

WVC—301 Christian Interpretation  
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### Christian Theistic Worldview

A worldview is a network of presuppositions which are not tested by natural science and in terms of which all experience is related and interpreted (Kenneth Gentry, ed., *Basic Training for Defending the Faith* [hereafter *BTDF*, based upon a lecture series by Greg L. Bahnsen], Lesson 3, p. 3).

An extended definition is this:

A worldview is a network of presuppositions (which are not verified by the procedures of natural science) regarding reality (metaphysics), knowing (epistemology), and conduct (ethics) in terms of which every element of human experience is related and interpreted (*BTDF*, Lesson 3, p. 3; hereafter abbreviated L3.3).

Everything we believe is organized into a “self-contained truth system”, not a list of **disorganized doctrines** which have no relationship to one another and which stand on their own independently of one another. Every part of our world-view must relate to every other part in a **coherent, consistent system of belief**. Every fact of our existence is necessarily an **interpreted fact**. That is to say, we cannot understand anything as a “**brute fact**” which stands independently on its own without the need for a context or interpretation. Every fact is related in some way to every other fact in a universe of facts, “a single unified and orderly system which is composed of many diversified parts” (*BTDF*, L3.3). The world we live in is a **universe**, not a **multiverse**, because every thing, person, and event is related in some way to every other thing, person, and event. The **Christian worldview** maintains that the only unifying principle which can hold everything together is the God of the Bible. As the writer of Hebrews says,

For by Him [*Christ*] all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.<sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and **in Him all things hold together**. (Colossians 1:16-17 NASB)

Without God as the unifying principle, we live in a multiverse of random, unrelated things, persons, and events which arose by chance. “These unconnectable facts would be meaninglessly scattered about in a chaotic disarray and ultimate disorder, being more like an explosion in a mattress factory than coherent Universe” (*BTDF*, L3.4). But coherent facts do not arise from incoherence.

### Presuppositions

A “presupposition” is an elementary assumption in one’s reasoning or in the process by which opinions are formed. . . . [It] is not just any assumption in an argument, but a personal commitment that is held at the most basic level of one’s network of beliefs. Presuppositions form a wide-ranging, foundational *perspective* (or starting point) in terms of which everything else is interpreted and

evaluated. As such, presuppositions have the greatest authority in one's thinking, being treated as one's least negotiable beliefs and being granted the highest immunity to revision (*BTDF*, L3.5).

A presupposition is, therefore, an "elementary" (i.e., basic, foundational, starting point) assumption about reality as a whole. An elementary presupposition serves as an essential condition necessary to one's outlook on the world and life. It is a necessary precondition for human thought and experience, without which logical reasoning would be impossible and human experience unintelligible (*BTDF*, L3.5).

We depend upon these presuppositions either consciously or unconsciously in order to **function** in life. For example, according to my sensory experience, I am standing in the same classroom today as I was last Thursday. If I didn't trust that experience to be uniform (what we would call memory), I might question whether I was somewhere else and that you were not the same people I saw last Thursday. Without a set of assumptions or worldview, nothing has an historical context. It would be like reading a verse in the Bible without a context. For example, what is the meaning of this verse?

At the Parbar on the west *there were* four at the highway and two at the Parbar. (1 Chronicles 26:18 NASB)

Have you memorized this verse for your devotions? Without a context, it is meaningless, but when you read the whole chapter, you discover that the chronicler is speaking about the Levites who were chosen to be the gatekeepers of the temple. Life is also meaningless without a context into which we can plug our experiences and the people we know. We have to have a closet with rods and hangers upon which we hang our clothes. If not, our lives become disorderly and chaotic, like some of your dorm rooms.

In your network of beliefs, those convictions more distant from your core beliefs (your presuppositions) are more susceptible to challenge, more open to failure, and more subject to dismissal. The closer you get to core presuppositions governing your thinking, the less likely you are to reject them. They give meaning to all your other thoughts and experiences and are therefore more basic and indispensable (*BTDF*, L3.8).

Your belief in the reliability of sensory experience would be one of those core beliefs most resistant to change. As I have said, we would not be able to function without it. Some core beliefs or presuppositions would include the following (*BTDF*, Lesson Three):

- The reality of an objective external world: Am I sure that I am not just a mind imagining that matter exists?
- The reliability of memory: Can I trust my memory as a basic personal function necessary for living?
- The relationship of the immaterial mind and the material body: How *does* the intangible mind interact with and govern the chemical processes of the tangible body?
- Your continuing personal identity over time: Are you sure you weren't created five minutes ago with a full memory program in place?
- The reality of cause-and-effect relations: May I expect that my physical actions will impact the material world round about me?

All of these are presuppositions that affect our behavior unconsciously, like the reflexes of the human body. When we burn our hands, we do not go through a conscious process whereby we determine that intense heat may damage our hands. We reflexively withdraw our hands away from the heat. In the same way, our minds do not have to boot up and wait for all its programs to work before we begin to think and take action on the basis of what we believe consciously or subconsciously. I don't have to ask myself each day, "Should I get from the second floor to the first floor by taking the stairs or by jumping out of a second-story window." I habitually head for the staircase instead of an open window. Therefore, our core belief in the theory of gravity and the uniformity of cause and effect, etc. instinctively guides me toward the stairwell. Moreover, we are utterly **committed** to the idea of the uniformity of cause and effect, because no matter how many times we leave a multi-storied building, we will either take the stairs or an elevator. And this is one thing which indicates whether we have a consistent world-view or not. Are we committed to it, and **can we live consistently with it?**

The empiricist philosopher, David Hume, came to the conclusion that we could not prove the existence of cause and effect on the basis of empiricism, because empiricism requires experience. Although you may observe a person walking safely down a stairway one thousand times, it did not prove that he could do that one thousand and one times because no one can observe the future. We can make predictions of the future, but not the future itself, and predictions are not observations, they are cognitive deductions about the sequences of events we have seen thousands of times.

Whether our presuppositions are conscious or unconscious, we do not test them scientifically. Science depends upon empirical observation, and one cannot observe a presupposition in a microscope or test it in a laboratory experiment. The uniformity of nature is assumed by scientists in order to perform experiments and come to conclusions, but the laws of nature and the conclusions themselves are **non-material** and lie outside the boundary of empirical investigation. To use another illustration, we all presuppose the existence of love without scientific investigation. We can observe sexual activity, but not love. Love is outside the boundary of observation.

There are other presuppositions which affect our behavior self-consciously, like our system of faith. We use this system to determine how to behave morally and make life decisions, like deciding whom we should marry.

Christian worldview considerations require that if you are committed to Christ in one particular area of life, you must be committed to Him at every point in life. Christianity is not concerned merely with a narrow range of human experience, involving only your prayer life, devotional reading, or worship.... the biblical cry "Christ is Lord" requires that you submit to Him in all areas of life. Too many believers are "Sunday-only" Christians who quarantine religious faith from the "real," every day life issues.

Since Christianity is a world-and-life view, it has a distinctive approach to reasoning, human nature, social relations, education, recreation, politics, economics, art, industry, medicine, and every other aspect of human experience. To be truly committed to Christ for salvation is to be committed to Christ in all of life (*BTDF*, L3.10).

### Theism—Foundation of a Christian World View

Genesis provides the Christian with the foundation of his world view, and it is not accidental that Genesis is the beginning of redemptive history and revelation.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 NASB)

Notice four things about this short verse (the first three from *BTDF*, L3.11-13)

(1) First, the author (Moses) does not make an argument for God’s existence from this verse.

It is a simple declarative sentence. “It is the grand **presupposition** of the creation narrative. In the believing worldview, the infinite, eternal, personal God absolutely exists and is the ground of all being” (*BTDF*, p. 11, emphasis mine).

(2) Secondly, God created all things—everything in the universe. Genesis 1: 1 is an introductory statement applying to the entire creation passage.

The creation of the heavens and earth is introduced in the first verse and given more detail in the rest of the chapter. The heavens include the heavenly bodies and the earth includes geophysical formations and all plant and animal life. Chapter 2 gives us even more detail about the creation of man and his relation to God. Moreover, there is nothing in the text that says that God had a beginning. God is the uncreated Creator. Materialists or naturalists insist that matter existed in the beginning and that matter is eternal, but this is not what the Bible says. The Bible says that God created matter. If one objects that a creator God is a presupposition which cannot be empirically proven, it only needs pointing out that the preexistence of matter and energy is also an empirically unprovable presupposition. Both presuppositions are based upon faith, but the more reasonable faith is in a personal Creator who had a plan when he made the world rather than in impersonal matter with no plan.

The word for God used throughout Genesis 1 is *Elohim*, the plural of majesty, but there is evidence of the Trinitarian God in Genesis when it says in v. 2, “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the **Spirit of God** was moving over the surface of the waters” and in v. 26, “Let Us make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness...” (Gen 1:26 NASB). God wasn’t addressing angels in v. 26. Man was not made in the image or likeness of angels, but in the likeness of God. The Spirit is moving over the waters and Christ, the eternal second person of the Trinity, is also involved in creation. In John’s Gospel, Colossians, and Hebrews, we have supporting evidence that all three persons were working together in creation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.<sup>3</sup> All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1-3 NASB)

For by Him [*Christ*] all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16 NASB)

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,<sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.<sup>3</sup> And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb. 1:1-3 NASB)

(3) Third, the universe is not eternal. God is eternal, but the universe had a beginning.

Therefore, naturalism, which claims that matter is eternal, is at odds with the biblical record. At this point I am not arguing against theistic evolution—namely, that God used the process of evolution to create plants and animals. I will argue against evolution later on in the course if we have time. But I am arguing at this point that all matter had a beginning and that God created the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Did matter arise from the big bang? This still leaves open the question of what it was that exploded to produce what we know as the material universe. Nothing cannot produce something.

(4) God spoke the world into existence. “And God said” occurs eight times in the passage. This implies the rationality of God and that language is a reliable medium of communication (Joseph A. Pipa and David W. Hall, *Did God Create in Six Days?*, pp. 244, 246). The Psalmist says,

**By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,** And by the breath of His mouth all their host.<sup>7</sup> He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses.<sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.<sup>9</sup> For **He spoke**, and it was done; **He commanded**, and it stood fast. (Psalm 33:6-9 NASB)

Therefore, the entire universe of matter is interpreted by Genesis 1. Genesis 1 is the lens through which we are able to understand the world and everything in the world, including us. It serves as the **starting point** of the Christian worldview.

### Central Elements of Worldview

Sire lists seven questions related to one’s worldview (James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, pp. 22-23):

- (1) What is prime reality—the really real?
- (2) What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
- (3) What is a human being?
- (4) What happens to a person at death?
- (5) Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- (6) How do we know what is right and wrong?
- (7) What is the meaning of human history?
- (8) What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

I will attempt to cover all of these at some point; but for now, I would like to narrow our focus to **three basic elements** of one’s worldview (*BTDF*, L4.2), all of which are included in Sire’s list.

- (1) Metaphysics
- (2) Epistemology
- (3) Ethics

## 1. Metaphysics

“Metaphysics” comes from a Latin word, *metaphysica* derived from the Greek words, *meta* (“beyond”) and *physika* (“physics” or “nature”). Thus, the study of metaphysics is the study of something “beyond the physical” or beyond the physical world of sense perception. Greg Bahnsen defines metaphysics as “The study of the ultimate nature of reality, the origin, structure, and nature of what is real” (**BTDF**, L4.3). So, you can see that metaphysics includes Sire’s first question: (1) “What is prime reality—the really real?” But metaphysics also asks such questions as (*BTDF*, L4.3-4):

- What *is it* to exist? What sorts of things exist?
- What is the nature of man? Is he free? Good? An animal?
- What is the nature of the Universe? Is it objectively real? Or is it simply appearance?
- Does God exist? What is his nature? What is God’s relation to the Universe?
- Is there change or development? How do things change? How is development possible? What is history?
- What is the character of the laws or concepts that govern reality? Are they changing? Universal? What are the limits of possibility?

So we can see here that Bahnsen is asking essentially the same questions as Sire but combining many of these questions under the category of metaphysics. For example, Sire asks: “(2) What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us? (3) What is a human being? (4) What happens to a person at death? (7) What is the meaning of human history?” All of these questions are questions of metaphysics. Anytime we ask questions about “meaning”, we are concerning ourselves with something beyond the physical world and beyond the capability of empirical observation. Has anyone observed meaning in a microscope or telescope? Or, take the example of a human being. Is a human being simply the sum of his components: tissues, organs, etc.? If we say, yes, then we have entered the realm of non-empirical, metaphysical questions?

Christians may lump some of these questions under the headings of Christian doctrines like **Creation**, **Fall**, **Redemption**, and **Consummation** (glorification). Those who are not Christians will ask similar questions like: What is the origin of the universe and the origin of man?—a question corresponding to creation. Do we have any meaning and purpose?—a question corresponding to the Christian doctrine of consummation, the fulfillment of man’s purpose found in Jesus Christ. Is history going anywhere or is it just an endless cycle of repetitive events?—again, a question related to consummation. Is there any difference between men and animals?—a question related to the doctrine of creation. Is man free or is he determined by biological, environmental, and social forces?—a question related to the fall. Is there such a thing as absolute right and wrong?—also a question related to the fall.

When we ask these questions, it is clear that people who are not Christians have come up with entirely different answers than Christians. Nevertheless, these are questions **common to everyone**, Christian and non-Christian. They are questions which allow Christians to have a **point of contact** with everyone else. By the very fact that men are made in the image of God, they are all asking some of the same questions. All men are inescapably religious. They are asking ultimate metaphysical questions which cannot be answered by **empirical observation**. Science, which is based on empirical data, cannot answer questions which go **beyond the physical**. It cannot answer questions of origin, meaning, purpose, or ethics. Science cannot answer the question of origins since no scientist was around when

the world began or when life began. What often is presented as science—e.g. the big bang or the theory of evolution—is nothing more than metaphysics, that which is beyond science.

Science cannot answer the question of the nature of man comprehensively. It can describe man physiologically but not metaphysically. It cannot tell us whether man has real purpose or whether history has purpose. Moreover, our knowledge of man physiologically has grown almost exponentially within the last 100 years. There are things medical science is now learning that make earlier “knowledge” of man obsolete. Science at any given time in history is never infallible science; it is expanding from further inquiry which may prove earlier theories to be in error.

### Evidence of God in General Revelation

The Bible shows that all men—Christians and non-Christians—have a point of contact with one another concerning **metaphysical** questions—questions pertaining to reality and existence. The apostle Paul says in Romans 1,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who **suppress** the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is **evident within** them; for God made it evident **to them**.<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly seen**, being understood **through what has been made**, so that they are **without excuse**.<sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they **did not honor Him as God or give thanks**, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.<sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:18-23 NASB)

This passage indicates that something of the knowledge of God can be gained through what theologians call **general revelation**, the revelation of God in the created order. The knowledge of God in general revelation is accessible to all because God desired to make it accessible to all. We have a poetical description of general revelation in Psalm 19: 1

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Psalm 19:1 NASB)

In Romans, Paul maintains that God made himself known **since the creation...through what has been made**. What does this knowledge consist of? To some extent it includes **His invisible attributes**. We will look at some of these attributes later but they must include his power or omnipotence, his omniscience or infinite knowledge, and his kindness. In Acts, speaking to the crowds in Lystra, Paul says,

"In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;<sup>17</sup> and **yet He did not leave Himself without witness**, in that He **did good** and **gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness**." (Acts 14:16-17 NASB)

God's kind **providence** resulted in giving **rains** which produced **fruitful seasons** or vegetation for food. The interesting thing about this reference is that Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, had made a man lame from birth to walk. The crowds began worshipping Paul and Barnabas saying, "The **gods**

[*plural tense*] have become like men and have come down to us" (Act 14:11 NASB), after which Paul says,

...Men, **why** are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these **vain things** to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. (Acts 14:15 NASB)

This is followed by Paul's insistence that the true God **had not left them without witness**, the witness of his kindness in providence. They were, therefore, **without excuse** (*anapologetos* in the Greek or "without an argument") for serving Greek gods. Notice that Paul did **not** say, "It is understandable that you are worshipping these vain idols because **you have not had sufficient evidence** of the true God." The Romans passage makes it plain that men who worship false gods have no excuse, not because they have not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, **special** revelation—something which would be excusable if there had been no one to tell them about it—but because they have not responded to **general** revelation with thanksgiving and adoration of the true God.

Several metaphysical questions are answered from the Romans passage:

(1) It is assumed that men can generally trust their sense perceptions to give them an accurate picture of reality. They see the **wonders of creation** which are actually there. They are not figments of their imagination. We do not exist in a "matrix" in which none of our sense perceptions are real but are actually part of a computer program masterminded by some genius. Naturally, this brings up the question of whether we exist in a world created by a sovereign God who has "programmed" every action of His creatures, removing every semblance of human free agency. An interesting question which we will discuss in due time. For starters, we must allow the first chapter of Romans to dictate the nature of true humanity which includes the free agency of man to rebel against and deny their Creator.

(2) Sense perception by itself is not the source of all knowledge. Although men perceived the creation with their senses, they did not see a **visible** God with their eyes. Rather, they **knew** something about Him from the **mental conceptions** produced by these sense perceptions.

It is a clear declaration to the effect that the visible creation as God's handiwork makes manifest the invisible perfections of God as its Creator, that from the things which are **perceptible to the senses cognition** of these invisible perfections is derived, and that thus a clear apprehension of God's perfections [*non-material perfections*] may be gained from his observable handwork (Murray, *Romans*, p. 40, emphasis and words in brackets mine).

**Empiricism** holds that we can know things **only** from sense perception, but in these verses, the knowledge of the **invisible** God comes from the **mental constructions** of the one who sees creation. One cannot see **God** through his senses, but he can clearly apprehend God's **invisible attributes** by means of his sensory perception of creation. In other words, the mind and heart can "see" God truly for who he is. Two specific attributes of God are mentioned along with a catch-all term for all of his attributes. Paul says that **His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen**. God is eternal and powerful. Moreover, He is divine which includes "the totality of that which God is as a being possessed of divine attributes" (John Murray, *Romans*, p. 39, citing Meyer). Therefore, divinity is the



summation of many attributes of God which are not spelled out in this passage. According to the passage we read from Acts, one of those attributes would be God's providential love and kindness to all men by giving them the means of growing their food (Murray, p. 39). Another verse expressing God's kind providence is found in the Sermon on the Mount.

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. (Matthew 5:44-45 NASB)

In contrast to His kindness, God's **wrath** is mentioned in v. 18. God's wrath is not uncontrollable anger or rage but "the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness" (Murray, p. 35). Manifestations of God's wrath are not limited to the final judgment when Christ comes at the end of the age, for the verb is present—**is revealed or is being revealed**. The present tense in the Greek indicates that his wrath continues to be revealed against men. Nor can we say that God's wrath is limited to supernatural acts like the flood in Noah's day or the parting of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians. The context of the verse indicates that the degrading passions of mankind are all manifestations of God's wrath against sin. Such degradation as homosexuality is itself a judgment against man.

**Therefore God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.<sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.<sup>26</sup> For this reason **God gave them over** to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,<sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (Romans 1:24-27 NASB)

We should understand here that Paul is **not making an exhaustive list** of sins which demonstrate the wrath of God. Homosexuality is just one example. Evil of every kind demonstrates the wrath of God: unjust war, poverty, political bondage, murder, theft, and sexually transmitted diseases of all kinds. All of these things plague mankind and represent the justice of God in response to man's turning aside from him to worship the creature. The things which plague the human race are not biological, economic, and social accidents; they are the results of God's wrath because men will not worship him or listen to his word.

(3) The revelation of God in creation had the end result that all men were rendered inexcusable for not worshipping the true God. Murray presents a possible alternative to this interpretation, namely, that rendering men inexcusable for their refusal to worship him was God's **design or purpose** of revealing himself in creation. God did not want man to have an excuse for worshipping anything or anyone except himself due to incomplete evidence. This is brought out by the clause in v. 20, **so that [a purpose clause] they are without excuse**.

(4) Men **suppress** the truth about God which they see in creation (v. 18). The perception of God in creation does not guarantee that men will rightly respond to God in worship. The weight of the passage seems to indicate that the majority of humanity has not done so, but has turned aside to worship and serve the creation instead by making images of created things and worshipping them—e.g. the bull image worshipped by the Israelites. But worshipping creation would also include anything in creation

which we might substitute for God. God created wealth and the things which represent wealth like gold, silver, equities traded on Wall Street, cars and real estate. God created sex, and men and women worship sex. American culture worships celebrities: actors, singers, and athletes. John Calvin says that our minds are “idol factories” constantly producing new idols for worship.

If men acknowledged the attributes of God in creation, they must agree to repent, worship the true God and obey him, but they refuse to do this. This passage indicates that there is no such thing as an honest atheist. Atheists have an **agenda**, and that agenda is to get rid of God so they can live their lives **autonomously** without the rule of God. But the unbelieving agenda would apply to anyone who follows false religions like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or other false religions. False religions **do not present a true picture of God’s attributes** nor do they point one to the true God; therefore, they are condemned as much as atheism.

For example, Buddhists believe that suffering is a normal, inevitable part of life which must be accepted. Christians understand that suffering has come into the world because of sin and God’s response to sin; but Christians also believe that God is not only holy, but kind and merciful. He has responded to man’s suffering by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem sinners into saints who care about other human beings. Consequently, we find Christian ministries all over the world that are feeding the hungry and caring for the sick. Do we find Buddhist or Hindu relief agencies responding to hunger, sickness, and suffering brought on by tsunamis, draught, hurricanes, or war? No.

### Christian Metaphysics

Christian metaphysics teaches the following (*BTDF*, L4.8-9):

- God is uncaused and eternally self-existent. There is nothing prior to God accounting for His origin and existence (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 33:37; Isa. 45:5–6, 18; Eph. 3:19; 1 Tim. 1:17).
- God is self-contained, needing nothing outside of Himself to prolong His existence. He is absolutely self-sufficient; He alone is self-definitional [i.e. He names himself and is named by no one else] (Exo. 3:14; John 5:26; Acts 17:25).

[Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14 NASB)

Exodus 3: 14 uses the imperfect tense of the verb “to be”. The imperfect tense in Hebrew implies incomplete action and ongoing reality. This speaks of God’s **self-existence**, independent of anything or anyone else “without prior cause or present dependence.” The verb also implies that He is eternal, changeless, and self-determined. He is not affected by anything outside of Himself or His sovereign will (*BTDF*, L4.20, emphasis mine.)

- God is absolutely independent and self-sufficient in thought (Job 11:7; 40:1–8; Isa. 55:8–11; Rom. 11:33-34), counsel (Ps. 33:11; Isa. 40:12–14), will (Dan. 4:35; Rom. 9:19; Eph. 1:5), and power (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; 40:21–26).
- God is the ultimate ground of all reality. Everything outside of God ultimately derives from His creative power (Gen. 1:1; Exo. 20:11; Neh. 9:6; Rev. 4:11).

Therefore, God and God alone defines the world and reality. He is the floor of all reality and must be the foundation of our metaphysical outlook and program. When asked to give the basis and starting point for the orderly universe and all external reality, the Christian points to the self-contained, omnipresent all-powerful, all-wise, personal God of Scripture (*BTDF*, Lesson 4).

God, then, is the **ultimate reality** and the basis for all other reality. Everything else is derived from God who is also **ultimate rationality and order**. On the other hand, the naturalist maintains that the material world came out of eternally existing matter producing an orderly universe from chance collisions of molecules. But chance cannot produce order even if given billions of years to do so. If you add a billion zeros to zero, you still have zero (*BTDF*, Lesson 4). You cannot get a rational universe from irrational chance.

## 2. Epistemology

The second element of worldview is epistemology. The word, “epistemology”, is derived from two Greek words: *episteme* (“knowledge”) and *logos* (“word, discourse”). It is “the study of the nature and limits of human knowledge; it addresses questions about truth, belief, justification [*i.e. the justification of why we believe something*], etc.” It investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge, discovering what we know and how we come to know it. Epistemology asks the following questions (*BTDF*, L4.10):

- What is the nature of truth and of objectivity?
- What is the nature of belief and of knowledge? What are their relationships? Can we *know* and yet not *believe*?
- What are the standards that justify beliefs? How do we know what we know? What is the proof or evidence that is acceptable?
- What are the proper procedures for science and discovery? How are they evaluated? What standards do they offer?

Christian epistemology is based on **general and special** revelation, as well as the **incarnation** of Jesus Christ in human flesh.

**1. General revelation**, as we have seen, is the revelation of God in creation (*BTDF*, L4.9). Romans 1 speaks of God’s “eternal power and divine nature” which includes all of his attributes. Paul speaks of God’s **immanence** or nearness to **all** men, Christian and non-Christian, when he proclaims Christ to the Greek philosophers on the Areopagus in Athens.

“...and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,<sup>27</sup> that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, **though He is not far from each one of us**” (Acts 17:26-27 NASB)

Therefore, God is near **in some sense** even to those who are not Christians. He is not distant or removed from his creation—as the Deists would assert—but present with creation. This is what theologians call the **omnipresence** of God. The Psalmist exclaims,

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,<sup>10</sup> Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. (Psalm 139:7-10 NASB)

In Romans 2, another specific attribute is implied, namely his **holiness**. Through creation, men understand something of the perfection of God.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,<sup>15</sup> in that they show **the work of the Law written in their hearts**, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (Romans 2:14-15 NASB)

All men, by virtue being made in the image of God, have the **work** of his law written on their hearts. This writing of the “work of the law” is not to be confused with the law “written on the heart” of a true believer by which the believer is given the desire and disposition to keep God’s law (2 Cor. 3: 3; Heb. 8: 10; Jer. 31: 33).

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and **on their heart I will write it**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:33 NASB)

Paul’s language applied to believers is different from the language applied to unbelievers. What he is saying in Romans 2 is that men cannot escape a moral consciousness rooted in the law of God. Their conscience **bears witness** to the fact that they are aware, in some sense, of God’s moral law revealed in the universe. They know that some things are wrong and others are right, although they may have a twisted view of morality, like the primitive tribe in Irian Jaya who cheered when they heard the story of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. To them, the art of deception was the highest virtue. Yet, they still had a concept of virtue and moral standards, however twisted.

**General revelation has limitations.** Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that men are limited in their ability to interpret general revelation. Although men can come to know about the creator God through an observation of creation, they cannot come to a right relation with God through general revelation.

...for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him **whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?** (Romans 10:13-14 NASB)

In this verse, Paul establishes the necessity of evangelism and missions. Salvation comes only through belief in Jesus Christ; it cannot be communicated strictly through natural or general revelation. Nevertheless, general revelation establishes a **point of contact** with those who are not Christians for the following reasons (*BTDF*, L4.12-13):

1. All the universe *necessarily* reveals God.

There are human analogies to help us understand this point. A painting reveals something of the artist who painted it, and a book reveals something of its author. When someone is viewing a painting in the presence of the artist, it would be appropriate to ask the artist what he intended to communicate with the painting. It would be arrogant for the critic to say, "It doesn't matter what you, the artist, intended; this is how your painting should be understood." The same could be said of an author who should be allowed to interpret the meaning of his own novel or the poet who is allowed to interpret his own poem. God created the world; and, therefore, the world **necessarily** reveals the God who made it. Nothing in the world can be properly understood apart from its maker. This leads to the next point.

2. All facts and laws of the universe are only properly comprehended in terms of their relation to God as divinely created facts and laws. All facts are **pre-interpreted** by God, which means everything in the Universe has meaning within the overarching, divinely-ordained, all-encompassing plan of God in which they exist (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). The [naturalist who believes only in matter] will not be able rationally to account for the orderly Universe which he experiences, since he is committed to **the ultimacy of chance**.

3. The universe is an intensely **personal environment** in that it is permeated with the presence of God (Jer. 23:23–24; Acts 17:27–28) and controlled by his wise purpose (Isa. 46:10; Eph. 1:11). As the Puritan Thomas Watson commented regarding God's omnipresence, "God's center is everywhere, his circumference is nowhere." In other words, he is central to everything in the universe, but he cannot be contained by the universe.

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me,<sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isaiah 46:9-10 NASB

The Universe is not an impersonal environment **awaiting the interpretation of man** and devoid of purpose and meaning apart from human activity. It is the God-created, God-permeated, God-controlled environment of man. In the unbeliever's worldview, he is standing quite alone in a cold, impersonal, and meaningless universe... (*BTDF*, L4.13).

**2. Special revelation** is the revelation of God to specific individuals throughout redemptive history and communicated to others in writing and by prophetic utterance (*BTDF*, L4.12) God wills to communicate to his image-bearers not only through creation but through language. Writing to Timothy, Paul says,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,<sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have **known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**.<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17 NASB)

We learn from this verse that the sacred writings of Scripture—Paul's reference to the OT Scriptures which are now expanded in the NT—are able to impart the wisdom leading to salvation in Christ.

Therefore, the special revelation of Scripture does what general revelation is not capable of doing, namely, lead a man to salvation or a right relation with God. The passage implies:

(1) There is **one way** of salvation and that way is in Christ Jesus. Although men know something of the nature of God through creation and have the work of the law written on their hearts, their knowledge of God's attributes is insufficient to lead them to salvation. Besides, men suppress the truth of general revelation so that it does not mean the same to them as God intended it to mean.

(2) Scripture is **not man-made**. It comes from the **mouth of God**. The word in the Greek is *theopneustos* or God-breathed. Although God utilized the culture, circumstances, and individual abilities and backgrounds of all the human authors of Scripture; nevertheless, the writers were influenced by the Holy Spirit in an extraordinary manner to write what they wrote.

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation,<sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men **moved by the Holy Spirit** spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21 NASB)

In this verse, Peter is not saying that only the writing prophets of the OT were inspired of God. All Scripture is prophecy because it comes from God. Even the OT **historical** books and **poetry** are included in "prophecy" because they reveal the will of God for mankind.

We learn from Genesis 1 and 2 that special revelation from God to man began **before** man fell into sin. Special revelation was therefore a **normal** means of communication before the fall.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."<sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.<sup>28</sup> God blessed them; and **God said to them**, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "**Behold**, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you;<sup>30</sup> and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given every green plant for food*"; and it was so. (Genesis 1:26-30 NASB)

The LORD God **commanded** the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;<sup>17</sup> but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17 NASB)

**3. Incarnational revelation** is a unique form of special revelation (*BTDF*, L4.13). Jesus Christ is called the word of God in John's gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. (John 1:1-2 NASB)

Christ is called the Word (*logos*) of God because in Christ we have the most complete manifestation of God's special revelation or communication of Himself.

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*. (John 1:18 NASB)

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,<sup>2</sup> in these last days **has spoken to us in His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2 NASB)

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NASB)

Jesus is the embodiment of the Immanuel principle found in the OT.

"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." (Matthew 1:23 NASB)

Incarnational revelation, among other things, separates the Christian from the theistic Muslim who recognizes that Jesus was a prophet but accuses the Christian of **polytheism** for believing that Jesus is God. Moreover, their greatest and last prophet, Mohammed, is not God nor did he ever claim to be. But reconciliation with God is impossible unless God takes upon himself human flesh and bridges the unbridgeable gap between God and man. Jesus completely assumes human nature in order to completely heal human nature. Mohammed, a merely human mediator, cannot bridge this gap.

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me."<sup>2</sup> "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you."<sup>3</sup> "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, **that where I am, there you may be also.**"<sup>4</sup> "And you know **the way** where I am going."<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know **where** You are going, how do we know **the way**?"<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "**I am the way**, and the truth, and the life; **no one comes to the Father but through Me.**"<sup>7</sup> "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."<sup>8</sup> Philip said to Him, "Lord, **show us the Father**, and it is enough for us."<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? **He who has seen Me has seen the Father**; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:1-9 NASB)

Therefore, God is not only **transcendent**, infinitely above and beyond us, but also **immanent** with us through his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. While God is near to all men in some sense, he is **especially** near and present with his people through the Spirit.

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;<sup>17</sup> *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."<sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18 NASB)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20 NASB)

**General, special, and incarnational** revelation form the basis of the Christian epistemology or theory of knowing. Knowledge is possible because God has **revealed himself truly** through these three means. It was God's intent to be known by man through **creation**, through the **written word**, and through the **incarnate Word**, Jesus Christ.

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3 NASB)

### 3. Ethics

Ethics is the third and last generic element of our worldview. It is the moral philosophy of what is right and wrong. It includes not only the **standard** of what is right and wrong, but the  **motive** of one's actions and the **goal** of one's actions.

For the Christian, morality is founded upon the all-good, all-knowing, everywhere present, all powerful, personal, and eternal Creator God of Scripture. His [*moral*]will, which is rooted in His being and nature, is man's **standard** of right. Since God is all good (Ps. 119:137; Mark 10:18b) and all-knowing (Ps. 139:2–27; Prov. 15:3), moral principles revealed in Scripture are always righteous and always relevant to our situation. Since God is eternal (Ps. 90:2; 102:12), his moral commands are always binding upon men. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13–14) (*BTDF*, L4.17).

#### Problems with the Unbelieving Worldview

Now that we have looked briefly at the three basic elements of a worldview, let's examine some of the problems encountered by anyone who does not have a Christian worldview. We will look briefly at the metaphysical problem of the **uniformity of nature**, the epistemological problem of **universals**, and the ethical problem of **moral absolutes**. We will also examine the problem of **personal freedom and dignity**.

##### 1. Metaphysical Problem—The Uniformity of Nature

That we live in a *universe* indicates that we exist in a single, unified, orderly system which is composed of many diversified parts. These parts function together as a whole, rational, predictable system. We do not live in a "multiverse." A multiverse would be a dis-unified, totally fragmented, and random assortment of disconnected and unconnectable facts. These unconnectable facts would be meaninglessly scattered about in chaotic disarray and ultimate disorder (*BTDF*, L10.2-3).

The uniformity of nature is essential for this universe of facts and events. The uniformity of nature states that what happens in the material world at any given time under certain circumstances will happen again under sufficiently similar circumstances. All science is built upon this principle. But

...if all knowledge must be empirical in nature, then the uniformity of nature cannot be known to be true. **And without the knowledge and assurance that the future will be like the past** (e.g., if



salt dissolved in water on Wednesday, it will do likewise and not explode in water on Friday) we could not draw empirical generalizations and projections—in which case the whole enterprise of natural science would immediately be undermined.

Scientists could not arrive at even one dependable, rationally warranted conclusion about future chemical interactions, the rotation of the earth, the stability of a bridge, the medicinal effects of a drug, or anything else. Each and every premise that entered into their reasoning about a particular situation at a particular time and in a particular place would need to be individually confirmed in an empirical fashion. **Nothing experienced in the past could become a basis for expectations about how things might happen at present or in the future.** Without certain beliefs about the nature of reality and history—beliefs which are supra-empirical in character—the **process of empirical learning and reasoning would become impossible** (Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, emphasis mine).

We cannot have an accurate metaphysics (the nature of reality) without an accurate epistemology (method of knowing). The empiricist cannot reasonably believe in the uniformity of nature without abandoning his system of empiricism. Why? **Because he cannot see or experience the future.** Our method of knowing (epistemology) is naturally influenced by our metaphysics and our metaphysics (view of what is real or what can be real) is influenced by our epistemology.

An individual's limited personal experience cannot warrant a comprehensive framework encompassing every sort of existent there may be...Empirical experience merely gives us an appearance of things; empirical experience cannot in itself correct illusions or get us beyond appearance to any world or realm of reality lying beyond. **Nor can it determine the limits of the possible.** A particular experience of the physical world does not deal with the world as whole. Nor does the nature of existence manifest itself in simple sense perception of any physical object or set of them (*Always Ready*).

#### **Two important truths concerning the uniformity of nature (BTDF, L10.3):**

(1) Uniformity is **valid in all places**. The character of the material universe is such that it functions according to a discernible regularity. Natural laws that operate in one place of the universe will uniformly operate throughout the universe so that the same physical cause will in a similar circumstance produce the same physical result elsewhere.

(2) Uniformity is **valid at all times**. We may expect the future to be like the past in that natural laws do not change over time.

Without the uniformity of nature, science is impossible. For science to be valid, we must be able to infer from past events what will happen in the future under similar circumstances. This does not rule out the possibility of **miracles**. By their very nature, miracles are rare departures from the norm of the uniformity of nature and from God's ordinary providence. Axe heads don't normally float (2 Kings 5: 5-6). We live in an **open** system where God is free to **use** the laws of nature in **extraordinary** ways—as in the Red Sea event when “the LORD swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided” (Exo 14:21 NASB). He also used the laws of nature to produce a catastrophic event like the flood in Genesis 7.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all **the fountains of the great deep burst open**, and the **floodgates of the sky were opened**.<sup>12</sup> **The rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.** (Genesis 7:11-12 NASB)

Dr. Henry Morris maintains that the fracturing of the subterranean reservoirs under the earth's surface coupled with torrential rains for forty days and forty nights

...are sufficient in themselves...to explain the Flood and all its effects without the necessity of resorting either to supernatural creative miracles or to providentially ordered extra-terrestrial interferences of speculative nature (*The Genesis Record*, p. 196).

Although the flood would not have occurred apart from God's omnipotent power, it represents God's extraordinary **use** of nature. It does not require what some would call a **"violation"** of nature. Greg Bahnsen explains.

It is sometimes thought that miracles are super-natural because they amount to **divine intrusions** into the ordinary and predictable operations of an otherwise "closed" and self-perpetuating domain of "nature." Mechanical metaphors are often used to give a picture of this natural order, for instance the metaphor of a **well-designed clock** [the Deist metaphor] which God devised, wound up, stood back from, and now runs on its own—except for those rare occasions when the clock-maker steps in to interfere with the way He intended the clock to operate.

The more philosophically sophisticated way to describe this situation is to speak of **"natural law."** The events which transpire in the universe, whether monumental or minuscule, are viewed as inevitable and predictable according to causal factors which can, in theory, be described in systematic, law-like principles....

The **religious version** of this notion that there are "laws of nature" postulates a personal God as the origin of the material world and of the causal principles by which it operates, but this God (and the free or arbitrary exercise of His almighty will) is nevertheless **"separated" from the ordinary and ongoing workings of the world He made. God has chosen not to directly govern every detail in the created world on a moment by moment basis**, and thus "nature" has laws inherent in it which determine what things are like and how things happen. Variations on this conception of God's world as governed by impersonal natural laws are found in a wide range of Christian professions, from **Deism** to Thomism (Roman Catholicism) to evangelical Arminianism.

Given the above conception [of inherent laws of nature] the super-naturalness of a "miracle" consists in its **"violation" of the laws of nature.** God **interferes** with the machinery of the world in its law-directed actions and procedures. **This is a flawed and terribly misleading way of thinking about the cosmos and about God, however.** God's self-revelation in the Scriptures offers no support for the idea that there are **impersonal laws of nature** which make the world operate mechanically and with an inevitability which is free (ordinarily) from the choices of God's will. In fact, the Bible offers us a view of the world which is quite contrary to this, one where God and His agents are seen as **intimately, continuously, and directly** involved in all of the detailed events which transpire in the created order. [Your next heartbeat is directly caused by God because Christ "upholds all things by the word of his power" Heb. 1: 3; my comment].

