Scripture. ... Whereas in 1500, only 19 percent of the world’s population was Christian and more than 83 percent of the world’s Christians lived in Europe, by the year 2000 more than 32 percent of the world’s population was Christian and most Christians were non-Western people of color.”³³

McGavran has pointed out that “discipling was to be followed by perfecting, that is, by the whole complex process of growth in grace. ...”³⁴ What McGavran calls *perfecting* is that second means of discipling that Jesus referred to in the Great Commission text. In the church growth movement which McGavran represents, “discipling dealt mainly with conversion and was viewed as the primary responsibility of the church, while perfecting, or the maturing of believers, was relegated to secondary status.”³⁵ As a result, much energy was spent getting churches to make converts, but little in making the converts mature enough to sustain the growth.

Inadequate Discipling: Perfecting Alone

Others have emphasized the nurture and development of those who are already Christians in such a way as to define that as discipling:

“One of the most biblical and valuable uses of your time as a pastor will be to cultivate personal discipling relationships in which you are regularly meeting with a few people one-on-one to do them good spiritually.”³⁶

³³ Douglas A. Sweeney, “Introduction,” in Martin I. Klauber, et.al., *The Great Commission*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 1.

³⁴ Donald Anderson McGavran, C. Peter Wagner, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 123.

³⁵ Elmer L. Towns, Gary McIntosh, Paul E. Engle, Howard Snyder, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 82.

³⁶ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel*. (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2005), 37.

These “personal discipling relationships” are not the whole task of fulfilling the Great Commission either. The church must intentionally do both. Each individual Christian and each congregation must assess their Great Commission productivity by asking 1) am I winning people to Christ?, and 2) am I nurturing and developing the faith of those within the church. Since both are part of the task, both must be part of the assessment.

The Role of Theology

Theology plays an important role in both parts of the discipling task. First, a good biblical theology makes the believer confident and competent as an apologist. With a good grasp of theology, the Christian feels she can answer the kind of questions that the seeker or the skeptic might ask. Having asked those important questions herself and having found God’s answers to those questions in his Word, she is much more likely to connect with her peers who are still struggling with the issues. She is also more likely to challenge those who are hiding behind current philosophical fads (Acts 17:18; Col. 2:8).

Second, a good biblical theology empowers the believer to mature and persevere in his Christian walk. Theology does not ruin true discipleship. It enables the believer to engage his mind in response to God’s revelation. Thus it improves the relationship with God because it enables the Christian to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). Theology is not an enemy of faith; it supplements it (2 Pet. 1:5). This supplemented faith keeps Christians “from being ineffective or unfruitful” in their Christian walk (2 Pet. 1:8). This means that more unbelievers are likely to seek Christ because they recognize the Christ-likeness in the thoroughly trained disciple.

On the other hand, when theology is dry, outdated (that is, unresponsive to the questions asked by society today) or heretical, it hinders both evangelism and nurture. Such theology will hinder discipleship because it is incapable of doing for the church what good theology alone can do. Therefore, the discipling mandate of the Great Commission becomes our primary

reason for doing theology and our primary motivation for seeking to get it right.

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GOD’S GLORY AND HELL

by Rev. Tom Warner

God’s Unveiled Glory: A Heavenly and Hellish Experience

Some years ago, during a time of illness, I became fascinated with the Bible’s teaching about the “glory” of God. One unexpected outcome of my study was how God’s glory may relate to the final punishment of the ungodly. Here is a summary of that aspect of my study.

God’s glory revealed, in part, to Moses

Moses saw glimpses of God’s glory, in the burning bush (Exodus 3) and on Mount Sinai when the radiant “fire” of God’s presence appeared (Ex. 19:16–21). Those experiences created a hunger in Moses to see more. In Exodus 33:18, he asked the Lord, “Please show me your glory.” It seems that Moses realized he’d only seen a veiled version of God’s beautiful presence.

The Lord told Moses no man could see his face and live (Ex. 33:20). Evidently, we mortal human beings cannot see God in his unveiled glory; it would kill us. We're assured, however, that someday all God's redeemed people will be made immortal and shall see his face, i.e., his unveiled glory (Matthew 5:8; Revelation 22:4).

In Exodus 33:19–23, God's fiery glory passed by Moses — who was protected in the cleft of a rock, covered by God's hand — as the Lord proclaimed his virtuous, gracious, glorious character.

Moses glimpsed only the “back” of the Lord, i.e., his veiled glory; but that was enough to send him back down the mountain literally glowing — almost as if he had a kind of “spiritual sunburn” (Ex. 34:29–30).

God's glory revealed in Christ

In Jesus, the glory of God was revealed more completely than ever before (John 1:14, 18). When God's Spirit opens our heart to the gospel, that spiritual vision of Christ transforms us (2 Corinthians 3:16–18; 4:3–6). As born again believers, the glory of God's presence resides — mostly hidden — in our mortality, like a beautiful diamond in a plain, clay jar (2 Cor. 4:7). But someday all of God's redeemed people will be revealed in glory, in immortal, resurrection bodies that are suitable for God's beautiful, fiery, glorious presence (Philippians 3:20–21).

Our Lord Jesus will return “in the glory of his Father” (Matt. 16:27); and that unveiled glory of God will be visible, like “flaming fire” (2 Thessalonians 1:7).

That vision of the unveiled glory of God and his Son will be an awesome, beautiful sight for those who are redeemed and immortal; it has been called the Beatific Vision, the most blessed sight we'll ever see. But for those who've rejected God's truth and grace to the bitter end, it will be too much to endure. It will consume those who are not raised and transformed into immortality (Hebrews 10:26–27; 12:29).

God's glory will be hell for the unredeemed

In Isaiah 33:14 the prophet asks, "Who among us can dwell with that devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with those everlasting burnings?" The answer: only those who've been granted immortal, glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:50–54).

Those who are finally condemned will be destroyed body and soul (Matt. 10:28), blotted out of existence — literally, forever — an eternal punishment. The process of their destruction will last as long as the justice of God determines for each one (Luke 12:47–48); but the result will be total, irreversible, everlasting destruction.

Cf. Malachi 4: ¹"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ²But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts."

Considering all of the above, it seems likely to me that the "fire" that destroys the ungodly may be the unveiled glory of God. The "destruction" that overtakes them may well be their exposure to the unveiled presence of the Lord: "They will suffer the punishment of eternal *destruction that comes from* the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. ... " (2 Thess. 1:9 ESV marginal reading).

Another clue comes from a more literal rendering of that passage: They "shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the *face* of the Lord and from the glory of his might. ... " (2 Thess. 1:9 ASV). Recall how the Lord told Moses that no man could see his *face* and live (Ex. 33:20).