God personally created **and now personally directs all the affairs of the world**. This sustaining of all animal life and renewing of the plants in this world is the work of God's Spirit (Isa. 63:14; Ps. 104:29-30); Jehovah's Spirit is intimately involved with the processes of the created world, from the withering of the flowers to driving the rushing streams (Isa. 40:7; 59:19). God's decretive will governs all things which happen, from the changing of the seasons (Gen. 8:22) to the hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30). Even the apparently fortuitous events in this life are planned and carried out by His sovereign will (Prov. 16:33, ["The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD."]; 1 Kings 22:28, 34). Paul declares that God "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). That is, He causes everything to happen which happens. **There is no semi-autonomous, self-operating realm of "nature" whose impersonal laws are occasionally "violated" by the God** who reveals Himself in the pages of the Bible. Nothing is independent of Him and His sovereign, immanent, personal will (*Always Ready*, emphasis mine).

The psalmist says,

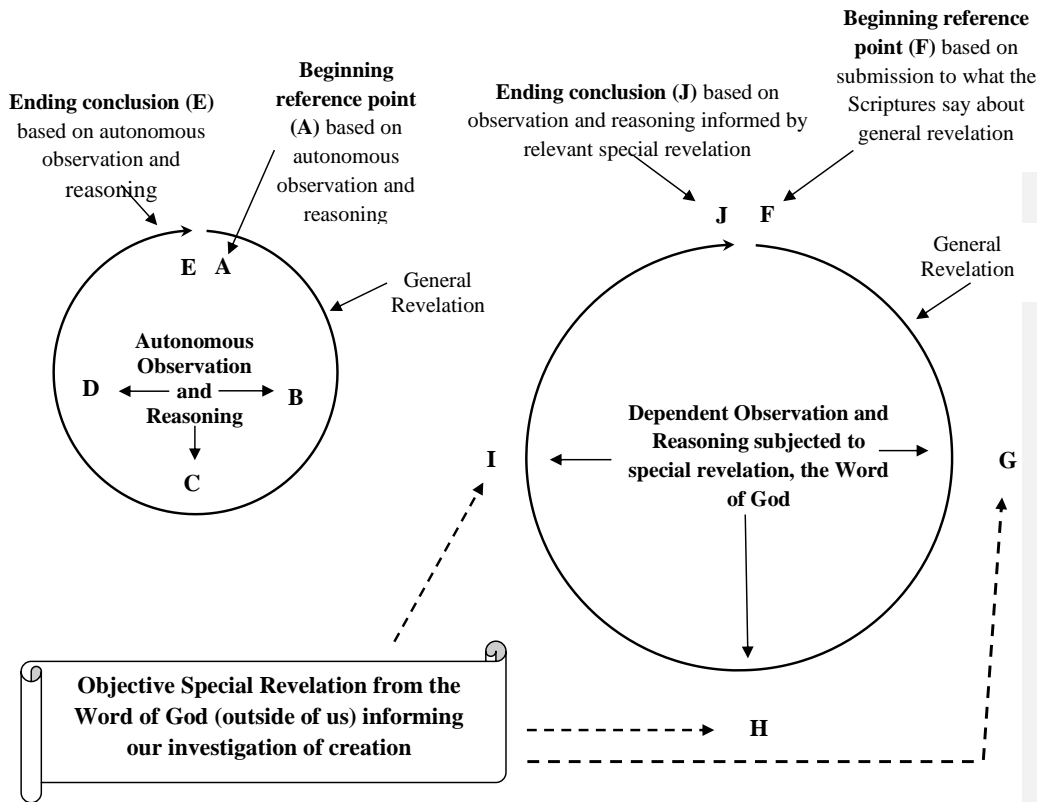
You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are **intimately acquainted with all my ways**  
(Psalm 139: 3 NASB)

For You formed my inward parts; **You wove me in my mother's womb**.<sup>14</sup> I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. (Psalm 139:13-14 NASB)

Therefore, there is no "mother nature" or even a "father nature". God created nature and is not part of nature. He is outside of nature, but he is not closed off from nature. In the diagram below, letters B, C, and D represent logical processes by which the unbeliever comes to a conclusion E without the aid of special revelation. These steps are represented **inside** the circle, in the **closed system** of man's autonomous mind. Contrarily, the logical processes of the Christian (G, H, and I) are represented **outside** the circle having access to the **open system** of special revelation enabling him to interpret general revelation by way of special revelation—especially the special revelation particularly relevant to the subject being investigated.

Both Christians and non-Christians reason in a circle, but the Christian's circle of reference is much bigger than the non-Christian's. His circle is the **open** system including God's special revelation found in the Scriptures. The Christian uses this special revelation to properly interpret the general revelation of creation in all areas of life—science, literature, ethics, art, etc.

For example, the subject of geology should be informed by the special revelation of the flood during Noah's day. Any attempt to interpret geological strata which does not take this information into account is doomed to error. We are back "full circle" to the sin of Adam and Eve who second-guessed the wisdom of God by determining for themselves what is good or bad through independent experimentation—eating the fruit. "God says one thing. The serpent says another. I'll find out for myself through independent research." Adam did not have to eat the fruit to know that disastrous results would come from it. He could have taken God's word for it.



### Accounting for the Uniformity of Nature

How do we account for the uniformity of nature? Everyone lives by it, but not all philosophical systems can logically account for it. The Christian has no problem accounting for the uniformity of nature because God has created a world which demonstrates order and predictability. He created the sun, moon, and stars to regulate the light.

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14 NASB)

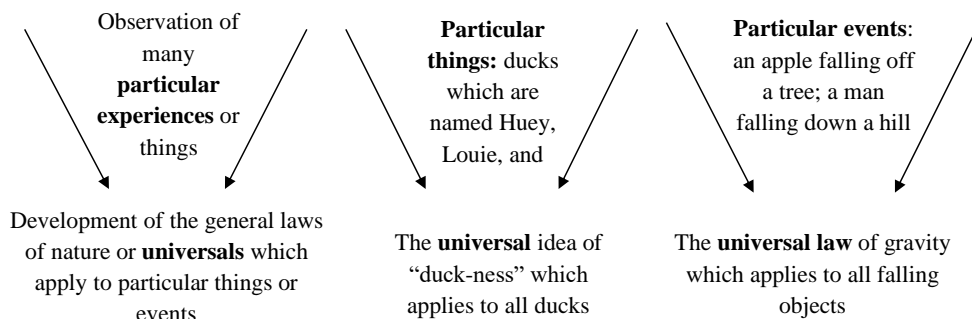
After God destroyed the world with a flood, he said,

"While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22 NASB)

In other words, the flood was a **departure** from the normal cycle of seasons, planting and harvesting. Essentially, God would not interrupt that cycle again until the end of time.

Therefore, the Christian can move forward with confidence that valid predictions can be made of future events when the same set of circumstances occur. The uniformity of nature is demonstrated every day in the natural world. But, of course, most everyone else believes this as well, so what's the big deal? The question is not whether the uniformity of nature is generally **accepted** or whether one's life demonstrates the utility of this law, but whether one's worldview can **account** for it. Is the uniformity of nature consistent with other worldviews? Naturalists claim: "We only know things based on the scientific method of observation and experience. We only know things that are results of sense experience in the material world." But the problem arises: We have **no experience of the future**, for it has yet to occur. Therefore, on this experience-based scientific method, how can we predict that the future will be like the past so that we may expect scientific experiments to be valid? The Christian can make this prediction because of his commitment to scripture which presupposes order and predictability.

Modern science is based upon observation and **inductive reasoning**, by which particular objects are observed under a similar set of circumstances, leading to a general theory which may become a law. The inductive method of scientific investigation can be illustrated the following way: (Based on the *Study Guide for Basic Training for Defending the Faith—A Lecture Series* by Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen, Dr. Ken Gentry, Jr., "The Problem of Universals", Lesson 11, based on Lecture 5 of tape series. See also *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*, Gary DeMar, editor, p. 201).



All ducks have similar characteristics like bills and webbed feet. Apples fall from trees and people fall down hills. We reason that all sorts of objects falling from heights are subject to the law of gravity. Tomorrow and the next day, the same thing will happen, even if the particular tree, hill, fruit, or person are different. But **Bertrand Russell**, an atheist, denied philosophically that we can make absolute predictions of future events based on the past. (And, philosophically, he would have been correct except for the fact that God exists.) All we have are **statistical averages telling us that future events will probably resemble past events**, but there is no **logical necessity** that they will do so. In practice, he lived as if he could trust the uniformity of nature—because, deep down, he knew he could—but he was attempting to determine absolute logical certainty, not probability. Here is what he said:

“It has been argued that we have reason to know that the future will resemble the past, because what was the future has constantly become the past, and has always been found to resemble the past, so that we really have experience of the future, namely of times which were formerly future, which we may call past futures. But such an argument really begs the very question at issue. We have experience of past futures, but not of future futures, and the question is: Will future futures resemble past futures? This question is not to be answered by an argument, which starts from past futures alone. We have therefore still to seek for some principle which shall enable us to know that the future will follow the same laws as the past.”

“The general principles of science, such as the belief in the reign of law, and the belief that every event must have a cause, are as completely dependent upon the **inductive principle** as are the beliefs of daily life. All such general principles are believed because mankind has found innumerable instances of their truth and no instances of their falsehood. [e.g. apples falling from trees have always dropped to the ground.] But this affords no evidence for their truth in the future, **unless the inductive principle is assumed.**

“Thus all knowledge which, on a basis of experience tells us something about what is **not experienced**, is based upon a belief which experience can neither confirm nor confute, yet which, at least in its more concrete applications, appears to be as firmly rooted in us as many of the facts of experience. The existence and justification of such beliefs—for the inductive principle, as we shall see, is not the only example—raises some of the most difficult and most debated problems of philosophy” (*BTDF*, L10.7).

Russell is by no means alone among non-Christian philosophers in his skepticism of the empirical method. In a paper called “The Paradox of Induction” (*Black’s Academy*, 2003, quoted in *BTDF*), another writer puts it this way:

“The paradox of induction is the problem that in all scientific reasoning we form conclusions, called laws, that are of a **general** nature; however, the evidence we have for those laws is based upon **particular experiences**. [That is, particular experiences like apples falling from trees.] For example, we form the conclusion that all rays of light will bend as they pass from air into glass, but we have only ever observed a finite number of instances of this law. On further reflection we see that there is no necessary connection between something happening on one occasion and the same thing happening in like circumstances on another occasion. We are not directly acquainted with the “power” behind events that ensures the uniformity of nature throughout space and time.

“The general law encompasses a potentially infinite number of instances that no amount of observation could possibly affirm. [In other words, how could we possibly observe all the many sorts of things falling from heights to be absolutely certain that the law of gravity always works under the same circumstances?] The problem is usually expressed as a problem of inference from past to future, but strictly this is only an instance of the problem; unobserved past events are also subject to the paradox of induction—we can never be sure that any general law has applied uniformly even in the past. No general law can ever be certain” (*BTDF*, L10.8-9, emphasis mine)

In other words, for the empiricist and naturalist—who says that knowledge comes only from sense perception—to be **certain** that all objects falling from heights drop to the ground, one would have to

be everywhere at all times; therefore, **he would have to be God**. But the empiricist system has no room for a God who cannot be seen. Thus, he is left **inside the circle** of his own experiences, and he cannot get out of that circle. **His epistemological method (theory of knowing) which determines what exists is flawed**. In other words, the naturalistic epistemology of modern science is **inadequate for determining its metaphysics**, the limits of reality. The statement, “God does not exist because I can’t see God” is a very unintelligent statement.

But the Christian can be certain that the law of gravity will operate every time in all places because he has this assurance from the Bible—i.e. unless God produces a miracle or makes an extraordinary use of nature.

Scientists could not arrive at even one dependable, rationally warranted conclusion about future chemical interactions, the rotation of the earth, the stability of a bridge, the medicinal effects of a drug, or anything else. Each and every premise that entered into their reasoning about a particular situation at a particular time and in a particular place would need to be **individually confirmed** in an empirical fashion. **Nothing experienced in the past could become a basis for expectations about how things might happen at present or in the future**. Without certain beliefs about the nature of reality and history—**beliefs which are supra-empirical** in character—the process of empirical learning and reasoning would become impossible (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, emphasis mine).

Of course, scientists don’t sit around discussing such things; only philosophers—otherwise we would not enjoy the fruits of science. Scientists merely assume the law of uniformity to be true and then use this unproven assumption to accomplish much good for the world—and sometimes much evil.

Keep in mind that the Christian is not saying that the uniformity of nature is not true. He firmly believes that it is true and certain, but only he can **account** for the uniformity of nature on the basis of the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal God who is everywhere, knows everything, and has ordained whatever comes to pass (Eph. 1: 11). For everyone else, the uniformity of nature is assumed as an **unconscious, but not less religious, commitment**.

The issue boils down to this: Since man cannot know everything he must *assume* or *presuppose* uniformity and then think and act on this very basic assumption. *Consequently the principle of uniformity is not a scientific law but an act of faith which undergirds scientific law*. Thus, adherence to the principle of uniformity— though absolutely essential to science and the scientific method—is an intrinsically religious commitment (*BTDF*, L10.10, emphasis his).

The problem of uniformity becomes difficult for those who assume that everything in the world **originated by a chance collision of atoms**.

“All matter and energy, as well as time, were created in the Big Bang between 10 and 20 billion years ago. In other words, at some point in the distant past, everything in the Universe was concentrated into a point-like region of space called a singularity. For some reason, and astronomers are unsure why, this singularity expanded rapidly in an explosion, releasing all the matter-energy and time—this event is what is termed The Big Bang” (*New Scientist*, quoted in *BTDF*, L10.11)

Nobel Prize winning French molecular biologist Jacques Monod puts it bluntly: “Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, [lies] at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution.... The universe was not pregnant with life nor the biosphere with man. Our number came up in the Monte Carlo game [a card game].”

Evolutionist K. Rohiniprasad comments in his “The Accident of Human Evolution”: “As the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould puts it, humans arose as a fortuitous and contingent outcome of thousands of linked events.”

Unfortunately for the non-Christian cosmology, chance involves randomness and unpredictability. As the source of all being, it undercuts the uniformity of all material reality, for a “singularity” (such as predicted of black-holes as well as for the beginning of the whole universe) “is a point where physical laws break down, where matter is infinitely dense.”

The unbelieving worldview requires **faith in miracles**, yet without a reason for those miracles. Life arises from non-life. Intelligence from non-intelligence. Morality from that which is non-moral. These are faith claims for explaining our world and how it came to be (BTDF, L10. emphasis mine).

## 2. Epistemological Problem—the Problem of Universals

The only way for human beings to reason coherently is through universal principles of reason called the laws of logic. In everyday life, we don’t think about these universals, but we employ them unconsciously moment by moment. Bahnsen defines **universals** as

“any truth of a general or abstract nature—whether it be a broad concept, law, principle, or categorical statement. Such general truths are used to understand, organize, and interpret **particular truths** encountered in concrete experience. . . . If one does not begin with some such **general truths** (universals) with which to understand the **particular observations** in one’s experience, those factual particulars would be unrelated and uninterpretable—i.e., ‘brute.’ In a **chance universe**, all particular facts would be random, have no classifiable identity, bear no pre-determined order or relation, and thus be unintelligible to man’s mind.” (BTDF, L11.2-3)

In other words, we would have no categories or “boxes” in which to place the particular things we see.

### Three Requirements for Universals (BTDF, L11.3)

- (1) By definition, a “universal” must apply to multiple things (otherwise, they would be particulars).
- (2) They are abstract rather than concrete (therefore, they do not appear in the material world).
- (3) They are general rather than specific.

To borrow an illustration from Bahnsen, if we wished to raise ducks for eating, we could go out in the backyard and pick a particular duck to eat. The next day we could do the same thing, knowing that each duck will have generally the same taste. They all taste like duck, not chicken or pork, because all of them possess the universal characteristic of “duck-ness”. Moreover, we also know that the only thing we can eat is a **particular** duck; we cannot eat the **universal idea** of “duck-ness.” Yet, the universal of duck-ness is essential for us to understand **particular** ducks; otherwise, we would pick pigs or chickens to eat instead of duck because we would not be able to discern the difference.



The same is true of all other universals or **boxes** into which we put particular observations. When crossing the street, we don't have to determine whether each individual automobile has sufficient weight to kill us if we cross the street carelessly. Whether the auto is a Ford truck or a Toyota Corolla, each vehicle would possess sufficient "**car-ness**" to splatter our bodies all over the street if they are hit by a car at 20 mph.

"If we wish to know the facts of this world, we must relate these facts to laws. That is, in every knowledge transaction, **we must bring the particulars of our experience into relation with universals**" (Cornelius Van Til, quoted in *BTDF*, L11.4).

What do universals include? They include **the nature of things** (like the nature of human beings or humanness, propositions like "all men are mortal"), **moral values**, and **laws**—including the laws of logic which govern rationality. One cannot function in life or communicate with other human beings without adhering to a set of universals. They are the fundamental presuppositions of human thinking and communication with others. We must be able to organize, classify, and associate particular things to general ideas.

### Laws of Logic

The laws of logic are...

...the abstract, universal, invariant rules that govern human rationality. In fact, they make rationality possible by allowing for coherent meaning, rational thought, and intelligent communication (*BTDF*, Lesson 11.5).

The laws of logic are not laws of thought in that they are **not subjective**. They are not "up for grabs", so to speak, as if anyone can **make up** their own laws of logic. They are the fundamental presuppositions of coherent, rational thinking which we assume on a day to day basis. We call them "common sense" but it is clear that at any given time, we and others may not be thinking logically.

The **three most basic** laws of logic are (*BTDF*, L11.5):

(1) The law of identity.

"A is A." This means that if any statement is true, it is true; it cannot be **both true and not true simultaneously**. That is, anything that exists in reality has a particular identity and is not something else.

If something is a cow, then it is not a horse. If someone is a man, he is not a woman—in spite of Bruce Jenner's insistence that he has always been a woman in the body of a man. His denial of reality does not make him a woman.

(2) The Law of Contradiction

"A is not not-A." That is, no statement can be **both true and false in the same sense at the same time**.

A person is alive or he is dead. He cannot be alive and dead at the same time and in the same way.

### (3) The Law of Excluded Middle

“A is either A or not-A.” That is, every statement must be **either true or false exclusively**, there is no middle ground. Or to put it differently: if a given statement is not true, then its denial must be true....

The law of excluded middle does not say there is no middle ground between opposites (such as large and small). Rather it is dealing with the question of middle ground between a statement and its *negative*.

This is not a course on logic, but we have looked at the three basic laws briefly so you will have some idea about what we are talking about. The universal laws of logic pose a problem for a person who views the universe as the **product of chance** in which everything occurs on the basis of random forces. Although naturalists believe in an orderly universe, **they cannot account for it** on the basis of their own presuppositions—e.g. the big bang and the evolutionary process which, they maintain, have no inherent design or purpose. How could they if only matter exists? Moreover, naturalists cannot account for the **connection or relationship between what we see with our eyes and the logical conclusions we make with our non-material minds**.

If, as the naturalists say, our minds are only a **material series of neuronal synapses and chemical processes in the brain**, how then do we account for the laws of logic which are universal and unconsciously agreed upon by the entire human race—with the exception of a handful of nihilistic skeptics who cannot deny the laws of logic in their practical experience? In other words, how do billions of particular brains with endless diverse neuronal variations come to a general agreement on the laws of logic? **One would think that logical thought would differ from person to person and from culture to culture** (BT, L11.9-11). While there are some differences in thought from person to person and culture to culture, one can “get around” with a translator quite nicely because logical coherence is practically the same throughout the world. As a cat is not a dog in the US, in the same way, a cat is not a dog in Uganda or China. If the **law of identity** did not operate globally, there would be fewer world travelers because people would stay at home in their familiar world of logical coherence.

This is not the same as saying that people disagree on issues. But they cannot disagree about the fact that A is not not-A, the **law of non-contradiction**: that no statement can be both true and false at the same time and in the same way. Otherwise, all conversation between human beings becomes unintelligible, and scientific thought impossible. For the sake of argument, we can set aside some Eastern religions and philosophy which are based on metaphysical **monism**. When you look at the economies of these nations, it is clear that they are **borrowing the intellectual capital of Christianity** to become world economic super-powers. You can’t grow world economies or science with metaphysical monism. When stocking the shelves of your family-owned grocery store, carrots are not peas.

The laws of mathematics are also examples of **universals**. 2 plus 2 always equals 4, and most people believe this even if their philosophical system cannot account for it. In a world which happened by chance, how can we be sure that  $2+2=4$ ? Why can’t  $2+2=10$ ? In fact, from the perspective of many **Eastern religions** which espouse **monism**—the belief that all is one—then  $2+2=1$ . **All plurality is an illusion**—that is, until the Indian farmer’s cow is stolen by his neighbor who now has two cows. All of

a sudden, the Hindu farmer will not agree with his thieving neighbor that his two cows are actually one cow. Nor will the tourist get very far in the Eastern market place by claiming that the two necklaces he just purchased are only one necklace and that he only owes the merchant for one necklace. **One question which must be asked of any philosophy is whether a person can practically live out the implications and conclusions of that system.** If he cannot, then we are wise to question the truth of his system.

The laws of mathematics are **mental constructs** which, according to the **nihilist**, have no relationship to the material world we observe. Although we can put the equation  $2+2=4$  on a chalkboard, there is nothing in the material world of endless particular objects which **requires it to be true**. You cannot find mathematical laws under a microscope, and what we cannot see empirically cannot be verified with empirical principles. In the same way, you cannot find duck-ness. You can only observe two or a million particular ducks, all of which may resemble one another but have different color variations and beak sizes.

...counting involves an abstract concept of law, or universal, or order. If there is no law, if there is no universal, if there is no order, then there is **no sequential counting**.

### Naturalism and the Loss of Reason

The nihilist carries naturalism a step further by questioning whether there is any real connection between the material neurological processes of the brain and the logical conclusions which result from these processes. **How can we know for sure that our conscious perceptions have anything to do with reality?** Our brains do not exist **outside** the material universe. They are **part** of this universe, and we have no reason to believe that matter, as Sire says,

...has any interest [i.e. purpose] in leading a conscious being to true perception or to logical (that is, correct) conclusions based on accurate observation and true presuppositions. The only beings in the universe who *care* about such matters are humans. But people are bound to their bodies. Their consciousness arises from a complex interrelation of “highly” ordered matter. **Why should whatever that matter is conscious of be in any way related to what is actually the case? Is there a test for distinguishing illusion from reality?** Naturalists point to the methods of scientific inquiry, pragmatic tests and so forth. But all these utilize the brain they are testing [in other words, the observation of the box is taking place inside the box]. Each test could well be a futile exercise in spinning out **the consistency of an illusion** (Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, p. 103).

The apostle Paul mentioned this problem when he said of certain false apostles, “For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but **when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding**” (2 Corinthians 10:12 NASB). If our entire understanding of the world is inside the tiny box (or circle) of our self-consciousness, we have no other reference point with which to compare it. We are like a carpenter inside a house building walls without a level. He is attempting to get all the walls plumb (perpendicular) to the ground, but the **only reference point** he has is the house itself which may or may not be straight up and down. The outside walls may be leaning in one direction or another, and when the carpenter builds all the interior walls, they will also be leaning and not plumb.

Sire continues,

Confidence in logic is ruled out [i.e. by the naturalist's own presuppositions].... One must hold that a brain, a device that came to be through natural selection and **chance-sponsored mutations**, can actually *know* a proposition or set of propositions to be true.

C.S. Lewis [*Miracles*, p. 109] puts the case this way:

If all that exists is Nature, **the great mindless interlocking event**, if our own deepest convictions are merely the **by-products of an irrational process**, then clearly there is not the slightest ground for supposing that our sense of fitness and our consequent faith in uniformity tell us anything about a reality **external to ourselves**. Our convictions are simply *a fact about us*—like the colour of our hair. If Naturalism is true we have no reason to trust our conviction that Nature is uniform (italics his, bold emphasis mine).

What we need for such certainty is the existence of some “Rational Spirit” outside both ourselves and nature from which our own rationality could derive. Theism assumes such a ground; naturalism does not....

Any argument we construct implies [the laws of logic]—the classical ones of identity, noncontradiction and the excluded middle. But that fact does not guarantee the “truthfulness” of these laws in the sense that anything we think or say that obeys them necessarily relates to what is so in the objective, external universe. Moreover, any argument to check the validity of an argument is itself an argument that might be mistaken...

The whole point of this argument can be summarized briefly: Naturalism places us as human beings in a box. But for us to have any confidence that our knowledge that we are in a box is true, we need to stand outside the box or have some other being outside the box provide us with information (theologians call this “revelation”). But there is nothing or no one outside the box to give us revelation, and we cannot ourselves transcend the box. Ergo: **epistemological nihilism** (Sire, pp. 103-106, emphasis mine).

Epistemological nihilism is the irrational conclusion of all non-Christian thought. And of course, everyone knows that epistemological nihilism is impossible—the reason why only a few mentally troubled people are bothered by it. Nevertheless, the logical conclusion of nihilism is inevitable if naturalism is true.

The thinking that human beings do **outside the box** is what Cornelius Van Til called **analogical** thinking or “thinking God’s thoughts after him”. All human thinking is contingent or dependent on God. To put it another way, all human thinking is **derivative**.

To illustrate Lewis’ point quoted by Sire above, consider the analogy of **human dreaming**. In those dreams we imagined something was happening, and at the time we were dreaming, the event seemed **very real**. I have dreamed that I was flying (not in an airplane, but like a bird), and it was exhilarating. Then I woke up, somewhat disappointed, that it was all a dream. But what if the dream was real and that what I am experiencing at this moment is the real dream? Do I conclude that since I seldom dream that I am flying, the real me can’t fly? Or am I just caught up in a perpetual dream that is only seldom interrupted? In the movie, *The Matrix*, the whole human race, with a few exceptions, was programmed

to believe that they were experiencing the real world while in fact their perceived world was not real at all; it was an illusion created by computers. They were all living in a perpetual dream programmed into their brains while their life was being sucked away to provide energy for the computers. The movie also presented Neo as the Messiah figure who led the new human race into true knowledge. He and his comrades alone knew the truth, and he was the ONE who had the power to expose the truth to the rest of civilization.

C.S. Lewis also recognized that real knowledge is impossible upon naturalistic presuppositions.

If necessities of thought force us to allow to any one thing any degree of independence from the Total System—if any one thing makes good a claim to be on its own, to be something more than an expression of the character of Nature as a whole—then we have abandoned Naturalism. For by Naturalism we mean the doctrine that only Nature—the whole interlocked system—exists. And if that were true, every thing and event would, if we knew enough, be explicable without remainder...as a necessary product of the system....

All possible knowledge...depends on the validity of reasoning. If the feeling of certainty which we express by words like *must be* and *therefore* and *since* is a real perception of how things outside our own minds really “must” be, well and good. But if this certainty is merely a feeling *in* our minds and not a genuine insight into realities beyond them—if it merely represents the ways our minds happen to work—then we have no knowledge [“knowledge” defined as truth rather than illusion]. Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, quoted in Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict—Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*, pp. 122-123).

Ronald Nash explains that the essential feature of human reasoning is the ability to understand the **necessary connections** between things—i.e. what **must** be true given a certain set of premises. For example, “If it is true that all men are mortal and if it is true that Socrates is a man, then it *must* be true that Socrates is mortal” (Nash, p. 123). Such necessary connections are essential to every kind of reasoning, but these connections cannot be accounted for on naturalism’s presuppositions—namely, that individuals are **all part of the inter-connected machinery** of the material cosmos and dependent upon it. Therefore, from the naturalist’s perspective, our reasoning (if you can call it that) is nothing but an **accidental outcome** (accidental because there is no design or purpose in the cosmos) of **the mechanistic system** of which we are but one part.

According to the naturalist worldview, our brains are built of the same **accidental collisions of atoms** as that of rocks and trees; and in the same way that rocks and trees cannot escape from the “total interlocking system” of nature, our brains also cannot escape. We cannot get **out of** the system in order to have an independent thought or action **concerning** the system. Our actions as well as our thinking are **determined** by the system. Thoughts and actions happen in the present because certain other thoughts and actions happened in the past. Everything is determined and there is **no freedom** of thought or action. We are like dominoes lined up close together in a row. What happens to us is the inevitable result of something else happening without any ability to make decisions.

Likewise, Bahnsen argues,

According to the dogma of empiricism, it would not make sense to speak of such things—**not make sense, for instance, to speak of validity and invalidity in an argument**, nor even to talk about

premises and conclusions. All you would have would be one contingent electro-chemical event in the physical brain of a scholar followed contingently by another. If these events are thought to follow a pattern, we must (again) note that on empirical grounds, one does not have a warrant for speaking of such a “pattern”; only particular events are experienced or observed. Moreover, even if there were a pattern within the electro-chemical events of one’s brain, it would be accidental and not a matter of attending to the rules of logic. Indeed, the “rules of logic” would at best be personal imperatives expressed as **the subjective preference of one person to another**. In such a case there is no point to argument and reasoning at all. An electro-chemical event in the brain cannot meaningfully be said to be “valid” or “invalid” (*Always Ready*).

### Naturalism and the Loss of Freedom

Naturalism’s answer to Sire’s “Worldview Question 3: What is man?” is this:

Human beings are complex “machines”; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand (Sire, p. 71).

Naturalists still like to maintain that humans are free within the closed system. We make real choices, like what to eat for breakfast. Yet, Sire says,

To be sure I can do anything I want, **but what I want is the result of past states of affairs over which ultimately I had no control**. I did not freely select my particular genetic makeup or my original family environment. By the time I asked whether I was free to act freely, I was so molded by **nature and nurture** that the very fact that the question occurred to me was determined. That is, my self itself was determined by outside forces. I can indeed ask such questions, I can act according to my wants and desires, and I can appear to myself to be free, but it is appearance only. Nietzsche is right [that is, right **if** the presuppositions of naturalism are right]: “the acting man’s delusion about himself, his assumption that free will exists, is also part of the **calculating mechanism**.”

In a closed universe the possibility that some things need not be, that others are possible, is not possible. For the only way change can come is by a force moving to make that change, and the only way that force can come is if it is moved by another force ad infinitum. There is no break in this chain, from eternity past to eternity future, forever and ever, amen.

**To the ordinary person determinism does not appear to be the case.** We generally perceive ourselves as free agents. But our perception is an illusion. We just do not know what “caused” us to decide....

In a closed universe...freedom must be a *determinacy unrecognized*, and for those who work out its implications, [the nihilists] this is not enough to allow for self-determinacy or moral responsibility. For if I robbed a bank, that would ultimately be due to inexorable [inalterable] (though unperceived) forces triggering my decisions in such a way that I could no longer consider these decisions mine. If these decisions are not mine, I cannot be held responsible. And such would be the case for every act of every person.

A human being is thus a **mere piece of the machinery**, a toy—complicated, very complicated, but a toy of impersonal cosmic forces. A person’s self-consciousness is only an **epiphenomenon** [a

result of something but which has no influence on the force that caused it]; it is just part of the machinery looking at itself. But if consciousness is only part of the machinery; there is no “self apart from the machinery. There is no “ego” that can stand over against the system and manipulate it at its own will. Its “will” is the will of the cosmos....

The nihilists follow this argument, which can now be stated briefly: Human beings are conscious machines without the ability to affect their own destiny or do anything significant: therefore, human beings as valuable beings are dead (Sire, pp. 98-100, emphasis mine).

**There is a slippery slope from naturalism to nihilism** because, as Sire says,

...naturalism does not supply a basis on which a person can act **significantly**. Rather it denies the possibility of a self-determining being who can choose on the basis of an innate self-conscious character.

However, C. S. Lewis says that **reasoning** is proof that naturalism is not true.

...acts of reasoning are **not** interlocked with the total interlocking system of Nature as all its other items are interlocked with one another. They are connected with it in a different way; as the **understanding of a machine** is certainly connected with the machine but **not in the way the parts of the machine are connected with each other**. The knowledge of a thing is not one of the thing’s parts. In this sense something beyond Nature operates whenever we reason (*Miracles*, quoted from Nash, p. 125, emphasis mine).

What I think Lewis is implying here is that the human mind works **analogically** like the mind of God **because man is made in God’s image**. As God is able to think outside the system of the universe, man is also given this ability because he is able to “think God’s thoughts after him”. God is not part of the material universe. **Man is** part of the universe, but man’s mind is not a machine. It is able to transcend, as it were, the natural universe to contemplate the meaning (or non-meaning) of the universe and what is true or false. He is self-conscious. In the Christian worldview, man’s mind is not trapped inside the box of impersonal forces, but, like the mind of God, can transcend the universe with analogical thought.

Using another illustration, perhaps we could say that the **blueprints of a house** designed by an architect are connected with the house in some way, but they are **not part of the house**. We are not required to staple the blueprints to the house in order for the house to stand up. Moreover, if during the construction of the house the architect sees something he wants to change, he can instruct the carpenters, electricians, and whoever is building the house to tear out what has already been constructed and build it differently. While the construction of the house is contingent (dependent) upon the architect and builders, they are independent of the house. Their skills are not part of the house itself or contingent on the house in any way.

Such reasoning, therefore, is **outside the box**—beyond nature—and independent of the total interlocking system of nature. **Man’s mind transcends the external world of reality**, stands outside external reality, consciously examining the system and asking questions like “why”, “what if”, or “how”. On the other hand, the cogs of a machine simply turn within the machine, and the direction they turn are totally dependent or contingent on the machine. They are determined.

One of naturalism's major problems is explaining how **mindless forces** [e.g. the un-designed and purposeless forces of the big bang and Darwinian evolution] give rise to **minds, knowledge, sound reasoning, and moral principles** that really do report how human beings ought to behave. Not surprisingly, every naturalist wants the rest of us to think that *his* worldview, his naturalism, is a product of *his* sound reasoning. All things considered, it's hard to see why naturalism is not **self-referentially absurd**. Before any person can justify his or her acceptance of naturalism on rational grounds, it is first necessary for that person to reject a cardinal tenet of the naturalist position. In other words, the only way a person can provide rational grounds for believing in naturalism is first to cease being a naturalist (Nash, p. 125, emphasis mine).

This is true because naturalism cannot account for non-material laws and universals; and it cannot account for the human mind which is non-material and not subject to the determinism of a mechanistic universe. The human mind is not the random collision of sub-atomic particles. Christians can account for universals because the Bible acknowledges them. There are no mathematics problems recorded in the Bible, but the Bible assumes the logic of singularity (one) and plurality (more than one). Days are counted (Gen. 1); people are counted (Ex. 1: 5); even lamps in the tabernacle are counted (Ex. 25: 37), as well as the hairs of our head (Matt. 10: 30).

In principle, all universals are acknowledged in the Bible because God is a God of order, not chaos and confusion. "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17 NASB), including universals. Men and animals are distinguished from one another, animals from plants, good from evil.

Christians see the laws of logic as expressions of God's thinking, his own consistent personal nature, not as principles **outside of God** to which he must measure up. The laws of logic **reflect the nature of God, for in him we find perfect coherence**... They are, therefore, *eternal* expressions of the *unchanging* character of God (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; Jms. 1:17)... Therefore, the laws of logic (which reflect that character) are unchanging and unchangeable, in that God "cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

Man is created in the image of God to engage the world in a rational way. Not only is man's mind analogical [similar] to God's, but it is compatible with the God-created Universe because of God's designing us and our environments. In fact, "the gift of logical reason was given by God to man in order that he might order the revelation of God for himself" (*BTDF*, L11.15-16).

### **Excursus: The Development of Modern Science from a Christian Worldview**

In his book, *How Christianity Changed the World* (formerly titled *Under the Influence*), Alvin J. Schmidt devotes a chapter to the connection of science with Christianity. One quote is from the renowned philosopher of science, Alfred North Whitehead, taken from *Science and the Modern World* (1926).

...faith in the possibility of science, generated antecedently to the development of modern scientific theory, is an unconscious derivative from medieval theology (Schmidt, p. 218).

Another quote is from Lynn White, medieval science historian who claims that



The [medieval] monk was an intellectual ancestor of the scientist (Schmidt, p. 218).

The Middle Ages (or Medieval Age)—from the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD until the Renaissance in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (some say 10<sup>th</sup>)—has been given the designation “Dark Ages” for a long time. The opprobrium became common from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today. Modern medieval scholars disagree with the term partly for the reason quoted above. It was not all dark but was the age of much scholarship and discovery by Medieval monks. Whitehead insists that the origin of science is rooted in the Christian belief in the rationality of God. The corollary of this belief is that man made in God’s image is also rational and can use this rationality to investigate the creation. The Christian philosopher Robert Grosseteste (1168-1253), a Franciscan bishop and the first chancellor of Oxford, was first to propose using the experimental method of induction. His student and fellow monk, Roger Bacon (1214-1294), carried Grosseteste’s work further and promoted the idea of verification through experimentation. Both were followed by William of Occam (1285-1347). Three hundred years later Francis Bacon (1561-1626) began recording the results of his experiments and has been called “the practical creator of scientific induction.” In his spare time, he wrote books on the Psalms and on prayer (Schmidt, p. 219).

The inductive empirical method, Schmidt says, was a departure from 1500 years of Aristotelian (Aristotle, 384-322 BC) dominance which held that knowledge was acquired through deduction (reasoning from a general idea to specific particulars). Deductive reasoning could be done in the comfort of one’s palace while inductive experimentation required getting one’s hands dirty with the particulars of life—plants, animals, rocks, etc.—not a preferred activity of the aristocratic elite. The medieval monks, on the other hand, were used to scrubbing floors and farming in the monasteries. Nevertheless, most monks were convinced Aristotelians until the ground-breaking work of Grosseteste, the Bacons, and Occam.

The Christian view of God as necessary being (uncaused and independent) separate from nature was also very important in the development of science. Aristotelianism viewed the gods as intertwined with nature, thus presenting a pantheistic view of God who is part of and continuous with nature, as well as a panemanationist view of God in which planetary motion was the result of the inner intelligence within planets. Quite naturally, the idea of God as inseparable from creation—even among church authorities who clung to Aristotle—created resistance to the inductive method in which nature was used in experimentation. Experimentation was seen as sacrilegious and offensive to the divine element within nature. This is one reason science eventually developed in the West as soon as the pantheistic theology of Aristotelianism was set aside. Science would not originate in pantheistic, animistic cultures in Africa or other nations in which “the living spirits of various gods or ancestors” lived in trees and animals (Schmidt, pp. 220-221).

Thirdly, it was the Christian belief in God’s rationality that led Christian scientists to the conclusion that there were predictable, rational laws set in place to govern the universe. On the other hand, the pagan, polytheistic conception of god viewed the gods as competitive and irrational, rendering systematic investigation futile (Schmidt, p. 222).

### **3. The Ethical Problem—the Problem of Moral Absolutes**

If there is any philosophical axiom that most secularists agree on, it is the fact that there are “no moral absolutes”. Of course, the moment anyone makes this claim, he is already involved in a logical

contradiction. The secularist is operating on naturalistic principles which deny the possibility of absolute truth in anything. Is the secularist **absolutely** sure that there are no moral absolutes? If he is, then he has just contradicted his own statement.

### Teleological Ethics

Most modern ethics utilized on a practical level is what we call **teleological** ethics. In **teleological** ethics, a good act maximizes human happiness or pleasure. Therefore, a good act is **goal-oriented** and the goal is human happiness, either **personal** happiness or the **corporate** happiness of many people—a whole society. If the goal is corporate happiness, a “good” act should be approved by the majority of society. The following statement from *Wikipedia* is a good summary of both the **personal approval theory** of ethics and the **social approval theory** of ethics.

“In philosophy, moral relativism is the position *that moral or ethical propositions do not reflect absolute and universal moral truths but instead are relative to social, cultural, historical or personal preferences*, and that there is no single standard by which to assess an ethical proposition’s truth. Relativistic positions often see moral values as applicable only within certain cultural boundaries or the context of individual preferences” (quoted in *BTDF*, L9.6, emphasis his).

From this definition, there is no such thing as a **necessary** (independent of us), **transcendent** (above and beyond us), and **absolute** system of moral ethics. All ethical systems are **relative** and **contingent** (dependent) upon individual preference or upon social preference.

Both the personal and utilitarian theory of teleological ethics is presented in the *Humanist Manifesto II*, written in 1973.

We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is **autonomous** and **situational** needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, **individually** and in **shared enjoyment**, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Method of Greg L. Bahnsen*; edited by Gary DeMar, p. 168, emphasis mine).

#### a. Utilitarianism and the Social Approval Theory of Ethics

If teleological ethics concentrates on **the greatest good for the greatest number of people**, it becomes **utilitarianism**, the most influential version of teleological ethics in the modern world, a system of ethics formally developed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Whenever ethical issues are discussed in modern culture, this is the system of ethics ordinarily assumed (John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 97). Over a long period of history, society has developed either a written or oral code of socially acceptable behavior. This code is assumed to be the **majority opinion** of society.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was instrumental in developing modern scientific sociology. He said,

*It can no longer be maintained nowadays that there is one, single morality which is valid for all men at all times in all places. . . . The purpose of morality practiced by a people is to enable it to live; hence morality changes with societies. There is not just one morality, but several, and as many as there are social types. And as our societies change, so will our morality* (Emile Durkheim, quoted in *BTDF*, L9.5-6, italics his, bold emphasis mine).

Another evolutionist, Max Hocutt stated it this way:

The position of the modern evolutionist is that . . . *morality is a biological adaptation* no less than are hands and feet and teeth. Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself,’ they think they are referring above and beyond themselves. Nevertheless, such reference is truly without foundation. **Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction** . . . and *any deeper meaning is illusory* (Max Hocutt, quoted in *BTDF*, L9.8, italics his; bold emphasis mine).

In both of these quotations, the teleological emphasis is the **survival of the species**. Ethics originates for the purpose of helping a society to survive, nothing more.

#### **Problems with the Utilitarian and Social Approval Theory**

But, we may ask, how is a changing morality **binding** on anyone, even upon those who live in the society which established the moral boundaries? On what basis are we obligated to obey such a moral system whose foundation is always shifting? Jesus warned about rejecting his words and thereby building one’s house on **shifting sand instead of immovable rock**.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man **who built his house on the rock**.<sup>25</sup> "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."<sup>26</sup> "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man **who built his house on the sand**.<sup>27</sup> "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." (Matthew 7:24-27 NASB)

Another question is: what constitutes a **critical mass** of the population sufficient to push a moral agenda forward? In the US, when the Supreme Court made abortion legal in *Roe v. Wade*, the majority of the population was probably not in favor of abortion. Maybe even today the majority is not in favor—can we trust polls and statistics?—but from a practical standpoint, the American population seems indifferent to abortion. But even if the public could vote on the issue, popular vote would not establish the morality of abortion. **What is does not determine what ought to be**. This is what is known as the **naturalistic fallacy**.

That is to say, from premises about what is, **about factual observations**, you cannot deduce conclusions about **what you ought to do**. For example, you cannot reason from “Ice cream tastes good” to “You ought to eat ice cream,” or even from “Immunizations prevent disease” to “You ought to be immunized.” . . . facts of nature do not carry with them moral obligations (Frame, *DOCL*, p. 60, emphasis mine).

Another example of a naturalistic fallacy is: Human beings have sexual needs; therefore, premarital sex is moral between consenting adults, and even adolescents. Frame says this about the naturalistic fallacy:

Facts can be learned through observation and the scientific method. **But moral obligations cannot be seen and heard. They cannot be observed.** No scientific experiment can identify them. You can see a thief walk into a bank, put on a ski mask, take out his gun, demand money, put it in his bag, and walk out. When you see that, you say, “That was wrong.” **But you don’t actually see the wrongness of it.** You may believe strongly that what the thief did was wrong, but you cannot deduce the wrongness of his action from a description of what happened (Frame, p. 60, emphasis mine).

The same naturalistic fallacy occurs when people say, **“Homosexuality is now part of our culture. Therefore, homosexuality is moral.”** The **fact** of homosexuality’s acceptance says nothing about its moral legitimacy. Such naturalistic fallacies abound with the “social preference” theory of ethics. But since the work of the law is written on every man’s heart, deep down men **know** that something is wrong with such choices (cf. Romans 1).

It makes one wonder how social practices developed in different societies. **Did they develop as naturalistic fallacies? What is, is right.** For example, in Asia, Indian cultures developed the social practice of *suti*, the self-immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands. How and why did this practice emerge? Did it ensure that wives would take good care—very good care—of their husbands or because husbands did not have to agonize about their widows being remarried after their deaths and enjoying sexual love with another man? Why did Alaskan Eskimo men share their wives with visitors? [I believe this is no longer practiced because Christianity became commonplace in Eskimo culture.] Did this practice emerge so husbands could enjoy sex with other men’s wives when they traveled away from home? Are all cultures morally equivalent or equally sinful? I don’t think so.

Sire has pointed out an **internal contradiction** of cultural relativity: the problem of “cultural rebels”. Cultural rebels like Aldous Huxley do not share their society’s moral values. In other words, says, Sire,

The cultural rebel’s *is* is not considered *ought*. Why? The answer of cultural relativism is that the rebel’s moral values cannot be allowed **if they upset social cohesiveness and jeopardize cultural survival.** So we discover that *is* is not *ought* after all. The cultural relativist has affirmed a value—the preservation of a culture in its current state—as more valuable than its destruction or transformation by one or more rebels within it. Once more, we are forced to ask *why*.

**Cultural relativism, it turns out, is not forever relative.** It rests on a **primary value** affirmed by cultural relativists themselves: that cultures should be preserved. **So cultural relativism does not rely only on *is* but on what its adherents think *ought* to be the case.** The trouble here is that some anthropologists are not cultural relativists. Some think certain values are so important that cultures that do not recognize them *should* recognize them. So cultural relativists must, if they are to convince their colleagues, show why their values are the true values. Again we approach the infinite corridor down which we chase our arguments (Sire, pp. 108-109, italics his, bold emphasis mine).

Sire has uncovered what Ronald Nash calls a **“self-referential absurdity”**.

This condition exists whenever the application of a theory to itself involves one in a necessary falsehood or logical nonsense (Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, p. 84).

As we have already seen, if acceptable cultural practice establishes what is good or evil, then there are many questionable practices which are immune from criticism. In 1994, racial prejudice against Tutsis by radical Hutus in Rwanda resulted in the genocide of close to one million people. The genocide was preceded several months by a smear campaign on radio broadcasts across the country calling the Tutsis “cockroaches” needing extermination. For three months, radical Hutus marched through the countryside hacking Tutsi villagers and their moderate Hutu protectors—very courageous Hutus—to death with machetes.

Hitler’s extermination of six million Jews in gas chambers during World War II was **approved by many Germans committed to the pseudo-scientific theory of Aryan superiority** and the need to purify the German gene pool through genocide. The gas chambers were met by the majority of Germans first with disbelief and later with indifference. There are countless other examples of socially accepted atrocities.

The literature of ancient Chinese civilizations speaks of widespread cannibalism. The Aztec Empire in Mexico was discovered to practice cannibalism by European explorers. Not all that long ago cannibalism existed among the Aborigines in Arnhem Land, in the far north of Northern Territory of Australia. According to anthropologists, the southeastern Papua Korowai tribe and the New Guinea Fore tribe are cannibalistic cultures even today.

[Human sacrifice] was known among the ancient Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Chinese, the early mediaeval Celts, Vikings, and in the Aztec, Mayan, and Inca societies.

Druid worship in Britain, Ireland and Gaul before the time of Christ also included human sacrifice. **Roman society practiced infanticide** whereby the *pater familias* (family patriarch) made life and death decisions about infants born into the family (*BTDF*, L9.16). Girls and defective males were often abandoned to exposure or to the scavenger dog packs in Rome. Christians would hide under the aqueducts bringing water into the city and would rescue abandoned Roman babies, adopting them into their families. **Greek mythology** is filled with stories of child sacrifice, including Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his daughter to acquire favorable sailing weather to conquer Troy. The Athenian Leos sacrificed three daughters after learning from the Oracle of Delphi that their deaths would stop a famine. **Egyptian mothers** sacrificed their children to “holy” crocodiles in the sacred Nile River. A Baal-worshipping Phoenician colony burned their children to death and stuffed their charred bones into urns, hundreds of which have been discovered in excavations in Carthage (*World Magazine*, January 23, 2016).

Carthaginians probably filled up 20,000 urns in that way from 400 B.C. until Rome destroyed their city in 148 B.C., with the percentage of infant bones versus animal bones increasing as time went on and the increasingly desperate Carthaginians upped their investment in death. One account from the time describes drums and fifes drowning out shrieks, much as situation comedies now distract us from considering abortion (*World*).

In other words, the Carthaginians were sacrificing their children to prevent the city from falling to Rome.

Infanticide has also been practiced in Greece, India, China, and Japan. Sexual relationships between adult men and adolescent boys (pederasty) were common among the ancient Greeks and Romans. It persists today in certain areas of Afghanistan, the Middle East, and North Africa (*BTDF*, L9.16). In America, the “North American Man/Boy Love Association” advocates sexual relationships between adults and children. One article on its website says,

Pederasty is the main form that male homosexuality has acquired throughout Western civilization—and not only in the West! Pederasty is inseparable from the **high points of Western culture**—ancient Greece and the Renaissance (David Thorstad, “Pederasty and Homosexuality”, quoted in *BTDF*, L9.17, emphasis mine).

Notice from this quotation that the practice of pederasty in Greek and the Renaissance eras—darlings of the Western educational elite—legitimizes the practice beyond question for Thorstad.

*Suti*, widow immolation, is still practiced among many of Hindu’s 900 million adherents, although officially it is against the law. When the husband dies, the widow is expected to be burned alive on the same funeral pyre. Imagine the very unlikely scenario of a young American woman—committed to the social approval theory of ethics—marrying an aging Indian man in a rural village. (Maybe the man is rich. Stranger things have happened.) After five years of marriage, he dies. She is then bound with ropes and placed upon her deceased husband’s funeral pyre to be burned alive. She pleads for her life against the absurdity of dying with her husband only to hear the villagers shout, “But every widow does it.” Too late to discard her ethics of social approval.

Alaskan Eskimo tribes have practiced rather strange forms of hospitality, with husbands offering their wives to sleep with male visitors. Failure to do so is a serious breach of hospitality. The practice has also been common in some African cultures. “Disgusting!” you say. But why, if Eskimo culture approves it?

The **self-contradiction and absurdity** of the social approval theory of ethics is illustrated in the statement, “The vast majority of the community heartily approved of and willingly joined in **the evil deed.**” Such a statement is nonsense upon the presupposition that what society approves is therefore moral.

The fact that a large number of people feel a certain way does not (or should not rationally) convince anybody that this feeling (about the goodness or evil of something) is correct. Ethics does not reduce to statistics, after all. **Ordinarily, people think of the goodness of something as evoking their approval—rather than their approval constituting its goodness!** Even unbelievers talk and act as though there are personal traits, actions or things which possess the property of goodness (or evil) *irrespective* of the attitudes or beliefs or feelings people have about those traits, actions or things [e.g. things like generosity, fidelity in marriage, kindness and courtesy to others. My note.] (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 168, emphasis his).

Most people in the West or East would strongly object to *suti*, cannibalism, child molestation, and wife-sharing, while at the same time maintaining that good and evil behavior are relative to the cultures they

live in. When hearing of child molestation, for example, the first thought that would come to mind is, “That is wicked and disgusting!” But on what moral high ground do cultural relativists decide which behaviors are wicked and which are moral? When did abortion on demand become socially acceptable? I remember when it became legal, but I don’t remember voting on the issue.

### Calculating the Greatest Possible Pleasure for the Greatest Number of People

If the good deed is that which brings the greatest possible pleasure to the greatest number of people, **how is this goal capable of calculation?** Is it really possible to calculate all of the possible pleasure—or pain—which results from the actions of a whole society of people? Can we determine mathematically what is the greatest good for the greatest number of people? This is what Marxist governments have pretended to do economically with disastrous results. In the Cultural Revolution of China, Mao Tse Tung forced village farmers off their family farms and into newly-constructed steel mills. His idea was to modernize China and make it an industrial country overnight. There was one big problem with this plan: the Chinese did not have the technical know-how at the time to produce quality steel. The result was massive famine, starvation, and zero orders for Chinese steel. **As a general rule in communist countries, the greatest good for the greatest number of people actually translates into the greatest good for the fewest number of communist party members**—that is, until the old guard is liquidated by a Joseph Stalin or Kim Jong Un of North Korea, who assassinated a large number of his father’s cronies a few years ago. According to one report, Kim Jong Un spends eight million dollars per year importing expensive cognac and whiskey for the elite members of the communist party.

The US government’s demand for increased use of ethanol from corn to be mixed with petroleum—all in the name of decreased carbon dioxide emissions—has diverted production of corn **for food** in Mexico and South America to production of corn **for ethanol**, leading to increased food prices in poor countries, among many other problems. No doubt, American congressmen would say that burning ethanol is the greatest good for the greatest number of people, **so long as they are American corn producers living and voting in their states.**

One single action can have an enormous impact on a whole culture to such an extent that no one could possibly calculate its positive or negative consequences into the distant future. Who could have calculated the consequences of Christopher Columbus’ desire to sail west across the Atlantic Ocean (Frame, *DCL*, p. 98)? Who could have calculated the consequences of the Supreme Court decision in 1973 to allow abortion on demand? Could anyone living then have known that it would result in over 50 million legal abortions by 2012? Could anyone have calculated the exact increase in the incidence of child abuse since 1973 in the US alone—60,000 cases of child abuse reported in 1972; but just four years later in 1976, three years after abortion was legalized, 500,000 reported cases of child abuse (*Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, p. 30).

Whenever society decides that the unborn baby has no worth apart from the autonomous decision of the mother, then **who is morally obligated to impute worth to children who are already living?** The difference in the worth of one child and that of another is all a matter of timing and imputed worth, and this difference is purely arbitrary and ambiguous. The situation was far worse in 2015, with representatives of Planned Parenthood joking on tape about selling fetal body parts. But why not? If the worth of the baby is decided by the mother—a decision sanctioned by the social approval theorists of the US Supreme Court—then why not at least make money on body parts sold to save other lives which are actually valued by someone.

From a purely economic perspective, could anyone have calculated the economic consequences of removing so many young people from the US work force from 1973 to 2016, forty-three years later, when these young people would now be fathers and mothers of millions of children? The US is now 18 trillion dollars in debt, and the government has no solution for meeting its Social Security obligations in the near future, simply because it has **allowed the murder of those who could have been contributing to the Social Security system for the last 20 years or so**. This is, of course, an ironic twist of events for those who decided to kill their unborn children because they would have been an economic threat to their careers and “personal peace and affluence” (Frances Schaeffer). But if a US congressman were to suggest that abortion is morally wrong because it fails to provide the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of senior citizens of the US—measured in Social Security payments—he would be accused of crass materialism and booted out of office by a vast majority of his constituents, young and old, and rightly so.

Just recently, China’s communist government announced a reversal of its one-child policy imposed more than 30 years ago. Couples can now have two children. Between 1950 and 1980, children ten or younger constituted the largest single age group in China. By 2060, those who are 70 years old will be the largest age group.

But for the sake of the argument, even if we could calculate the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people in a culture, would the happiness of the majority necessarily make an action good? Stated another way, **can we decide what is moral by majority vote**, or can we determine what is moral by the will of the governmental elite elected by the majority or by nine legal scholars appointed to the US Supreme Court by acting presidents? But surely we cannot go wrong if we are guided by an elite group of scientists. Consider these quotations from **James D. Watson** and **Francis Crick**, Nobel Prize laureates who discovered the double helix of DNA. In a 1973 interview with *Prism* magazine, a publication of the American Medical Association, Watson offered this suggestion,

If a child were not declared alive **until three days after birth**, then all parents could be allowed the choice only a few are given under the present system. The doctor could allow the child to die if the parents so choose and save a lot of misery and suffering. I believe this view is **the only rational, compassionate attitude to have** (quoted by Schaeffer and Koop, p. 73, emphasis mine).

Watson’s colleague, Francis Crick, concurs with this conclusion in a 1978 article of *Pacific News Service*.

...no newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment and that if it fails these tests **it forfeits the right to live** (quoted by Schaeffer and Koop, p. 73, emphasis mine).

Again, the **logical ambiguities** of these scientists are left unanswered. A child is declared to be alive only after three days. Why three days? Why not seven days, or a month? Why not one year to make very sure the parents really want the responsibilities and inconveniences of an infant? If not, then they can kill their little “inconvenience”. As for Crick’s suggestion, what exactly are the “genetic endowments” necessary to make a life that is worth living? What is the “cut off” for IQ tests: 100, 115, 116, what? Does the child have to be pretty? If so, then better to wait two years rather than three days to assess the child’s beauty. **Essentially we are all the way back to Greece and Rome.**



In response to Watson's suggestion that his view is "the only rational, compassionate attitude to have", we might ask: Who gets to decide the definitions of words like "rational" and "compassionate"? Compassionate to whom? Rational as compared to what?

The scientists are not alone in their well-laid plans for the rest of society. Millard S. Everett, former professor of philosophy and humanities at Oklahoma A&M, voices his own solution in his book, *Ideals of Life*.

My personal feeling—and I don't ask anyone to agree with me—is that eventually, **when public opinion is prepared for it**, no child should be admitted into the society of the living who would be **certain to suffer any social handicap**—for example, any physical or mental defect that would prevent marriage or would make others tolerate his company **only from the sense of mercy**.... This would imply not only eugenic sterilization but also euthanasia due to accidents of birth which cannot be foreseen (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 73; bold emphasis mine).

Notice the words, "**when public opinion is prepared for it**". Everett is correct on this point. Little by little, a society is desensitized to the idea of killing innocent people for the "good" of society. Abortion on demand would not have been acceptable in the US in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—although abortions were taking place in the US illegally at that time and earlier (see Marvin Olasky, *Abortion Rites*). The general public, which adhered at least formally to a Christian view of man, would not have tolerated it. Little by little, the **personal preference** of abortion by individuals has culminated in the **social preference** of abortion, or at least its **acceptance as fact**—what **is**. But again, what **is** does not determine what **ought to be**.

One wonders whether Everett has known many handicapped people who could not marry, or deformed people who were "tolerated out of mercy", **who would prefer to be single or to be "tolerated" rather than exterminated**. I have met quite a number who are happy to be alive. But it would have been a terrible inconvenience to people like Everett to tolerate someone who is mentally handicapped or physically deformed! This would not have made Everett happy. He died in 1980, but if he were alive today, would he now tolerate **Steven Hawking**, a well-known scientist whose body is wasting away from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis? And why, we may ask, was Everett worried about people suffering social handicaps when his own epistemology of naturalism **views meaning in life as an arbitrary mental construct having no reality in fact**? Why was he so unwilling to let handicapped people **define their own meaning** in life? Or could it be that Everett, along with Watson and Crick, were attempting to genetically engineer the American population on the sly without us knowing it, ridding it of all the unwanted handicapped genes? Again, is the utilitarian theory concerned for the greatest good for the greatest number of people, or does it actually **originate from the convenience for a few individuals**.

Consider the case of "Infant Doe" in April, 1982. In that year, a Down's Syndrome baby was allowed to starve to death in Bloomington Hospital in Indiana. His parents believed that he would never have a quality of life which was even minimally acceptable, so they refused to authorize surgery that would allow him to eat normally. They also did not authorize him to be fed intravenously. The Indiana Supreme Court and a lower court supported the parents in not treating their son, and Bloomington Hospital complied, allowing Infant Doe to starve six days after birth. Earlier, in 1973, Drs. Raymond Duff and A.G.M. Campbell reported that fourteen percent of the infant deaths in the intensive care

nursery of Yale-New Haven Hospital were the result of deliberate neglect, the withholding of life-saving treatment or its withdrawal. Staff pediatricians concurred with this non-treatment.

In a national survey of pediatric surgeons and pediatricians reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1977, a majority of those surveyed said that they would not treat a baby like Infant Doe if the parents wanted him to die. In Massachusetts and the San Francisco Bay area, one-half of the surveyed pediatricians said they would not operate on a Down's Syndrome baby with intestinal obstruction. One-third said they should be allowed to kill such babies directly. Seventeen out of twenty medical workers and bioethicists in Sonoma Valley, California said in 1974 that they would support the direct killing of infants in some circumstances (*Whose Values?—A Battle for Morality in Pluralistic America*, Carl Horn, ed., pp. 96-97).

The truth is that infanticide has become a widespread problem largely because ethicists have provided a rationale for eliminating defective infants. Doctors look to specialists in bioethics for guidance in the treatment of handicapped newborns. So do parents. So do policy-makers and hospital administrators. Acts that would otherwise be unthinkable become thinkable when moralists say they are justified (Horn, p. 97).

Schaeffer and Koop trace such thinking to its sociological conclusions.

We are moving from the state of mind in which destruction of life is advocated for children who are considered to be **socially useless or deemed to have nonmeaningful lives** to the stance that we should perhaps destroy a child because he is socially disturbing. One wonders if the advocates of such a philosophy would espouse a total blockade and "starving out" of urban slums as a solution to poverty—considering all the social and economic problems this would solve all at once! (p. 75; emphasis mine)

**We may also ask how such a state of mind is fundamentally different from the genocidal presuppositions of Nazi Germany.** Hitler's mass extermination of six million Jews is well-known, but his extermination of the sick and handicapped before the Jewish genocide is not so well-known. Dr. Leo Alexander, a Boston psychiatrist, was consultant to the US Secretary of War in 1946-47 and was attached to the Chief of Counsel on War Crimes in Nuremberg. In his presentation, "Medical Science under Dictatorship", he identified the philosophical underpinnings of Hitler's systematic extermination of 275,000 chronically sick or handicapped people in German society beginning on September 1, 1939.

Irrespective of other ideological trappings, the guiding philosophic principle of recent dictatorships, including that of the Nazis, has been Hegelian in that what has been considered "rational utility" and corresponding doctrine and planning has replaced moral, ethical and religious values....

Medical science in Nazi Germany collaborated with this Hegelian trend particularly in the following enterprises: **the mass extermination of the chronically sick in the interest of saving "useless" expenses to the community as a whole**; the mass extermination of those considered **socially disturbing or racially and ideologically unwanted**; the individual, inconspicuous extermination of those considered disloyal within the ruling group; and the ruthless use of "human experimental material" for medico-military research...It started with the acceptance of the attitude basic in the euthanasia movement, **that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived....**

[Before Hitler came to power in 1933] a propaganda barrage was directed against the traditional, compassionate nineteenth century attitudes towards the chronically ill, and for the adoption of a utilitarian, Hegelian point of view. Sterilization and euthanasia of persons with chronic mental illnesses was discussed at a meeting of Bavarian psychiatrists in 1931 (Schaeffer and Koop, pp. 105-106; bold emphasis mine, words in brackets theirs).

What's more, the killing centers which murdered 275,000 were just the beginning of a much larger network of centers which were being prepared for the future extermination of Jews, Poles, and thirty million Russians (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 106). Christians were on the long list.

**The first to be killed were the aged, the infirm, the senile and mentally retarded, and defective children.** Eventually, as World War II approached, the doomed undesirables included epileptics, World War I amputees, children with badly modeled ears, and even bed wetters.

Physicians took part in this planning on matters of life and death to save society's money. Adults were propagandized, one outstanding example being a motion picture called *I Accuse*, which dealt with euthanasia (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 106).

Another example of propaganda included a high school mathematics textbook, *Mathematics in the Service of Political Education*, which included math problems calculating the cost of caring and rehabilitating those who were chronically sick or disabled. One of the problems posed the question, "...how many new housing units could be built and how many marriage-allowance loans could be given to newly-wed couples for the amount of money it cost the state to care for 'the crippled and the insane'"? (Schaeffer and Koop, pp. 106-107)

"The important thing to remember," say Schaeffer and Koop, "is that the medical profession took a leading part in the planning of abortion and euthanasia."

It seems likely that had it not been for the example and active role played by German physicians in the practice of euthanasia, Hitler's progress in the extermination programs would have been slowed if not stopped. The medical profession went along with Nazism in discouragingly large numbers. More than a few participated in the terror, genocide, extermination programs, and active and barbaric experimentation on the unfortunate minorities in the Nazi grip (p. 103).

It is a short, slippery slope from declaring unborn children to be non-persons to declaring the old, infirm, and mentally handicapped as being non-persons. This is certainly the conclusion of Joseph Fletcher, famous professor of ethics at Harvard University.

To speak of living and dying, therefore...encompasses the abortion issue along with the euthanasia issue. They are ethically inseparable (*The Humanist*, quoted in Schaeffer and Koop, p. 87).

In an interview with the *The American Journal of Nursing* in 1973, Fletcher says,

It is ridiculous to give ethical approval to the positive ending of sub-human life in utero as we do in therapeutic abortions for reasons of mercy and compassion but refuse to approve of positively ending a sub-human life in extremis [at the point of death]. **If we are morally obliged** to put an end to a pregnancy when an amniocentesis reveals a terribly defective fetus, **we are equally obliged** to put an end to a patient's hopeless misery when a brain scan reveals that a patient with cancer has advanced brain metastases (quoted in Schaeffer and Koop, p. 99, emphasis mine).

Notice Fletcher's question-begging. He merely **assumes** at the outset that we are "morally obliged" to end a pregnancy when a "defective fetus" is discovered. Who says? Fletcher? What qualifies as "defective"? But Fletcher fails to answer the question of why we can end a sub-human life in the uterus as well as the subhuman life of an adult with brain cancer, while allowing a subhuman infant—**already born**—to continue living. We may safely assume that Fletcher would have any subhuman life snuffed out, although he is incapable of defining the term "subhuman". It is a logical conclusion of humanistic utilitarianism to eradicate all infant children, unborn or newly born, who would not significantly contribute to the well-being of society as a whole or the happiness of their parents. Roman parents did so.

Bahnsen points out the absurdity of determining right and wrong on the basis of the utilitarian theory of the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

The irrelevance of such a notion for making ethical determinations is that one would need to be able to **rate and compare happiness**, as well as to be able to **calculate all of the consequences of any given action or trait**. This is simply impossible for finite minds (even with the help of computers). But more devastating is the observation that good may be taken to be whatever promotes general happiness **only if it is antecedently the case that generalized happiness is itself "good."** Any theory of ethics which focuses on the goodness of achieving a certain end (or consequence) will make sense only if it can establish **that the chosen end (or consequence) is a good one to pursue and promote**. Instrumental theories of goodness eventually must address the issue of **intrinsic** goodness, so that they can correctly determine what their goals **ought** to be.

For example, was the "generalized happiness" of white supremacists in the South before and during the 1960's a "good" thing. Most white people were satisfied with the status quo of perceived "white supremacy" and privilege, but their satisfaction did not make their racism a "good" thing. Thus, teleological ethics based on social consequences is based on **circular reasoning** which begs the question: **How do we define the good** that society should be approving for its best ends?

### b. Personal Approval Theory of Ethics

The personal approval theory of ethics is candidly presented by Aldous Huxley in his book, *Ends and Means*.

The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove that *there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do*.

For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness [nihilism] was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation ... from a certain system of morality [namely, socially-approved ethics]. **We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; we objected to the political and economic system because it was unjust.** The supporters of these systems claimed that in some way they embodied the meaning (a Christian meaning, they insisted) of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and at the same time justifying ourselves in our

political and erotic revolt: *we could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever* (quoted in *BTDF*, L9.5, italics his, bold emphasis mine).

In other words, Huxley is asking: Why should the **social approval of Christian ethics** deprive him and others of their sexual freedom? The question would arise whether Huxley would consider it within the limits of his freedom to seduce another man's wife. Probably so. But would he consider child molestation within the proper limits of his freedom? When does Huxley's freedom end and another person's freedom begin—namely, a child's freedom from the tyranny of adult sexual perversion? But of course, Huxley's **nihilistic ethic** does not allow any definition of "perversion". It is purely a matter of **individual preference** unshackled by social conventions or consensus.

But we may also ask Huxley: Upon what basis did he object to the injustice of the political and economic system prevalent at the time he lived? If the world had "no meaning", and if someone should be able to do "as he wants to do", then Huxley had no ground to accuse others of being "unjust"—another **self-referential absurdity**. Repeating Nash's definition,

This condition exists whenever the application of a theory to itself involves one in a necessary falsehood or logical nonsense (Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, p. 84).

Huxley was a well-known philosopher, but his "wisdom" is absurd nonsense.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Corinthians 1:20 NASB)

The **personal preference** or **personal approval** theory of ethics is expressed on a more popular level in a teen magazine article, "The Quest for Excellence".

Early on in life, you will be exposed to different value systems from your family, church or synagogue, and friends. . . . *It is up to you to decide upon your own value system to build your own ethical code.* . . . You will have to learn what is right for yourself through experience. . . . *Only you can decide* what is right and comfortable for you.

Bahnsen notes the ambiguity.

The personal approval approach to morality ends up with an emotivist theory of ethics: **Good and evil are just expressions of our emotional responses**. Good and evil do not really describe anything. This school of ethical thought claims that moral judgments cannot be deemed either as true or false. This is due to their being expressions of either individual or societal subjective preference (*BTDF*, L9.19)

There are even further problems with taking "good" to be whatever evokes the approval of the individual (rather than public at large). Not only does this too reduce to subjectivism, it absurdly implies that **no two individuals can make identical ethical judgments**. When Bill says "Helping orphans is good," he would not be saying the same thing as when Ted says "Helping orphans is good." Bill's utterance means "Helping orphans evokes Bill's approval," whereas Ted's would mean "Helping orphans evokes Ted's approval"—which are altogether different matters. Not only would this view make it impossible for two people to make identical ethical judgments, it would

likewise (absurdly) imply that a person's own ethical judgments could never be mistaken, unless he happened to misunderstand his own feelings! (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 168).

For decades now, **values clarification** has been taught in the public school systems across the US to help high school students “clarify” their own private, autonomous system of ethical behavior. After the Columbine executions in Colorado and those in Jonesboro, Arkansas, parents throughout the nation were throwing up their hands and crying, “How could this happen?” But with **existential** values clarification, who can argue with any cogency that the teenage murderers were wrong for what they did? Were they not simply acting out the logical implications of deciding “what [was] right and comfortable for [them]”? We may also ask: Have there been **social consequences** for teaching students for 50 plus years **that they are the chance products of natural selection** and have no more worth and dignity than snails or cockroaches, especially since, according to evolutionary theory, cockroaches have existed much longer than humans?

Sire sums up the ethical dilemma of the personal preference theory of ethics.

We alone make values. Are our values valuable? By what standard? Only our own. Whose own? Each person's own. Each of us is king and bishop of our own realm, but our realm is pointland. For the moment we meet another person, we meet another king and bishop. There is no way to arbitrate between the two free value makers. There is no king to whom both give obeisance. There are values, but no Value (Sire, p. 112).

### Existential Ethics

Existentialism is an attempt to **transcend the nihilistic conclusions of naturalism**. Nihilism concludes that human beings are the products of chance without meaning, value, significance, dignity, or freedom. We exist as the effects of causes which have occurred previously, like dominoes lined up in a row, each one falling inalterably and inescapably because the one before it fell in the same way. We are cogs in a machine, and our physical lives are determined in this way without the possibility of transcending the system or getting outside the machine. Even the mind is the effect of neurological reactions in the brain which have no necessary connection with external reality. Our perceptions are illusions. As Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis said, “The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile.” Atheistic **existentialists** acknowledge that we are in a box from which the body of matter cannot escape, but they do acknowledge the existence of the mind which transcends the world of matter. The mind is self-conscious and free, not determined. Jean-Paul Sartre, the father of atheistic existentialism said,

The effect of all materialism is to treat all men, including the one philosophizing, as objects, that is, as an ensemble [group] of **determined reactions in no way distinguished from the ensemble of qualities and phenomena which constitute a table or a chair or a stone** (quoted in Sire, p. 120, emphasis mine).

Existentialists will not accept such nihilistic conclusions. There are two worlds, not one—the world of matter and determinism (the objective world) and the **subjective world of values distinct from the material world**. Human beings define themselves by the **conscious choices** they make, by what they do with their lives, by the values they create. They **make** themselves, as we often hear people today saying that they are going to move away from where they are living and working and “re-invent” themselves. This is existentialism based upon the belief, conscious or unconscious, that our choices

define who we are, and that we can escape the past through present decisions and affirmations of what is true. Whether our affirmations are objectively true is beside the point as long as we **believe** they are true **for us**. There is a sense in which we **create the truth** in the present moment by what we believe. While there is some truth to the belief that we are what we think, existentialists, atheistic or “Christian” existentialists, are **not concerned with what is objectively true** in fact or with **absolute standards of right and wrong**.

In **existential** ethics, it is the inwardness of the act, the **motive**, which is most important. “A good act is an act that actualizes the true self”, particularly the actualization of our freedom. “A good action is the consciously chosen action” (Sire, p. 124).

To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, **because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good** (Sartre, quoted in Sire, p. 124).

Expressed in simple terms: “**Be true to yourself**” or “**follow your heart**”, and you can’t go wrong. (Let’s see. I think the Bible says something about following your heart: “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” Jer. 17:9 NKJ) Laws or principles must be affirmed from within the person; therefore, we cannot, on the basis of existential ethics, determine whether an act is right or wrong simply on the basis of **external** conduct (Frame, *DCL*, p. 53). In other words, even if I do something which appears to be moral by others, but I fail to act **sincerely from the heart**, I am a hypocrite and morally wrong, no matter what I do. As you can see, the **standard** of morality is not the issue. The problem, Sire, points out, is that each person is his own center of value multiplied by the number of people in the universe. Sartre attempts to overcome this objection by saying that nothing is good for one person without being good for all people. When we live passionately and authentically, we create value for everyone, not just for ourselves (Sire, p. 125).

Sire gives no examples of creating value for others by creating value for ourselves, but perhaps some existentialists like Aldous Huxley would point to the sexual revolution of the 1960’s drug culture which threw off the shackles of Christian sexual morality. By creating the value of individual sexual permissiveness, a growing critical mass of existentialists paved the way for a whole society to express their sexual freedom without inhibitions. The homosexual movement would be another example of liberating the whole society from the limitations of heterosexuality.

In the existential paradigm, evil is the refusal to choose, being passive, or being dictated to by other individuals or society as a whole. The good is choosing something passionately and autonomously.

But the flaws in the system are the same as those in the personal approval theory. One’s core commitment is to himself alone. While the naturalist may commit himself to his family, community or country, the existentialist is morally obliged to act in regard to self-interests alone as the king or queen of their own realm, “pointland” (Sire, p. 126).

Existential ethics has become popular with the man on the street, but it has not been widely held by modern philosophers who seek more objective approaches to the question of right and wrong (Frame, *DCL*, p.77). **Obviously, a society cannot maintain any system of law and order based on the subjective obligation to be true to oneself or to always act with the motive of absolute freedom.** John Wayne Gacey, a renowned serial killer in the US, could say that he was being true to himself by killing over 20 young men in their teens and early twenties and burying their bodies under the floor of

his house; but existential principles did not keep the courts from sentencing him to death. “Be true to yourself” is a declaration of **anarchy** which is incapable of sustaining law and order in any society.

It would not take long to figure out that if everyone in society is doing whatever brings him, or her, the most personal pleasure or self-actualization, life as we know it would become a living hell. Some men intensely enjoy the sexual exploitation of women; and if it were legal, they would spend much of their time raping. But if “there is no valid reason why [a person] personally should not do as he wants to do”—according to Huxley—then surely we have no standard of ethics to forbid rape. **Serial killers**, to use another example, must get some personal pleasure from stalking and killing weaker victims and getting away with it to repeat the behavior. Why else would they do it were it not for some perverted sense of gratification? **Con artists** enjoy the game of deceiving people and robbing them of their money. If the greatest personal pleasure to the individual was the social standard, then there would be no standard, and all of us would soon be afraid to walk out of our houses in the morning, far more at night.

But what about activities which do not incur legal consequences? Adultery will not land you in jail, and the pleasure and personal fulfillment it brings you may convince you that it is morally justifiable. But does your personal pleasure prove that adultery is therefore morally correct? Who says? Would your spouse believe that your adultery is morally correct, and could he or she now bring the maximum personal pleasure to himself or herself by putting a bullet between your eyes for your infidelity?

Aside from Huxley’s desire for sexual freedom, other philosophers are candid about the possible social fallout from the man on the street when he is informed—and he has—by the philosophical elite that there are no rules. Paul Kurtz, one of the notable signatories of the *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), faces the consequences realistically,

Nevertheless, the humanist is faced with the crucial ethical problem: Insofar as he has defended an ethic of freedom, can he develop a basis for moral responsibility? Regretfully, merely to liberate individuals from the authoritarian social institutions, whether church or state, is **no guarantee that they will be aware of their moral responsibility to others**. The contrary is often the case. Any number of social institutions regulate conduct by some means of norms and rules, and sanctions are imposed for enforcing them. Moral conduct is often insured because of fear of the consequences of breaking the law or of transgressing moral conventions. Once these sanctions are ignored, we may end up with [a man] concerned with his own personal lust for pleasure, ambition, and power, and impervious to moral constraints (*Understanding the Times—The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth*, David A. Noebel; p. 206, words in brackets his, emphasis mine).

What the secular humanist, Kurtz, is saying is that **he doesn’t know if he can live with his own ethical system**—another self-referential absurdity.

### Deontological Ethics

In **deontological** ethics, ethical norms are based on absolute, universal principles of right and wrong which apply to everyone. They must be universal; otherwise, they cannot be absolute. What is right for one person and one culture must also be right for another person and another culture. Basically, the deontological theory of ethics says that “A good act is a response to duty, even if it requires self-sacrifice” (John A. Frame, *DCL*, p. 50). A duty is something we **ought** to do. The question naturally



arises: From whence does this duty come? **From where, from whom, or from what do we derive a set of universal duties obligating the whole human race?** From a purely non-transcendental point of view eliminating God from the discussion, it becomes impossible to construct a deontological set of rules and obligations, although secular deontologists have tried. The deontological ethics of Christianity is based on one's duty toward God who is absolute and who has given us his word which is absolute truth. The Muslim theory of ethics is also deontological, but Christians believe that the Qur'an is not the word of God but the word of Mohammed. Since the Qur'an is **not infallible truth**—although it may contain some element of truth borrowed from the Bible—it is not absolute truth and cannot be trusted as the foundation of ethical obligation. Frame has noted that

...the reason why [Judaism, Islam, and Christian heresies such as the Jehovah's Witnesses] affirm an absolute personal God is that they are influenced by the Bible....it is a remarkable fact that belief in a personal absolute is not found in any religion or philosophy except those influenced by the Bible....