Our God is said to be a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). We're told that, someday, God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28), i.e., his glorious presence will finally be revealed in unveiled form throughout the entire universe. His glory will no longer need to

be mediated to us in a veiled fashion; it will be fully revealed. For his redeemed people, it will be our greatest pleasure; but, for the ungodly, it will be a most painful and fearsome destructive experience.

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CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

by Dr. Glenn Peoples

Is it really clear that the first Christians believed in the empty tomb of Jesus and in the resurrection of our bodies, leaving all the graves empty?

When we view history through Christian eyes, the resurrection of Jesus is the turning point. Without it, St. Paul assured his readers, we are wasting our time with this whole Christianity thing. There is no salvation, no life beyond death, nothing, so let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. The resurrection of Jesus is also vital to understanding conditional immortality. Because we don't just naturally survive death in disembodied form, we need the resurrection in order to have eternal life (this is why St. Paul's comments, alluded to above, resonate so strongly with us). Without the resurrection, through which we receive immortality as a gift, there's no other way that we could live forever. But do we need to think of the resurrection of Jesus as a bodily, physical, tangible event? Although this is what Chris-

tianity has historically taught, not everybody is convinced that this is really what the earliest Christians believed.

One of the arguments for the authenticity of the New Testament accounts of the empty tomb of Jesus of Nazareth is this: The Christian movement began in Jerusalem, very shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus. However, Jesus was crucified and buried in Jerusalem. His tomb — or rather, the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the ruling council — was right there in the same city. If anybody wanted to pour cold water on this resurrection nonsense, it would have been relatively easy. Go to the tomb, produce the body, Jesus is still dead, end of story. Unless the tomb was really empty, the fledgling Christian faith, starting out in Jerusalem, would not have stood a chance.

Outspoken sceptic Richard Carrier rejects this argument. Carrier doesn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead at all, and he thinks that Jesus' body remained in the tomb. But the empty tomb, he claims, would have been quite unnecessary in order for the early Christians to believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead. This, he says, is because the first Christians never believed that the body of Jesus came back to life. They believed, he says, that the resurrection of Jesus left the old body dead in the tomb, while Jesus was raised in a spiritual or heavenly body, by which Carrier means a body that isn't made of what we would think of as matter, but rather of some other-worldly stuff.

Obviously, the gospels describe the resurrection of Jesus as the coming to life of his dead body. The disciples inspect the empty tomb, their opponents invent a story about why the tomb was empty (instructing the guards to say that the disciples stole the body), and when they see Jesus again he is undeniably physical — eating food just to show his disciples that he was real and not an apparition or a spirit. But, Carrier claims, since the Gospels were written some decades after the fact, this just goes to show that these descriptions of the risen Jesus were myths that very quickly developed in the Christian community. In the earliest Christian community and in the letters of Paul, Carrier maintains, this was not what Christians thought.¹ It isn't just Richard

Carrier who thinks this. There is a relatively small number of Christians (although we are now using that term fairly loosely when it comes to doctrine) who maintain that in the resurrection of the dead our bodies do not rise, but instead our soul is transferred into a completely different, heavenly, spiritual body that goes, unseen, to its reward in the immaterial afterlife, and that this is the view we find expressed by the first Christians in the New Testament era.

What merit does this line of argument have? In short, virtually none. There are at least three serious objections to it and in favor of the view that resurrection in early Christian theology cannot be thought of without the resurrection of the dead body.

Judaism and the Concept of Resurrection

The resurrection of the dead became a widely accepted Jewish teaching in the Second-Temple period, even though not everybody believed it. The very concept of resurrection is that something that was dead is now alive again, and although the Old Testament premonitions of a fully-fledged doctrine of resurrection are few, what they say suggests that this was — the idea that what was once dead is now alive — was *the* central pillar of that belief.

Probably the most familiar Old Testament passage that refers to resurrection is Daniel 12:2. “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The thing that will wake up is the thing that is, when the person is dead, “sleeping” in the dust of the earth.

Isaiah 26:19 is very similar in its description of resurrection: “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” The dead are said to now be in the dust, and from there they shall rise. The bodies that are now dead will rise, and the earth will give up the dead that are in it.

This was the consistent view of those Jews who believed in resurrection. Throughout the Jewish literature on the resurrection up to and including the early to mid-first century AD, the resurrection was the resurrection of a dead body. In Sanhedrin 90b, Rabbi Gamaliel — Paul’s own teacher — explained how he knew that the dead would rise as follows:

From the Torah: for it is written: ‘And the Lord said to Moses, Behold you shall sleep with your fathers; and this people will rise up’ (Deuteronomy 31:16). From the Prophets: as it is written: ‘Your dead men shall live, together with my dead bodies shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in the dust; for your dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out its dead.’ (Isaiah 26:19); from the Writings: as it is written, ‘And the roof of your mouth, like the best wine of my beloved, like the best wine, that goes down sweetly, causing the lips of those who are asleep to speak’ (Song of Songs 7:9).

The metaphor of going to sleep and then rising up suggests that the same thing that dies will “wake up” in the future, which would indicate that Gamaliel thought the body would come back to life. The reference to Isaiah is fairly obvious in meaning, showing that Gamaliel thought of the reference to dead bodies rising up as a depiction of resurrection, and in the unusual reference to the Song of Songs, we see that Gamaliel thought that the lips of the dead would one day open and speak, giving us a clear insight into his view of the resurrection: the bodies that are now dead will one day be alive. It is true, of course, that Paul turned his back on much of his background in Pharisaism, so not everything that Gamaliel taught him would have continued to be his own view. What is clear enough, however, is that belief in the resurrection was not one of those beliefs that Paul gave up. In fact, in order to rather mischievously stir up a fight between Pharisees and Sadducees (in an effort to take the heat off himself!), Paul publicly proclaimed that his belief in the resurrection is something that he held in common with the Pharisees (Acts 23:6–10).

Passages from the Jewish literature that were current in the

first century affirm this view of the resurrection. In a well-known story in 2 Maccabees chapter 7 (written in the late second century BC), a mother and her seven sons are tortured and killed because they would not break the law of God. The words of the third son reveal the way that the writer (as presumably his community) thought about the world to come:

When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands[to be cut off], and said nobly, “I got these from heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.

Or in 2 Baruch chapter 50, likely written towards the close of the first century AD:

For the earth will certainly then restore the dead it now receives so as to preserve them: it will make no changes in their form, but as it has received them, so it will restore them, and as I delivered them to it, so also will it raise them. For those who are then alive must be shown that the dead have come to life again, and that those who had departed have returned.

Belief in resurrection was not universal in first century Judaism. There were three ways of thinking about the future life. At one extreme were the Sadducees, who did not believe in any sort of future life. Then there were those who believed in disembodied existence without a body. Then there were the Pharisees, many of whom believed in the immortality of the soul, a prevalent view in many of the cultures existing alongside Judaism, but they also affirmed the resurrection of the dead. Those who held the third view had no trouble recognizing that those who held the second view — that the spirit lived on without a body forever — did not believe in resurrection. In fact, there is no record of anyone at the time referring to the second view as resurrection, a term that was always used to refer to the view of the Pharisees that the graves would be emptied and the bodies of the dead would live again.