Islam, too, may be understood as a Christian heresy. Its founder, Mohammed, initially respected the "peoples of the book," the Jews and Christians. **He sought to promulgate the monotheism of Scripture among his own people.** But eventually he produced another book, the Qur'an, which denied many fundamental teachings of Scripture, such as Jesus' deity and his atoning death. Even then, Muslims regarded Scripture as a divine revelation, but argued that it had been corrupted during the centuries of its transmission (*DCL*, p. 67).

From the Christian perspective, the source of duty comes from the Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments. But, I might add, while identifying the source is not difficult, determining **how to properly interpret and apply the Biblical ethic**, written over a period of 1500 years by different human authors, to audiences living in different historical and cultural contexts, can become very difficult. But it is our duty to try. (For further reading, see Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* and *Understanding the Law of Moses*, as well as Frame, *DCL*). Neither Frame or Poythress is convinced, and neither am I, that the seldom-read and little-known case laws of the OT are obscure curiosities easily discarded by evangelical Christianity (cf. Matt. 5: 17-19). They are also not convinced, and neither am I, that we can apply Mosaic laws indiscriminately and non-contextualized for modern, non-theocratic societies. But this is another story.)

Although the non-Christian will not accept the Biblical ethic consciously, he borrows from it unconsciously to have any coherent sense of right and wrong—as we have observed above with the internal inconsistencies of other ethical systems. Even if he has never read the Bible, by virtue of being made in God's image, he cannot totally escape some sense of objective duty to God's law. Otherwise, there is no accounting for the fact that moral principles from culture to culture are so similar, despite the perversions already mentioned.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,<sup>15</sup> in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (Romans 2:14-15 NASB)

Moreover, **the unbeliever is not excused from obedience** due to any deficiency in his knowledge of God's law. As we discovered from Romans 1, he has "seen" something of the holiness of God in

general revelation rendering him “without excuse”. OT history confirms this obligation. When warning King Nebuchadnezzar of his impending insanity, Daniel declared,

‘Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your **sins** by *doing* righteousness and from your **iniquities** by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’ (Daniel 4:27 NASB)

As the story goes, Nebuchadnezzar did not repent and paid the price of his impenitence by living as an animal for seven years. Many years later as an old man, Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson Belshazzar, “you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient” (Daniel 5:27 NASB). The **scales** were none other than the standard of God’s law. God had been judging his administration all the time, but Belshazzar did not know it or acknowledge it until it was too late. This is the fate of all world rulers who fail to understand their obligation to God who placed them in leadership positions according to his will (Rom. 9: 17).

Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. <sup>11</sup> Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. <sup>12</sup> Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalm 2:10-12 NASB)

Likewise, Jonah the prophet prophesied in the decadent Assyrian city of Nineveh, “Yet forty days and the city of Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3: 4). But why? Because they were wicked, and we discover their wickedness from the mouth of their own king who issued a proclamation saying,

“In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. <sup>8</sup> “But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly **that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.** <sup>9</sup> “Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.” (Jonah 3:7-9 NASB)

We are not given the content of Jonah’s preaching, but doubtless it had something to do with the law of God and its universal obligation for all men, Jew and Gentile. As Paul says,

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; (Romans 3:19 NASB)

### **Christian Theism as the Unifying System of Ethics**

No theory of ethics—teleological, utilitarian, social or personal approval, existential, not even deontological—makes any sense in a **closed universe** consisting only of **material** things with man at the top of the food chain of evolutionary biology. **You cannot derive ethics from accidents, and you cannot derive absolutes from relatives.** Such theories leave us in a sea of moral despair. It’s simply one man’s opinion against another man’s opinion.

On the other hand, teleological, existential, and deontological theories **all make sense if we believe that there is a God to whom we are accountable.** On Christian presuppositions, the **deontological** theory of ethics has validity because we have a transcendental God outside of nature and above nature

who created the world and who has the right to set the standards of morality, a God who has a right to tell us what we **ought** to do, and indeed, has told us what we ought to do in the Bible.

On Christian presuppositions, the **existential** theory also has some validity because God is not pleased when we only keep the rules externally to avoid punishment. He also wants us to keep his law **from the heart** because we love Him and because we love others. Our **motives** for obedience are also important to God.

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> **"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.** (Deuteronomy 6:5-6 NASB)

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." <sup>38</sup> "This is the great and foremost commandment. <sup>39</sup> "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' <sup>40</sup> "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40 NASB)

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. <sup>9</sup> For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law. (Romans 13:8-10 NASB)

As we can see from the last passage in Romans, **love is not self-defining** and does not serve as a substitute for the law of God. Many immoral practices are condoned in the name of love. Genuine love is the fulfilling of the law of God. It is the law that love fulfills.

"If you love Me, **you will keep My commandments.** (John 14:15 NASB)

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, **he will keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. (John 14:23 NASB)

The **teleological** theory of ethics is also valid because every action should have a **goal**, and that goal should be **the glory of God, the realization of his kingdom on earth, and the good of others**. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6: 10). Whatever I do, whether teaching this course or changing the oil in my car, should make God smile, benefit other people, and promote his kingdom on earth. The greatest good for the greatest number of people can be achieved only in obedience to God.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do**, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31 NASB)

What this verse teaches is that the Christian should be self-conscious about the glory of God and the promotion of his kingdom on earth. Every Christian should have an agenda, a game-plan, for exhibiting God's glory in this world to the maximum of his ability and opportunity.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9 NASB)

Peter was not speaking to preachers and missionaries, but to all Christians living in the diaspora (Christians spread out over many countries). Moreover, proclaiming God's excellence involves more than witnessing. It involves one's whole worldview and his approach to living and working. Speaking to slaves in Colossae, Paul says,

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,<sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Colossians 3:23-24 NASB)

Slaves were not paid to preach and witness, but to do a host of things, many of which were unpleasant, like cleaning latrines and bathing their masters. Yet, Paul tells them, "If you do it for Christ, you'll receive a reward." Not every Christian will be given the same ability or opportunity to glorify God. Only a few Christians will ever be given the opportunity or ability to be president of the United States or governor of any given state, but we must use all the potential and opportunity that God gives us to bring him glory.

The **personal approval** and **social approval** theories of ethics cannot be defended on their own presuppositions; yet the Christian should desire to see individuals **approve** of God's law through **personal** repentance and faith, and for **society** as a whole to be transformed in its thinking to approve of the Bible as its source of ethics and laws for God's glory and the good of humanity. Rather than legislating laws guided only by naturalistic, existential principles, we should seek to apply the law of God in the public arena to the best of our ability. Although given specifically to Israel, the law of God contains ethical principles which apply to any society at any time in history. Political leaders will one day be judged by how well their administrations upheld the ethical standards of the law of God. Remember Belshazzar.

God is the **unifying principle** who brings all these things together—the standard, the motive, and the goal (cf. Frame, *DCL*, pp. 28-36).

To sum up: you cannot have a unified, consistent system of ethics, medical ethics or otherwise, without the God revealed in nature, the Bible, and the incarnation of Jesus Christ recorded in the Bible. Truly, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted" and mankind is adrift on the sea of moral relativity.

#### 4. The Problem of Freedom and Dignity

We have discussed the problems of **metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics** facing anyone who denies a Biblical worldview. Now we come to the problem faced by any non-transcendent system in accounting for **personal freedom and dignity**. Existentialism attempts to solve the problem of freedom and dignity with a leap of faith. We declare something to be true although we have no logical reason

to believe it—like Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. But just as this non-material resurrection changed the lives of his disciples, we can hope that it will change our lives as well, so the thinking goes.

I’ve spent much more time dealing with naturalism than existentialism because I believe it is naturalism more than existentialism that poses the major threat to the Christian worldview. Concerning naturalism’s threat to freedom and dignity, Bahnsen says,

If naturalism is true, then naturalists have no reason to believe in naturalism. The naturalist says that all thinking is but the electro-chemical response of the gray matter in the material brain, and that these responses are determined by our environment. **Human thinking is on the same order as weeds growing.** If naturalism is true, then the advocate of the naturalistic approach is only saying **he affirms naturalism because nature has determined that he would.** Naturalism contradicts freedom (and dignity). He has **no reason** for declaring naturalism to be true; he is just **forced** to say so (*BTDF*, L12.3-4).

Moreover, naturalists themselves admit that their system cannot account for freedom and dignity. In reviewing a book by Paul Davies on the possibility of life on another planet, Gregory Koukl makes this revealing statement,

[The author] has some interesting thoughts about the impact of the idea of evolution on the notion of human value and dignity. If you believe that we are the result of the natural processes of cause and effect, you end up with a serious problem with value, purpose, worth and dignity. **It is hard to argue that someone who is an accident of the universe has some kind of special destiny** (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 225, emphasis mine).

Stephen Jay Gould, former professor of paleontology at Harvard University, not only challenges the concept of man’s “special destiny”, but even questions **man’s relative importance** in the evolutionary chain of being.

Human existence occupied but the last geological millimicrosecond of this history—the last inch of the cosmic mile, or the last second of the geological year. . . . If humanity arose just yesterday as a small twig on one branch of a flourishing tree, then life may not, in any genuine sense, exist for us or because of us. **Perhaps we are only an afterthought, a kind of cosmic accident, just one bauble on the Christmas tree of evolution** (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 225, emphasis mine).

But what did Gould mean by “afterthought”? Afterthought of whom, what? Does the material, impersonal universe have a thought? How does Gould come to the **logical** conclusion that he is a “cosmic accident” if the very thought, “I am a cosmic accident” is itself, a cosmic accident? As C. S. Lewis would say, Gould’s reasoning is itself proof that he is mistaken about man being a cosmic accident, for by the process of reasoning Gould rises above the machinery of this universe with the analogical thinking that God has given him. Dogs and cats don’t ask questions about the meaning of their existence, but man does. Contrast Gould’s conclusions to those of King David,

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;<sup>4</sup> What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?<sup>5</sup> Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!<sup>6</sup>

You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, (Psalm 8:3-6 NASB)

Reading creation through the lens of the OT Scriptures, David concludes that man must be very important against the backdrop of seemingly infinite space and the heavenly bodies. Steven Jay Gould, on the other hand, **reasons inside the small circle of empiricism** without reference to special revelation (p. 19, notes). Yet, the nagging thought still lingers that maybe man is more than just an afterthought. As Paul says in Romans 1, he **suppresses the truth in unrighteousness**. William Ernest Henley does the same thing in his poem, *Invictus*, written in 1875 and published in 1888 (emphasis mine).

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my **unconquerable soul**.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winc'd nor cried aloud.  
**Under the bludgeonings of chance**  
**My head is bloody, but unbowed.**

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
**Finds and shall find me unafraid.**

**It matters not how strait the gate,**  
**How charged with punishments the scroll,**  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

Perhaps Henley “protesteth too much” about being unconquered, unbowed, and unafraid. Bertrand Russell, whose essay, “Why I am not a Christian”, is still widely quoted 45 years after his death, sums up the pessimistic conclusions of philosophical naturalism in his book *A Free Man's Worship: Mysticism and Logic*.

Why does science rob human beings of their dignity? Science has limited its area of study to the area of natural occurrences. Not only has it limited its search to that area, but it has essentially said that that is the only area that really exists. This is called **philosophic naturalism**. If only nature exists, then it turns out that **we are merely parts of the machinery** in the workings of nature, and we are the unwitting victims of the machinery of cause and effect happening over time without any plan. **That robs human beings of their dignity**. Clearly, if we are the product of chance, then we have no purpose. It seems hard to argue that we are anything different than anything else on this earth that has resulted from the process of evolution.

The claim that we have some kind of peculiar dignity turns out to be a kind of species-ism. We arbitrarily view our species as qualitatively more valuable than other species, but the fact of the

matter is that in nature that just isn't the case. Davies acknowledges that if we are stuck with philosophic **naturalism**, we are robbed of unique value and dignity, and we become one of many living organisms that are qualitatively indistinguishable.

One might argue that we are more sophisticated in our evolutionary accomplishment, but what separates us from the rest? Nothing. That's a value judgment, and there are no value judgments like that that make any sense in nature because **nature is value-less**. Values are a philosophic construct. They are a theological and moral notion and have no place, strictly speaking, in a world that is simply defined by **scientific law** (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, pp. 227-228, emphasis mine).

**Young people in the US are driven to despair by an educational system which has no answers to the bigger (metaphysical) questions of life**, nor do they get help from their parents who were educated by the same system. Moreover, science has not provided those answers because it can't, a fact which makes the arrogance of the majority scientific community all the more appalling. The results of this despair are there for all to see. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers in the US, second only to auto accidents. Woody Allen, a famous comedian in the US, faces the desperation of our culture honestly and frankly in an article written for *Esquire* in 1977.

...alienation, loneliness [and] emptiness verging on madness...The fundamental thing behind *all* motivation and *all* activity is the constant struggle against annihilation and against death. It's absolutely stupefying in its terror, **and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless**. As Camus wrote, it's not only that *he* (the individual) dies, or that *man* (as a whole) dies, but that you struggle to do a work of art that will last and then you realize that *the universe itself* is not going to exist after a period of time. Until those issues are resolved within each person—religiously or psychologically or existentially—the social and political issues will never be resolved, except in a slapdash way (quoted in Schaeffer and Koop, p. 123, italics theirs, bold emphasis mine).

One might think that Allen had been reading the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible, but I doubt it. He was simply taking a long realistic look at the dead-end conclusions of a universe containing only matter. If we are products of chance, and death puts an end to all human accomplishments, even the most notable human accomplishments, then life is meaningless; and you and I are meaningless.

### **Social Contradictions to Philosophic Naturalism**

But man cannot—and will not—live without meaning. In the words of Schaeffer and Koop,

...everyone is caught, regardless of his world view, **simply by the way things are**. No one can make his own universe to live in" (*Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, p. 138, emphasis mine).

Even by shouting, "There is no meaning," the nihilist is asserting its existence: He believes that his statement has meaning (Sire, p. 113); but, as Romans 1 teaches, he doesn't even believe what he is saying, namely, that there is no meaning.

We may note some peculiar behavioral contradictions to any denial of human dignity. When encountering the scene of a car accident and smelling gasoline fumes, the committed naturalist will not examine the scene to see whether he might accidentally squish ants or centipedes during his rescue efforts. All of his attention will be riveted toward saving the life of the small child pinned down in the

back seat. And I would argue that his heroic efforts will have nothing whatever to do with any instinctive drive to preserve a fellow member of his species. Instead, he will see a human being in need of help, and helping will be the right thing to do. On the other hand, if he decides to play it safe and let the child die, his conscience will haunt him the rest of his life even if his world view insists that the child's life has no meaning. He does it because the law of God is written on his heart, and he cannot escape it.

Likewise, the philosophers and scientists who believe that we are products of chance do not treat their wives and children as if they are products of chance—at least, we may hope they don't. They love their families, even though they define "love" as nothing more than a biochemical synapse in the brain; and do all within their power to ensure that their children live happy and "meaningful" lives in the midst of a universe which they believe has no meaning. They deny the foundations of right and wrong, but they still teach their children right from wrong—especially obeying mommy and daddy—and they still live and act as if there were such a distinction. And, I might add, the professors of science and philosophy who loudly proclaim a world without good and evil still forbid their students to cheat on papers and exams.

Philosophical naturalists still employ **funerals to bury their dead**. Nothing resembling funerals is found in the behavior of animals; but if humans are nothing more than sophisticated animals, it appears strange that we would discover no intermediate animal behavior providing a connecting link to the human practice of burying the dead. Moreover, it is not as though burying the dead has any **survival value** for the human species; rather, funerals consume time and money which could be used for the living (*BTDF*, L12.6). To my knowledge, not even nihilists are advocating taking dead bodies of humans out with the day's garbage (unless they are the bodies of aborted babies). Although they pretend that there is no meaning in order to avoid moral responsibility before God, they would cringe at the thought of themselves or their loved ones rotting under heaps of wastes.

In spite of its abuses, the **legal system** is also evidence of our belief in human dignity. Legal codes protect life, liberty, property and reputations; and no one should be allowed to violate these rights (*BTDF*, L12.5). The jungle, on the other hand, is red with tooth and claw. But some animal rights groups in the US have noted the discrimination against animals and detest the idea of elevating humans to a plane of existence superior to other animals.

Animal rights activists do not simply resist the perverse torture of pets for amusement or deadly dog fights for sport. Nor are they simply trying to preserve "endangered species" from extinction. **Animal rights are now legal and political issues** that have generated an "Animal Legal Defense Fund," the "Animal Liberation Front," an *Animal Rights Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and more. Many even decry "speciesism"—elevating man over animals, of all things!—lamenting "human chauvinism," "human supremicisim, [sic]" and "anthropocentrism."

One animal rights website presents an article titled "Freedom is a Basic Right for Animals." It opens with these words: "This article is about the central role that freedom plays in our sense of justice. According to Ruut Veenhoven, a Dutch researcher on happiness, this is the most important factor in seeking happiness. Should that be any different for animals?" In *The Animal Question*, Paola Cavalieri argues regarding modern moral argument that: "its very logic extends to nonhuman animals as beings who are owed basic moral and legal rights and that, as a result, human rights are not human after all."



Many vegetarian groups argue for the immorality of eating animals. Others decry wearing fur coats or leather shoes as involving the destruction of animal life (*BTDF*, L9.3-4, emphasis mine).

Many years ago, I picketed in front of an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama. On one of the cars on front—whether a patient’s car or a staffer’s at the abortion clinic—was the bumper sticker, “Wear fake furs; animals have feelings, too.” This kind of intellectual schizophrenia is common in modern thinking.

But as we have seen, animal rights activists cannot derive the freedom and dignity of animals from the naturalistic system they espouse. In this system, everything in the universe is determined. Actions happen because other actions happened in the past, etc. in seemingly **infinite regression** to the Big Bang billions of years ago.

### **Christian Theism, Freedom, and Dignity**

Human “dignity” deals with notions of the ethical value, personal respect, and inherent worth of human life. The question of human dignity is of enormous practical significance in both our mundane lives and our theoretical worldviews. It not only impacts our daily attitudes and our interaction with others but **serves as the very foundation for human rights and a stable society** (*BTDF*, L12.4).

The history of civilizations, if approached with any sense of objectivity—an objectivity that does not exist because men “suppress the truth in unrighteousness”—would demonstrate that those civilizations most affected by Christianity are the most concerned with human freedom and dignity (cf. Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*). The Christian view of all men and women—no exceptions in race or sex—is that we are made in the image of God requiring that everyone be treated fairly and decently. Schools for boys and girls of every economic status, hospitals, and political rights for women and the poor, are the consequences of the Christian Worldview. Of course, this doesn’t imply that the Christian faith is always practiced consistently, as we have seen historically with African slavery in the southern states of the US, the human rights abuses toward blacks throughout the US, and the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda. But if consistently applied, Christianity produces societies where all people are treated with consideration and given due process of law; whereas human bondage has been defended in other non-Christian cultures. The Muslim state is one example.

The justification for **chattel slavery** as practiced in many Muslim lands today demonstrates their denial of universal human dignity. According to leading government cleric Sheikh Saleh Al-Fawzan: “Slavery is a part of Islam . . . Slavery is part of jihad, and jihad will remain as long there is Islam.”

Contrary to the myth that Islam is a religion free from racial prejudice, **slavery in the Moslem world has been, and remains, brutally racist in character**. To find truly endemic, open, raw anti-Black racism and slavery today one needs to go to the two Islamic Republics in Africa: Mauritania and Sudan. Black people have been enslaved on such a scale that **the term black has become synonymous with slave**. [My South Sudanese friends have verified this point.] The mixed-race, predominantly Negroid but self-avowedly “Arabic” denizens of the transitional sub-Saharan zone have been indoctrinated into treating their pure-black southern neighbors with racist disdain.

(To this day it can be dangerous to one's life to ask a dark-looking but Arabic-speaking Sudanese or Mauritanian Moslem if he is "black." (*BTDF*, L12.7)

The Christian can account for freedom and dignity on the basis of his commitment to something **outside himself and outside the universe: the existence of God and the special revelation he has given in his word.**

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; <sup>4</sup>What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? <sup>5</sup>Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! <sup>6</sup>You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:3-6 NASB)

"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man." (Genesis 9:6 NASB)

"You shall not murder." (Exodus 20:13 NASB)

## 5. The Problem of Human Freedom in a World Controlled by God

Naturalism declares man to be an insignificant cog in the machinery of the universe without any real choice. His choices are **illusions of freedom** because they are determined by previous events. Life just happens. Christians like to believe that God is all-knowing and all-powerful. **But how can we say that man is free if God controls the world by his omnipotent power?** Particularly, how is man free if God has ordained everything that comes to pass and has declared the end from the beginning?

also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.** (Ephesians 1:11 NASB)

In this verse, Paul says that God works **all** things, not just **some** things, after the counsel of His will. This cannot mean that everything happening in the universe is according to God's **moral** will. It is clear that the world contains much evil, a problem we will address later. The **will** Paul is speaking of here is God's **eternal, decreed will** or his secret purpose which no one can know but God. The distinction between God's decreed will and his preceptive (moral) will is found in Deuteronomy 29:29.

"The **secret things** belong to the LORD our God, but **the things revealed** belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of **this law.** (Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB)

In this verse, the **"things revealed"** are synonymously parallel with **"this law"**. We are only **responsible** for what he has revealed, not for what he has not revealed which remains secret to us. Some examples of secret things are future events which will become known in the present. Secret things also include the reason for many present and past events which we may never know. God's ways are higher than our ways, and we are not able to understand everything God does. Nor should we expect to understand his hidden purpose or expect God to give us explanations for all his actions. God does not need anyone's advice, and he is not subject to the bar of human judgment.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.<sup>9</sup> "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, **So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.** (Isaiah 55:8-9 NASB)

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! **How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!**<sup>34</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? (Romans 11:33-34 NASB)

The Bible says that God sees the present, past, and future as one comprehensive whole.

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me,<sup>10</sup> **Declaring the end from the beginning.** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My **purpose** will be established, And **I will accomplish all My good pleasure**'; (Isaiah 46:9-10 NASB)

"Present your case," the LORD says. "Bring forward your strong *arguments*," The King of Jacob says.<sup>22</sup> Let them bring forth and declare to us **what is going to take place**; As for the former *events*, declare what they *were*, That we may consider them and know their outcome. Or announce to us what is coming;<sup>23</sup> **Declare the things that are going to come afterward.** That we may know that you are gods; Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together. (Isaiah 41:21-23 NASB)

If God declares the end from the beginning, then He also declares everything **between** the end and the beginning. Relative to God as the omniscient Creator, there is no future; for God sees past, present, and future all at once. Moreover, if God **declares** the future, he obviously **knows** the future, and if God knows the future, then any alternative action or thing which God has not declared is impossible; otherwise, God has not known it. True knowledge of something rules out the possibility of the contrary; otherwise it is not knowledge, but only opinion which proves to be false. I don't recall Scripture attributing any opinions to God ("It seems to me..." or "I think") only perfect knowledge. But suppose I say, "In ten seconds this building will collapse and kill everyone in it." Is this knowledge or opinion—or just a bad illustration? But no one is moving toward the door, so I suppose that everyone thinks this is just a bad illustration. No one believes that **I know** that the building is about to collapse. But if I **really knew** that it was going to collapse, it **would** collapse!

The question arises, does God ordain **evil things** which come to pass, or are these evil things outside of God's circumference of control? To put the matter this way is also to supply the answer. If there are some things outside of God's control—e.g. all evil things—then the omnipotence of God is denied. He is not all-powerful. This is the opinion of Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book on Job, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Kushner's conclusion is that while God is good, he is not all-powerful. There are some things even God can't control. He would like to help you, but he can't help.

We have now entered a **dualistic** universe where God and the Devil are two **equal** beings fighting it out to see who wins. But can there be a God who is not all-powerful? Are God and the devil equal manifestations of God? But this is not the picture of God presented in the Scriptures. When Satan desired to afflict Job, **he had to ask God's permission**, and then he could not go beyond the specific limits of affliction permitted by God.

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, **only do not put forth your hand on him.**" So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:12 NASB)

Afterward, Satan killed Job's children and servants, but Job was unscathed. Satan then argued that Job would not serve God if his own health was afflicted.

"However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face."<sup>6</sup> So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, **only spare his life.**" (Job 2:5-6 NASB)

**God is still calling the shots.** "This far, but no farther", and Satan must comply with God's limitation on Job's affliction. It is evident throughout the story that Job knows exactly who is responsible for his affliction, for **he does not wish to have an argument with Satan, but with God.** After losing his bet with God, Satan slinks away and isn't heard from for the rest of the story.

When Satan desired to destroy Peter, Jesus prayed for him that his faith would not fail.

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;<sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you, **that your faith may not fail**; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32 NASB)

The Bible says that everything has a purpose in God's plan, including the temptation of Peter, the affliction of Job, and the existence of evil people.

The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil. (Proverbs 16:4 NASB)

Notice that the verse does not say that God made **wickedness**, but that he made **the wicked**, i.e. evil people. But God did not make them evil. God also **made an angel** who **became** Satan who took with him other angels who rebelled against God's sovereignty, but he **did not make Satan**, Satan. Although we would have liked more information about how Satan rebelled and why God allowed him to rebel, God has not seen fit to give us this information. Nevertheless, **God is never presented in Scripture as being the author of evil**, just the opposite.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (James 1:13 NASB)

God controls the actions of men without being culpable for their actions.

The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes. (Proverbs 21:1 NASB)

"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will** in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Daniel 4:35 NASB)

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,<sup>28</sup> **to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.** (Acts 4:27-28 NASB)

In the last verse we see both God's **sovereign purpose** and the **secondary means** God uses to accomplish his purpose. We also see that the most evil act in the history of the world, the crucifixion of the God-man Jesus Christ, was planned beforehand according to God's purpose. God predestined (planned beforehand) to have Jesus put to death at the hands of Herod, Pilate, the Roman guards, and the people of Israel who cried, "Crucify him!". Yet, all these people were acting "**freely**" according to the **evil choices** they had made concerning Jesus, a conscious and deliberate choice mentioned also in Acts 2: 23.

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup> this *Man*, **delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross** by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. (Acts 2:22-23 NASB)

According to this verse, God's foreknowledge is not simply what God knows will happen, but what God plans or **predetermines** to happen. He knows what he has planned, and this plan is unchangeable. It is the **perfect plan** implemented by an all-wise and omniscient God; therefore, any change in such a perfect plan would render the plan **imperfect**. There is no hint in this verse or anywhere else in the Bible that the Jewish people who cried "Crucify him", or the Jewish leaders who manipulated Pilate to execute him, or Pilate who ordered the execution, or the Roman soldiers who nailed Jesus to the cross, were not **culpable**. All were culpable. Yet, all their freely chosen, evil actions were governed by God to accomplish **his purpose**, not theirs.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 11, asks,

What are the works of providence? [Answer:] God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and **governing all his creatures, and all their actions.**

Ps. 145:17; Ps. 104:24; Isa. 28:29; Heb.1:3; Ps. 103:19; Matt. 10:29, 30, 31 (WSC 1:11 WCS)

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says this about God's providence:

God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His **infallible foreknowledge**, and the **free and immutable counsel of His own will**, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy (emphasis mine).

Heb. 1:3; Dan. 4:34,35; Ps. 135:6; Acts 17:25,26,28; Job 38,39,40,41; Matt. 10:29,30,31; Prov. 15:3; Ps. 104:24; Ps. 145:17; Acts 15:8; Ps. 94:8,9,10,11; Eph. 1:11; Ps. 33:10,11; Isa. 63:14; Eph. 3:10; Rom. 9:17; Gen. 45:7, Ps. 145:7. (WCF 5:1 WCS)

But if God is “governing all his creatures and all their actions” “according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will,” **how can man be free?** Is this not just a **biblical form of determinism?** The Confession goes on to say,

Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out **according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.**

Acts 2:23; Gen. 8:22; Jer. 31:35; Exod. 21:13; Deut. 19:5; 1 Kings 22:28,34; Isa. 10:6,7. (WCF 5:2 WCS)

To say that God ordains everything that comes to pass is not the same as saying that everything he ordains comes to pass **irrespective of secondary causes or means. God has not only ordained the end, but the means to the end.** If God has ordained Event D, then he has also planned everything which will eventually lead to D—events A, B, and C which usually include human choices or human agency. Considering all the events of history, God has ordained trillions of events which lead immutably (unchangeably) to the final end and conclusion of history. **All of these events are contingent on other events taking place,** but they are **ultimately contingent upon the will of God** with Whom there is no contingency, but only certainty. Everything is connected, but not randomly and by chance which would be self-contradictory (chance implies disconnected-ness). Everything is connected by the providence of God, but the means to the ends also include men’s “free” agency, including sinful choices—the secondary means to God’s immutable providence.

Joseph was convinced that God used the sin of his brothers to save the entire twelve tribes from extinction. Speaking to his brothers after he revealed his identity he says,

"Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, **for God sent me before you to preserve life.**"<sup>6</sup> "For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting."<sup>7</sup> "**God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant** in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance."<sup>8</sup> "Now, therefore, **it was not you who sent me here, but God;** and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:5-8 NASB)

"As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." (Genesis 50:20 NASB)

Three times Joseph says that God **sent** him into Egypt before his brothers in order to preserve life. The last time he says this, the secondary causation (agency) of his brothers is minimized in comparison with God’s providence, “it was not you who sent me here, but God.” We see here that **God uses sin sinlessly** to accomplish his purpose. Man’s obedience is not necessary for God to do what he wants to do. In the final analysis, the ultimate cause of Joseph’s sojourn in Egypt was God, not the sinful decisions (free agency) of Joseph’s brothers. In fact, God had planned the transition of the twelve tribes to Egypt long before this event.

God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. (Genesis 15:13 NASB)

Yet, God used the wickedness of Joseph's half-brothers to bring this transition to pass. His foreordination **does not eliminate the secondary causes/actions/agency** of others, but actually renders these actions **certain**. Moreover, Joseph's brothers were acting **in accord with their own evil character and desires** to rid themselves of Jacob's favored son. There was **no external coercion** imposed upon them forcing them to do what they did. They acted "freely", but their wills were in bondage to evil—the paradox of sinful man who believes that he is free but is actually a slave to his own passions.

**[Excursus: Free will vs. free agency]**

There is a difference between **free will** and **free agency**. In the above story, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because they hated him. No one forced them to do something against their will; they acted in accordance with their disposition toward Joseph, one of hatred rather than love. Moreover, although they had the **free agency** to return him safely to his father, they did not have the **free will** to do so. Their actions were driven by their hatred which fueled their actions.

All men have the free agency to do good or evil; otherwise, they cannot be **responsible** for their actions. They freely choose one action or the other. However, the unbeliever's inner nature **necessarily** causes him to choose evil. Even though he may choose an outwardly good action, he does not choose the action with the proper **goal** (the glory of God and His kingdom) or with the proper **motive** (love for God and man). In this higher sense, men cannot please God. For an action to be pleasing to God, the motive and goal must also be in accordance with God's will, but unbelievers cannot fulfill these obligations.

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil. (Jer. 13:23 NASB)

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,<sup>7</sup> because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it **does not subject itself to the law of God**, for it is **not even able to do so**,<sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh **cannot** please God. (Rom. 8:6-8 NASB).

Paul is not saying that the unbeliever cannot keep any of God's laws **externally**, but that they cannot produce the kind of obedience which is fundamentally pleasing to God, obedience according to the standard of God's law with the proper motive and goals. He says that the unbeliever is **not even able to do so** and **cannot please God**. This implies that the unbeliever does not have the capacity to make choices that please God in the highest sense, not because he is being coerced to make the wrong choices, but because his inner nature renders him unable to make those choices. For example, a cow is in its natural environment when it is out to pasture grazing on lush green grass, but if you place a bloody carcass of an animal in front of the cow, it is **unable** to eat it, not because it is externally prevented from eating it, but because of its nature as a herbivore, not a carnivore. The same carcass in front of a ravenous lion would soon disappear. The scripture uses similar analogies.

Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly. (Prov. 26:11 NASB)

Why does a fool repeat his folly? Because he is a fool, and fools do stupid things.

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than

the first.<sup>21</sup> For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.<sup>22</sup> It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet. 2:20-22 NASB)

A hungry dog does not have to be forced against its will to return to its own vomit, nor must a clean pig be forced against its will into the mud. The inner nature of the dog and the pig **necessarily** inclines them to the behavior described. In the same way, a person who has heard the truth but has not been changed by it will return to his former life characterized by fallen behavior. A person will necessarily act according to his nature. This is also true of the Christian who has a new nature.

No one who abides in Him **sins**; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.<sup>7</sup> Little children, make sure no one deceives you; **the one who practices righteousness is righteous**, just as He is righteous;<sup>8</sup> the one who **practices sin** is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.<sup>9</sup> **No one who is born of God practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and he **cannot sin**, because he is born of God.<sup>10</sup> By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 Jn. 3:6-10 NASB)

When John says that the one born of God "cannot sin", he does not mean that he cannot sin at all; otherwise, he has just contradicted what he says in the first chapter.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:8 NASB)  
If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:10 NASB)

He simply means that the one born of God cannot live a life which is dominated by habitual sin. He cannot do this because he has been given a new disposition to hate sin.

The bible also says that faith is **essential** if we wish to please God. Since the unbeliever cannot act on the basis of faith in God and in Jesus Christ His Son, then he is unable to please Him.

And **without faith** it is **impossible** to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Heb. 11:6 NASB)

...whatever is **not from faith** is sin. (Rom. 14:23 NASB)

The unbeliever is also incapable of discerning spiritual truth.

But a natural man **does not accept** the things of the Spirit of God, for they are **foolishness to him**; and he **cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

The unbeliever may be able to understand the bible—or the gospel—intellectually; but he is not able to grasp its **significance for him personally**. He cannot **accept** the fact that his situation is hopeless unless he surrenders to God's will for his life through repentance and faith. Analogously, a frog standing still in front of the *Mona Lisa* will perceive that it is an object in its way that he must go around to get to the other side, but the frog will not **understand** the *Mona Lisa* as a famous work of art. It does not have the capacity to appreciate it. In the same way, Jesus told Nicodemus that unless he was born again, he would not **see** (understand, appreciate) the kingdom of God.



So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine;<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and **the truth will make you free.**"<sup>33</sup> They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and **have never yet been enslaved** to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the **slave of sin.** (Jn. 8:31-34 NASB)

This is a passage that helps us discern the difference between **free agency** and **free will**. Jesus says that only the truth will make us **free**. This implies that those who do not have the truth are not free. They are free to make choices, but by their very nature, they are not living in a state of freedom but are **slaves of sin**. The verse literally reads, "Jesus answered them, 'Verily, verily, I say to you –Every one who is **committing sin**, is a servant of the sin, (Jn. 8:34 YLT) That is, everyone who is committing sin habitually is a slave of sin. This is clear from Paul's use of the same expression, "slaves of sin."

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?<sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that though you were **slaves of sin**, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,<sup>18</sup> and having been **freed from sin**, you became **slaves of righteousness.** (Rom. 6:16-18 NASB)

Slavery to sin implies inability to do good. It is a bondage in which men are not free to be righteous—although they have free agency. **Slaves of righteousness** implies the disposition to live in habitual obedience.

#### [End of Excursus]

Picking up where we left off, in the story of the Apostle Paul traveling in a prison ship to Rome, **the free decisions (agency) of men were woven into the fabric of God's providential purpose** of saving Paul and everyone on the ship from drowning.

When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul *began* to admonish them,<sup>10</sup> and said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."<sup>11</sup> But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul. (Acts 27:9-11 NASB)

The centurion and captain do not recognize that God has enabled Paul to foresee the future. Consequently, they continued the journey, ignoring Paul's prophecy of shipwreck. Days later, the ship's crew had to throw the ship's cargo and tackle (ropes, pulleys, etc.) overboard to lighten the ship and avoid sinking. This action fulfilled Paul's prophecy that the voyage would be attended "with damage and great loss...of the cargo." Days later, Paul gives them another prophecy based on additional information given him by an angel.

When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss."<sup>22</sup> "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for **there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.**"<sup>23</sup> "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,<sup>24</sup> saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; **you must stand before Caesar;** and behold, **God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.**'"<sup>25</sup> "Therefore, keep up your

courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. (Acts 27:21-25 NASB)

After Paul's "I told you so!" speech, he assures them that **all** of them will live through the shipwreck. But then let's see what happens.

But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors *began* to surmise that they were approaching some land...Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.<sup>30</sup> But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the *ship's* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow,<sup>31</sup> Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men [namely, the sailors] remain in the ship, you yourselves [the Roman soldiers] cannot be saved."<sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship's* boat and let it fall away. (Acts 27: 27, 29-32 NASB)

But wait a minute. If God had promised to save **everyone** on the ship, **why was it necessary** for the sailors to stay with the ship? Well, it was necessary for experienced sailors to stay on board to guide the ship close enough to shore for everyone to swim or float ashore. The Roman soldiers were not capable sailors, and God was not going to miraculously pick the ship up in midair and sail it through the air to shore like an airplane. Probably through good common sense, Paul perceived that God would use **experienced sailors** to guide the ship to a small beach. He did not need special revelation to understand this point. He would also use the soldiers to keep the sailors from escaping the ship and leaving it to capsize in the sea a long way from shore, making it impossible for anyone else to survive. Both events are **significant**: **The soldiers keeping the sailors on the ship and the sailors getting the ship close to shore. Yet, both events are also determined by God's sovereign purpose.**

Later on the ship got stuck in shallow water and started getting demolished by the waves. Luke, the author of Acts, says,

The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none *of them* would swim away and escape;<sup>43</sup> **but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention,** and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,<sup>44</sup> and the rest *should follow*, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land. (Acts 27:42-44 NASB)

Who saved Paul, God or the centurion? Answer: God saved Paul **by using the centurion**. God had assured Paul that he would make it to shore alive and appear before Caesar. God is the **primary cause** for saving everyone on the ship; but God used **secondary causes**—experienced sailors, fierce soldiers, and the centurion, and Paul's common sense—to save everyone, including Paul. Were the sailors, Roman soldiers, and the centurion **really necessary**? Yes. Did everyone act according to his own **free agency**? Yes, the sailors attempted to flee, and the soldiers decided to follow the centurion's orders. Was God in control, and did he determine every activity? Absolutely. Scripture is insistent that men's actions are under God's control, but that they are usually **necessary to accomplish what God intends**. God often acts apart from human causation: He sends floods, tsunamis, draught, etc. none of which has anything to do with human activity—including global warming, if indeed, the globe is warming.

The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps. (Proverbs 16:9 NASB)

Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, How then can man understand his way? (Proverbs 20:24 NASB)

### God's Sovereignty and Human Activity in Saving Sinners

In the same way, God saves individuals through his sovereign power, but he will use the weakness of human vessels in the proclamation of the gospel.

(1) The Bible says Christians are predestined to eternal life in Jesus Christ even before God made the world.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, **just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.... (Ephesians 1:3-4 NASB)

Therefore, before they were ever born, before they had done either good or bad, Christians were chosen for eternal life, **not because they were good**, but in order that God's choice would not be based on man's will, but his will.

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup> for though *the twins* were not yet born and **had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls**, <sup>12</sup> it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." <sup>14</sup> What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! <sup>15</sup> For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." <sup>16</sup> So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." <sup>18</sup> **So then He has mercy on whom He desires**, and He hardens whom He desires. (Romans 9:10-18 NASB)

(2) Second, those who are chosen in Christ before the world was created are **given to Jesus** by God the Father. And Jesus said that whoever was given to him by the Father would also believe in him,

"**All that the Father gives Me** will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup> "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> "This is the will of Him who sent Me, **that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.** <sup>40</sup> "For this is **the will of My Father**, that everyone who beholds the Son and **believes in Him** will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:37-40 NASB)

We learn from this passage that being given by the Father to the Son **does not eliminate the necessity of faith; it guarantees that faith will occur.** All those given by the Father to the Son will believe in the Son and have eternal life, no exceptions. Moreover, the Son will lose **no one** who is given him by the

Father. All who truly believe in the Son will continue to believe in the Son, and Christ will raise them up on the last day.

(3) Nevertheless, it is necessary that those who are given by the Father to the Son **hear** the message of the gospel. Otherwise, these people will not be saved.

for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." <sup>14</sup> **How** then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? **How** will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And **how** will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> **How** will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Romans 10:13-15 NASB)

Therefore, God's will to save people—the **first cause**—does not eliminate the **secondary cause** of preaching the gospel. Rather, the first cause implies the second cause.

The famous missionary, William Carey, argued before the leaders of his denomination that their church should send missionaries to heathen nations (a term no longer used in today's vocabulary) so that these people would hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Some of the leaders of his denomination believed that the Great Commission was given only to the Apostles. After Carey made his case for foreign missions, one leader said to him, "Sit down young man. If God wishes to convert the heathen, he will do it without your help or mine." This was a hyper-Calvinist response which fails to understand God's use of secondary causes to accomplish His will.) But Carey would not be silenced. After this encounter he wrote an essay with the title, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (bold emphasis mine). This essay led to the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society (Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, p. 115). Carey understood that God would not save unreached people **without the use of means**, and the means were other people.

There is a fictional story about an old man who lived on a farm. He was a very devout Christian, but not a very smart one. One week he heard a very bad weather report of a coming storm that would cause the nearby river to flood. The rains came and the farmer went out on his front porch and prayed, "Lord, save me from this storm." The rains continued for hours, and the roads began to disappear under the water. The sheriff's department sent a four-wheel-drive truck to retrieve the man. The deputy shouted at him from the truck, "Get in. The flood waters are rising two feet per hour and your house will be underwater soon!" "Nope," said the farmer. "God will save me." An hour later four feet of water was up to the top of the porch. The sheriff's department sent a deputy with a fishing boat to save the man. "Get in! You don't have much time!" "No," said the farmer. "God will save me." Three hours later the old man was sitting on the roof of his house with water up to the eave. The sheriff sent a helicopter to rescue him. "Nope, God will save me." The old man drowned and went to heaven. He asked God, "Why didn't you save me?" God said, "I sent a four-wheeled drive truck, a boat, and a helicopter. You rejected all of them."

My addition to this story would be: "You rejected all the means I [God] could have used to save you, but I was ready to take you home, anyway; and I made use of the secondary means of your deficient theology to accomplish my ultimate purpose."

God's sovereignty does not eliminate the necessity of secondary causes. He ordains not only the ends but the **means to the end**. He chooses people for salvation, but he also ordains the means by which

they will be saved, the faithful preaching of the gospel.

### **The Compatibility of God's Sovereign Providence with Human Freedom**

The question still remains, is God's providential ordering of all creatures and their actions **compatible with human freedom**? To put the question differently: If God is all-powerful and can do anything consistent with his nature, **is he capable of predetermining all things while at the same time giving humans genuine freedom to act**? Can he make a universe consistent with his control and with human freedom? The answer is, yes, **if** God is omnipotent, and **if** such a universe allowing freedom is consistent with his nature. Human freedom, properly defined, is not inconsistent with God's nature; just the opposite is true. While human freedom may seem **incompatible** with God's sovereign control, Scripture demonstrates that God ordains the "free" decisions of human beings. People do not get out of bed in the morning (also a free decision) wondering whether God has ordained them to wear black socks or brown, or what they eat for breakfast. If we are honest, most of our decisions are made without the slightest consideration of the decreed, foreordained will of God. We simply make decisions according to our own interests and desires. Most of these decisions are what we would call amoral decisions. Does God really care what color socks I wear? Maybe in a particular situation it would be important, like a soldier dressing in accordance with proper protocol in obedience to his commanding officer. But what about moral decisions?

I must reiterate the precise definition of **freedom**, which people most often define as something entirely different from the way Scripture interprets it. God's goal is for his people to be free, just as He is free; but God alone is authorized to define what true freedom is.

We have already seen that God purposed the "free" decisions of Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery. God purposed to save everyone on the prison ship to Rome. God also ordained the decision of Cyrus to allow the Jewish exiles to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and this event was predicted by Isaiah about **150 years before Cyrus was born** (the following examples are cited in Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, [hereafter *DG*], pp. 62-63).

"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" (Isaiah 44:28 NASB)

God **determined** that Cyrus would order the rebuilding of the temple. Yet, Cyrus was **free** in his decision to let the exiled Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild it. He was under no external coercion to do so. Allowing maximum religious freedom was the foreign policy of Persian rulers.

Judas' betrayal of Jesus is a decision which fulfilled Scripture, and in that sense, his decision was **determined**. Yet, Judas was fully responsible for a decision he made according to his own desire to eliminate a so-called messiah who had not measured up to Judas' messianic expectations.

"For indeed, the Son of Man is going **as it has been determined**; but **woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!**" (Luke 22:22 NASB; cf. Acts 2: 23-24 quoted above)

Pharaoh's refusal to let the people of Israel go was a decision ordained by God.

The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; **but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.** (Exodus 4:21 NASB)

And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" <sup>2</sup> But Pharaoh said, "**Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go.**" (Exodus 5:1-2 NASB)

Beyond any doubt, Pharaoh was acting freely. Three times the Bible says that Pharaoh **hardened his own heart** so that he would not let the people go (Ex. 8: 15, 32, 34). It is equally clear that God had decided beforehand to harden his heart. The Bible says three times that God **will harden** Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4: 21; 7: 3; 14: 4) and five times specifically that he **hardened** Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 10: 1, 20, 27; 11: 10; 14: 8). Yet, you will notice from the texts that Pharaoh is acting from the **heart**. That is, he is acting **in accordance with his own character and desire**. This is what he wants to do.

Even **seemingly random decisions** are controlled by God; and yet, they occur as the result of secondary decisions based up the character of the actors, e.g. the decision of the Roman soldiers to divide Jesus' garments at the crucifixion, thus fulfilling the details of Jesus' crucifixion predicted in the Psalms one thousand years before Christ.

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and *also* the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. <sup>24</sup> So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, *to decide* whose it shall be"; *this was* to fulfill the Scripture: "THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS." (John 19:23-24 NASB)

They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots. (Psalm 22:18 NASB)

We can see from these passages that the **free agency** of human beings is **compatible** with the Scriptural idea of God's sovereignty in ordaining these actions. **The biblical authors never treat divine sovereignty and human freedom and responsibility as a problem.** Someone asked Charles Spurgeon (arguably the most famous preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), "How do you reconcile divine sovereignty with human responsibility?" His reply, "I never attempt to reconcile friends." In other words, they are compatible with one another. This is what Frame calls a **compatibilist theory of freedom**.

This kind of freedom is sometimes called compatibilism, because it is **compatible with determinism** [not the determinism of naturalism and nihilism which is purposeless; but the determinism of God's divine ordination and control of all events]. Determinism is the view that every event (including human actions) has a sufficient cause other than itself. Compatibilist freedom means that even if every act we perform is **caused by something outside ourselves** (such as natural causes or God), we are **still free**, for we can still act **according to our character and desires** (*DG*, p. 136).

On the other hand, **libertarianism** [not to be confused with political libertarianism, although related to it] maintains that humans are **capable of making choices contrary to their internal character and**

**desires** however much these things may influence their decisions. Libertarianism is **not compatible** with determinism because it emphasizes that **human choice is not determined ahead of time by God** or any other cause. That is, human action is not ordained by God. As far as human decisions are concerned, we are the “first causes of our actions. We have a godlike independence when we make free choices. Only if we have this kind of freedom, libertarians insist, can we be held accountable for our actions” (Frame, *DG*, p. 138). Otherwise, our actions are caused by previous events that have taken place, by other people, by biological necessity, etc. Therefore, we are like falling dominoes and have no responsibility for what we do.

This libertarian view of freedom is the **majority view** among evangelical Christians, and it is defended by Arminians, open theists, and process theologians (Frame, *DG*, p. 139). **Arminians** believe that God knows everything, including the future, but that this knowledge consists in knowing beforehand what people will independently decide to do. Arminians do not believe God **foreordains** whatever happens. This obviously rules out God’s control of what men do. He is simply the omniscient spectator who foresees independent actions. But, as we have seen, to truly **know** something rules out the contrary. **Open theists** acknowledge the inherent contradiction of Arminianism and do not believe God foreknows “the free decisions of human beings”; otherwise, this would limit human freedom and would be another form of determinism (Frame, *DG*, p. 488). They are correct in saying that God’s foreknowledge logically implies foreordination. There is nothing new about this view; it was espoused by the Socinians who not only opposed Calvin’s view of God’s sovereignty but also the deity of Christ and the substitutionary atonement (Frame, *DG*, p. 485). **Process theologians** believe that it is

...an essential attribute of God to affect and **be affected** by temporal processes, contrary to the forms of theism [e.g. the Westminster Confession] that hold God to be in all respects non-temporal (eternal), unchanging (immutable), and unaffected by the world (impassible) (Wikipedia, “Process Theology”, emphasis and additional comments mine).

**James Sire** makes comments in *The Universe Next Door* leading me to believe that he is either an Arminian or an open theist. I don’t know which, but I’m absolutely certain that Sire is a devout Christian. Some squabbles take place within the family of God, and the debate between Arminians and Calvinists and open theists and Calvinists is a family debate. However, I do believe that open theism is a very serious heresy. Sire says,

The system is *open* and that means it is **not programmed**. God is constantly involved in the unfolding pattern of the ongoing operation of the universe. And so are we human beings! The course of the world’s operation is **open to reordering by either**. So we find it dramatically reordered in the Fall. Adam and Eve made a choice that had tremendous significance. But God made another choice in redeeming people through Christ (p. 32, emphasis mine).

If Sire is saying that God uses the actions of human beings as secondary causes to accomplish his **predetermined** purposes, then I would agree. We have already seen this in the story of Paul’s voyage at sea. But Sire makes it sound like God had no “program”—no decree—to start with and that both God and humans are **equally** changing the course of world events with God **reacting to human choices**. Adam and Eve chose to sin, but God then chose to redeem, as if God was reacting to their choice. This, it appears to me, denies the **immutability** (unchangeableness) of God’s **eternally decreed will**. The Bible says that God declares the end from the beginning, and that Christians are chosen in Christ before God made the world, that is, before Adam and Eve sinned. According to Sire’s view, the

“unfolding pattern” will have to be decided in the temporal **present**, not by God’s **eternal** decree. But, as I have said, if God’s decreed will is perfect—the result of infinite knowledge and wisdom—any change in that plan would make it imperfect. Sire continues.

The world’s operation is also **reordered** by our continued activity after the Fall. Each action of each of us, each decision to pursue one course rather than another, **changes** or rather “**produces**” the future. By dumping pollutants into fresh streams, we kill fish and alter the way we can feed ourselves in years to come. By “cleaning up” our streams, we again alter our future. If the universe were not orderly, our decisions would have no effect. **If the course of events were determined, our decisions would have no significance.** So theism declares that the universe is orderly **but not determined.** The implications of this become clearer as we consider humanity’s place in the cosmos (p. 32, emphasis mine).

Again, I have no problem in agreeing with Sire **that human activity is significant** and that human actions have **real consequences** like polluted streams—and dead prisoners in shipwrecks. I disagree that humans “reorder” creation with their activity. Rather, **human activity actualizes or brings into temporal existence the order—or disorder—God has decreed.** (Warfare is quite disorderly.) I also disagree with his premise that “if the course of events were determined, our decisions would have no significance.” If even sparrows cannot perish apart from God’s will (Matt. 10: 29), then far more important events are also determined by God. Human decisions are significant **because God has ordained human activity and freedom to accomplish his ordained purposes.**

Human participation in God’s plan—“program” if you will—is very significant, otherwise Jesus would not have commanded us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” The book of Revelation assures us that God’s kingdom is, indeed, **coming** in its consummation. Satan and all his demonic forces cannot stop it (Matt. 16: 18: “upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.”). Yet, mysteriously, God uses our prayers and efforts to build his church; otherwise, they are mere formalities—like the queen of England inviting the newly elected prime minister to set up his government. Moreover, God’s omnipotence implies his ability to make a universe in which he controls all events while giving people real freedom. Human freedom is not inconsistent with God’s power; **they are not incompatible.** If I don’t quite understand **how** God does this, it is because I am not God; but God is not limited by my rational ability to understand him. Some things are **supra-rational**, beyond human rationality, but nevertheless rational.

The Bible insists in many places that our decisions do have significance.

“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, **choose for yourselves today** whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15 NASB)

**Did Joshua’s decision have significance?** Yes. It anchored Israel’s faith until the death of all the elders who served under Joshua. God used Joshua’s faith to preserve his people for a long time.

Israel served the LORD **all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders** who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel. (Joshua 24:31 NASB)



**Did God determine that Joshua would make this decision?** Yes, if we believe that “The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov. 21:1). **Was it less significant because God determined it?** No. Did Israel’s later decision to follow other gods have significance? Indeed, it did, and God spewed them out of the land of Canaan because of their idolatry. Did God **know** what they were going to do? Moses told Israel just before his death,

“For **I know** that after my death **you will act corruptly** and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.” (Deuteronomy 31:29 NASB)

How did Moses know this? He was God’s prophet. God told him.

Sire says, “So theism declares that the universe is orderly but **not determined**.” Does it really? I would argue that the universe is orderly **because it is determined** by an all-wise, omniscient God who has “programmed” the universe according to infinite knowledge. A universe ordered or “reordered” by trillions of autonomous, undetermined, disconnected human decisions would be utterly **chaotic, not orderly**. It would be a universe “ordered” by the disorganized decisions of billions of human beings, a chance universe. But this is a self-contradiction.

We have already seen that the testimony of Scripture does not support the idea of a God who is limited in his knowledge of people’s decisions—past, present, or future—or a God who **voluntarily** limits his own knowledge of those decisions. God knew Pharaoh would decide not to let the people of Israel go because he had foreordained the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. He also knew Cyrus would allow the Jews to rebuild the temple, precisely because God had foreordained this decision. **But if God’s knowledge does not extend to future decisions of human beings, this is a serious curtailment of the traditional protestant view of his omniscience.** Robert Strimple puts the matter in perspective.

Think about it. Just how “limited” is the part of the world’s ongoing history that we are asked to see as not under God’s control, nor even within his present knowledge? How many truly significant occurrences in our world are *not* the actions of human beings or the consequences of such actions?... Perhaps the fact that the sun will shine on my picnic tomorrow would be one such event. But even a “natural” phenomenon such as whether or not tomorrow will be sunny in Southern California may well be determined by how much smog has been produced by how many automobiles whose drivers decided to turn on the ignition key in the past several days. And, of course, at a global level, how could God know it as absolutely certain that someone would not have made this planet uninhabitable before tomorrow by recklessly unleashing a nuclear holocaust? (“What Does God Know”, quoted by Frame, p. 489).

If there is such a passage in the Bible describing **the self-limitation of God**, where is it? God calling to Adam in Genesis 3: 9b, “Where are you?” This is hardly a proof text for God’s self-limitation. When my children were small and were getting into some mischief in the room next door, I would ask them, “What are you doing?” But I knew full well what they were doing! I just wanted them to own up to it. What about Genesis 22: 12? After Abraham demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, God said,

"Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for **now** I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:12 NASB)

But if God did not already know what Abraham was going to do, then we must conclude that knowledge of the present—i.e. the state of Abraham's heart—is also hidden from God, not just knowledge of the future. It is better to interpret such passages in terms of God's testing of his people, like testing Adam to see if he would admit to what he did (Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, p. 452). God also put a rainbow in the cloud after the flood to "remember" his covenant with Noah and all creation (Gen. 9: 14-16), but how could God **forget** anything? The blood of the Passover lamb is applied to the doors of Israelite houses so that the Lord would "see" it, even though all the Israelites were gathered together in the land of Goshen segregated from the Egyptians (Ex. 22: 12; Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 112). If God does not know the present, the past, or the future, what exactly does God know? Anything?

In Isaiah's prophecy, God is presented as superior to all the other so-called gods precisely because he is **not limited** (Isa. 40—41). Such theories of God's limitations abound in theological circles only **because men value the idea of absolute human freedom more than the sovereign purposes of God.**

In discussing models of divine and human agency, Frame prefers the model of **the author and characters in a story**. In a story the author has **complete control** over his characters, but he shapes the story in such a way that the **integrity and freedom of the character** is not sacrificed. Characters live and act in ways consistent with the way the author develops them within the story. In the same way, the integrity and coherence of the story is also not sacrificed by the character. While **the author is the ultimate cause** of everything happening in the story, he writes it in such a way that the reader will understand the sequence of events in terms of **secondary human causation**. In the story of Joseph, the reader understands that Joseph is in Egypt because his brothers were treacherous. At the end of the story, the ultimate cause is expressed, the will of God to save the tribes of Israel. If some event seems disconnected or unexplainable in light of the whole story, it is generally because the author failed to weave the story together successfully (*DG*, pp. 156-157). What if Joseph had gotten lost in the wilderness and wandered into Egypt on his own?

So why have I spent so much time on this? It is important for a Christian worldview to know that **we are not in ultimate control over our lives**. We are not masters of our own fate or captains of our souls. God is in ultimate control. The only other alternative you have is that blind fate or naturalistic determinism is in control of your lives. And if God is in ultimate control anyway, why don't we willingly surrender to him in complete submission, obedience, and trust? Why don't we trust the one who made us to order our lives for the best possible results? Lack of such trust is how the human race got into its present mess in the first place.

### **What is True Freedom?**

**But let us now examine the biblical idea of freedom.** In what sense does Scripture describe human beings as free? Freedom is usually defined as **the ability to do whatever we want**. But this broad definition can be easily refuted. Does a 120-pound freshman have the freedom to become the starter tackle on the high school football team? The coach might have something to say about that! Even when I was in high school (a hundred years ago), the varsity tackles weighed in at 240 to 275 pounds. Does someone with an IQ of 80 have the freedom to become a nuclear scientist? Our freedom is always

limited by our inabilities, many of which are beyond our control. The popular mantra, “You can be whatever you want to be” simply isn’t true in an absolute sense, and we all know it, high school counselors to the contrary.

But Scripture also presents **spiritual** limitations on our freedom. Jesus tells us that our sin demonstrates spiritual slavery and that emancipation from this slavery must come from him.

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine;<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and **the truth will make you free.**"<sup>33</sup> They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.**"<sup>35</sup> "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever."<sup>36</sup> **"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.** (John 8:31-36 NASB)

**Freedom from sin** is the kind of freedom given priority in Scripture, not man’s ability to make choices, many of which are bad choices. The **freewill argument** attempting to explain the problem of evil in a world created by a good God maintains that

...God places such a high value on human free choice that he gave it to creatures even at the risk that they might bring evil into the world. One would imagine, then, that Scripture would abound with statements to the effect that **causeless free actions** by creatures are terribly important to God, that they bring him glory. But Scripture never suggests that God honors causeless choice [autonomous choice independent of any cause, including God or one’s character and desires] in any way or even recognizes its existence (Frame, *DG*, p. 140; cf. p. 138).

Scripture teaches that the **highest point of human freedom** will be found in heaven where **believers will not be able to sin**. The reason for this inability will be the same as the reason for God’s inability. God is not able to sin because sin is a contradiction of his nature. Libertarian freedom insists that human beings can choose contrary to their nature, but the Bible says that our choices are consistent with our nature.

Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly. (Proverbs 26:11 NASB)

It has happened to them [*those who seem to have become Christians, but return to their former life*] according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter 2:22 NASB)

Why do dogs eat their own vomit and pigs wallow in the mire. In the theme of Geico commercials, “If you are a dog or a pig, this is what you do.” **What do professing Christians do** whose lives have not really been changed by the gospel? They return to the old life they lived before they professed faith in Christ (Matt. 13: 3-8, 18-23, the parable of the sower).

In heaven we will be like Christ in his moral purity, and we will be repulsed by sin in the same way he is.

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, **we will be like Him**, because we will see Him just as He is. (1 John 3:2 NASB)

**The goal of human history** is God's people dwelling with him in perfect harmony, like Adam and Eve walking with God in the garden before the fall (Gen. 3: 8). Such harmony could not continue with rebellious people, so God put enmity between Satan and the woman, between his seed and her seed (Gen. 3: 15). Therefore, the inability to sin is a step beyond the freedom from the **dominion and control of sin** experienced by believers who have been justified (declared righteous) and set apart for fellowship with God (Rom. 6: 1-14). True believers are not in this present life **dominated** by sin—although they still sin—but in heaven, we will be free from the very presence of sin and from any desire to sin. The sanctification which began at conversion will be made complete in death. Is this a **limitation** of our freedom? Any genuine believer will consider it **liberation** (Rom. 7: 24).

On the other hand, the Bible speaks of the unbeliever's inability to please God as a real limitation.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup>because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, **for it is not even able to do so,** <sup>8</sup>**and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** (Romans 8:5-8 NASB)

Paul is speaking not of the inability of the unbeliever to keep God's law in any sense of the word. Unbelievers can be law-abiding citizens, good husbands and fathers, honest businessmen, and generous philanthropists; but they cannot please God or keep God's law with **the motive of loving God or the goal of doing everything for the glory of God and his kingdom**. Unbelievers may keep the standard of God's law, but they cannot please God in the highest sense without proper motives or goals.

**True freedom, then, is the ability to do what God wants us to do, to please Him at all times.** Christians have such freedom in a relative sense. Jesus says that knowing the truth sets us free (Jn. 8: 32). Yet, we know the truth now only partially. If we knew it fully, then we would perfectly obey God in everything we do. That perfect obedience will one day be a reality.

## **6. The Problem of Moral Evil in a World Created and Governed by an All-Powerful and All-Good God**

The existence of evil in a world created by a God who is good has always been a perplexing problem. The problem cannot be solved, as some attempt to solve it, by merely balancing the amount of good in the world against the amount of evil and seeing whether there is more good than evil. Any amount of evil in the world is still an enigma if certain things about God are believed: not only that God is good, but that he is also all-powerful. The logical argument, similar to one presented to philosophy class by my atheist professor over 40 years ago, is this (Frame, *DG*, p. 160):

1. If God is omnipotent [all-powerful], he is able to prevent evil.
2. If God is good, he wants to prevent evil.
3. But evil exists.

Conclusion: either God is not omnipotent, or he is not good.

My college philosophy professor extended the argument by using the conclusion as the fourth premise.

4. Either God is not omnipotent, or he is not good.
  5. But God's existence requires that he be all-powerful and all-good.
- Conclusion: God does not exist—at least the Christian idea of God.

A variation of this argument incorporates God's omniscience (Nash, p. 94, emphasis mine):

1. If God is good and loves all human beings, it is reasonable to believe that he **wants** to deliver the creatures he loves from evil and suffering.
2. If God is all-knowing, it is reasonable to believe that he **knows** how to deliver his creatures from evil and suffering.
3. If God is all-powerful, it is reasonable to believe that he is **able** to deliver his creatures from evil and suffering.

Either God does not want to eliminate evil, does not know how to eliminate evil, or doesn't have the power to eliminate evil. Evil exists in the world; therefore, it does not seem likely that God exists. Therefore, we might fill out the argument:

4. Evil and suffering exist.
- Conclusion: God must not be all-loving, all-knowing, or all-powerful. Therefore, the God of the Bible does not exist.

But it is argued by many Christian philosophers that there is nothing in any of the premises of these syllogisms which demands the conclusion that the Christian God does not exist. It is not inherently contradictory to say that God is all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful, and that evil exists in the world.

But we may also challenge the first premise: "1. If God is good and loves all human beings, it is reasonable to believe that he **wants** to deliver the creatures he loves from evil and suffering." We know in fact that God **did not want** to deliver Job from evil and suffering, at least not immediately. He did not wish to deliver Jesus from evil and suffering until the work of redemption was accomplished. Moreover, he has not wished to deliver believers from evil and suffering since the fall of man, and he does not wish to deliver them from evil and suffering today, at least not immediately.

However, he does have an eternal plan to deliver them from all evil and suffering. It's called by many names:

- "kingdom of heaven" (throughout Matthew's gospel)
- "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65: 17; Rev. 21: 1; cf. Matt. 5: 5)
- "restoration of all things" (Acts 3: 21)
- "the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18)
- "the creation...set free" (Rom. 8: 21)
- "new Jerusalem" (Rev. 21: 2); etc.

But for the time being, evil and suffering have an important place in God's plan. Frame enumerates some of the reasons for evil and suffering in this world. "God uses evil," he says,

to test his servants (Job; 1 Peter 1: 7; James 1: 3), to discipline them (Heb. 12: 7-11), to preserve their lives (Gen. 50: 20), to teach them patience and perseverance (James 1: 3-4), to redirect their attention to what is most important (Ps. 37), to enable them to comfort others (2 Cor. 1: 3-7), to enable them to bear powerful witness to the truth (Acts 7), to give them greater joy when suffering is replaced by glory (1 Pet. 4: 13), to judge the wicked, both in history (Deut. 28: 15-68) and in the life to come (Matt. 27: 41-46), to bring reward to persecuted believers (Matt. 5: 10-12), and to display the work of God (John 9: 3; cf. Ex. 9: 16; Rom. 9: 17).

For unbelievers, God sometimes uses evil and suffering **to bring them to repentance** (the pagan sailors in Jonah 1: 5-16; Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4: 33-37; note: there is nothing negative said about Nebuchadnezzar after this event; Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9; me, after being jilted by my college girlfriend in 1971, leading me to repentance and belief for the first time). I believe **“natural” disasters** (ordained and caused by God) also occur partly for this reason. They are **temporary warnings** of a much greater judgment to come, even greater than the global flood in the days of Noah. Some who survive localized disasters repent and believe. Jesus used the flood as a warning of the coming judgment.

"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. <sup>38</sup> "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matthew 24:37-39 NASB)

Very often, the devastating conditions of natural disasters and war put people into a state of mind more open to the gospel. This has been seen in Indonesia after the Tsunami in 2004 when Christian relief agencies poured into the country with food, water, and medical treatment. The same thing happened after the tsunami in Japan in 2011. MTW missionaries who had been living in Japan many years said they had seen much more openness to the gospel after this event.

On a cosmic scale, God uses evil as the **“grand demonstration”** of his wrath and power upon “vessels of wrath” (unbelievers) contrasted with the **grand demonstration** of mercy and grace upon “vessels of mercy”, also known as “the riches of his glory” (Rom. 9: 22-23; cf. Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration*). Would Christians understand grace apart from judgment? We have already seen some **morally good reasons** for God to allow evil in the world. To take a closer look, God had a perfectly moral reason for putting Abraham through the agony of almost sacrificing Isaac on the altar (Gen. 22). He was giving Abraham a picture of what he would do two thousand years later in sending his son as a substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. He also had a morally good reason for allowing Job’s affliction.

In each case God had a **perfectly good reason** for the human misery involved. It was a mark or achievement of faith for them not to waver in their conviction of God’s goodness, despite not being able to see or understand why He was doing to them what He did. Indeed, even in the case of the greatest crime in all of history—the crucifixion of the Lord of glory—the Christian professes that God’s goodness was not inconsistent with what the hands of lawless men performed. Was the killing of Christ evil? Surely. Did God have a **morally sufficient reason** for it? Just as surely. With Abraham we declare, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). And this goodness of God is beyond challenge: “Let God be true, though all men are liars” (Rom. 3:4) (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pp. 171-172, emphasis mine).

Behind the scenes, Satan accuses Job of loving God only for the material benefits he receives (Job 1: 10-11); but although disillusioned at God’s severe providence, Job never relinquishes his faith in God, even when encouraged to do so by his wife (Job 2: 9-10). Insisting from the beginning that Job is a

righteous man, God wins his “bet” with Satan—although an **omniscient** God never takes any risks—who is not heard from again after the second chapter. Meanwhile, God also maintains his sovereign prerogative to use Job’s suffering to prove that **genuine believers worship him for who he is and for his eternal promises**, not for the material benefits they receive in this life.

[Note: It is not accurate to say that Christians would love God and serve him even if he did **not** promise eternal life. Paul does not present the Christian hope in this way: “If we have hoped in Christ **in this life only**, we are of all men most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:19 NASB). “If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? **If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE**” (1 Corinthians 15:32 NASB).]

God can allow suffering for the purpose of glorifying himself because he is God. Although God never does anything contradictory to his nature or moral will, this does not put God on the same playing field as human beings. This is what we call the **Creator-creature distinction**. He is the potter and we are the clay (Rom. 9: 21; Jer. 18: 3-10). As Creator, he has the right to do with his creatures as he pleases within the limits of his own perfections. Speaking of Pharaoh and Esau, Paul anticipates the objection that God is unfair in dealing with his creatures.

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?”<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it?<sup>21</sup> Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Romans 9:18-21 NASB)

Therefore, the so-called problem of moral evil is solved by adding a fourth premise to the argument (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pp. 171-172):

1. GOD IS ALL-GOOD.
2. GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL.
3. EVIL EXISTS.
4. GOD HAS A MORALLY SUFFICIENT REASON FOR THE EVIL WHICH EXISTS.

#### **A Problem for the Unbeliever, not the Believer**

The Problem of Moral Evil in a World Created by a Good God is really **more of a problem for the unbeliever than the believer**. Just as the unbelieving naturalist cannot account for the existence of universals, the uniformity of nature, or the reality of the external universe he perceives with his eyes, he also cannot account for morality. This is because his epistemology and metaphysics **cannot account for such a distinction between good or evil**. To use Frame’s illustration again, if a thief comes into a bank and robs it at gunpoint, who can say that he has done wrong merely on the basis of observation? Can we see goodness or badness oozing out of this situation like a cloud of smoke?

Unless God’s standards govern our concept of goodness, **there can be no talk of good or evil at all**. If there is no personal Absolute, values must be based on impersonal things and forces, like **matter, motion, time, and chance**. But values cannot be based on any of these. They arise only in a context of personal relationships, and absolute standards presuppose an absolute person. Thus, the Christian can turn the tables on the unbeliever who raises the problem of evil: **the non-Christian has a “problem of good.”** Without God, there is neither good nor evil” (*DG*, p. 171, emphasis mine).

To quote Dostoevsky again, “If God does not exist, everything is permissible.” (I think. I’ve seen his statement quoted half a dozen different ways.)

Likewise, in **monistic religions** like Hinduism, Buddhism, or western variations of eastern mysticism (the new-age movement), everyone and everything is god. There is no Creator-creature distinction in monism; and if everything is one, there can be no ethical distinction between good and evil. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader of Cambodia who murdered thousands and ordered pregnant women disemboweled, is god (cf. *Reader’s Digest*, “The Red-Blood Trail of Ho Chi Minh”, month and year unknown). The student can see why we have not spent any time with philosophical monism. It is patently absurd, and were it not for a few celebrities like Tom Cruise and Shirley Maclain, it would not receive so much attention in American culture (my opinion). As Kenneth Gentry says in a footnote to one of Bahnsen’s lectures, if a monist asks you in a very solemn monotone voice: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” just reach across the table and slap him. (But don’t really do that. Try to love him and explain the absurdity of his belief.)

But the problem unbelievers have with evil in the world is usually **psychological** rather than philosophical (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pp. 172-174). People go through a great deal of personal suffering and misery in their own lives, and they suffer vicariously through the suffering of their loved ones—like one father in Indiana I spoke with who said he could not believe in a God who would let his son suffer and die from congenital heart disease. This belief was confirmed for him when he visited his son’s hospital that was crowded with diseased children just like his son. Suffering Job demanded an explanation for his affliction for 35 chapters (chapters 3 through 37) until God showed up in chapter 38. But God didn’t show up to explain or defend himself. He simply declared that he was God and that he created the world, including Job who would not be able to understand an explanation even if God gave him one. End of argument. But somehow, Job understood what appears to be God’s “non-explanation”, for he said, “Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth” (Job 40:4 NASB). After God’s second speech, Job says,

“I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup>Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? **“Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”** (Job 42:2-3 NASB)

And this is the proper response. To accuse God of evil or to demand him to defend his actions is to make declarations about things **we don’t understand**, things “too wonderful” (that is, too full-of-wonder) for us. Rather, we should embrace the mystery of God’s dealings with us and the world, and bow before his sovereignty.

But rather than humbling themselves before God, people would rather accuse God of what they would call an **obvious violation of goodness**—even though without God they cannot account for good or evil. **Goodness, of course, is what the unbeliever calls goodness** on the basis of his autonomous human reasoning independent of God’s word. Therefore, unbelievers wish to trade places with God who must now answer their questions about his behavior. This is essentially a **repetition of primeval history** when Adam and Eve were put in the position of determining whether they should refrain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or eat it. God said one thing; Satan said another. The ball was in their court to independently decide for themselves what to do. Was God **really** looking out for their best interests, or was he holding out on them? Could he be trusted to tell them the truth? Maybe



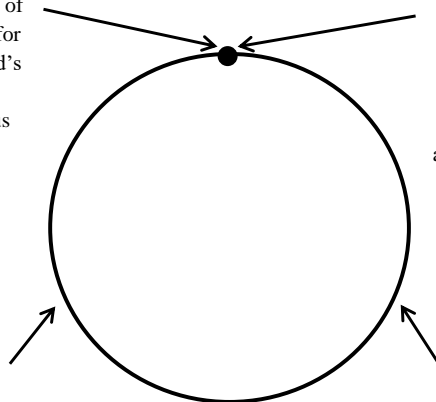
God was the Devil, and the Devil was God. Thus, whenever a believer or an unbeliever takes God to court—a law-court, that is—to determine whether God had the prerogative to do this or that and to demand an explanation of why he did it, **he is thinking like Adam and Eve**. And we know how that turned out!

So then, the Bible calls upon us **to trust that God has a morally sufficient reason** for the evil which can be found in this world, **but it does not tell us what that sufficient reason is**. The believer often struggles with this situation, walking by faith rather than by sight. The unbeliever, however, finds the situation intolerable for his pride, feelings, or rationality. He refuses to trust God. He will not believe that God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists, unless the unbeliever is given that reason for his own examination and assessment. **To put it briefly, the unbeliever will not trust God unless God subordinates Himself to the intellectual authority and moral evaluation of the unbeliever**—unless God consents to trade places with the sinner. The problem of evil comes down to the question of whether a person should have faith in God and His word or rather place faith in his own human thinking and values. **It finally becomes a question of ultimate authority within a person's life**. And in that sense, the way in which unbelievers struggle with the problem of evil is but **a continuing testimony to the way in which evil entered human history in the first place** (*Always Ready*, pp. 173-174).

In other words, we repeat the sin of Adam and Eve every time we question God's goodness in the face of evil and suffering. As finite human beings—like Job—who are we to question what God is doing? We can barely plan two days activity in a row, nor can we determine the consequences of that activity the day after. Much less can we declare the end of human history from the beginning.

Essentially the unbeliever reasons in a limited circle starting from his **lack of faith** in God's word and reasoning back to where he started, **lack of faith** in God's word. This autonomy is illustrated in the following diagram.

**Ending point:** Rejection of the biblical explanation for evil. Lack of faith in God's word and trust in the authority of autonomous human reasoning



**Starting point:** Evil is incompatible with the goodness and power of God. Lack of faith in God's word and trust in the authority of autonomous human reasoning

Biblical explanation found outside the limited circle of man's reasoning: God has a morally sufficient reason for all the evil in this world, but he does not tell us what this reason is.

The believer, on the other hand, should not be intimidated or embarrassed that he cannot explain why an all-good and all-powerful God permits evil in the world. All this proves is that believers don't know everything. "But," as Nash says, "that is hardly surprising news" (*Worldviews in Conflict*, p. 99).

## 7. The Problem of Authority

### Islam and the Qur'an

#### Beginnings

Muhammed was born about 570 AD and became a religious leader forty years later in 610 AD with his alleged revelations from the angel Gabriel. He died in 632 AD; therefore, his religious leadership of Islam lasted a short 22 years. Through his contact with Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible, he came to the conclusion that there was only one God. Therefore, he rejected the deity of Christ and the Trinitarian personality of God. The New Testament, he held, did not teach that Christ was God, but was later distorted to teach Trinitarianism, another form of polytheism.

Rejected by his own tribe of polytheists, the Quraysh in Mecca, he began propagating his new-found faith through warfare. In 622 AD, he fled Mecca to settle in Medina—a flight called the Hijrah—gathering together a band of loyal warriors who had accepted his message. The movement was initially financed by means of raiding Quraysh caravans from Mecca, the city whose inhabitants had rejected Muhammed as a prophet. Loyal followers who did not wish to fight were encouraged with the following revelations (cited in Geisler, p. 78; quoted from noblequran.com):

**4:95.** Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home), except those who are disabled (by injury or are blind or lame, etc.), and those who strive hard and fight in the Cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has preferred in grades those who strive hard and fight with their wealth and their lives above those who sit (at home). Unto each, Allah has promised good (Paradise), **but Allah has preferred those who strive hard and fight, above those who sit (at home) by a huge reward;**

**3:195.** So their Lord accepted of them (their supplication and answered them), "Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female. You are (members) one of another, so those who emigrated and were driven out from their homes, and suffered harm in My Cause, and **who fought, and were killed (in My Cause)**, verily, I will remit from them their evil deeds and admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow (in Paradise); a reward from Allah, and with Allah is the best of rewards."

Being "driven out from their homes" is a reference to the flight of Muslims followers from Mecca to Medina.

At this point, suffice it to say that terrorism and militarism have a long, established tradition in the Islamic faith, as does the beheading of Allah's conquered foes. Islam's momentum received its major boost in March 624 when Muslim forces, outnumbered three to one, defeated 950 Meccan warriors at the Battle of Badr. Muhammed interpreted this victory as a sure sign of Allah's favor and the vindication of his message. As a result of his increasing prestige, Muhammed ordered the execution of some of his leading opponents in Medina, including poets who had satirized the prophet, and the

expulsion of one of the three Jewish tribes. In spite of his popularity in Medina, the Jews there had rejected his message due to discrepancies between the Qur'an and the OT scriptures. One year after the Battle of Badr, Muhammed suffered a crushing defeat at Uhud by the same Meccan forces that had come back to redeem themselves. In spite of this defeat, his warriors continued raiding neighboring Arabian tribes and looting their villages. He also expelled the second Jewish tribe from Medina which had shown approval of Muhammed's defeat at Uhud. After the failure of the siege of Medina by Meccan forces, Muhammed attacked the third and last Jewish tribe in Medina whom he had suspected of plotting with the forces of Mecca.