If the early Christian movement did not believe that Jesus had been bodily raised back to life so that the body that died was

now alive again, but they still claimed that he had been resurrected, then one obvious question would have been put to them: What exactly was resurrected? His body that died? No, that body is still dead, in the tomb. His new, spiritual, ethereal body then? No, because that body had never been dead to begin with. It was newly created when his old body died. His immaterial mind or soul that once lived in the old body and now lives in the new body — assuming of course that they believed in any such thing? No, for that never died in the first place! It just moved from one body to the next. In this scenario, there is nothing that was dead and is now alive. To tell a first century Jew that Jesus had been raised from the dead but that they could still see his body if they went to the tomb would have made the resurrection look like a ludicrous and implausible ruse, one that no Jew could have taken seriously, and would have made a laughing stock of the new (and soon to be ended) Christian movement.

Resurrection in the Early Christian Writings

But what about the earliest Christian writings that we have — the letters of Paul? Do they, as Carrier suggested, refer to a second, replacement body that is ethereal, heavenly and discontinuous with the body that died? A “spiritual” body?

“Spiritual” vs “natural”

Here is where some people get thrown off track by the fact that actually St. Paul *does* use the term “spiritual body” to refer to the body that will rise in the resurrection. Does this make Carrier’s description of the resurrection of Jesus in Paul’s theology correct? Carrier is not alone in thinking that the word “spiritual” must have the implication of non-physical or ethereal. When I was at Bible College I was giving a presentation on a paper I had written on the resurrection of the dead, and in the Q and A session that followed I was asked — by a senior student — “But doesn’t Paul contrast this body, a physical body, with the

resurrection body, which is spiritual?” The assumption here was that “spiritual” is the opposite of “physical.” But Paul never made this contrast at all. Paul’s contrast was between the “natural” (*psuchikon* — ψυχικόν) body and the spiritual (*pneumatikos* — πνευματικός) body. This is not the only place where Paul contrasted the natural and the spiritual, and it is quite clear that in his mind, the contrast is not between something that is physical and something that is not.

1 Corinthians 2:14–15

The natural (ψυχικός) person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual (πνευματικός) person judges all things, but is himself judged by no one.

It is obvious that the contrast Paul is making between two types of people is not based on one sort of person being ethereal while the other is made of flesh. Rather, one person is under the control or influence of the Spirit of God while the other person is centered on themselves.

Although Paul did not use the term *psuchikon* or its related words often, it does appear in Jude 1:19, alongside the word usually translated “spirit,” *pneuma* (πνεῦμα), where Jude refers to “the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded (ψυχικοί), not having the Spirit (πνεῦμα).” Lastly, James 3:15 uses a similar term, *psuchike* (ψυχική), referring to human wisdom that does not come from above, which is “earthly, natural (ψυχική), devilish.” In both of these examples outside of Paul, the writers use these words to refer, not to the sort of stuff a thing is made of, but rather the moral qualities of a person, oriented toward themselves rather than God.

Paul on the resurrected body

It would be a mistake, then, to assume that Paul’s reference

to a natural body and a spiritual body is the same as a reference to a physical, material or tangible body on the one hand and a non-physical, immaterial, heavenly body on the other. Certainly something being “spiritual” is compatible with it being ethereal and other-worldly, but it certainly does not require it. What’s more, any time that Paul writes about the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians and elsewhere, it is clear that he is not talking about one body being scrapped and forgotten, with a brand new body, discontinuous with the old body, being created from scratch. Paul is always clear that the resurrection body is continuous with the current mortal body, albeit transformed. In 1 Corinthians 15 he made this point using the analogy of a seed and the plant that grows from it. The mortal body is like a seed that goes into the ground and “dies,” and the resurrected body is like the plant that the seed will become (1 Corinthians 15:35–38). And so “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (v. 44). The same thing that is “sown” will also be raised. There is no doubt that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is speaking of a transformed body, rather than a replaced body, as he claims that “this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality” (v. 53). The picture Paul paints is one where this current mortal body takes on new, better qualities. This is why NT Wright likens Paul’s thought to the idea that the resurrection body is “like a new and larger suit of clothes to be put on over the existing ones.”²

Paul also wrote, this time to the Philippians (3:21), that Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” But of course, if our soul will simply move from a physical body to an ethereal body, then nothing needs to happen to our “lowly” body. It can simply be left in the dust. Carrier has pointed out that the verb for “transform” here is sometimes used of a “disguise” by which people transform their appearance (e.g. 2 Corinthians 11:13 where people disguise themselves as apostles of Christ), suggesting that the imagery of changing clothes really supports the idea that the old body is left behind. But this is to overlook the context, because Paul is describing the

changing of the appearance, not of the person (as though the person can exist without their body), but rather the changing of the appearance *of the lowly body itself*. The literal wording (ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν) is “who will transform (or if Carrier prefers, change the appearance of) the body of humiliation of us.” It is thus the body that is changed. What is more, the body will be literally conformed (σύμμορφον — *summorphon*, literally formed or “morphed”) to “the body of his glory.” Why would a body need to be conformed to a new form when the body is brand new, a replacement for the old body? No amount of bending over backwards can avoid the conclusion that Paul is talking about a body that has a lowly form being transformed so that it conforms to a new glorious form. This is not a replacement but a metamorphosis.

In a well-known passage where Paul is — wrongly, I think — often thought of as expressing his hope of disembodied bliss in heaven, he expresses his hopeful anticipation of the future state of glory, a transformed body. Even if this body — our current physical form — is killed or destroyed, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 5, we look forward to an eternal house with which we will be clothed.

True, all of this makes it hard to see how the body of someone who died five-thousand years ago could be resurrected today when there may simply be nothing left of them. That is another problem, however, which has been discussed by others elsewhere.³ The point here is that Paul’s view of the resurrected body, like that of his Jewish forebears and contemporaries, is that it has continuity with the body that died, and it is not simply a replacement. What is more, this problem did not exist in the case of Jesus, whose dead body was obviously still available on the third day after his death.

Setting aside Paul’s reference to the resurrection body itself, there is a brief but interesting piece of evidence in 1 Corinthians for the empty tomb, in 15:3–5.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also re-

ceived, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Recall that Paul's conversion took place apart from the ministry of the apostles, who wouldn't have wanted to be within a mile of him at the time. While on the road to Damascus in search of Christians to have arrested, he was struck down, as Mick Jagger sang, "St. Paul the persecutor was a cruel and sinful man. Jesus hit him with a blinding light and then his life began."⁴ But after that he went to Jerusalem and met up with the other disciples, which is likely what he is referring to here, where the teachings of the other apostles were passed on to him, and he is now passing it on to the church in Corinth. But why does he say that Jesus rose on the third day? How did that part of the resurrection tradition become adopted by the disciples in the first place? The most likely explanation is that the third day is when the disciples went to the tomb of Jesus and found it empty, just as the Gospels record. But if the body that died is not the body that was raised, there would be no reason for the tomb to be empty.

The redemption of the body

Lastly, apart from the concept of resurrection itself and the way that St. Paul described his hope, there is a very important feature of Christology (our understanding of the person of Christ) that is relevant here.

In the early centuries of the Christian faith there were two major disputes about Jesus of Nazareth. First, was he really divine? Second, was he really human? In regard to the latter question, it became clear to Christians that it was very important that Jesus was really, truly, fully human. Why? Because as the fourth-century theologian Gregory of Nazianzus put it, "What has not been assumed has not been healed."⁵ The Son of God took human nature to himself — *all* of human nature — in order to redeem it, restore it, raise it up and glorify it. And there is no real doubt

that the Christian movement always understood that Jesus was a real, physical, earthly person, and not an illusion (in fact, the challenge that his humanity was merely an illusion, a view called *Docetism*, was quickly rejected as heresy when it arose).

If God never intended to redeem the human body, then why would Christ have come in the flesh at all? As no more than a moral teacher? The belief that in Christ, God took humanity to himself, assures us that everything that was in Jesus of Nazareth: body, heart, mind, will, anything else you care to think of, is part of the humanity that through Christ was transformed. That the redemption of these bodies was part of the whole process of salvation was so clear to St. Paul that he could not even think of our adoption as God's children without it, a thought he expressed in Romans 8:23, "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Belief that Jesus slipped away unseen in an undetectable body, leaving his old one in the tomb, makes mockery of the very reason that Jesus had that body in the first place, in Christian thought.

Summary

So rather than serving as an earlier and less tangible concept of the resurrection that was later developed into the mythological history that we find in the gospel (as Carrier would have it) or into a crassly material version later advanced by the church (as though there is anything crass about the material world!), what we find in the New Testament epistles is an *affirmation* of the resurrection of the body in a very real, physical sense. The notion of a resurrection that left a corpse behind would have been nonsense to St. Paul and the early Christian community, and the whole package of salvation through God in Christ, as proclaimed from the beginning, only makes sense with its crowning glory, the resurrection of the dead.

Dr. Glenn Peoples runs *Right Reason*, a popular blog featuring the “Say hello to my Little Friend” podcast on theology, philosophy and social issues. You can also find him at www.rethinkinghell.com

References

- ¹ In fact Carrier has since gone even further, falling into what is commonly called the “Jesus myth” point of view, an extraordinary fringe movement that denies even the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth around whom the group of disciples formed. The number of serious adherents of this point of view among biblical scholars — none of whom could be considered mainstream — can likely be counted on the fingers and toes, and even the most liberal of scholars like John Dominic Crossan, the late Robert Funk, Gerd Lüdemann and Bart Ehrman have no time for it.
- ² N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 3 (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2003), 368.
- ³ For example, these three articles by Christian philosopher Trenton Merricks: “How to Live Forever Without Saving your Soul,” in Kevin Corcoran (ed.) *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 183 – 200, “There Are No Criteria of Identity Over Time,” *Noûs* 32:1 (1998), 106 – 124 and “The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting” in Michael J. Murray (ed.), *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 261 – 286.
- ⁴ The Rolling Stones, “Saint of Me.”
- ⁵ “What has not been assumed has not been healed; it is what is united to his divinity that is saved ... ” Gregory of Nazianzus, Epistle 101.

EARL WATERMAN — A BLESSED LIFE

by his children

Theresa Waterman Saunders

Rev. Earl Ellsworth Waterman, our Dad, was born on No-

vember 20, 1912, in Attleboro, Massachusetts, to Earl and Mildred Waterman. He was the third of four children; the only boy. When he was four his father was killed in a workplace accident and his mother was forced to go into housekeeping (living-in with her employers) for several years. The three oldest children were sent to live with various relatives and the year-old baby was adopted by her uncle and aunt, Louis and Genevieve Waterman.

One of Dad's earliest memories and never-forgotten pain was of watching out of the windows every evening at bedtime for his mother's infrequent visits, wondering if this was the night she would come. This hurt colored much of his life, and he suffered with it until his death. He found the unconditional forgiveness of all his sins by the Lord Jesus, especially those committed as a Christian, extremely hard to accept in his last years. This came from a deep sense of his own unworthiness and from his lifelong pain over feeling like a deserted child with the accompanying sense of personal guilt that most children believe caused their loss.

The years from early childhood to late teens are very vague. The family moved to St. Johnsbury, Vermont, when he was in grade school. When Earl was six his mother married a refined, demanding man, autocratic and alcoholic. He says,

“My room was my home when I was small. It was at the top of the stairs and was a retreat from my step-father. I spent a lot of time there. He was no father to me; he didn't know how to be. He did love my mother. He provided us with a home — at least a house. We were never hungry, but there was no joy for us kids.”

His two sisters avoided home and became quite rebellious. He saw much of his mother's hard life, and often said, “I hated my step-father with a perfect hatred.” He got a passion for reading from spending so much time in his room, which continued throughout his life. He became very well read, with history and literature his special interests.

At age 12, Dad visited a very small prayer-meeting group in the neighborhood Advent Christian Church. He had gone there some as a small child. Here he accepted Jesus as his Savior and

never rejected him. He says he lived with the strong sensation that something was wrong or missing in his life, and when he heard about the wonderful salvation that Jesus offers, he immediately responded. His need of love was met; love for studying and knowing the things of God was born.

A young man in the neighborhood, Carroll Montgomery, established a Christian Mission, and Dad became very involved in its work. This was a tremendous blessing to him. He read his Bible through several times and wore it out completely in three years. He spent much time with Carroll and was well disciplined. This was when he first began to dream of preaching the gospel.

Dad went to high school for four years in two different states, but because they did not accept credits from one another, he had to repeat both his freshman and sophomore years. After four years he took a chance and enrolled in Boston Bible School, in Boston, with no money and no high school diploma. Meantime, he had fallen in love with a neighborhood girl. With no family support or interest, no funds, and being in love, he only attended one semester.

It had to be very painful for one with such a life-long hunger for learning to have no apparent opportunity for higher education. But he demonstrated his desire to serve God by enrolling in the school, attempting to support himself alone.

At age 18 he returned to St. Johnsbury and married Marion Moulton. In the next year their first child was born, and the country experienced the great depression. He found work in Somersworth, New Hampshire, in the shoe shops; then worked in the electric plant in Dover, New Hampshire. There he joined the Advent Christian Church. The family grew fast; four more children were born in these years.