"Then they surrendered, and the apostle confined them in Medina...Then the apostle went out to the market of Medina...and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and **struck off their heads** in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches... There were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900" (William J. Federer, *What Every American Needs to Know About the Qur'an—A History of Islam and the United States*, pp. 49-50).

One historian, Tor Andrae, has this comment about the initial animosity between Muhammad and the Jews.

"One must see Mohammad's cruelty toward the Jews against the background of the fact that **their scorn and rejection was the greatest disappointment of his life**, and for a time they threatened completely to destroy his prophetic authority. For him, therefore, it was a fixed axiom that **the Jews were the sworn enemies of Allah and His revelation**. Any mercy toward them was out of the question" (quoted in Geisler, p. 81, emphasis mine).

Continuing success in his raiding campaigns attracted more followers (everyone likes a winner), even leading to the defection of some leading men from Mecca. After the peace treaty with Mecca was breached in 630 by an attack on Muhammad's allies, Muhammad invaded and conquered Mecca with 10,000 soldiers. Mecca was the city of his birth, and possibly for this reason he was willing to pardon most of the leaders of Mecca with few exceptions, thus winning the respect and admiration of his conquered foes (Geisler, pp. 77-81).

### **Foundation of Islam—the Qur'an**

The foundation of Islam is similar to the foundation of the Christian faith **in one particular sense**. Islam, like Christianity, is **based upon a book**, and this book is allegedly from God. Christians believe that Christ is the *logos*, "the word of God" who was with God" and who "was God". Christ is the fullest visible expression of God's will for his people, but Christians also recognize that the Bible had many human authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit of Christ over a period of 1500 years. This is not true of the Qur'an, which Muslims believe was revealed to his prophet Muhammed directly. Some Islamic scholars have argued for **the pre-existence of the Qur'an** and its **uncreated essence**. Whereas the Bible teaches that the Word became flesh, Muslims believe that "the Word became a Book." In fact, as Mary is the vehicle by which the Word of God, Christ, comes to earth, Muhammed is the vehicle by which the Word of Allah, the Qur'an, comes to earth. It is orthodox Muslim doctrine to say that "the Qur'an is the uncreated speech of God that has existed in the mind of God from eternity" (Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam—The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, pp. 100-102).

Muhammed never claimed to produce miracles, but maintained that the Qur'an is the **ultimate miracle** of the Muslim faith—still the most widespread and unshakeable doctrine among Muslims today. It superior to all other known literature in its **beauty, style, and laws**; and unlike the Bible, it is claimed, the Qur'an has been **perfectly preserved** from corruption from the original to its present form today. We will now examine these and other claims.

### Eloquence and Beauty as Evidence of the Qur'an's Divine Inspiration

The superior literary eloquence of the Qur'an is by no means an established given. Some examples of its eloquence are found below (quoted in Geisler, p. 194).

Sura [chapter] 111:

Perish the hand Of the Father of Flame! Perish he! No profit to him From all his wealth, And all his gains! Burnt soon will he be In a Fire Of blazing Fame! His wife shall carry The (crackling) wood—As fuel!—A twisted rope Of palm-leaf fibre Round her (own) neck!

Sura 109:

Say: O ye That reject Faith! I worship not that Which ye worship, Nor will ye worship That which I worship. And I will not worship That which ye have been Wont to worship, Nor will ye worship That which I worship. To you be your Way, And to me mine.

But if, for sake of argument, we were to agree with Muslims that the Qur'an was unsurpassed in eloquence, **it would not prove that the Qur'an was inspired of God.** There are many works of literature that would be considered by unbiased scholars as far more eloquent than the Qur'an but which no one believes have their inspired source in God: Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Mozart's music produced before he was forty years old—some when he was six years old—Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Geisler, p. 192). Many, including all Christians, would consider the Psalms as far more eloquent than the above verses from the Qur'an, but even the eloquence of the Psalms is not the reason promoted by evangelical scholars for their conviction that they are God's word. In fact, I have never heard a single argument for the Bible being the word of God on the basis of eloquence or literary genius.

### The Perfect Preservation of the Qur'an

Most of the followers of Muhammed who had committed the Qur'an to memory were killed shortly after his death. Early Muslim tradition has it that the Islamic scribes copied the oral tradition on "pieces of paper, stones, palm leaves, shoulder blades, ribs, and bits of leather." These fragments were later gathered together and combined to make the Qur'an. During the reign of the third Muslim Caliph, Uthman, several Muslim communities were using **different versions** of the Qur'an. Muhammed's follower Zayd was commissioned by Uthman to oversee the official revised version which has remained intact up to the present day; **all other versions were destroyed.** This proves that there was **no perfectly preserved copy** of the Qur'an—unless we dismiss all the other versions purged by Uthman. Archeologist Arthur Jeffrey's *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*, confirms the theory that there were many different versions of the Qur'an existing before Uthman's purge. Even today, not all Muslim's accept the same version of the Qur'an, and the variations are substantial (Geisler, pp. 197-198).

“The only difference [in the preservation of the text] between the Qur’an and the Bible today is that the Christian Church in the interest of truth, carefully preserved the variant readings. . . whereas the Muslims at the time of Uthman, deemed it expedient to destroy as far as possible all the evidences of different readings of the Qur’an in the cause of standardizing one text for the whole of the Muslim” (A. Guillaume, quoted in Geisler, p. 311).

However, as with the claim of eloquence, divine inspiration is not definitively proven by perfect transmission of the text. Even a perfect text may be **perfectly false**. As Geisler and Saleeb say,

The Muslim claim that they have the true religion because they have the only perfectly copied Holy Book, is as logically fallacious as someone claiming it is better to have a perfect printing of a counterfeit thousand dollar bill than a slightly imperfect printing of a genuine one! (p. 199)

With regard to the Old Testament, Jesus quotes from almost every book, including Jonah, thus verifying the truthfulness of the OT. Moreover, we find numerous **distant predictions of future events** in the OT which are later fulfilled. **But is Jesus’ witness to the OT valid?** Well, it isn’t if Jesus is the imposter and liar (megalomaniac?) that many accuse him of being. But his witness of the OT is definitive **if** Jesus turns out to be who he claimed to be, God the Son, and if what is written about him can be reasonably substantiated; and it has. What I mean by this is that if everything the NT says about Jesus had been historically demonstrated as **the fabrication of overactive imaginations**—as some liberals claim—then the Christian faith would have never survived the first century. While the Muslim faith had the military backing of armies and the financial backing of looting, Christians made no armed resistance at all. Instead, they were hunted, persecuted, and killed; and they made converts through preaching and deeds of mercy to others.

The eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection who wrote the New Testament verify the truthfulness of Jesus’ claims to be God the Son. After his resurrection, Jesus spent forty days and nights in the land of Palestine producing convincing proofs that this risen Galilean was the same Jesus who was crucified. Forty days was sufficient time for some astute skeptic to dig up enough evidence proving that this was a different man altogether, but no such evidence ever surfaced.

However, it should be noted that even the internal testimony and consistency of the Scriptures and the external witness of those who saw the crucifixion and the risen Christ **will not be convincing** to the unbelieving mind unless the Holy Spirit opens his heart to the truth.

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.<sup>26</sup> **"But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.**"<sup>27</sup> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; (John 10:24-27 NASB)

The unbeliever does not believe the testimony of Scripture because of his religious commitment to independent, autonomous thinking. His unproven religious presuppositions—empiricism, naturalism, monism, etc.—lead him to believe either that miracles are impossible, or that everyone is god, or that he will be reincarnated in a future life; or any number of other unproven presuppositions. If he is Muslim, he is committed to the authority of the Qur’an. We are deceiving ourselves if we believe that **facts alone** will convince anyone of the truth of Christianity. No fact is a **brute fact** or an

**uninterpreted fact.** Everyone looks at the **same** facts through the lens of his own presuppositions. Looking through pink sunglasses, everything looks pink.

**But as for Muhammad, what substantial evidence do we have that he was Allah’s prophet?** While Jesus said, “the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me”, Muhammad himself claimed no miracles, and his followers do not claim that he rose from the dead. We have already discussed the invalidity of saying that the Qur’an is a miracle because of its eloquence and preservation. Even if both of these things are true—and they are not—the “miracle” of the Qur’an remains unimpressive. Something else must have been in operation to convince thousands, and now 1.3 billion, that the man Muhammad, who never claimed to be God, was indeed God’s last and most important prophet. Geisler and Saleed may have their finger on the reason when they point out that most of Muhammad’s followers did not come during his initially peaceful missionary activity. Only a relatively small number were won with moral persuasion, and He was able to build a following only **after** he began an extensive raiding campaign of city after city.

Robert Spencer writes,

When the forces of Islam united the scattered tribes of Arabia into a single community, the newly Islamic Arabia was surrounded by predominantly Christian lands—notably the Byzantine imperial holdings of Syria and Egypt, as well as the venerable Christian lands of North Africa. [Yes, North Africa was at one time predominantly Christian, producing some of the richest Christian theology of the church, notably the doctrine of Christ by Athanasius and the doctrine of salvation by Augustine, to name only two of many famous African theologians. My note.] Four of Christendom’s five principal cities—Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem—lay within striking distance of Arabia. The Byzantine Empire’s great rival, Persia, also had a significant Christian population.

But for centuries now, the Middle East, North Africa, and Persia (Iran) have been regarded as the heart of the Islamic world. **Did this transformation take place through preaching and the conversion of hearts and minds? Not at all: The sword spread Islam.** Under Islamic rule, the non-Muslim majorities of those regions were gradually whittled down to the tiny minorities they are today, through repression, discrimination [*dhimmitude*], and harassment that made conversion to Islam the only path to a better life (*The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* p. 107, emphasis mine).

When faced by hostile Islamic armies, non-Muslims were given **three choices**. In an important communication called a *hadith* (sayings of Muhammed not found in the Qur’an), Muhammed said,

“When you meet your enemies who are polytheists, invite them to **three courses of action**. If they respond **to any one of these**, you also accept it and **withhold yourself from doing them any harm**. Invite them to accept Islam: if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them...If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizya [a poll tax on non-Muslims]. If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah’s help and fight them” (quoted by Spencer, pp. 35-36, emphasis mine).

(One wonders what Muhammed meant when he said that option three would not result in any harm.)

A **pluralistic society** where all religions may be practiced within the boundaries of civil law is **not recognized by the Qur'an**—and we are talking about **Islam** in general, not simply **radical Islam**. Not a single country has freedom of religion where Islam is the established state religion. The reason for this is that the eschatological goal (things pertaining to the future) of Islam is world domination by any means necessary. So far, the means has not been missionary zeal to persuade people to follow Islam; it has always meant and still means **forced subjugation of religious minorities**. Muslim leaders of the seventh and eighth century sieges of Constantinople fully understood the requirements for jihad. During this time one such leader said,

“The Great God says in the Koran: ‘O true believers, when you encounter the unbelievers, strike off their heads.’

This was in obedience to the Qur'an (or Koran) which says in Sura (chapter) 47: 4,

“When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield, strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly.”

Not surprisingly, many people groups throughout the centuries decided to **“convert”** to Islam when faced with the prospects of death or second-class citizenship called *dhimmitude*. *Dhimmi* means both “protected” and “guilty”. Non-Muslim Christians or Jews are protected by the “book” (the Bible) because they have received revelations from Allah—revelations which they have since “distorted” through many subsequent translations. They are given higher status than pagan people like the Hindus or Buddhists who historically have been treated far worse by Muslims than Christians and Jews. The *dhimmi* are also “guilty” because they have rejected the last and greatest revelation of Allah’s prophet, Muhammed. They are not only required to pay heavy taxes, but their places of worship, temples and churches, are subject to being torn down by authorities if suspected of anti-Muslim activities. After being destroyed, they can never be rebuilt. Historically, *dhimmis* were also required to give three days food and lodging to any traveling Muslim who requested it, and Muslim travelers could also reside in Christian churches. They must wear distinct clothing to distinguish themselves from Muslims.

Christians cannot erect crosses outside their churches, nor sound the bells in their churches too loudly—a very ironic requirement considering the millions of minaret towers with loud-speakers **in predominately Christian countries** announcing the times of prayer. I once stayed in a hotel in Gisenyi, Rwanda and was awakened at 5 in the morning by an Imam blaring *Allahu akbar* (“Allah is the greatest”) over loud speakers. I told the hotel manager that I did not need a Muslim cleric to tell me when I needed to get up in the morning and left for another hotel. While every free or quasi-free country in the world is bending over backwards to grant Muslims freedom of religion—perhaps through fear—Islamic regimes are doing whatever they can to subjugate the free world to Islam, including the fomenting of jihad in mosques across America and Europe.

Coupled with the dim prospects of those who resisted the onslaught of Islam are the bright promises to Islamic soldiers who wage war against unbelievers. Islamic tradition (*hadith*) says,

The sword is the key of heaven and of hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two month’s fasting and prayer. Whoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven at the day of judgement.

Women are also part of the bargain.

**4:57** But those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah - Islamic Monotheism) and do deeds of righteousness, We shall admit them to Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise), abiding therein forever. Therein they shall have *Azawajun Mutahharatun* [purified mates or wives (having no menses, stools, urine, etc.)] and We shall admit them to shades wide and ever deepening (Paradise) (noblequran.com).

**2:25** And give glad tidings to those who believe and do righteous good deeds, that for them will be Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise). Every time they will be provided with a fruit therefrom, they will say: "This is what we were provided with before," and they will be given things in resemblance (i.e. in the same form but different in taste) and they shall have therein *Azawajun Mutahharatun* (purified mates or wives), (having no menses, stools, urine, etc.) and they will abide therein forever (noblequran.com).

I didn't make up any of this. I just copied and pasted. The "seventy-two virgins" promotion comes from the hadith, not from the Qur'an (cf. Noble Quran.com). Whether seventy or seventy-two is ambiguous.

"He [Muhammad] said (in a *Hadith*, Islamic tradition):  
*'[There is] a palace of pearls in Paradise and in it seventy courts of ruby... And in each court [there are] seventy houses of green emerald stone. In every house, seventy beds. On every bed, seventy mattresses of every color and on every mattress a woman.'* (*Hadith*)  
 The writing of the Prophet [Muhammad in this *Hadith*]... is intended to fill Muslims with desire for Paradise... to be worthy of it, because only three dwell there: **Prophets, Righteous and Shahids (Martyrs for Allah)**." (*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Jan. 2, 2004)

The message comes from all parts of society, including religious leaders, TV news reports, schoolbooks, and even music videos. Newspapers routinely describe the death and funerals of terrorists as their "wedding." The indoctrination has impacted so significantly on Palestinian society that **mothers celebrate their sons' death as "weddings"** and some even state that their sons' motivation to fight Israel and be killed was to reach Paradise and marry the Dark-Eyed Virgins (*Palestinian Media Watch*, palwatch.org).

Thus, Muhammad invented the seventy-two-virgins (70?) myth as an **incentive for warfare**, sometimes suicidal warfare. In Islam, the final judgment is based upon works, not grace. One's good and evil deeds are written in a book, and there is no certainty that one's good deeds will outweigh his evil deeds, resulting in salvation. Thus, there is no assurance of going to paradise unless one dies under one of three conditions: **martyrdom, childhood before puberty, or mental retardation**. Those who are immature or mentally incompetent are not considered accountable for their actions. No one can dictate to Allah what he is obligated to do (Sire, p. 261). (This is quite contrary to Christianity in which God obligates himself by a covenant to save us on the basis of the death of Christ and our trust in his atoning work. Otherwise, God's promise to save can be changed at the whim of God's displeasure.) Quite naturally, Muslims are willing to guarantee their place in paradise through martyrdom rather than living a full life and discovering their fate at the end when it is too late.



Since the promises of paradise are geared toward the sensual desires of men, **one wonders what paradise has in store for Muslim women**, especially those who are not virgins. Women are property, and the institution of slavery in the world will not be dead as long as there is Islam. Their second-class citizenship in Muslim countries is highly disputed by Muslim writers, but the proof is in the practice. Consider the following quotations (noblequran.com; emphasis mine):

**4:34.** Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because **Allah has made one of them to excel the other**, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband's property, etc.). As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) **beat them** (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Ever Most High, Most Great.

**2:223.** Your wives are a **tilth** [cultivated field] for you, so go to your tilth (have sexual relations...)

**2:282.** O you who believe! When you contract a debt for a fixed period, write it down... And get two witnesses out of your own men. **And if there are not two men (available), then a man and two women**, such as you agree for witnesses, so that if one of them (two women) errs, the other can remind her.

**4:3.** And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan-girls, then marry (other) women of your choice, **two or three, or four** but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or (the captives and the slaves) that your right hands possess. That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice.

The Bible encourages and requires sexual love in marriage, as the Song of Solomon attests; but in stark contrast to the Qur'an's emphasis upon male sensual appetites, **the Bible presents the ultimate "wedding" as the spiritual wedding of Christ and his church.** The relationship between Christ and each individual Christian through the Holy Spirit will be so wonderful that even earthly marriage between man and woman will no longer be necessary as the most intimate companionship possible.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,<sup>26</sup> so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,<sup>27</sup> **that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory**, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.... This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:25-27, 32 NASB)

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." (Revelation 19:7 NASB)

"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Matthew 22:30 NASB)

I have often wondered how strange it will be in heaven when I am no longer married to Fran, my faithful companion of forty years; yet, I know that our happy marriage on earth is nothing compared to the relationship we will have as brother and sister in the new heavens and earth. No matter how much we love each other now as a **sinful marriage partners**, our love for one another and enjoyment of one

another as **sinless siblings** will far surpass anything we have experienced in our marriage—and that is something to look forward to.

The Bible does teach that women must be **functionally subordinate** to the leadership of men in the home and the church. This is based upon the functional subordination of Christ to God the Father. But it also teaches an **equality of essence** as far as the person is concerned parallel to the equality of essence between Christ and the Father. Christ and the Father are one, yet Christ functionally subordinates himself to the Father to accomplish the Father's will of redemption.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, **there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** (Galatians 3:28 NASB)

The phrase, "one in Christ Jesus", speaks of equality of essence just as John 10: 30 speaks of the equality of essence between God the Father and Christ.

"I and the Father are one." (John 10:30 NASB)

For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, (Colossians 1:19 NASB)

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, (Colossians 2:9 NASB)

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? **He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'?** (John 14:8-9 NASB)

The functional subordination of the Son to the Father and the wife to the husband is developed in other passages.

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and **the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.** (1 Corinthians 11:3 NASB)

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:38 NASB)

Notice that Paul **did not say** in 1 Cor. 11: 3 that the man is head of "**every** woman", but "**a** woman." Paul is encouraging a woman to be subordinate to **one specific man**, her husband, not to all men in general; although in 1 Timothy 2, he requires the submission of all women to the leadership of the church within the limits of their primary loyalty to Christ and his word (see below). **The Qur'an, on the other hand, teaches that men are generally superior to women.** And although Christian husbands are the heads of their own wives, their headship must be expressed in a manner that **imitates the headship of Christ over his church.** Christ laid down his life for the well-being and salvation of the church; he did not beat or abuse the church.

Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord.<sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body.<sup>24</sup> But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.<sup>25</sup>

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, (Ephesians 5:22-25 NASB)

The phrase, “**as to the Lord**”, sets the parameters of the wife’s obedience. Her total commitment and first loyalty is not to her husband, but to the Lord; and she can do nothing fundamentally in disobedience to her Lord. Likewise, the headship of the husband must be understood within the boundaries set by Christ’s love for his church. The husband can do nothing legitimately that violates those boundaries. Yet, leadership is fundamental in every sphere of society and cannot be set aside without anarchy. A leaderless society is a Marxist pipe dream (source unknown). Someone must lead and others must follow. Society cannot function on majority vote on every issue; and in the case of marriage, there is no majority.

### The Unity of the Qur’an

Much can be said about the unity of the Bible. The message of salvation through a redeemer is the repetitive theme throughout in spite of the fact that it has many authors (the exact number unknown, since we don’t know who wrote some books) over a period of 1500 years. But what about the Qur’an?

The Qur’an contains early and later revelations of the prophet. **The later revelations are more important than the earlier ones and may serve to abrogate the early ones.** Compare the following verses from the Qur’an (quoted in Geisler, p. 202, or from noblequran.com).

**2:106.** Whatever a Verse (revelation) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a **better one or similar to it.** Know you not that Allah is able to do all things?

**2:256.** There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path.

The Islamic rulings (*fatawa*) of Saudi Sheikh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid are widely read in the Islamic world. Commenting on the peaceful statement of Sura 2: 256, Saalih quotes the intolerant Suras 9: 29 and 8: 39. He also quotes 9: 5, saying, “This verse is known as Ayat al-Sayf (the Verse of the Sword). **These and similar verses abrogate those saying that there is no compulsion to become a Muslim**” (Spencer, p. 27).

**8:39.** And fight them until there is no more *Fitnah* (disbelief and polytheism: i.e. worshipping others besides Allah) and the religion (worship) will all be for Allah Alone [in the whole of the world ]. But if they cease (worshipping others besides Allah), then certainly, Allah is All-Seer of what they do.

**9:29.** Fight against those who (1) believe not in Allah, (2) nor in the Last Day, (3) nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger (4) and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth (i.e. Islam) among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), until they pay the *Jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

**9:5.** Then when the Sacred Months (the 1st, 7th, 11th, and 12th months of the Islamic calendar) have passed, **then kill the *Mushrikun* (see V.2:105) [the disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah, idolaters, polytheists, pagans, etc.] wherever you find them,** and capture them and besiege them,

and prepare for them each and every ambush. But if they repent and perform *As-Salat (Iqamat-as-Salat)*, and give *Zakat*, then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

**10:64.** No change can there be in the Words of Allah, this is indeed the supreme success.

**2:62.** Verily! Those who believe **and those who are Jews and Christians**, and Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve .

**4:150.** Verily, those who disbelieve in Allah and His Messengers and wish to make distinction between Allah and His Messengers (by believing in Allah and disbelieving in His Messengers) saying, "We believe in some but reject others," and wish to adopt a way in between.

**4:151.** They are in truth disbelievers. And We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating torment.

In an earlier Sura, Muhammad spoke of Jews and Christians who did good deeds and believed in Allah (the Muslim name for God) as believers. This is abrogated by a later Sura stating that Christians and Jews cannot be believers if they fail to accept Muhammad as Allah's prophet.

Logically it is difficult to reconcile Sura 2: 256 with what is known as the "Verse of the Sword" (Sura 9: 5). They are **conflicting** commands, not "something better or similar." It is generally acknowledged that the Quran is not arranged chronologically from the earliest revelations to the later revelations. Rather, the suras (chapters) are arranged from the longest suras to the shortest. The **Meccan suras** are generally the **shortest and earliest revelations** of Muhammed while the **Medinan suras** are the **longest and latest**. It is in the Medinan suras that one finds exhortations to jihad warfare against unbelievers. **Some Islamic scholars admit that that the Verse of the Sword abrogates 124 verses of the Quran which are tolerant to unbelievers.** Historically, the less tolerant verses of the Medinan suras—the later suras—correspond to the time in Muhammed's life during which he was engaged in military struggle against other religious groups. "In fact, **most Muslim authorities agree that the ninth sura was the very last section of the Qur'an to be revealed.**" One well-known Qur'an commentator, Ibn Kathir, says that Sura 9: 5 "abrogated every agreement of peace between the Prophet and any idolater, every treaty, and every term....No idolater had any more treaty or promise of safety ever since Surah Bara'ah [the ninth sura] was revealed." Another Quran commentator, Ibn Juzayy, concurs with this interpretation saying that the purpose of Sura 9:5 is "abrogating every peace treaty in the Qur'an" (Spencer, p. 25, emphasis mine, words in brackets his).

One wonders how an all-knowing God can make statements that are inconsistent with one another or laws which must be later abrogated in favor of **better** laws. How can a perfect Word be improved? The Qur'an was written over a period of only 22 years or so; and it is difficult to imagine why divine revelation would need such radical emendation (scholarly improvement) over such a short period of time to accommodate a historical situation which had remained **virtually unchanged**. But in the case of the transition between the OT epoch and the NT epoch, 400 years had passed between Malachi and Christ alone, not to speak of the other 1100 years of progressive revelation. This emendation would be unnecessary except to accommodate the whims of a false prophet.

The Qur'an is also **inconsistent about the teaching of the OT and NT scriptures** (Geisler, p. 217), treating them as valid representations of the words of Allah to the OT prophets and later to Jesus. Note the following quotations (some cited in Geisler, all quoted from noblequran.com, emphasis mine):

**5:44.** Verily, We did send down the Taurat (Torah) [to Musa (Moses)], **therein was guidance and light, by which the Prophets, who submitted themselves to Allah's Will, judged the Jews.** And the rabbis and the priests [too judged the Jews by the Taurat (Torah) after those Prophets] for to them was entrusted the protection of **Allah's Book**, and they were witnesses thereto.

Allah supposedly revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, who is likely one of the referents of the first person plural, "we". In these verses, Muhammad—the true author—is acknowledging that the OT prophets submitted themselves to Allah's will and judged the Jews by means of the Torah—the Law of Moses, also called the Taurat by Muhammed (5: 44). Moreover, **the OT prophets were entrusted with the protection of "Allah's book" (5: 44)**. "Allah's book" in 5: 44 is **not the Qur'an** which was not yet completed. The context of the sentence shows that this book is the OT to whom the prophets, rabbis, and priests were witnesses. Here, Muhammed seems to forget that throughout the OT the true prophets of God preached the Law of Moses (the Torah) not only to the people but also to the priests, many of whom were corrupt. Jesus later rebuked the rabbis (Scribes and Pharisees) for being blind leaders of the blind.

**5:45.** And We ordained therein for them: "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal." But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity, it shall be for him an expiation. And whosoever does not judge by that which Allah has revealed, such are the *Zalimun* (polytheists and wrong-doers - of a lesser degree).

Sura 5: 45 is a reference to the "lex talionis" in the Law. In Exodus 21 below, note the reference to an unborn child who dies in childbirth as the result of a fight between two men in which a pregnant woman is inadvertently struck. If the child dies ("*any further injury*"), the man who struck the woman shall pay with his life ("life for life"). Since it was accidental, the man would probably be able to ransom his life with money. On the other hand, a penalty is still paid to the "woman's husband" even if "there is no further injury"—i.e. if the unborn child lives.

"If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*.<sup>23</sup> "But if there is *any further injury*, then you shall appoint *as a penalty life for life,*<sup>24</sup> *eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,*<sup>25</sup> *burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.*" (Exodus 21:22-25 NASB)

**5:46.** And in their footsteps, We sent 'Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) , **confirming the Taurat (Torah) that had come before him,** and We gave him **the Injeel (Gospel)**, in which was guidance and light and **confirmation of the Taurat (Torah) that had come before it,** a guidance and an admonition for *Al-Muttaqun* (the pious - see V.2:2).

In the footsteps of the OT prophets, Allah (through the angel Gabriel) sent Jesus the son of Mary upholding and confirming the Law of Moses (Torah). To Jesus was given the gospel which was in agreement with the Law of Moses. **Thus, Muhammad teaches here that Allah gave Jesus the gospel, thus recognizing the truth of the gospel given to Jesus.**

**5:47. Let the people of the Injeel (Gospel) judge by what Allah has revealed therein.** And whosoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed (then) such (people) are the *Fasiqun* (the rebellious i.e. disobedient (of a lesser degree) to Allah.

**5:48.** And We have sent down to you (O Muhammad...) **the Book (this Qur'an) in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it and Mohayminan (trustworthy in highness and a witness) over it (old Scriptures).** So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging away from the truth that has come to you.

In Sura 5: 48, the Qur'an is said to confirm the Scripture (the OT and the gospels) which came before it.

**5:69.** Surely, those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah, in His Messenger Muhammad...and all that was revealed to him from Allah), **those who are the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians, - whosoever believed in Allah and the Last Day, and worked righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.**

The Jews, Sabians, and Christians are described in this verse as those who **"believed in Allah"**. And how did they believe in Allah? They believed "the book" Allah had given them, namely, the OT and the gospels.

**5:70.** Verily, We took the covenant of the Children of Israel and sent them Messengers. Whenever there came to them a Messenger with what they themselves desired not - a group of them they called liars, and others among them they killed.

This is a reference to the gospels, which Muhammed recognized in their "uncorrupted" edition.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,<sup>30</sup> and say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.'<sup>31</sup> "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. (Matthew 23:29-31 NASB)

In the following verses Muhammed distances himself from those who identify Jesus the Messiah as Allah or who believe in the Trinity. In Muhammed's estimation, this was just another form of polygamy which he had earlier repudiated. Yet, according to Muhammed, Jesus repudiates the worship of others, saying that only the Lord should be worshipped.

**5:72.** Surely, they have disbelieved who say: "**Allah is the Messiah ['Iesa (Jesus)], son of Maryam (Mary).**" But the Messiah ['Iesa (Jesus)] said: "O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord." Verily, whosoever sets up **partners in worship with Allah**, then Allah has forbidden Paradise for him, and the Fire will be his abode.

"Partners in worship with Allah" is a reference to Jesus Christ whom Christians believe to be God. The quotation of Iesa (Jesus) in Sura 5: 72 could be an allusion to Jesus' response to Satan's temptation to worship him.

Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" (Matthew 4:10 NASB)

**5:73.** Surely, disbelievers are those who said: "Allah is the third of the three (in a Trinity)." But there is no *ilah* (god) (none who has the right to be worshipped) but One *Ilah* (God -Allah). And if they cease not from what they say, verily, a painful torment will befall the disbelievers among them.

**5:75.** The Messiah [‘Iesa (Jesus)], son of Maryam (Mary), **was no more than a Messenger**; many were the Messengers that passed away before him. His mother [Maryam (Mary)] was a *Siddiqah* [i.e. she believed in the words of Allah and His Books (see Verse 66:12)]. They both used to eat food (as any other human being, while Allah does not eat).

In the following verse, **Christians are obligated to receive the copies of the NT which existed in Muhammed’s day in the seventh century** (Geisler, p. 217). The NT was “the truth” that had come down to Muhammed “from your Lord”.

**10: 94** So if you (O Muhammad...) are in doubt concerning that which We have revealed unto you, [i.e. that your name is written in the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel)] then ask those who are reading **the Book [the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel)]** before you. Verily, **the truth has come to you from your Lord**. So be not of those who doubt (it).

Geisler notes two important points about this quotation.

First, **Muhammad would not have asked them to accept a corrupted version of the New Testament**. Second, the New Testament today is **substantially identical to the New Testament of Muhammad’s day**, since today’s New Testament is based on existing manuscripts that go back even centuries before Muhammad’s day. Hence, by the logic of this verse Muslims should accept the authenticity of today’s Bible. But if they do, then they should accept the doctrines of the deity of Christ and the Trinity...since that is what the New Testament teaches.

The overwhelming textual evidence of the New Testament demonstrates that there has been virtually **no** alteration of the New Testament. All four gospels are preserved in the Chester Beatty Papyri (250 AD), and the Vaticanus Ms (B) from 325-350 AD contains **the majority of texts from the entire NT**. There are nearly 5,700 other NT manuscripts dating from the second century to the fifteenth century. By way of comparison, Homer’s *Iliad*, dated 800 BC, has been preserved with a modest 643 copies (Geisler, p. 238). Hundreds of biblical manuscripts are dated previous to the seventh century and Muhammad’s revelation (Geisler, p. 218). **Thus, the gospels to which Muhammed refers in the Qur’an were uncorrupted texts, the same texts used in modern times to produce Greek copies and translations**. The John Ryland Fragment of John 18, dated around 117-138 AD, preserves the text as it was found in later manuscripts and as we now have it in the current NT. The whole books of Peter and Jude are preserved in the Bodmer Papyri from the second century identical to today’s texts. Therefore, the Muslim claim that the NT texts have been tampered with to teach Trinitarianism and the deity of Christ is baseless. The NT has always taught these doctrines which have been preserved in texts familiar to Muhammed and modern readers (Geisler, p. 219).

Muslims overestimate the significance of variant readings of the NT, estimated by some Muslim scholars to number more than 200,000 “errors” in the preserved texts. However, Muslim scholars count

“a variant spelling of one letter of one word in one verse in 3,000 manuscripts” as 3000 “errors” (Geisler p. 239), thus bloating the figures out of proportion. Remember that no Christian scholar claims that we have a perfectly preserved copy of the original texts of Scripture—the autographa. But these so-called “errors” are merely variant readings of the original text consisting mostly of **grammatical variations** which are not ultimately important in deciding doctrinal or moral issues. For example, consider 1 Samuel 6: 19.

He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, **50,070 men**, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter. (1 Samuel 6:19 NASB)

And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. He struck **seventy men of them**, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow. (1Sa 6:19 ESV)

So which is it, 70 or 50,070? Many conservative scholars believe that there would not have been 50,000 people in the whole city of Bethshemesh; therefore, the ESV translators and the NASB translators differ with each other about which Hebrew manuscript should be the basis of its translation, **but the difference poses no threat to the message of the Bible**. A.T. Robertson said that only one-thousandth of the NT texts presents any difficulty, leaving a NT text which is 99.9% free of significant variations.

Muslims are not the only religious group that has attempted to discredit the NT. The former Bultmannian scholar, Eta Linnemann, once questioned the integrity of the NT manuscripts but came to the conclusion: “As time passes, I become more and more convinced that to a considerable degree New Testament criticism as practiced by those committed to historical–critical theology does not deserve to be called science” (Geisler, p. 219).

### The Satanic Verses

During the mid-Meccan period, Muhammad made a speech before the leaders of his Meccan opponents proclaiming that the gods al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat could be accepted as deities whose prayers Allah would hear. This communication has become known as the Satanic Verses (Geisler, pp. 74-75, 198).

Did you consider al-hat and al-Uzza  
And al-Manat, the third, the other?  
Those are the swans exalted;  
Their intercession is expected;  
Their likes are not neglected

This declaration, of course, ran counter to everything else Muhammad had taught thus far, and early biographers believe the words were spoken to win the support of the opposing Meccan leadership. Soon afterwards, **Muhammad believed that Satan had inserted corrupting words into his speech**, explaining that “Satan had deceived him and inserted the false verses without his knowing it.” To correct this interpolation, Muhammad wrote the following verses from Sura 53 and 22 (Geisler, p. 74; verses copied from noblequran.com).

**53:19.** Have you then considered *Al-Lat*, and *Al-'Uzza* (two idols of the pagan Arabs)



**53:20.** And *Manat* (another idol of the pagan Arabs), the other third?

**53:21.** Is it for you the males and for Him the females?

**53:22.** That indeed is a division most unfair!

**53:23.** They are but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. They follow but a guess and that which they themselves desire, whereas there has surely come to them the Guidance from their Lord!

**22:51.** But those who strive against Our *Ayat* (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.), to frustrate and obstruct them, they will be dwellers of the Hell-fire.

The story has been discredited by modern biographers, but it is unlikely that Muslim followers would have invented such a story at a later time after Muhammad's death. Even less likely is the possibility of Muslims receiving the story from a non-Muslim as credible. Quite naturally, the story begs the question of whether Muhammad had been deceived by Satan all along throughout the whole period of divine revelations. Were they from Allah or Satan? (Geisler, p. 75)

I would ask at this point: **Do we have any analogous situations in the Bible in which Jesus, Moses, or the Apostle Paul must renounce what he had originally spoken because their prophecy had been corrupted by Satanic insertions?** We are not speaking here about narrative portions of Scripture in which God's chosen ones—apart from Jesus—demonstrate their humanness by sinning against God (e.g. Moses striking the rock twice and forfeiting his entrance into the Promised Land, Abraham deceiving Pharaoh and Abimelech about Sarah, etc.). We are also not speaking of progressive revelation in which God gradually revealed the plan of salvation over many centuries through many prophets. We are speaking about foundational ethical instructions in the Bible: e.g. "You shall have no other gods before me", etc.

### Holy War in the Bible

Yet, Christians must also supply some answers to what **appears** to be biblical inconsistency. There is **progressive revelation** in the Bible **abrogating** a previous command for offensive military violence against pagan nations. Such commands are similar to Muhammad's command for jihad.

"When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. <sup>11</sup> "If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. <sup>12</sup> "However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. <sup>13</sup> "When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword. <sup>14</sup> "Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you. <sup>15</sup> "Thus you shall do **to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby.** <sup>16</sup> "Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. <sup>17</sup> "But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you, <sup>18</sup> **so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods,** so that you would sin against the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 20:10-18 NASB)

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt.<sup>3</sup> 'Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, **child and infant**, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" (1 Samuel 15:2-3 NASB)

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> "But I say to you, **love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**,<sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.<sup>46</sup> "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?<sup>47</sup> "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?<sup>48</sup> "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48 NASB)

And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; **for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword**. (Matthew 26:51-52 NASB)

The OT passages mentioned here are, indeed, troublesome to explain; and it does not completely satisfy us that God was **preserving the holy race of Israel from the influence of pagan idolatry** or that purging the typological land of Canaan from unbelievers was a **foreshadowing of the New Jerusalem in which no unclean person can ever enter** (Rev. 21: 27). These passages are helpful, but they do not answer all of our questions: e.g. why didn't God command the Israelites to **adopt** the infant children into their homes rather than to kill them? I have never heard or read anyone who addresses this question, much less answers it. I have no answer either. Some writers have explained these verses in terms of **literary hyperbole**, but that answer does not satisfy me either. Nevertheless, holy warfare for the purpose of reclaiming the inheritance of Abraham, i.e. the Promised Land, from intruders was **necessary**; otherwise, God is guilty of gratuitous (unnecessary and uncalled for) evil, an impossible conclusion. God gave the land to Abraham by promise; all other inhabitants were tolerated for a limited time only until God was ready to judge their iniquity by expelling them from the land (Gen. 15: 16).

Holy War was necessary, first of all, as **God's justice upon evil civilizations** who worshipped idols, sacrificed their children on pagan altars, and were guilty of all manner of sexual perversion—bestiality (sex with animals), homosexuality, multiple forms of incest, and adultery. For these sins, God removed the Canaanites and replaced them with the Israelites (**Lev. 18**; Deut. 9: 4-5).

"It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deuteronomy 9:5 NASB)

The reason for their removal was **not genocide**, but religious apostasy and moral degeneracy. This is proven by **Rahab's** (a Moabite) **acceptance** into Israel and **Achan's** (an Israelite) **rejection** for taking things devoted to God (Joshua 6—7; Matt. 1: 5; cf. Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 396). If Israel later proved to be morally degenerate, she would be "spewed" from the land even as the Canaanites (Lev. 18: 28). This is proven by the expulsion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians and the expulsion of the Southern Kingdom of Judah by Babylonia—both tools in God's

hand to punish Israel. God expels the Jews from the land again in 70 AD by Roman armies which destroy Jerusalem and the temple for the second time.

Holy war was necessary, **secondly**, because it was the only way to ensure **the moral and physical survival of Israel**. This is proven in the book of Judges when many tribes failed to follow through with God's directives to conquer and expel those who practiced the abominations listed in Leviticus 18. When they failed to obey, they fell into pagan practices after one generation.