While in Dover, Dad was able to attend Alton Bay Campmeetings and learned much from all the ministers there: Clyde Hewitt, C. O. Farnham, Carlyle Roberts, Vernon Burt. He wrote,

“We had both missionaries and ministers with us over the years. None of them made a greater impact on my life than Vernon Burt — a mighty preacher. His com-

ing to our church in Dover, N.H., was the beginning of a new hope that I might be a preacher (which hope I had practically given up). Rev. Burt had no training, but the call of God was on him. By then I had five children and I thought it impossible. But something in me would not be denied. And brother Burt, without knowing it, gave me courage to step out into this field of endeavor. On this subject this is my favorite Scripture: “I was not a prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was a herdsman and the Lord said unto me, ‘Go prophecy unto my people Israel’” (Amos 7:14–15).

“There was nothing dramatic about my calling. It was just a tremendous urge or desire that came upon me. It’s what I wanted to do with my life up until I was 30. By then I had a large family, and it didn’t seem a reachable ambition any more. But the Lord made it possible somehow. I can never be grateful enough to the Advent Christian denomination for the chance they gave me and the mercy they had on me — and to God for the gift he gave me to expound his Word. Considering my lack of training and my ignorant ways, I didn’t do too badly. I was in demand considerably during my active years.”

Dad “launched out” in faith in 1942 and accepted the pastorate in West Ossipee, New Hampshire. He had a farmer’s heart and was very happy in this farming community. At the end of the second year, a spinal meningitis epidemic struck, and the whole town was quarantined. He had been uncertain about how long to stay and believed it was clear he must leave at once or be there indefinitely.

His ministry took him to North Springfield, Vermont; Sunshine, Maine; Whitefield, New Hampshire; Auburn, Crouseville and Chelsea, Maine; Clearwater, Florida. He had very short-term ministries, usually three to five years. He had had no training in handling difficult relationships or conflict resolution and felt very inadequate in these areas. His gifts were his excellent ability to preach, his heart for evangelism, his strong personality, and his love for learning.

It didn't take him long to become fascinated with Daniel and Revelation and all prophesy. This was stimulated by his love for Advent Christian doctrine and the marvelous teaching of William Miller with such emphasis on the second coming of Christ. He studied avidly and found satisfaction in discussing (and arguing) with other ministers at the campgrounds. He became an excellent prophetic preacher. He was always pleased to be approved by his more educated peers.

Dad became an excellent preacher, especially on prophecy and had many opportunities in prophetic conferences. Through the years he did frequent evangelistic work in many church revival services and camp meetings. He began to dream about becoming a full-time evangelist as he was a real soul winner. In several of his churches he had secular jobs, and as he worked on the railroad, in the woods, in the grocery stores, he won many people to Jesus.

In 1956 Marion died. She was his childhood sweetheart, and he was lost without her. He had two children still at home, the youngest was only 12. He was pastoring in Crouseville, Maine, at the time. In time, he met and married Rev. Ethel Sinclair, pastor of the Zion Fellowship Pentecostal Church in Washburn, Maine. In their first two years of marriage they traveled as full-time evangelists in Assemblies and Advent Christian churches, many of them in the south. Then he pastored in the Gospel Tabernacle in Augusta and Chelsea, Maine, and in Clearwater, Florida.

During their time in Clearwater another desire and passion was growing. As a young man he had always dearly loved Alton Bay with its powerful services, great teachings, and strong, helpful fellowship. He would have spent all his time there were it not for the need to work. Later, with a large family he found it impossible to go there very often. So now, he and Ethel prayed about establishing a camp meeting built and operated entirely by faith alone. He wanted to offer the chance for anyone who desired it to experience camp meeting at no charge whatever.

They decided to try, and moved to Whitefield, New Hampshire, where a friend sold him land on Dalton Mountain to begin

his campground. He and Ethel walked the perimeter claiming the land for a place for the Spirit of God to dwell. Then they traveled through the year to promote the Camp Harbinger. People from all the New England states attended. Harbinger celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2001. It grew to a facility with a main house, rooms for families, private cottage, and a large tabernacle with dining room and well-equipped kitchen.

Harbinger became a wonderfully fulfilling ministry for Earl. He preached often in the early years and brought in wonderful speakers and Bible teachers. He had a forum there for prophecy, evangelism and theological fellowship. It became his heart and life, and he loved every minute there. Lives have been changed. Harbinger has served as a work of faith and is a place where all may come at no charge — offerings and volunteer labor have been blessed by God.

Ethel began to lose her health, and in 1999 they moved to Vernon Green in Vernon, Vermont. They were happy in Vernon. Ethel died there in 2002. They enjoyed their friends and appreciated the care they received and were in turn loved by the staff and residents. Dad always felt that Vernon was very good to him. While there, he led several Bible studies and attended the Vernon AC Church. Dad continued to live there until 2009 when he died very peacefully in his sleep.

Dad dearly loved the Advent Christian Denomination. He always felt tremendous gratitude that it ordained him, and accepted him to serve the Lord in its churches. He respected the leaders, loved its history, and believed its teachings. He felt honored to have fellowship with the well-educated men and professors and missionaries. He led all his churches to support and be involved with its conferences and ministry. He had great admiration for this area of God's work and felt highly blessed to be a part of it.

Dad was painfully aware of his limited “formal” education. I enclose “formal” in quotation marks because in fact he was very well educated without benefit of the classroom. As an avid reader, if he was sitting down he was probably reading something. When

he was finished with breakfast, together with breakfast dishes, there would usually be a copy of “Time” magazine, “World’s Crisis,” or one of Winston Churchill’s books left on the table. On occasion when none of these were handy, he was known to read aloud from the cereal boxes and offer commentary on the ingredients, the additives, and the nutritional content in comparison with the percentage of “no nutritional value” therein.

Obviously, the bulk of his reading was much more sophisticated. He enjoyed quoting from Shakespeare, though it is doubtful that he ever read a complete Shakespearian play. He loved words and continued building his vocabulary throughout his life. His sermons, written out word for word, were particularly expressive. Regarding using a manuscript, he told me, “When you write out your sermon, you will not intentionally write poor grammar. You will think out your sentence structure and choice of words, a luxury you do not have when preaching from limited notes. If he was expounding on a controversial subject, he would not be merely presenting an echo of a popular (or unpopular) viewpoint. He would have prepared well and be thoroughly prepared to defend his position. He revered his colleagues who were able to take advantage of higher education and pursue advanced degrees, always being self-effacing in contrast. Yet these same colleagues held him in equally high esteem.

He had an insatiable desire for a deep relationship and close walk with God. He often spoke of several emotional/spiritual encounters that he had experienced at White River Campground, Alton Bay, or at a special rock on the island of Sunshine, Maine, where he had been the pastor. He desired to be **filled** with the Spirit; he did not want a one-time “filling” or “gift” per se, but an ongoing fullness of the Holy Spirit for purity and power.

After the death of our mother, Dad took a sabbatical from vocational ministry. This afforded him time for continued pursuing of his own spiritual growth. Through his study in the Scriptures, he had already come to the conclusion that Spiritual Gifts had not yet ceased, but are still offered to the church “... *to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building of*

the Body of Christ.” Also, he was assured from the Scripture that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was distinct from, and subsequent to, salvation. It was during that summer that he received the answer to his prayer. He attended the local Pentecostal Church and was encouraged in this manner of Christian practice. (As an added bonus he eventually married the pastor of that church.) This prompted a change in his ministry and provoked some misunderstandings in Advent Christian circles as it had for several other Advent Christian men at that time. Soon after, the “Charismatic” movement was being endorsed by many evangelical churches. Akin to the popular country song by Barbara Mandrell, “I Was Country When Country Wasn’t Cool,” he was heard to say, “I was charismatic when charismatic wasn’t cool!”

For many years he had dreamed of establishing a conference center removed from the busyness of life where tired workers could come, rest and be encouraged at no cost. This resulted in Harbinger Bible Conference, probably his most personally fulfilling ministry. Harbinger developed into a conference center, offering three spiritual retreats a year, where **anyone** may attend without cost. Its purpose and practice continues today. He wanted to make a connection with a larger organization for accountability as well as encouragement. He applied to the Maranatha Conference (New Hampshire) to have Harbinger included as a cooperating ministry. He summoned up all of his courage and told Dr. Gedney, who was conference president at the time, that Harbinger is un-ashamedly and un-compromisingly charismatic, and hoped that this would not cause a problem. Dr. Gedney smiled and assured Dad that they would stand together on that issue.

Dad’s sense of self-worth was not predicated on the size of his congregation. Although he pastored several larger churches, he preferred smaller churches. As a result, most of the time he had to find other work to augment his income. This was a mixed blessing at best. The family was never hungry, cold or poorly clothed, but even two small incomes were never enough to provide in the manner that he would have liked; and, naturally, the secular work limited the time spent in ministry.

He loved the Advent Christian Church. For a while he thought he might have greater opportunity for ministry in a larger denomination. However, he learned that one of the common marks of most denominations is to have unity among their preachers on their secondary teachings as well as the orthodox doctrines of Christianity. His “modified historicist” position of eschatology was not well accepted amongst some of those brethren, and it caused no small uproar in the Northern New England District. He then accepted a call to a very small Advent Christian Church in rural New England, and both he and Ethel were welcomed as ordained clergy into the conference.

At my ordination he included in his sermon for the occasion: “You will have a difficult time finding a fellowship that will give you the liberty found in the Advent Christian Church. There is no pre-arranged credo you must fully embrace. If you are convinced from the Scripture on a given issue, you may adhere to it; you may even put it forward for consideration without fear of censorship.” Not only did he modify his prophetic position, he was a staunch Arminian until the day he died.

Some Personal Notes

By Earl Waterman

Over the years, Dad baptized a substantial number of people. He baptized me when I was 11 years old in the cold Atlantic waters off Sunshine Island, Maine. Twenty-five years later he baptized my three older children in the Advent Christian Church in Littleton, New Hampshire.

My children’s baptisms were very moving to me. It was during camp-meeting at Harbinger, and the Littleton Church was filled with camp folks. Dad asked each candidate questions designed to show that they knew what they were doing, and fully intended to turn away from the works of darkness and earnestly follow Jesus. I had no apprehensions about Wanda and Nathan. They understood the process of baptism and the meaning it holds.

But, Rita Kay has Down’s Syndrome. She wanted to be bap-

tized. Her Sunday school teacher back in Bear River, Nova Scotia, had told her stories about baptisms in the Bible. I was concerned that she didn't really understand "dying to self and being resurrected to newness of life." Also, Rita Kay was always frightened of being submerged in water.

The service went along very nicely. Enthusiastic singing; lots of praising God; a joyful, uplifting time. Then Dad gave a brief resume of the meaning of baptism and the candidates descended into the tank one by one. "On confession of your faith," Dad stated, "I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost." Each one was precious.

When it came to Rita's turn, I tensed up. I remember praying, "Lord, make it good; make it real."

She was somewhat uneasy about getting into the water, but decided she could trust Grandpa. Instead of the usual questions, Dad asked, "Rita Kay, do you love Jesus?" "Yes, Grandpa, I do." "Do you want to be baptized?" "Yes!"

When he submerged her, she panicked. She swallowed water and thrashed about, spraying water all around. When she came up, she climbed on Dad and got her arms around his neck. After a brief session of gasping and sputtering, she said, so all could hear, "Grandpa, NOW I am a Christian!"

And so she was.

Dad was very affectionate to his children and grandchildren and cared much about their spiritual lives. In his later years he could be heard praying with a loud voice, sometimes with tears, for his family. I am grateful to God for Dad's impact upon my life and the lives of my children.

By Marion Waterman Blake

I had a healthy "fear" of my father. I was the "child" and he was the "father." Mama only had to say, "I'll tell your father," and my behavior improved immediately. He played with us, fixed cook-outs in the back yard, took us on rides on hot days, which always ended with an ice-cream cone. He read "Pilgrim's Progress" to us, quoted famous and not-so-famous writers; loved music; could play numerous instruments, wrote music and lyrics;

he would even grab Mama and do the “light fantastic” across the kitchen floor (much to her chagrin).

Dad symbolized constancy in our family. He was always there and would always be there. When he died I felt a great loss — as if something I had always depended on was gone. He represented security. He was a solid rock, always there, loving and praying for his children.”

By Carol Jensen Waterman

He called me “daughter”; this was always a delight to me and endearing.

When I first met my father-in-law I was quite fearful. He was a well-established pastor and, from what I had heard about him, quite intelligent. I thought, possibly stern, too. My first visit to the Waterman home was in Augusta, Maine. I was the guest of his son, George, my future husband. First impressions are important, but George and I broke his piano stool and fell flat on the floor. During that visit, I learned he liked limburger cheese.

Anyone who really knew Earl knew that he had a wonderful sense of humor. He wrote and quoted on occasion some of his limericks and poems. The music he wrote was sung by my husband and I and others, especially at Harbinger.

I had a deep respect for my father-in-law’s knowledge of Scripture and his love and understanding of eschatology. He had a unique preaching style, and was always sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He had an extremely intimate relationship with his Creator and Savior.