The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel.<sup>8</sup> Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten.<sup>9</sup> And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.<sup>10</sup> **All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.**<sup>11</sup> Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals,<sup>12</sup> and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger.<sup>13</sup> So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. (Judges 2:7-13 NASB)

Even the judges and Levites led the people into idolatry (Waltke, pp. 617-618). The last three chapters of Judges must be edited for children, including the serial rape and dismemberment of a Levite's concubine. These final chapters, written out of historical sequence, highlight the theme of the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6 NASB).

**Thirdly**, holy war was necessary for the **proclamation of God's superiority over other gods**. Heath Thomas explains.

Biblical "divine war" breaks the ideological nexus [connection] between deity-people-land. As the Canaanites were displaced and defeated, **their gods were defeated and shown to be impotent and false**. If the Moabites were defeated or displaced, their deity was shown to be false and unreliable. Interestingly, Israel's God, Yahweh, is the only God in the ancient Near East who is able to leave his land and people and then return to both in his own power (see Ezekiel 8-11; 43:1-9).

**The point is straightforward: for Israel's God to show the gods of the nations to be false, a simple sermon would not do. He chose to demonstrate his power so that the world would know the vitality of *this* God.** [cf. Rom. 9: 17, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." My note.] And remember, those who heard of this God and responded in faith would be spared and receive the blessing that comes with worshipping the true God. The clearest example of this comes in the story of Rahab, who tells the Israelites that all of Canaan "heard" of God's fame and mighty power, and then makes a pact with the Israelites (Joshua 2:9-19) (Heath Thomas, "*The Old Testament, 'Holy War' and Christian Morality*", from *Comment*, cardus.ca, emphasis mine).

**Fourthly**, as I mentioned briefly, holy war is **typological**. A type in the OT is a picture of something that will happen in the future. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son by Sarah is a type of the Father's willingness to sacrifice his eternally begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Holy War is an OT picture of God's future judgment of all unbelievers; and for this reason, it is a warning of the wrath of God to come so that unbelievers will repent before it is too late. This can also be said of any verse in the Bible directed to the wicked. God takes no delight in the death of the wicked; he would rather they repent and live (Ezek. 18: 23; 33: 11). The psalmist says of the wicked,

The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Psalm 34:16 NASB)

I have seen a wicked, violent man Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. <sup>36</sup>Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found. (Psalm 37:35-36 NASB)

Christ will return from heaven at the end of this age riding on a war horse, not a donkey. Moreover, he will not be preaching the gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, but will be slaying his enemies and the enemies of his people.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. (Revelation 19:11 NASB)

*He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:13-16 NASB)

While God's power is known in earlier epochs by **military victories**, his power later becomes known through the **prophets**—Elijah, Elisha, many unnamed prophets, and the writing prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, et al). **The prophets slay the wicked with words**, not swords, including the wicked of Israel and Judah as well as the wicked of Nineveh (Jonah and Nahum), Edom (Obadiah), Babylonia and Persia (Daniel), and every nation on earth (Isa. 13-24) (Waltke, pp. 815-816). There is no escaping God's wrath except through repentance, even if you are the most powerful king on earth (Dan. 4; cf. Ps. 2).

Holy war continues to be waged in the present age through **the prophetic word of Christ and his apostles, and those who bear testimony to this Word**. The conquest of Christ over death has **abrogated** the need for military conquest and replaced it with a new method, evangelism and discipleship. Christ's people must occupy the entire earth, not just Canaan, and one day the earth will be their unique possession (Matt. 5: 5). All authority in heaven **and earth** has been given to Christ, and through the proclamation of the gospel, persuasion, deeds of mercy, and spiritual renewal—not force—disciples will come willingly to Christ from every nation (Matt. 28: 18-20; Rev. 5: 9).

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**" <sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of **all the nations**, baptizing them in the name

of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 NASB)

The Great Commission is assuredly **a declaration of war** against the unbelieving world; but it is a **new kind** of war—the war of the **mind and heart** waged with **new weapons**: truth, righteousness, salvation, the gospel, the Word of God, and prayer (Eph. 6: 13-18). Moreover, the real enemy consists of the spiritual forces of darkness that use sinful men as accomplices to further their rebellion against God initiated before the fall in the Garden of Eden.

For our struggle is **not against flesh and blood**, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. (Ephesians 6:12 NASB)

Further, Jesus instructs his disciples to teach other disciples everything he commanded them, including **love for one's enemies**. These enemies—once including every person (Rom. 5: 10; Eph. 4: 8)—**have already been defeated** at the cross, so there is no need for God's people to corporately take up arms to save their lives against unbelievers. They are already saved eternally; and although they may be persecuted and killed, not a single hair of their heads will perish (Lk. 21: 16-18; cf. Rom. 8: 31-39). (However, this does not rule out legitimate personal defense against those who would harm us, or national defense against intruding nations like mid-twentieth century Japan or current religious armies like ISIS or Al-Qaeda. It also does not exclude the legitimate self-defense of persecuted people groups like the Karen Christians of Burma [aka Myanmar] who must defend themselves against an oppressive government. See *World*, March, 19, 2016. Pacifism in the face of evil is not taught in the Bible. See also Ex. 22: 2-3. But notice that all these examples are defensive measures, not offensive.)

Rather than taking up arms to spread the kingdom of God, believers must be willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the gospel (Matt. 10: 27-28; Lk. 9: 23-24). Self-sacrifice is Jesus' paradigm for building the kingdom of God—a most unlikely paradigm for establishing a world kingdom. The grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies yields fruit, but if it doesn't die, it yields nothing (Jn. 12: 24). Yet, who would have expected the kingdom of God to grow in this manner? Jesus' contemporaries rejected him for failing to come as a David-like military hero. Rather, Jesus conquered not by killing others but through his own death and sends his disciples as sheep among wolves, armed only with truth as ambassadors, urging individuals and nations to lay down their spiritual weapons and surrender to Christ before he comes in judgment.

Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,<sup>19</sup> namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are **ambassadors for Christ**, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20 NASB)

An ambassador is an official representative of his country to the country in which he resides. The Apostle Paul says that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3: 20); therefore, while we live in this foreign land as appointed ("called", Eph. 4: 1) ambassadors, we are awaiting our "recall" into heaven. While here, we are urging men and women to be reconciled to God through Christ, who has come first as a gentle savior riding on a donkey and declaring peace (Matt. 21: 2-5), but will come again as a fierce warrior destroying his enemies and saving his people definitively from the forces of evil (Rev. 19: 11-

16). There can be no salvation for God's people apart from the destruction of his enemies who threaten to destroy them.

If the progressive nature of biblical revelation disturbs you, remember that the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years. God's people needed to know **how to live and function at different periods of history**. We may be troubled by the holy wars in the OT, but to claim that they were evil and unnecessary would be to deny the very nature of God who is incapable of evil and infinitely wise. **At any point in history, God has decided what is necessary or unnecessary for the preservation and propagation of his kingdom on earth.** We are not at liberty to anachronistically (inappropriate for its time) declare holy war as unnecessary brutality unworthy of a holy and loving God. If God had told Moses the same thing Jesus told Peter, "Put away your sword", Israel would not have survived long enough to enter Canaan. The point is: God loved **Israel** and would not allow foreign people and foreign religions to ultimately destroy her. From time to time she was sorely disabled, but never destroyed. Israel had to survive until the Christ could be born from the tribe of Judah. God also loves Christians today, including those recently murdered in a Taliban suicide attack in Lahor, Pakistan; but their marching orders are different from those of the Israelites.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup>*we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup>always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. <sup>11</sup>**For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.** (2 Corinthians 4:7-11 NASB)

How much do we want the kingdom of God to spread among the nations? Are we willing to die to see it accomplished? In the **present age**—the age beginning from Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven—God no longer uses a political entity or physical nation to demonstrate his lordship over the whole world. There are no more **theocracies** like ancient Israel, and the nation of Israel today is no longer a theocracy in which God is king. (The United States is not, and never has been, a "Christian nation" in the sense of Americans being the chosen people of God. The US is "Christian" only to the degree that it is influenced by Christianity. It can become predominately pagan—and might be pagan already—as its culture rejects the teachings of Christ.) **What God has now done to demonstrate his power and deity is to raise Christ from the dead.** No war has ever been fought or won, or shall be, that has accomplished such a stupendous (astonishing) feat.

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. <sup>55</sup>"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55 NASB)

**Islamic jihad, therefore, is anachronistic** (out of its proper time) **from its inception**; for when Muhammed began conquering Arabic lands for Allah, the Trinitarian God **had already won the final battle—against death**. The defeat of death, and sin which leads to death, is the final victory against which no other victory can compare.

For this reason also, Paul proclaims to the Athenian philosophers that there is no longer any justification for the worship of false gods and rejection of the true God. The **final argument** for the existence of the true and only God has been furnished by Christ's resurrection.

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent,<sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, **having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.**" (Acts 17:30-31 NASB)

This is why the resurrection of Christ is so pivotal to the Christian faith. **Without it, we have nothing** and should be pitied more than all people for believing such a colossal lie and depriving ourselves of fleeting sensual pleasures (1 Cor. 15: 19); but because of the resurrection we have something **no other religion** has or claims to have, a **living Savior and a living hope.**

But where is the evidence that Muhammed is God's prophet? He said he was, and through Satan's deceit, people have believed that the Qur'an is the most eloquent, well-preserved, consistent book ever written. But most people in this world need more than Muhammed's assurance that he is God's prophet. When asked to produce miracles proving his claims to speak for Allah, Muhammad merely pointed to the eloquence and content of the Qur'an as definitive proof; but Jesus pointed to attesting miracles.

"If I do not do the works of My Father, **do not believe Me;**<sup>38</sup> but if I do them, **though you do not believe Me, believe the works,** so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (John 10:37-38 NASB)

Moreover, we know this to be God's method of inspiring belief in his Word during specific epochs of salvation history from Moses until the middle of the first century when the book of Acts was written. Moses produced miracles so the people of Israel would believe that he was sent from God (Ex. 4: 1-9). Elijah called down fire from heaven to convince the idolatrous Israelites that Yahweh was the true God but Baal a false idol (1 Kings 18). Jonah survived three days and nights in the belly of a sea monster, possibly the reason for Nineveh's willingness to repent. In the gospels, Jesus and his disciples healed the sick and cast out demons, and Jesus raised three people from the dead. In the Acts of the Apostles, the apostles continue the miraculous deeds of Jesus to confirm their calling as true apostles and to draw attention to the message of the gospel (Gal. 3: 5).

Jesus claimed to be God, but most people need more than bare testimony to believe this is true. Even his disciple Thomas needed more tangible proof that Jesus had risen from the dead, and Jesus graciously supplied such evidence—along with a mild rebuke (Jn. 20: 25-29). Jesus did not stop with words; he produced miraculous deeds, and he rose from the dead. Christianity provides the most reliable evidence of any event—miraculous or otherwise—occurring in the ancient world, the resurrection of Christ. Yet, since no human being living today witnessed the resurrection, we must rely on the witness of those recorded in the NT. Relying on these witnesses, in turn, requires that we rely on the NT itself. We will now turn to the reliability of the NT.

## The Authority of Scripture

[The following notes have been excerpted from my existing work on "The Doctrine of Scripture". Therefore, you will have footnotes instead of scientific notation.]

Many copies of the original manuscripts have been made, but the doctrine of inerrancy (no errors) applies only to the original manuscripts called the *autographa* which we no longer have in possession. This of course brings up the obvious objection by non-evangelical scholars (and Muslims): If Christians no longer have the original copies of the Scriptures, then the debate over inerrancy is irrelevant. Why argue over the integrity of manuscripts which no longer exist? But there is overwhelming manuscript evidence that the integrity (accuracy) of the original manuscripts has been maintained throughout centuries of copying by hand. The science of examining and comparing the existing copies (manuscripts) of the Bible is called **textual criticism**.

It should be clear to all that the **trustworthiness** of the Scriptures and the **authority** of the Scriptures go hand in hand. We cannot have one without the other. But we have adequate reason to believe that God has preserved the original integrity and message of the Bible down through the ages. The textual criticism done over the last several decades has given us overwhelming evidence that the relatively few errors which do exist in **copies** of the autographa (not the autographa itself which had no errors) have little if any bearing on Biblical doctrine. There is nothing about our salvation or the Christian life which is significantly affected by the differences which are found in existing manuscripts. Carl F. H. Henry, a leading conservative theologian of the twentieth century, stresses the success of modern textual criticism in harmonizing the existing copies of the original manuscripts with one another.

F. J. A. Hort's verdict remains timely, however, that "for practical purposes in the case of the New Testament, textual critics have been successful in restoring [the copies] to within 99.9% accuracy" and that "only about **one word in every thousand** has upon it substantial variation supported by such evidence as to call out the efforts of the critic in deciding the readings" (B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, "Introduction," p. 2). According to Joseph P. Free **this is the equivalent of about a half page in a five hundred-page New Testament** (*Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 4-5). And Bruce writes that the "variant readings about which any doubt remains... affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice" (*The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* pp. 19-20). Whatever uncertainties copying has contributed, the Bible remains **virtually unchanged and its teaching undimmed**. The text of the Old and New Testaments alike has been preserved even in the copies in remarkably pure form.

**Not a single article of faith, not a single moral precept is in doubt.** Those who make an issue of snake-handling or drinking deadly poison miss the point; this passage [Mk. 16: 9-20] falls within the disputed ending of Mark's Gospel and cannot be considered binding unless and until **better manuscript evidence** is found. Curiously, those who appeal to the passage to encourage the handling of poisonous snakes as evidence of faith's power are seldom as inclined to drink deadly poison!<sup>1</sup>

In other words, when we compare the existing copies of the autographa with one another—numbering over 5700 for the NT—there are only few differences, none of which would be substantial. Contrast this with the Qur'an which in Sura 2 alone has over 150 variations among existing copies, some variations omitting whole clauses or complete sentences. Shiite Muslims, comprising less than 20% of the world's Muslim population, claim that Caliph Uthman purged all copies of the Qur'an mentioning Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. The Shiites reject the first three Caliphs of Islam as

<sup>1</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. IV, pp. 235-236, bold emphasis mine.



illegitimate usurpers who deprived Ali of his prerogative as the rightful successor to Muhammad. Therefore, while the Sunnis (80% of the Muslim population) believe the Caliph should be elected, the Shiites believe that a Caliph must be chosen from the bloodline of Muhammad, including such figures as the Ayotollah Khomeini of Iran who murdered thousands during the purge of 1979.

However, it is important for us to understand that **inerrancy** does not apply to different **copies** of the autographa; much less does it apply to different **translations** of the Bible which are taken from the copies. Therefore, when ten different English translations of the same verse use different words, we must not assume errors in the Bible, but different ways of translating the Greek or Hebrew words into English. Furthermore, different translations of the Bible have used different copies of the autographa which differ from one another on **minor** points. Since the King James Bible was translated from the Greek and Hebrew in 1611, other copies of the autographa have been found which are older than the *Textus Receptus* used in translating the King James Version. Most modern evangelical scholars believe that the translations of the Bible since 1611 are superior in quality because they are based on better manuscripts, but there is still disagreement.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, if we believed that all the **copies** of the autographa were inspired, we would have the embarrassing problem of accounting for the fact that they differ from one another—a problem which could call into question the whole doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible.

This does not mean that I cannot hold up my English translation of the Bible and say with confidence, “This is the word of God,” because I can. Frame says that the most important thing is not the autograph itself but the autographic **text**. It is true that we do not have any of the original autographs; yet, **we do have the autographic text which has been well-preserved**—though not perfectly preserved—in multiple copies of the original autograph. We also have very accurate translations of the Bible in many languages, especially English, since English is the most widely spoken language in the world. In other words, we possess the **autographic text** in the accurate Hebrew and Greek **copies** of the autograph. The reason we can be confident of this fact is that through the science of textual criticism (see Henry’s quote of F.J.A. Hort above) scholars can discover the likely places where imperfect copying took place. “Where there is no evidence of textual corruption, we are quite within our rights to assume that our present text is autographic and therefore to appeal to the text as the inerrant Word of God—just as Jesus and the apostles appealed to copies and versions of their day.”<sup>3</sup>

...to cite a copy, when the copy is accurate, does not violate the sole authority of the autographic text....Insofar as their [Jesus’, the apostles’, and NT writers’] quotation reproduces the content of the Hebrew autographic text, it is true and authoritative....When Jesus and the apostles quote the OT using the LXX version, their intent is not to assert the authority of the LXX as a translation, but to quote what is said in the OT autographic text. The LXX is only a vehicle for accomplishing that, a good means of communication to people who know the Scripture primarily through the LXX.<sup>4</sup>

Textual criticism done over the last several decades overwhelmingly inspires our confidence in the copies of the original Scriptures. As noted above, there is internal evidence within the message of the Bible itself supporting the claim that **we have in the copies themselves the very Word of God**—the autographic **text**. Greg Bahnsen demonstrates that Jesus and the biblical writers embraced the authority of **copies** of the autographa although the autographa itself was not available for quotation. Copies of

<sup>2</sup> Henry, p. 235

<sup>3</sup> Frame, *DWG*, p. 247

<sup>4</sup> Frame, *DWG*, pp. 244-245; words in brackets mine

the Law of Moses were made of the original Law and were read by the kings of Israel to prevent apostasy.

"Now it shall come about when he [*the Israelite king*] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.<sup>19</sup> "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, (Deuteronomy 17:18-19 NASB)

It was never assumed by anyone that since they were not the original they could not authoritatively and accurately reflect the will of God (1Kings 2: 3). Proverbs 25 is specifically identified as a copy of the proverbs of Solomon transcribed during the days of King Hezekiah (Prov. 25: 1).<sup>5</sup>

### What Jesus Said about the Old Testament

After reading from the copied scrolls of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus asserted, "Today **this Scripture** has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4: 21). Jesus' confidence in the text is never qualified: "Of course, you know that what I read was merely a **copy** of the book of Isaiah and not the **original manuscript**." On a number of occasions Jesus challenges his opponents by directing them to the Scriptures, knowing full well that they could only access the copies and not the originals (Matt. 12: 3, 5; 21: 16, 42; Lk. 10: 26). And never once did the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were experts in the Law of Moses, object that Jesus' arguments were not substantial since He could cite only the copies. **It is a notable fact of history that there was never any dispute over the inspiration and authority of Scripture—apart from Islam—from the apostolic age until the nineteenth century.**<sup>6</sup>

Two of the most important phrases Jesus uses throughout His ministry when appealing to the authority of scripture are: "**Have you not read...**" (Matt 19:4; 21:16; Lk.6:3) and "**it is written**" (Matt 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mk 9:12, 13; 11:17). Such phrases are applied to many parts of scripture including history, law, psalms and prophecy. For Jesus, the appeal to the OT was the end of any argument. When confronted with Satan's temptation in the wilderness, Jesus always countered with "**It is written**" (Matt. 4: 4, 7, 10). The verb tense in Greek is perfect, denoting action in the past with continuing results in the present, results which in this case were not affected by the fact that the OT quotations He cites were available only in copies. As Wenham notes, "There is a grand and solid objectivity about the perfect tense.... 'Here,' Jesus was saying, 'is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction.'" Henry concurs by saying, "The force of the perfect tense (Matt. 4: 4) is that **God's providence preserves the unbroken authority of the copies.**"<sup>8</sup> Speaking of the formula, "It is written" in Matt. 4, Bahnsen explains,

This form (the perfect tense) appears at least **seventy-three times** in the Gospels alone. It signifies that something has been established, accomplished, or completed and that **it continues to be so or to have enduring effect**. "It stands written" expresses the truth that what has been written in the original Scripture **remains so written in the present copies**. Conversely, that to which the writer

<sup>5</sup> Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa", *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed., pp. 159-171

<sup>6</sup> Henry, p. 76

<sup>7</sup> Wenham, "Christ's View of Scripture", *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed., p. 15

<sup>8</sup> Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, "The Infallibility of the Copies", p. 230, emphasis mine

appeals in the present copies of the Scripture as normative is so because it is taken to be the **enduring witness of the autographic text.**<sup>9</sup>

When the resurrected Lord confronted two of his despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus, He chastised them for failing to believe the prophetic witness of the OT. “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27 NASB). Again, Jesus never once questioned the validity and authority of the extant (existing) copies of the Scriptures **available to His generation**. He referred to them continuously throughout His ministry **without the slightest degree of depreciation as copies and not originals**.

Because Christ raised no doubts about the adequacy of the Scriptures as His contemporaries knew them, we can safely assume that **the first-century text of the Old Testament was a wholly adequate representation of the divine word originally given**. Jesus regarded the extant copies of His day as so approximate to the originals in their message that He appealed to those copies as authoritative. The respect that Jesus and His apostles held for the extant [existing] Old Testament text is, at base, **an expression of their confidence in God’s providential preservation of the copies and translations as substantially identical with the inspired originals**....The fact is that, although present copies and translations had a practical authority and adequacy for the purposes of divine revelation, the Bible evidences a pervasive concern to *tether* [tie together] *current copies to the autographical text*....

Present copies function authoritatively because they are viewed as reflecting the autographa correctly....

Jesus taught that we are to live by “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4: 4), **thus tethering the authority of the Scriptures in hand to the original utterance given by divine inspiration**. What people read as “Scripture” in the books of Moses was thought of as “spoken unto them by God” (Matt. 22: 29-32; Mark 12: 24-26)....In each case the autographical text is assumed to be present in the extant copy that is consulted.<sup>10</sup>

### What the Apostles Said about the Old Testament

Christ’s confidence in the copies of the autographa was also **shared by other NT writers**. Peter assured his readers that the prophetic witness of the OT was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

But know this first of all, that **no prophecy of Scripture** is *a matter* of one's own interpretation,<sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21 NASB)

<sup>9</sup>Bahnsen, “*The Inerrancy of the Autographa*”, Geisler, ed., p. 169, emphasis mine

<sup>10</sup>Bahnsen, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed. pp. 161-163, emphasis his

He was apparently sure that the copies of the OT Scriptures reliably communicated **the very same message originally given by the Spirit to the prophets.**

It is likely that the copies of the OT which Timothy had read as a youth were not Hebrew copies but Greek copies known as the Septuagint. His father was Greek (Acts 16: 1) which makes it probable that Greek was his first language and the language of his education. Still, these Greek copies of the OT were sufficient in Paul's eyes to give Timothy "the wisdom that leads to salvation" and were "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness..." (2 Tim. 3: 15-16). They were "theopneustos", "God-breathed". In 1 Cor. 10, Paul warned his readers that they should be careful to avoid the fatal errors of the Israelites and says, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and **they were written for our instruction**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (v. 11). It is evident that Paul believed the actual events of Israel's history were **preserved accurately** in the copies of the OT and were available to the Corinthian church.

According to Roger Nicole, there are 295 quotations of the OT by NT writers, occupying some 352 NT verses. One verse in 22.5 in the NT is an OT quotation, and there are many more citations of it where the OT is mentioned but not directly quoted. "It can therefore be asserted, without exaggeration, that more than 10 per cent of the New Testament text is made up of citations or direct allusions to the Old Testament."<sup>11</sup> Paul cites the OT 93 times, twenty-three of which occur in Romans 9, 10, and 11 to give some explanation and clarification of the puzzling question of why the Jews did not recognize and accept their Messiah.<sup>12</sup>

Several introductory formulas are used by the NT writers to help us understand their view of the OT. One of the most common is the expression, "**it is written**", the same one Jesus used. **Whenever Scripture is speaking, God is speaking.** When we examine Rom. 9:13, 15, and 17, we find out that there is an interchange between "it is written", "He says" and "Scripture says" when it is clear from the passages cited that God is the author in all three citations. Yet we see that no distinction is made by the writers between God and Scripture.

**Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."** (Romans 9:13 NASB)

For **He says** to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." (Romans 9:15 NASB)

For **the Scripture says** to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." (Romans 9:17 NASB)

Paul also says in Galatians,

**The Scripture**, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, **preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying**, "In thee shall all the nations be blessed." (Galatians 3: 8 NASB)

<sup>11</sup> Roger Nicole, "New Testament Use of the Old", pp. 137-138, *Revelation and the Bible*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed.

<sup>12</sup> Edwin A. Blum, "The Apostles' View of Scripture", p. 41, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed. I owe much of the material in this section to Blum.

However, “the Scripture”—the OT cannon—did not exist at that time and could not have communicated these words to Abraham in writing. **Paul is equating what Scripture says with what God says**, since Scripture is, in Paul’s thinking, the very word of God.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.<sup>17</sup> For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; **as it is written**, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Romans 1:16-17 NASB)

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?<sup>4</sup> May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, **as it is written**, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." (Romans 3:3-4 NASB)

...so that, just as **it is written**, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." (1 Corinthians 1:31 NASB)

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for **it is written**, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." (Galatians 3:10 NASB)

In other passages, the NT writers attribute to **God** what **others** say. Examples of such references are the following:

Therefore, **just as the Holy Spirit says**, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,<sup>8</sup> DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, (Hebrews 3:7-8 NASB)

For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice,<sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, (Psalm 95:7-8 NASB)

The author of Hebrews attributes the saying to the Holy Spirit when it is actually written by the Psalmist. The same is true of Acts 4: 24-25 which is a reference to Psalm 2.

And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,<sup>25</sup> who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?' (Acts 4:24-25 NASB)

Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? (Psalm 2:1 NASB)

Hebrews 1:6-8 is a reference to Ps. 97:7, Ps. 104:4, and Ps. 45:6 (written by psalmists but attributed to God). We find in the NT “habitual identification...of the text of Scripture with the utterances of God.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 300

### What Jesus Said about His Own Teaching

Did Jesus put the same confidence in His own teaching as he did the OT Scriptures? A brief look at the following passages will help us to answer this question. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Moses in Dt. 18: 18-19.<sup>14</sup>

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put **My words** in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. <sup>19</sup>It shall come about that whoever will not listen to **My words** which **he shall speak** in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. (Deuteronomy 18:18-19 NASB)

Compare this passage to Jesus' closing comments at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, paying attention especially to the repetition of "these words of mine".

"Therefore everyone who hears **these words of Mine** and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> "Everyone who hears **these words of Mine** and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." (Matthew 7:24-27 NASB)

Thus, Jesus was fully **self-conscious** that **He was the greater antitype of the prophet Moses** (the type) whose authority was unquestionable. Those who would not listen to the "words" of Christ would come to ruin, but those who listened to Him and acted on His words would be secure. Listening to His words must be followed by obedience to them; listening to them and not acting upon them was the same as despising His words. Lip service would not do (Isa. 29: 13).

A casual reading of the sermon in Matthew 5—7 will disclose the numerous times Jesus introduces His law with a profound air of authority unmatched by the scribes and Pharisees of His day, "You have heard that it was said...but **I** say to you..." By saying this, Jesus was not contradicting what had already been spoken in the Law of Moses, but added increasing depth to the understanding and application of the Law. At the conclusion of the sermon, the depth and authority of His words were recognized by the whole multitude.

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; <sup>29</sup> for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29 NASB)

Jesus was confident that He could predict future events (Lk. 21: 10-33; Matt. 24), and we may safely assume that He applied this same confidence to everything else He said. This is clearly the implication of the "I say unto you" passages.

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<sup>14</sup> For more discussion of the role of Christ as the new lawgiver, see Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*.

When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "**Truly, truly, I say to you**, that one of you will betray Me." (John 13:21 NASB)

And Jesus said to him, "**Truly I say to you**, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." (Mark 14:30 NASB)

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'<sup>22</sup> "**But I say to you** that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. (Matthew 5:21-22 NASB)

Before His departure into heaven, Jesus also promised that the Holy Spirit would come and bring to remembrance everything He had taught his disciples, further evidence that **Christ considered His teaching to be the foundation stone of the church.**

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." (John 14:26 NASB)

#### **What the Apostles Said about Their Own Teaching**

Finally we come to the matter of what the apostles thought about their own writings.<sup>15</sup> It is one thing to say they thought the writings of the O.T. were the word of God and were authoritative, but quite another to say that they thought **their own words** were the very word of God. When we examine the NT, it becomes clear that the apostles considered their authority as coming from God. Paul calls himself an apostle, a herald, a witness, and an ambassador (Rom. 1:1, 5; Gal. 1:8, 9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1Tim. 2:7). The letters he wrote were to be read in the public assemblies of the churches and obeyed (Col 4:16; 2 Thes. 3:14). This public reading was the time-honored practice of the synagogues in which the OT scriptures had been read for years. In 1 Cor. 2:13 Paul makes it clear that what he says was not in words of human wisdom but they were words taught by the Holy Spirit.

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. (Colossians 4:16 NASB)

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. (2 Thessalonians 3:14 NASB)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,<sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. (1 Corinthians 2:12-13 NASB)

There has been some misunderstanding of what he says in 1 Corinthians 7:12 as if he was making a distinction between the authority of his teaching and the authority of Christ's teaching.

<sup>15</sup> Blum, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed. .pp. 51-53

But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. (1 Corinthians 7:12 NASB)

Here, Paul is not disclaiming inspiration or authority for what he says, but rather he is making a distinction between what the Lord Jesus said about divorce during His earthly ministry and what Paul is now telling the Corinthians in a completely new situation they were facing. Jesus had addressed the issue of divorce between two believers, not divorce between a believer and an unbeliever.<sup>16</sup> It should not be overlooked that in that same chapter he orders his instructions to be followed in all the churches (v. 17). Later in the letter Paul identifies his instructions with the command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14: 37).

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. (1 Corinthians 7:17 NASB)

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. (1 Corinthians 14:37 NASB)

It is clear from Paul's own testimony that he was fully aware that his teaching and writing were invested with the authority of Christ (2 Cor. 10: 8; 2 Thes. 2: 15; 3: 6-14).

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of *mouth* or by letter from us. (2 Thessalonians 2:15 NASB)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (2 Thessalonians 3:6 NASB)

The Epistle to the Galatians has long been recognized along with Romans as Paul's definitive statement of the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the law. However, the first order of business in the first two chapters is Paul's defense of his own apostleship, without which the rest of the letter would have had little persuasive effect upon the Galatians. In those two chapters, Paul maintains that he received the gospel directly from Christ, independently of the apostles in Jerusalem. Convinced that he was endowed with the very words of Christ, he did not even consult with the apostles about his teaching for the first fourteen years after his conversion, and only then because he was concerned about rumors that he and the other apostles were preaching a different gospel.<sup>17</sup>

In the introduction of Galatians he warned them not to listen to *anyone* who preached a different message from the one he had already given them. This would include any other apostle, including Paul himself, or even an angel from heaven. Thus, Paul invested the message he had received from Christ with an authority above the angels in heaven.<sup>18</sup>

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;<sup>7</sup> which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want

<sup>16</sup> For an extensive discussion on divorce, see McNeill, *Anthropology*, unpublished, and Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*.

<sup>17</sup> Donald F. McNeill, *Galatians*, unpublished

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, Vol. II, p. 539, John E. Meeter, ed.



to distort the gospel of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel **contrary to what we have preached to you**, he is to be accursed!<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel **contrary to what you received**, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:6-9 NASB)

Luke believed that his account of Christ's birth, ministry, death, and resurrection which he records in the Gospel of Luke were "the exact truth" (Luke: 1: 4).

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,<sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,<sup>3</sup> it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;<sup>4</sup> so that you may know **the exact truth** about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NASB)

### Fulfilled Prophecies of the Bible

The Scriptures contain many predictions of events which occurred much later in history, in some cases, hundreds of years later. The prophecy of Micah, written over 750 years before Christ, predicted that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5: 2). Isaiah, also written 750 years before Christ, predicted that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). He also predicted the miracles Jesus would perform throughout His ministry (Isa. 35: 5-6 with Matt. 9: 35).

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.<sup>6</sup> Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. (Isaiah 35:5-6 NASB)

Christ's rejection by His countrymen, the Jews, is prophesied in Ps. 118:22 (Compare with 1 Pet. 2:7) and His betrayal by Judas in Ps. 41: 9 (Jn. 13: 18).

The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner *stone*. (Psalm 118:22 NASB)

Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me. (Psalm 41:9 NASB)

He was betrayed by Judas for the bribe of 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26: 15; Matt. 27: 1-10 with Zech. 11: 12-13). He was mocked, beaten, spit upon, and pierced (Isa. 50: 6; Isa. 53:4-5; Ps. 22: 6-8 with Matt. 26: 67; 27: 31, 40-44). A very detailed description of the crucifixion is given in Ps. 22 hundreds of years before this method of execution even came into existence. It is a psalm of David written some 1000 years before Christ. Of particular interest is vv. 7-8 compared with Matt. 27: 41-43.

All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, *saying*,<sup>8</sup> "Commit *yourself* to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him." (Psalm 22:7-8 NASB)

I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.<sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death.<sup>16</sup> For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed

me; They pierced my hands and my feet. <sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; (Psalm 22:14-17 NASB)

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying, <sup>42</sup> "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. <sup>43</sup> "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matthew 27:41-43 NASB)

Christ was crucified with thieves and made intercession for his persecutors. His garments were divided among the Roman soldiers and lots were cast to see who would get His tunic.

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12 NASB)

At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. (Matthew 27:38 NASB)

But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. (Luke 23:34 NASB)

They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots. (Psalm 22:18 NASB)

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and *also* the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. <sup>24</sup> So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, *to decide* whose it shall be"; *this was* to fulfill the Scripture: "THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS." (John 19:23-24 NASB)

His bones were not broken as was customary with all victims of crucifixion to hasten their deaths (Ps. 34: 20 with Jn. 19: 31-33).

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all. <sup>20</sup> He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken. (Psalm 34:19-20 NASB)

Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; <sup>33</sup> but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. (John 19:31-33 NASB)

After His death, darkness fell over the land from about noon to three o'clock (Amos 8:9 with Matt. 27: 45). Although Christ was poor, He was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Isa. 53: 9 with Matt. 27: 57:-60). His body was not allowed to decompose (decay) in the grave after His crucifixion (Ps. 16: 10 with Acts 2: 31). David, who wrote Psalm 16, could not have been speaking of himself since he knew that

one day he would die, and his body would decompose in the grave. In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter says,

"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.<sup>30</sup> "And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE,<sup>31</sup> he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. (Acts 2:29-31 NASB)

I have limited our discussion to those prophecies about Christ which cannot be interpreted as self-fulfilled. There are many others which skeptics of the Bible could claim are contrived fulfillments which Jesus arranged Himself. For example, in order to fulfill the prophecy of Ps. 78: 2, Jesus could have purposely spoken in parables. He purposely remained silent in the presence of His accusers (Isa. 53: 7 with Matt. 27: 12-19). He arranged for the donkey to transport Him into Jerusalem as a fulfillment of Zech. 9:9 (Matt. 21: 1-5). Many of His quotations from the prophets during His crucifixion could be interpreted as self-fulfillments of prophecy.

All of these self-fulfillments may be conceded by the evangelical, but such prophecies do not explain those which Jesus had no human power to fulfill: being born in Bethlehem, performing miracles, his betrayal by Judas, His torture before and during crucifixion, the crucifixion itself, His garments being divided, the derision of His enemies during the crucifixion, His burial in the tomb of a rich man, etc. Humanly speaking, Jesus could not have arranged any of these fulfillments of prophecy, and the burden of proof lies on those who do not believe that predictive prophecy is possible. The reader will notice that most of the predictions which have been noted are referenced to events surrounding His execution, a time when Jesus, humanly speaking, was at the weakest point in His life and, therefore, in no position to manipulate prophetic fulfillments.<sup>19</sup>

The predictive prophecy of the OT, of course, is not limited to prophecies of Jesus Christ. Other momentous events of Israel's history have been prophesied in the Bible, only a few of which will be noted here. The 430 years of Israel's slavery in Egypt are predicted in Gen. 15, roughly four hundred years before the exodus event. The decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem was predicted in the prophecy of Isaiah about 150 years before his birth (Isa. 44: 28-45: 1; Ezra 1: 1-3). The successive kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, all of which affected the history of Israel, are prophesied in Daniel's dream along with the rise of another world empire, the kingdom of Christ, which will supplant and put an end to all the rival kingdoms of man (Dan. 2). Although it is admitted that none of these kingdoms except Babylon are actually named in the prophecy, the succession of kingdoms and the allusions given are too close to be accidental. They are so close, in fact, that liberal scholars unwilling to concede the possibility of predictive prophecy date Daniel during the period of the Maccabees from 165-40 BC. The seventy years of Israel's captivity in Babylon are predicted and also their return to the land of Canaan (Jer. 25: 12 and Jer. 29: 10).

It is recognized that none of the predictive prophecy of the OT will be conclusive or convincing to someone who is committed, without sufficient reason, to the ultimate and final criterion (standard) of

<sup>19</sup> For further study, consult *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, "The Messianic Prophecies", Josh McDowell.

independent human reasoning. The Holy Spirit alone can convince the human mind of the authority of Scripture. At the same time, it should be pointed out that Scripture does not make irrational claims for itself. It does not invite us to take a blind leap of faith without any evidence to support its claims. As John Frame observes:

The Spirit certainly does persuade, but he persuades us to believe inherently rational content...the Spirit's work is not to persuade us of something for which there are no rational grounds, but rather to persuade us by illumining the rational grounds which obligate us to believe. Spirit-created faith is not "blind"<sup>20</sup>

### **The Unity of the Bible**

The Bible was written during a period of 1500 years of differing economic, social and political circumstances by some forty or so different authors who came from a variety of backgrounds: kings, priests, prophets, farmers, physicians, fishermen, and political officials. One would think it impossible that such a variety of authors laboring under such different circumstances and spanning 1500 years could produce a book with any degree of coherency (unity of thought) much less 66 separate books which essentially have the same unifying theme. But the Bible is no ordinary book, and even though such a book is impossible with men, all things are possible with God.

Frank E. Gaebelein has identified the primary unity of the Bible not in the doctrinal teaching of the Bible, not in its literature, not in its typology or symbolism, not even in "the drama of redemption" which in some theological circles would be called the divine covenants. Rather, he finds the unity of the Bible in a person, the person of Jesus Christ, who was self-conscious that the OT Scriptures as a whole focused on His person and work. Jesus said that the OT Scriptures testified of Him (Jn. 5: 39) and that Moses wrote about Him in the first five books of the Bible (Jn. 5: 46). He identified Himself as the stone which the builders rejected (Compare Matt. 21: 42 and Ps. 118: 22-23) and the smitten shepherd whose sheep would be scattered (Compare Zechariah: 13: 7 with Mark 14: 27). Added to this is the witness of all the prophets of which He reminded His two despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24: 25-27).<sup>21</sup>

There is scarcely a page of the Bible on which we cannot find some direct or indirect reference to Christ. We see him in the seed of the woman in Gen. 3: 15 (cf. Rom. 16: 20); the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen. 22; the rejection of Joseph by his brothers in Gen. 37 and the explanation of his sufferings in Gen 50: 15-21; in the deliverance of Israel by Moses in Exodus 1-19; the giving of the Law in Exodus 20 (cf. Matt. 5—7); the sacrificial system in Leviticus (cf. Hebrews), the conquest and inheritance of Canaan in Joshua (cf. Matt. 5: 5); the rule of David (2 Sam. 7: 8-17), the wisdom of Solomon, the Messianic Psalms (e.g. Ps. 22), and the servant passages of Isaiah (Isa. 42, Isa 61: 1-3; cf. Lk. 4: 17-19). Philip was able to lead the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ by explaining Isaiah 53. By tracing the history of Israel's rebellion, Stephen was able to refute and rebuke the scribes and Pharisees for failing to recognize their Messiah and for putting him to death (Acts 7).