When Earl died my heart was broken. I wanted him and his spirit to go on forever. In a sense, that is happening through his sons and grandsons who have dedicated their lives to full-time ministry and hold steadily to the truths that Earl planted in their hearts and minds. No one can take his place in our lives because no one prayed so faithfully and earnestly for his family and loved ones. When Earl would come to our home for a visit we could always count on him to be up half the night praying for us all by name. If he told anyone that he would pray for them, they can

be certain that he did, and did often. He would spend his waking hours reading and studying or inquiring into our lives and encouraging us. He always brought nuts or popcorn, (things he was not supposed to eat!)

He had a wonderful memory and made wonderful memories for us all.

I am proud to be his daughter (in-law).

By Gillian Waterman Willey

I remember our childhood in Dover, New Hampshire. Dad worked nights in the gas plant. He says he spent most of his time studying and praying.

We would sit around the table with pencils and notebooks and he led a Bible study just for us. He taught us all the books of the Bible. I still remember every prophecy Genesis to Malachi about Jesus' birth.

He kept a tight reign on us kids. He took us to every camp-meeting he preached at. He had the best ability to help (encourage) people to love Jesus and developed a desire in people to want to be closer to Jesus.

As children we were poor but we didn't know it. While other parents gave their children "things," Dad gave us Jesus. He taught us to pray, read the Word, and to live by it. He was the best preacher; I miss his ministry.

Examples of his Humor and Satire

To the editor of "Henceforth ..."

Please consider yourself under suit by us as the result of your publishing that penetrating article on prophecy in your last issue. Any sudden increase in the circulation of "Henceforth ..." will only add to the enormity of your crime and will be dealt with accordingly.

So that we may be kept informed of your future practices, we enclose a check for a new subscription.

It is the judgment of our staff that if you published four times

a year instead of three, we would have the satisfaction of seeing you run out of Scriptures with the word “henceforth” in them.

We see no reason to ask your permission to print a part of the last article in our own paper, editing those manifestly erroneous portions which wreak such havoc on calm and deliberate reflection.

Indignantly yours,
The Harbinger

Dear Freeman,

I will call you “Freeman” and wish you would call me “Earl.”

In “Henceforth ...”, Volume 8, page 127, you make a statement about the antichrist and his identity in which I concur and would like to quote in an up-coming chapter, with your permission.

You might be interested in an observation my son and I had. I said that in person Brother Barton is a gentle self-effacing man who differs with grace. But when he takes pen in hand he reminds me of Martin Luther.

Earl responded, “And you, Dad, are somewhat restrained in your writing but very self-assertive and unrestrained in the pulpit.”

Christian love and much respect,
Earl Waterman

Earl Waterman was a man blessed of God. He was a happy man and always knew how much he needed Jesus and never, ever felt worthy of his love. Earl was impulsive, quick-tempered, energetic, independent, a family man, animal lover, part-farmer, poet, song-writer, quick to speak and quick to forgive.

Earl wrote many beautiful songs. The best known is the sweet, simple song, “Who Could it be but Jesus?” He played the accordion, trumpet, piano, autoharp and enjoyed the organ, (but couldn’t *actually* play it). He knew himself to be a great sinner, and Jesus to be a great Savior. He always felt unworthy, but always rejoiced in his wonderful God.

Who Could it be but Jesus?

by Earl Waterman

A beggar sits by the roadside
Sightless and friendless is he,
Then comes a stranger to help him,
Restoring his sight, making him whole,
Who could it be?

Disciples adrift on the water
Of turbulent Galilee
They cried out, "Master, we perish!
Who stilled the waves? Silenced the winds?
Who could it be?

Silas and Paul in the prison,
Beaten and hungry and cold,
Singing God's praises at midnight,
Who made them sing? Who gave them joy?
Who made them bold?

Poor lost Samaritan woman,
Nobody cared for her soul.
Then came a stranger with water,
She took a drink, her life was changed,
She was made whole!

Who has that living water,
Able to satisfy?
Who else would sit by a well,
Save a lost soul, walk to a cross,
And hang there to die?

Who could it be but Jesus?
Able to set a soul free?
Who else would pour out his life?

None but the Son, Jesus our Lord,
Surely 'tis He!

BOOK REVIEW

Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible

by Randolph Richards and Brandon O'Brien
published by IVP 2012

Reviewed by Penny Vann

“Context, Context, Context,” hermeneutics professors everywhere drill into the skulls of their students. Hermeneutics and consequently applications and theology are what this book is about. Richards’ and O’Brien’s strong commitment to proper interpreting of Scripture is what drives this book. They remind us westerners that our interpretation of Scripture, unless we are aware of it, is influenced by our cultural framework. They point out that some of our culture is so deeply embedded in us we don’t even realize it is there.

The authors’ goals in writing this book are first to remind the readers that the Bible is a foreign book, so to read it is to engage in a cross-cultural experience. The second goal they have is to raise questions as to what, because of our culture, readers misinterpret or overlook in Scripture; for instance, in one of the authors’ experiments only 4% of westerners remembered the famine in the story of the Prodigal Son. Their third goal is to give

suggestions as to how to lessen our culture's impact on our interpretations and thereby on the western church's Christian walk and theology. Last, they wish to make us aware of areas of our cultural thinking of which we are truly unaware.

They accomplish the goals by discussing nine cultural traits that westerners have. Each trait is deeper than the last and therefore less perceived. The nine traits are: mores, prejudices, language, individualism, shame vs. guilt, time, law, virtue, center of existence. These traits are then compared to other cultures such as Indonesian culture or the culture of Bible times. The authors do a good job in bringing up Scriptures that westerners often misinterpret for each section of traits. Some examples of this are:

- Revelation 3:15. Jesus is telling the Laodiceans that he wishes they were hot or cold. Many westerners interpret this to mean that Jesus wishes his people were either on fire for him or totally pagan rather than nominal. However, Laodiceans would have interpreted this statement differently.
- Jeremiah 29:11. Many, according to the authors, interpret this passage individualistically and therefore believe that God is promising every believer a prosperous life. The authors point out that this passage was for the nation of Judah as a community and not as individuals and therefore should be interpreted as such.

Another strength of this book is the questions at the end of each chapter and resources at the end of the book, which help drive home their points well.

There are many books on interpreting Scripture and many others that compare western to eastern culture. There are not many books that combine both. This book does this well and would help any westerner wishing to study Scripture better. This book, however, does have some weaknesses. Hyperbole is one of the glaring flaws. When the authors discuss that westerners tend to be introspective vs. the people of the Bible, they suggest David did not engage in this at all. Yet Psalm 139 and 51 would argue against this assumption. Also, while discussing individual-

ism vs. collectivism they make it seem that the entire of Scripture is communal in thinking, yet, there are people in Scripture being judged for individual sins. The second is that though they keep saying that the eastern cultures are NOT totally accurate in interpreting the Bible either, by their constant alluding to Indonesian culture they make it seem that they are.

Weaknesses aside, I do recommend the book to anyone who truly wishes to interpret Scripture. The book is helped by the authors' constant commitments to two principles; readers must know the context of Scripture and any Bible passage has only one meaning. It is also excellent for making the reader aware of how the undercurrent of culture distorts the understanding and applying of the Bible. Last, and probably more important, it is also really useful for getting conversations going about the issues raised.

Penny Vann serves as an Asia Pacific Area Director and a Global Training Coordinator for ACGC Department of World Outreach. She has a Master's degree in Missions from Columbia International University and has served as a pastor, teacher and missionary.

BOOK REVIEW
Immortality: The Quest to Live Forever and
How it Drives Civilization
by Steven Cave

Reviewed by Jeff Vann

I really do not think I have been wasting my time, but you be the judge. I have just read a 320-page book on immortality by

a person who does not believe in it. The book is called “Immortality: The Quest to Live Forever and How it drives Civilization” by Stephen Cave.¹ The book is an amazing and entertaining investigation of how the world has sought to come to grips with a paradox: on the one hand, everybody knows that they will die, but on the other hand, nobody wants to believe that this life is all there is.

Cave suggests that all the ways humanity has invented to deal with this paradox can be summed up in five “immortality narratives.”² He asserts that these ways of dealing with death have been the “underlying driver” behind a number of advances in civilization.³

1. Death is real, but we can beat it by *staying alive*.

Here Cave traces all the ways we humans have sought to extend life so that we postpone our date with the Grim Reaper. He concludes, however, that “success rates to date are not reassuring.”⁴ Eventually, no matter how healthy people are, they eventually croak. This means of gaining immortality is a dead end.

2. Death is real, but we can beat it by being *raised again*.

Cave attributes many world religions with being proponents of what he calls the resurrection narrative, but he especially notes how Jesus and Paul popularized the idea. It teaches that “although we must physically die, nonetheless we can physically rise again with the bodies we knew in life.”⁵ But for Cave, this view has an intrinsic problem in that we can never be sure if it is really me who is raised, or just a replication that happens to look like me. So, for Cave, hope of a resurrection is dead, too.

3. Death is not real, because we survive it as *immortal souls*.

Cave shows how this view had its beginning in the Greek mystery cults, was incorporated by Plato into his anthropology,

and borrowed by Augustine as he sought to define Christianity's doctrine of the afterlife. Cave says that this view "has come to be the dominant belief in Christianity and is central to Hinduism, Buddhism and many other religions."⁶ It offers a solution to death by positing that the real essential person will always survive. But Cave can find no scientific proof of any such survival, so nixes that idea, too.

4. Death is real, so we can only live on *in the lives of others*.

Cave calls this the most widespread immortality narrative of all, and he titles it *Legacy*.⁷ People either try to make themselves remembered by what they do, or by who they leave behind: their children. But for Cave, even this is an unprofitable way to live your life, because nothing — not even a legacy — lasts forever. Even Alexander the Great will one day be "Alexander who?"

5. Death is real, so just *accept it* and make the best of the lives we have.

Finally, Cave suggests his solution to the paradox. He draws on an analogy that goes back to the "Epic of Gilgamesh" and supports it with texts from Ecclesiastes.⁸ In essence, it is wrong to worry about living forever. Instead, we should be making the best of the tremendous gift of life now.

As a believer in Christ, and the resurrection he promises, I can agree that we should not worry about living forever, but I cannot agree that we should concede this life as being all there is.

Cave does not claim to be a believer in Christ, and he has rejected the notion that Christ can make good on his claims to raise the dead. But, interestingly, Cave is quite accurate in his assertion that a resurrection was exactly what Jesus offered. He said that, according to the New Testament, Jesus' "death on the cross and the resurrection three days later ... heralded the coming of the End Times and revealed God's plan for humanity: to raise the faithful from the grave to eternal life."⁹

Cave asserts that Paul picked up that ball and ran with it. Paul preached Christ as raised from the dead, proof that God will raise the dead. Cave explains, “by focusing on the resurrection, (Paul) could claim that Jesus had defeated death, not just for himself; but for all humanity; the crucifixion and resurrection had undone the curse of the Fall that brought death to mankind — ‘as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ’ (1 Corinthians 15:22).”

Cave compares what Paul asserts in the New Testament with what present day churches are teaching in their pulpits. He concludes that “the majority of Christians today have sided with the Greek belief that we have a soul, that it lives on after our death, and that it goes straight to heaven (or hell). But this is the opposite of what was preached by the early Christians, including both Jesus and Paul.”¹⁰

Cave speaks from outside the box, but he has quite a clear view from there. He can see that many Christians have abandoned the biblical hope of eternal life through resurrection for another hope. We conditionalists champion the biblical hope. And we have an answer to Cave’s arguments against it as well. We have faith in God. We find it not at all impossible for the God who created us to raise us from the dead. It will be us in our entirety, not just a likeness, a replication of what we once looked like. Why do we have the audacity to believe such a thing? Because we are children of Abraham, who “reasoned that God could even raise him from the dead.”¹¹ So, we do not see seeking immortality from the God who can deliver it as a futile quest.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen Cave, *Immortality: The Quest to Live Forever and How it Drives Civilization*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012).

² Cave, 2.

³ Cave, 14.

⁴ Cave, 4.

⁵ Cave, 4.

⁶ Cave, 5.

⁷ Cave, 6.

⁸ For my take on those passages, see *Analyzing Ecclesiastes 9:5*, not enough, false hopes for reward, and *Sheol: The Old Testament Consensus*.

⁹ Cave, 95.

¹⁰ Cave, 97.

¹¹ Hebrews 11:19 NET.

Jefferson Vann is a missionary with Advent Christian General Conference, and elder at McAlpin Advent Christian Church in Florida and Relevant Church in Virginia. “My hope is that everyone who reads this will have an opportunity to understand the gospel, and will know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.”

BIBLIOLOGY: HOW FIRM IS OUR FOUNDATION?

Looking Ahead to Volume XL, Number 1, Spring 2014.

The next issue of “Henceforth ... ” highlights the Bible — the source of our thinking about God, the Christian life, the church and everything else. The following bullets might suggest a possible article to contribute for this issue:

- Can we trust the Bible?
- What is the best adjective to describe how God inspired the Bible? (Is it authoritative, infallible or inerrant?)
- Do we always have to do things the *biblical* way?
- What is the role of the Bible in evangelism and discipleship?
- Should we always preach expositions of biblical texts?

The deadline for article submission is May 1, 2014. Submit your articles by email at one of the addresses below. Identify yourself with a short biographical section if you would like that included. Provide footnotes or endnotes. Formatting will be done by ACGC Department of Communication.

Other possible features of this issue:

- reviews of books you have read.
- lists of resources and training materials recommended for Advent Christians.
- letters to the editor, responding to articles in previous issues.

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