Christ is evident in all the prophets who, according to Peter, "were seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the

<sup>20</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 136. See also "The Argument from Prophecy" in the same book, pp. 136-140.

<sup>21</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, ed. "The Unity of the Bible", *Revelation and the Bible*

glories to follow” (1Pet. 1: 11). Paul regularly used the O.T. Scriptures to reason with the Jews in the synagogues everywhere he went, proving from them that Jesus was the Christ who died and rose again (Acts 17: 1-3). The single thread running throughout the O.T. is the promise of salvation through the provision of a redeemer for God’s fallen people. The N.T. gospels see the fulfillment of this promise in the physical reality of Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection; and the epistles challenge us to live out the implications of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection in the here and now with a view to the glories which will certainly follow.

Sixty-six books, forty or so different authors, written during 1500 years of turbulent and brutal history, yet one unified story of the person of Christ. The Bible truly is a **miracle** of God’s grace given for one main purpose—to reveal Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life”, as the only means of being right with God the Father (Jn. 14: 6).

### **The Best Defense of the Bible—the Bible Itself**

Thus far we have presented rational (reasonable) defenses of the authority of Scripture: the prediction of events hundreds of years before they took place, the unity of the Bible’s message, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and the testimony of the apostles. **A critic of the Bible could easily accuse us of using the Bible to defend the Bible rather than using “reliable” sources outside the Bible.** To this accusation we would respond: **Of course, because there is no higher, more reliable authority to which we can appeal to prove the authority of the Bible.**

If I were trying to prove that the average heart rate for a man of fifty years old, weighing 180 pounds, is 60-70 beats per minute, I would appeal to the testimony of a cardiologist, a textbook in cardiology, or technical internet articles. I am a Bible teacher; obviously cardiologists know more about the physical human heart than Bible teachers. If I wanted to determine the weight-bearing load of a concrete beam with steel reinforcements I would appeal to the authority of a structural engineer. If I wished to determine the required amperage to service a 50,000 square foot commercial building, I would consult an electrician. But to whose authority do we appeal to determine whether the Bible is the word of God and, therefore, authoritative for our faith and practice? Do we appeal to historians, archaeologists, scientists, linguists, mathematicians, or theologians? Are we confident enough in **their** ability to judge the **reliability** of Scriptures? The ultimate question really is this: Are we confident in their **infallibility** to judge the reliability of the Scriptures? Or should it be the other way around? Should the Scriptures be allowed to judge the reliability of historical, archaeological, and scientific research?

Would we be willing to abandon our confidence in the Bible as the word of God if a famous historian produced evidence which proved that the Bible was historically inaccurate? What if several famous archaeologists demonstrated the historical inaccuracy of the Bible? Are we willing to abandon our belief in divine creation because Charles Darwin, a naturalist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, proposed the theory of evolution supposedly proving that human beings evolved from lower life forms? The overwhelming majority of scientists today scoff at the idea of supernatural creation or the possibility of miracles. If we are willing to yield our confidence in the Scriptures to the conventional wisdom of our day, wisdom which God has “made foolish” (1 Cor. 1: 20) and which the Apostle Paul called mere “speculations...raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10: 5), then what we have done is **shifted our allegiance** from the authority of the Bible to the authority of historians, scientists, and conventional human wisdom.

One must not only be willing, but is **forced**, to take his stand upon some authority outside himself and to base his eternal destiny upon that authority. Moreover, this authority, whoever he is, will be basing his arguments on unproven, metaphysical (beyond the physical) assumptions, not on empirical proof. When it comes to the creation of the world and miracles occurring in the Old and NT epochs, no living human being today was there to observe miracles taking place or collecting evidence to disprove their occurrence. Shall your authority be Darwin's *Origin of the Species* which cannot bear the weight of modern research in cellular biology (the "irreducible complexity" of cell mechanisms) or the absence of transitional fossil forms between new species? Shall it be empirical science in general which is philosophically incapable of defending its own epistemological method and must resort to inane (silly) metaphysical theories about alien DNA transported to earth to begin life—the panspermia theory touted by Stephen Jay Gould? Shall your destiny be based upon the claims of Muhammed who was a religious leader for only 22 years? Shall you rest your destiny on famous movie stars like Tom Cruise who believes everything is an illusion? Or shall you rest your destiny upon the authority of the Bible which not only claims to be the word of God, but demonstrates evidence of being the infallible and inerrant word of God? I don't know about you, but "as for me and my house", we will entrust our destiny to the Bible and to the Word made flesh.

The enthusiast of the Bible will be encouraged by the fact that human "knowledge" has been in a constant state of change for thousands of years. Early scientific "authorities" once "knew" that the earth was flat, and those who insisted otherwise were scoffed and threatened even by church authorities who had misinterpreted the Bible. Medical doctors once bled their sick patients for every illness, making them even weaker and more susceptible to death and infection. Only since 1847 was hand-washing and fingernail scrubbing encouraged among medical staff, and not until 1881 were surgical instruments sterilized by boiling or steam.<sup>22</sup> Sterile procedure was once ridiculed as being a waste of time by busy doctors and nurses who "knew" that disease and infection could not be transmitted from patient to patient by contaminated blood. Obviously, then, what men and women thought they "knew" about the earth and medicine turned out to be false. They did not "know" the facts at all. The scientific method, while useful and necessary, does not insure total objectivity simply because all "facts" must be interpreted facts, and all interpretations of facts by human beings are subjective.

Almost fifty years ago, F.F. Bruce warned the evangelical community of putting too much emphasis upon **external evidences outside the Bible itself**. Speaking particularly of archaeological research, he said,

Generally speaking, "confirmation" is not the best word to use of the bearing of archaeology on the New Testament. In fact, in both Testaments it is better to regard archaeology as illustrative than as confirmatory....Archaeology may illuminate the historical context in which he [Christ] was manifested in flesh, but how could it confirm the claim that life and salvation are available as God's free gift to those who believe in him?...it is not by means of archaeology that the revelation itself is apprehended as truth.<sup>23</sup>

Much current apologetics (defense of Christianity) would argue likewise. John Frame suggests that external evidence for the authority of the Bible is helpful at points because it sometimes agrees with

<sup>22</sup> Brian Skellie, bmskll.com

<sup>23</sup>F.F. Bruce, *Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 330-331

the data of Scripture. He uses the historical work of Josephus, a Jewish historian who occasionally recognized Biblical testimony. However, Josephus does not in any way add any weight to the fact that the Bible is the word of God.

I conclude that we may use extrabiblical data in apologetics, but **not as independent criteria** to which Scripture must measure up. How ridiculous it would be to imagine that God's Word must be considered false if it fails to agree with Josephus or Eusebius or Papias—or with some anthropologist's theories about "early man"! Precisely the opposite is the case. We would simply present Scripture as it is, that is, as sometimes agreeing with other writings and sometimes not.<sup>24</sup>

John Murray contributes to this line of argumentation by saying:

We say Scripture is infallible not because we can prove it [that is, prove empirically or scientifically] to be infallible. The impossibility of [empirical] proof lies on the face of Scripture. For example, how could we prove that the first chapter of Genesis is substantially true, not to speak of its being infallible? This chapter deals with the origin of created realities, and what collateral or independent evidence do we possess regarding the action by which created entities began to be?...Or again, if we think of the third chapter of Genesis, who can prove that the events there recorded are true, or that it provides us with an infallible account of what is alleged to have occurred?

...How could we prove that when Christ died upon the cross he expiated the sins of a countless number of lost men? How are we to prove that Christ after his ascension entered into the holy places at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens? It can be demonstrated that the Scripture so teaches but not that these things are true.

Thus, on the question of warrant for the proposition that Scripture is infallible, what are we to say? The only ground is the witness of Scripture itself, to its own origin, character, and authority.

This may seem an illegitimate way of supporting the proposition at issue. Are we not begging the question? We are seeking for the ground of the proposition that Scripture is infallible. And then we say: we believe this because the Scripture says so, which, in turn, assumes that we are to accept the verdict of Scripture. If we accept this verdict we imply that its verdict is true, and not only so, but *infallibly true* if the verdict is to support the declaration that Scripture is infallible. This is the situation and we must frankly confess it to be so. It can be no otherwise in the situation that belongs to us in God's providential grace....

If we do not accept its verdict respecting its own character or quality, we have no warrant to accept its verdict respecting anything else. If its witness respecting itself is not authentic, then by what warrant may we accept its witness on other matters?<sup>25</sup>

In other words, if we cannot believe the claim of Biblical writers to be speaking for God, then on what basis do we accept any other information they give us, including the way of salvation?

<sup>24</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 20-21, emphasis mine.

<sup>25</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 9-12, emphasis his

John Calvin, the greatest theologian of the Reformation, said over 500 years ago, “But those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known.” This statement can be misleading if taken out of context, for the very same chapter of his *Institutes* is devoted to proofs of the credibility of the Scriptures. He also says in the same section:

There are other reasons [than those mentioned in chapter 8], neither few nor weak, for which the dignity and majesty of Scripture are not only affirmed in godly hearts, but brilliantly vindicated against the wiles of its disparagers [those who do not respect the Bible]; yet of themselves these are not strong enough to provide a firm faith, until our Heavenly Father, revealing his majesty there, lifts reverence for Scripture beyond the realm of controversy. **Therefore Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.** Indeed, these human testimonies which exist to confirm it will not be vain if, as **secondary aids** to our feebleness, they follow that chief and highest testimony.<sup>26</sup>

What follows is Calvin’s statement—quoted above—about the futility of proving to unbelievers that the Scriptures are the word of God.

### The Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit

We have many references in Scripture to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that the gospel is hidden to those who are perishing, but in those who believe, the light has shone to reveal the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4: 3-6). In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul rejoices that the gospel had come to the Thessalonians in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. In Romans and Galatians we learn that God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son, Jesus Christ, to produce in us a special relationship to God which Paul calls adoption (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16). The apostle John tells us about the anointing we have from the Holy One by which we know the truth and are able to discern truth from error, an anointing which abides in us (1 Jn. 2: 18-27).

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, the Bible will not be believed. The classical text demonstrating this fact is found in 1 Corinthians 2. In v. 4 Paul says his message went forth “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” This was in order that their faith should not rest on human wisdom, that is, on rational arguments of learned men unaided by the Holy Spirit. In v. 8 he says that the rulers of this age had not understood the wisdom of God; otherwise, they would not have crucified Christ; and in v. 9 we learn that man cannot imagine the wonderful things that God has prepared for those who love Him. The reason man cannot imagine them is that such things are revealed only through the Holy Spirit (v.10). Just as only a man can read his own mind (that is, no other man can read it), even so only God can read God’s mind. But the Holy Spirit is given to us so that we can, in some limited sense, **read the mind of God**—not exhaustively, but sufficiently unto salvation. This thought comes out in vv. 11 and 12, especially in v. 12 where he says we have received the Spirit from God that we might know the things which are freely given to us by God, things which are taught by the Spirit. Verse 14 gives us the reason why the Bible is a dead letter to those unaided by the Spirit.

For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.<sup>11</sup> For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is

<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (1.8.13), emphasis mine



in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.<sup>12</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **so that we may know the things freely given to us by God**,<sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.<sup>14</sup> But **a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised.<sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.<sup>16</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? **But we have the mind of Christ.** (1 Corinthians 2:10-16 NASB)

The natural man (cf. James 3:15), or the unsaved man, does not accept the things of God's Spirit. They are nothing but foolishness to him (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-27), and he **cannot understand them** because he does not have the spiritual equipment to understand them. Such enabling comes only from God. Christians, on the other hand, have the mind of Christ (v.16), not exhaustively, but sufficiently to discern spiritual truth. Paul's teaching in this passage is akin to Jesus' words to Nicodemus in Jn. 3 when He says, "...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Unless you are born again you cannot **understand or appreciate** the kingdom of God for what it is.

Jesus also praised His Father for hiding the truth from the self-proclaimed wise men of his day and for revealing the truth to simple people whom He called "babes" (Matt. 11: 25).

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants."<sup>26</sup> "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight."<sup>27</sup> "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*." (Matthew 11:25-27 NASB)

This doxology is made against the backdrop of the unrepentant cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin where **many miracles had been performed**.

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.<sup>21</sup> "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."<sup>22</sup> "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you. (Matthew 11:20-22 NASB)

**This is proof that even the miraculous deeds of Jesus could not be understood by human reasoning alone**, nor could they be discerned through an empiricist epistemology. The same principle is learned from Jesus' remark to the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

"And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'<sup>25</sup> "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'<sup>26</sup> "And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.'<sup>27</sup> "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—in order that

he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'<sup>29</sup> "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'<sup>30</sup> "But he said, '**No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!**'<sup>31</sup> "But he said to him, '**If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.**'" (Luke 16:24-31 NASB)

And sure enough, when Jesus rose from the dead, the religious leadership of Israel still did not believe.

The miracles of Jesus were clear enough to those who saw them; yet, they remained in unbelief. Romans 3:11 proclaims that there is none who understands and none who seeks for God among the Greeks or Jews who are still unconverted. It is clear that if understanding comes, it must come from some source **outside of man**.

When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:13-17), Jesus immediately informed him that such truth was not revealed to him by flesh and blood, that is, by natural man with human reasoning, but by His Father in heaven. Peter could never have come to that conclusion otherwise. We learn from this passage and others that the gospel is not comprehended with human reason and intellect alone, but by the mind and heart which has been aided by God, regenerated and washed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Matt. 11: 25-27).

Nothing that has been said thus far should be interpreted to mean that the authority of Scripture is **merely subjective** and depends upon the "faith-response" of the individual who reads or hears the Word of God. This was the error of Karl Barth, a German theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who maintained that "the true nature and meaning of biblical inspiration is to be found in the church's belief-ful subjection to the Bible as the Word of God."<sup>27</sup>

In Barth's system, the authority of Scripture is conditioned (dependent) upon man's personal response to the Scriptures. The Bible "becomes" the word of God in the existential moment of belief. Upon this view, the general revelation of God in creation is denied **since all revelation is saving revelation**. Man can no longer be held accountable for his rejection of the revelation of God in creation for the simple reason that unless he responds to this revelation in faith it is not, by definition, revelation. It is his faith, subjectively applied to revelation, which validates (makes truthful) the revelation. Henry further observes that, based upon this premise (assumption), only those portions of the Bible which have "imposed" themselves upon the human heart "become the Word of God, and these cease to be the Word of God when not self-imposing. What is Word of God for some need not be Word of God for others..."<sup>28</sup>

One can see the implications of this view for apologetics (the defense of the gospel). The one who agrees with Barth believes that the apologist is left without any recourse to external arguments—i.e. external to one's subjective experience—for supporting the truth-claims of the Bible. **Any other document** which "imposes" itself upon the human heart must be appreciated to have equal validity to the Scriptures—the Quran or the Upanishads<sup>29</sup>, "The Matrix", or the next tweet on your cell phone.

<sup>27</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. IV, p. 258

<sup>28</sup> Henry, pp. 259-260

<sup>29</sup> The "Bible" of Hinduism

Evangelical theologians believe that **the inspiration and authority of the Bible is objective and independent of any subjective human response to it.** It is the Word of God whether anyone believes it or not. Even if the Bible had never had an impact upon a single human being, something which not even the most adamant skeptic would claim, it would still be the Word of God. The necessity of the Spirit's operation in the human heart simply means that this objective Word cannot be subjectively appreciated or recognized as the Word of God without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work is not limited to the inspiration of human authors of the Bible, but is necessary for the human audience of the Bible as well; and while the Spirit's **inspiration** of the original writers has ceased with the completion of Scripture, the subjective **illumination** of each reader is an ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

R.C. Sproul gives a helpful analysis of the testimony of the Spirit (illumination) in light of the existential trends of Barth's theology mentioned above.

The effect of the internal testimony [of the Spirit] is that the believer acquiesces [consents without protest] to Scripture. The internal testimony offers no new argument or content to the evidence found in Scripture objectively, but so works in our hearts that we are willing to submit to what is already there.

...The *testimonium* [testimony of the Spirit] does not function either against the evidence or apart from the evidence but produces *acquiescence* to the evidence. The Scripture objectively gives evidence that it is the Word of God. The Spirit does not prove true what gives evidence of being false but rather gives us the quiet assurance that the evidence is certain. The Spirit causes us to submit or yield to the evidence. Our yielding is a subjective act to an objective basis of evidence.<sup>30</sup>

In the same essay, Sproul cites several key passages of Scripture which illustrate the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind of the believer.<sup>31</sup> In 2 Corinthians 4: 3-6, Paul contrasts the spiritual blindness of those who are "unbelieving" with the spiritual "light" which belongs to those who believe.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,<sup>4</sup> in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.<sup>5</sup> For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:3-6 NASB)

This text reveals the fundamental cause of the difference between believer and unbeliever; it is not found in the individuals themselves, but in the work of two opposing spiritual forces. Satan, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (v. 4). Contrarily, for believers, "God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (v. 6). The light of v. 6 is the illuminating work of the Spirit who overrules and pierces through the darkness created by Satan. Darkness and light are repeatedly

<sup>30</sup> R.C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," *Inerrancy*, Norman L. Geisler, ed., pp. 342-343, emphasis his.

<sup>31</sup> Sproul, p. 353

used in Scripture as synonyms for the spiritual state of those who are lost and those who are saved (Col. 1: 13; 1 Pet. 2: 9; Eph. 5: 8; 6: 12; 1 Thes. 5: 4, 5; 1 Jn. 1: 5; 2: 8).

The gospel which Paul preached to the Thessalonians came with the attendant power of the Holy Spirit which produced the full conviction and exemplary conduct of the Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thes. 1: 5-9). Paul exhorts the Philippians to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” with the full assurance that they are already saved and that God is presently and continuously working in them “both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2: 12-13). What God has begun with the Spirit, He will also complete with the Spirit (Phil. 1: 6). He does this in all believers through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who illumines the Scriptures so that we might know the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2: 6-16).

In His illuminating work, the Spirit does not act apart from the Word of God. He does not impart new truth to the believer, but makes the truth of the Bible understandable and convincing to the believer through a variety of circumstances and means. This does not imply that the unbeliever cannot intellectually understand the truth claims of the Bible. The words of Scripture can convey the thought that Christ was born of a virgin, that He was God, that He died for our sins, and that he rose again from the dead. All of this is plain enough grammatically from the Bible. Nevertheless, the Spirit is necessary to convince the reader that these things are true.

### Vocational Calling

Now that we have discussed the authority of the Bible, we might ask the question: So what? So what if the Bible is authoritative; authoritative for what purpose? Does the Bible give me any guidance for life other than the knowledge of salvation and ethical morality? The answer is yes. The Bible lays out the paradigm for living in **this** world, not merely in the world to come. Eternal life begins at conversion; it is not postponed for some future pie in the sky. Death is but a transition to a new phase of life before the resurrection of the body. But before we get to this, let’s take a short survey.

### The Sacred/Secular Dichotomy

In his book, *LifeWork*, Darrow Miller traces modern attitudes toward labor back to the Greek philosophy of Plato in the fourth century BC. Plato believed that the material world was only a shadow of the real, spiritual world. Man was a prisoner in his material body hoping one day to be free from this body. Disdain for physical work was the ultimate result of this philosophy. Only the rich had the means to pursue an education and participate in the **higher life of the mind**; the rest were destined for a life of common labor. Slavery was a common way of removing the drudgery of manual labor from the wealthy, who could spend their time in intellectual contemplation. Women were demeaned as those whose only function was material—sexual gratification, child-bearing, and managing a household. Women were denied an education.

But how did we get from Plato to the church? First of all, many of the early church fathers were influenced by platonic philosophy; and secondly, the early church was influenced by a platonic heresy called Gnosticism teaching that the material world was evil and the spiritual world was good. Through knowledge, *gnosis*, one could escape the material world and progress upward to the spiritual world. Later in the second century AD, Christianity became blended with Gnosticism into a form of syncretism. Although Gnosticism was condemned by the church as a heresy, elements of it remained among Christian leaders and developed into a form of dualism between body and spirit which expresses

itself even among evangelical Christians today. The kind of thinking which Gnosticism espoused is reflected in the writings of the church historian, Eusebius.

“Two ways of life were given by the law of Christ to his Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living....Wholly and permanently separated from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone....Such then is the perfect form of the Christian life. And the other, more humble, more human, permits men to...have minds for farming, for trade, and the other more secular interests as well as for religion....And a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to them.”<sup>32</sup>

One wonders how Eusebius failed to see the inconsistency of his thinking. The first Adam was a farmer and the second Adam was a carpenter.

From this idea arose the concept of **layperson (laity) and clergyman**. Laypersons are living non-consecrated lives to God while the clergy is living a consecrated life. In this system, the church becomes the faucet of God’s grace to the layperson, the conduit by which he can access God’s grace indirectly through the church and its priests rather than directly through a relationship to God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

When the Reformation hit Europe by storm, this kind of teaching was challenged. Reformed teaching reaffirmed the idea of every Christian, not just clergy, living “consciously and intentionally in the presence of God”—also known as the priesthood of all believers. There was no separation between laity and clergy in the sense of one devoted or consecrated to God versus the unconsecrated life of common Christians. You were either consecrated to God or not. There were Christians and non-Christians, but nothing in-between.

Moreover, the Reformation taught justification by grace alone through Christ alone, which meant that attending religious services was not the means of justification or being accepted by God. Faith in Christ was the only thing necessary, and this faith resulted in the desire for worship and good works done in the world. It was no longer necessary to attend mass every day, leaving more time for pursuing one’s vocational calling. “The Reformation called Christians out of the building and into the world.” Every Christian had his calling before God.<sup>33</sup>

Fast-forward to the Enlightenment of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe in which Deism—the belief that God created the world, but He doesn’t matter anyway—laid the groundwork for philosophic naturalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—the belief that empirical science makes God unnecessary altogether. The church responded to the Enlightenment with either compliance, as in the case of the liberal church, or it pushed back with a greater commitment to orthodox faith. The Great Awakening of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century broke out in England and America. “First Inheritance Evangelicalism” (per Ralph Winter) taught a wholistic gospel which included not only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ but also the importance of transforming cultures and the importance of foreign missions. The leaders of the First Great Awakening were John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards. One of the spiritual children of First Inheritance Evangelicalism was **William Wilberforce** who fought most of his life for the abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire. He accomplished the last goal in

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted from Miller, p. 19

<sup>33</sup> Miller, pp. 20-22

the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, three days before he died. Another spiritual child was **William Carey** who not only translated the Bible into some 35 Indian dialects but also taught land conservation and new methods of gardening. He was also instrumental in diminishing the practice of *suti*, widow-emulation on the funeral pyres of their husbands. Carey was a missionary and social reformer because, for him, such tasks were inseparable. The gospel changes almost everything.

With the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, the way was now paved for a full-blown atheistic materialism and naturalism. The church responded to this wave of materialism in two ways: **accommodationism and fundamentalism**. On the one hand, the liberal church, in the mode of Thomas Jefferson, believed Jesus was a good moral teacher and that Christianity consisted in doing good to others through social activism. Salvation was defined as deliverance from physical and political oppression; missions became equivalent to mercy ministries minus the gospel. The liberal church didn't need a divine savior, because man could either save himself or be saved by other men. Therefore, the liberal church accommodated itself to naturalism with a Christian faith stripped of grace and the supernatural.

On the other hand, the fundamentalist church—holding to the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith—pushed back by emphasizing the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However, its orthodoxy lacked what Francis Schaeffer later called “**ortho-praxy**”. The conservative church holding to biblical Christianity became less interested in the social and cultural transformation taught by leaders of the First Great Awakening. They had inadvertently and unconsciously drifted into a platonic view of body and spirit separating nature and grace. Faith had become privatized. Miller calls this **evangelical Gnosticism**; Ralph Winter calls it **Second Inheritance Evangelicalism**.<sup>34</sup> Rather than an emphasis on what the church should be doing to change the world, evangelical Gnosticism has emphasized eschatology—the doctrine of future things, particularly the second coming of Christ. The world is not going to get any better, only worse; so why polish the brass on a sinking ship called “the earth”? Jesus' return is just around the next corner, so we won't have to put up with this world much longer anyway. The church should just save a few souls from the flames of hell and let unbelievers take whatever they want—the arts, music, science, political, judicial, and academic institutions, the whole works. Running for political office is not worthy of a Christian because politics is hopelessly corrupt; there is no use trying to change it. The purpose of education is not for enabling one to think Christianly in every area of life, but merely for getting a job. Christians became Sunday Christians, having little thought of the kingdom of God from Monday through Saturday despite Jesus' command, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.” This, of course, does not characterize the whole institutional church, but it does describe much of it.

Therefore, Miller says that the church returned to a pre-Reformation, dualistic paradigm in which “religious” work was viewed as something higher and more devoted to God than being a carpenter, college professor, or housewife and mother. We now speak of “full-time Christian service” for pastors and missionaries as if other Christians were not in full-time Christian service. Yet, we have not adequately trained Christians in how to use their vocations for the advancement of the kingdom of God. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” is viewed as pertaining to overseas missionaries or church planters rather than all Christians who are seeking to interpret their lives and vocations through

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<sup>34</sup> Miller, pp. 24-30

the lens of Christ’s teaching.<sup>35</sup> This is in stark contrast to what Abraham Kuyper—Prime Minister of the Netherlands—said in 1880.

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, “Mine!”<sup>36</sup>

Or Isaac Watts who wrote the hymn, *Joy to the World*.

No more let sins and sorrows grow nor thorns infest the ground.  
He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.

So, how do we get back to Reformational teaching about vocation? By returning to the beginning of vocational training in Genesis.

## Features of the Dominion Mandate in Genesis 1-2

### 1. God gave man an uncultivated earth.

Adam was placed in a garden, but one which had not been developed to its fullest potential. It was “good” but not complete. God could have given man a fully-cultivated garden which required no planting and no up-keep, but He didn’t. In fact, God could have created millions of people and thousands of cultures at once, and He could have created cultures with a large degree of sophistication and technological expertise already in place. He chose, rather, to allow the human race to develop its **innate potential as the image-bearers of God**. Man was required to utilize and fully develop his God-given potential in an environment which, before the fall, was completely responsive to his efforts. After the fall, he must continue his culture-making efforts in spite of the earth’s resistance. In the new heavens and earth, man’s work will continue unimpeded and at maximum potential in a new, sinless environment unhindered by the curse.

### 2. Dominion over the earth is given to man before the fall (Genesis 2:15).

This leads us to a very important conclusion. **Work is a blessing, not a curse.** It is not part of the curse placed upon man after the fall in Genesis 3. When I was a teenager I used to watch a TV show called “Doby Gillis”. One of the characters in that show was named Maynard who was an irresponsible, unproductive loafer who was basically “allergic” to work. Whenever he heard the word “work”, he would get visibly nervous and make a quick, but quiet, exit through the first available door. There are many in every culture who view work in the same sinful way. Since the fall of man, work—especially manual labor—has become a dreaded thing to many people. It was not this way when Adam cultivated the garden before the fall. As sinless human beings, Adam and Eve enjoyed their work. Work was an **act of worship** before God and was just as meaningful and rewarding as walking with God in the cool of the day (Gen. 3: 8). We may assume that man was free to arrange the plants the way he wished and to cross-pollinate and graft to produce new species within their kinds. Rather than giving Adam the name of every animal, God brought animals to man to see what **Adam** would call them. By naming the animals, Adam was carrying out his calling to subdue every creature upon the earth. Immediately

<sup>35</sup> Miller, pp. 31-33

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Miller, p. 28

after he names the animals, God made Eve from Adam's rib and Adam promptly gives Eve a generic name, woman, afterwards naming her Eve. Every day proved to be a new adventure in expressing their creative ability as a reflection of God's creativity. Each new day was a day of discovery and experimentation. Man's work was both physical and mental, a balance between "action and reflection".<sup>37</sup> Man did his work *coram deo*, in the presence of God, in contrast to the deistic notion of man living in the absence of God to work out his life in isolation from God. Work mattered because man always had an audience, an audience of one, the transcendental and immanent God.

What strikes me about man's immediate calling is the simplicity of it all. God did not put man in a coat and tie and put him behind a desk at Chase-Manhattan Bank, nor did He put him in a space suit and launch him to the moon. He put him in a garden. Adam got dirt under his fingernails and between his toes, but he could not have been happier. Adam had no conception of sacred and secular, work and worship, play and work. I like to emphasize this fact in Africa since the general cultural view is that work is part of the curse. If you ask many Africans the question: "When did Adam work in the garden, before or after he sinned?" they will say, "After he sinned." I suppose they think he was sun-tanning beside the Euphrates River before the fall. You can imagine how harmful such theology is to one's view of labor. **Is this at least part of the reason sub-Saharan Africa is poor?** I have discussed this point in Systematic Theology class in Uganda and Kenya. In Uganda, some of the men did not receive it very well, arguing strenuously that Ugandan men worked hard. Well, some do. But the men who argued with me were the same ones who never finished the requirements for the course.

In a well-known movie, "Chariots of Fire", the famous Scottish runner, Eric Liddell, was being discouraged by his sister from training for the Olympics. She believed that his training would hinder him from his mission work in China. But Liddell did not distinguish his running from his mission work. They both equally expressed his devotion to God. He replied to her, "God made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure." Doubtless this was the way Adam felt when he worked in the garden. He could feel God's pleasure in his labor. What kind of work helps you feel God's pleasure? This may be the key to finding your life's work.

The Biblical commentary on man's work after the fall is found in **Ecclesiastes**. No matter how hard he tried, Qohelet (the preacher) could not initially resolve the tension between the value of his labor and the seeming meaningless of it all, especially since he believed that death would be the end of man's legacy. Everything he had accomplished would be forgotten. He knew from the wisdom of the OT (Proverbs) that labor was a gift from God to be enjoyed, but in his own experience and the observable experience of others, work "under the sun" was from all appearances an unresolvable enigma, although he later resolves this tension at the end of the book by appealing to the traditional wisdom of the OT (Eccl. 12: 13-14), a tradition he was unable to forget.

After the fall, God cursed the ground, and it no longer readily yielded its produce to man's efforts.

"Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.<sup>18</sup> Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field;<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17b-19 NASB).

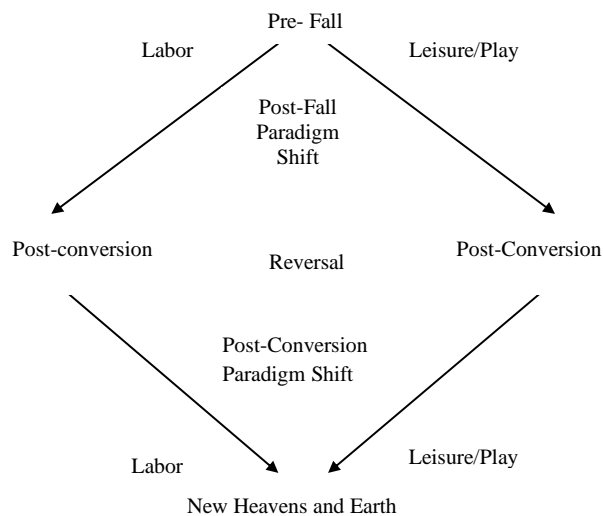
<sup>37</sup> Darrow Miller, *LifeWork—A Biblical Theology for What You Do Every Day*, p. 101



Man would now “work himself to death”.<sup>38</sup> Work would no longer be the enjoyable thing it was in the past. Nevertheless, it is not **work** that is cursed but **the ground**, making work difficult and often unrewarding. Nevertheless, man’s labor is not totally futile since he will still “eat bread” (Gen. 3: 19). Man will still continue to till the ground and subdue the created order, **for without work life is meaningless and without purpose**—not to speak of insufferably boring.

A former professor of mine provided a very helpful illustration in class to explain the relationship between man’s labor and leisure (play) before the fall and after the fall and how Christ has changed this relationship for the Christian.<sup>39</sup>

Before the fall, Adam and Eve did not discern any substantial difference between work and play (swimming perhaps?) as far as their enjoyment of each activity. Both work and play were equally enjoyable. In one sense work was play and play was work. After the ground was cursed at the fall, Adam’s labor “under the sun” (Ecclesiastes) became difficult and often unrewarding. His paradigm or model for understanding his work changed. Work and play diverged (separated) from one another in terms of enjoyment so that man welcomed the time when he could get some relief from the drudgery of his labor. This does not imply that there was no enjoyment in his labor at all, only that the “thorns and thistles” of the cursed ground were often overwhelming and led to discouragement and fatigue. Man now cultivate the earth by the sweat of his brow, and the earth would not be as yielding to his efforts as before, and often resistant.



<sup>38</sup>Pratt, *Designed for Dignity*, p. 55

<sup>39</sup> Richard Watson, former academic dean at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS

The extent to which work and play are distinguished from one another will be different from person to person, and even non-believers often enjoy their work without understanding its relationship to God. Nevertheless, Christ should make a tremendous difference. When a person is converted to Christ, another paradigm shift takes place in which work and play begin to merge together again. The difference between our work and our play in terms of enjoyment should diminish and will diminish given certain factors. First, work and play will once more come closer together **as we become more mature in our faith**, recognizing that whatever we are doing, work or play, we are doing it *coram deo*, in the presence of God and for God's pleasure (Col. 3: 23).

Secondly, our work and play will come closer together **the more we realize and pursue the specific calling God** has for each of us. This calling may consist of a series of many kinds of work, for our main calling may require many kinds of skills acquired over time. If we are not given the gifts and desire to do a certain kind of work, it is unrealistic to believe that we will be fully happy in it. New Testament slaves had to become content with their slavery because they had no other choice; nevertheless, while slaves, they were free in Christ and should do their work as to the Lord. They were serving Christ even in their slavery. If they ever had the opportunity to be free, Paul tells them to take advantage of the opportunity.

Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.<sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, **is the Lord's freedman**; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.<sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. (1 Corinthians 7:21-23 NASB)

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, **not with external service, as those who merely please men**, but with **sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord**.<sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, do your work heartily, **as for the Lord** rather than for men, (Colossians 3:22-23 NASB)

These verses contain many biblical principles concerning our vocations.

- (1) We are never married to a job like we are married to a spouse. We are free to extricate ourselves from a job which feels like bondage if we have the opportunity. The same job may not feel that way to someone else.
- (2) Our reverent fear of Christ should cause us to pursue our work in order to please him even while the boss is not looking. We are God-pleasers, not men-pleasers. We have an audience of one.
- (3) We ultimately belong to Christ; therefore, in all our labor we must pursue what is just and true even if it means disobeying our employer. We cannot allow others to enslave us because we are slaves of Christ. For example, we are not free to lie for our employer.
- (4) True liberty in our work does not come from the paycheck but from God alone. Some people are slaves to their paycheck. They dislike their work and do not feel called to it, but they will not leave it and pursue their true calling because their work makes good money.

It is legitimate to pursue a job which provides a better standard of living for your family when you are having a difficult time providing for their needs. But there is a point of diminishing returns in which additional income will not enhance your life and may diminish your enjoyment of life and hinder you from pleasing the Lord with your work.

The more we understand our work before the Lord and our specific place in God's world, the more we will enjoy our labor and the less we will look forward to "retirement". Retirement is legitimate if we are speaking of retiring from our existing job. It is unbiblical to think of retirement from all forms of meaningful and productive labor. We may even retire from a paying job to pursue work we always wanted to do for free. But as a general rule, there is no retirement for Christians, only interment (burial).

We may wonder what significance planting corn, raising livestock, flipping burgers at McDonald's, or laying bricks, or selling clothes could have in the eyes of the One who created the universe. It should be sufficient for us to know that God receives glory—and pleasure—from our labor and bids us to work for that reason. Only later will we understand the full importance of what we have done on earth. By taking pleasure in our labor, we also give God pleasure in our labor.

Many passages [of scripture] take us beyond a merely economic stewardship, but the one that has come to seem most valuable to me is Revelation 4: 11....: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."....

Our responsibility, then, as stewards, the responsibility that inescapably goes with our dominion over the other creatures, according to Revelation 4: 11, is to safeguard God's pleasure in His work. And we can do that, I think...by safeguarding *our* pleasure in His work, and our pleasure in our own work.

It may be argued that our whole society [namely, western society] is more devoted to pleasure than any whole society ever was in the past, that we support in fact a great variety of pleasure industries and that these are thriving as never before. But that would seem only to prove my point. That there can be pleasure industries at all, exploiting our apparently limitless inability to be pleased, can only mean that our economy is divorced from pleasure and that pleasure is gone from our workplaces and our dwelling places. Our work-places are more and more exclusively given over to production, and our dwelling places to consumption. And this accounts for the accelerating division of our country into defeated landscapes and victorious (but threatened) landscapes.

More and more, we take for granted that work must be destitute of pleasure. More and more, we assume that if we want to be pleased we must wait until evening, or the weekend, or vacation, or retirement. More and more, our farms and forests resemble our factories and offices, which in turn more and more resemble prisons—why else should we be so eager to escape them? We recognize defeated landscapes by the absence of pleasure from them. We are defeated at work because our work gives us no pleasure. We are defeated at home because we have no pleasant work there. We turn to the pleasure industries for relief from our defeat, and are again defeated, for the pleasure industries can thrive and grow only upon our dissatisfaction with them [in other words, we move from one entertainment to the other because none of it really satisfies us].<sup>40</sup>

We owe God pleasure in our labor, and we rob Him of pleasure when we attempt to avoid it, either because we are lazy or because we nurture an unbiblical view of labor. We are made for work (Gen. 1: 28; 2: 15), not idleness, and even God is still at work in sustaining creation, "upholding all things by

<sup>40</sup> Berry, pp. 139-140; words in brackets mine. My thanks to Craig Bartholomew and his commentary on Ecclesiastes for first drawing my attention to this section in Berry's book. To see how this fits into Qohelet's enigma in Ecclesiastes, see McNeill, "Ecclesiastes", "The relation of our work to creation", pp. 29-30.

the word of his power” through Christ (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1: 17). Laziness is a sin and a blatant denial of the kind of person God designed us to be, and it should not be surprising that those who have labored diligently and found meaning in their work in the presence of God have lived more happily, and generally longer, than those who have squandered the time and talents God gave them.

### 3. Dominion is given to both man and woman

Both man and woman were given the task of dominion. This is clear from Genesis 1: 26 when God said, “...and let them [*male and female*] rule....” Both are necessary in filling the earth, but also for having dominion over the earth. The cultural mandate is a “community project”<sup>41</sup> requiring the skills of both men and women—lots of them.

### 4. Dominion is given to corporate humanity, thus, the continuing importance of reproduction and the nurture of children.

Ancient kings placed their images throughout their extended kingdoms to display their power. The command to exercise dominion over the entire earth requires more than two image-bearers. Multiplication is, therefore, an equally important part of the creation mandate. Moreover, it is given to the whole human race, not just believers.<sup>42</sup> In spite of what the “experts” are saying today about the over-population of the earth and the need for population control, we have no record in the Bible of God ever limiting the multiplication of His images.<sup>43</sup> The problem is not overpopulation, but **distribution**. But this is not God’s fault, for he told man to **fill the earth**, not huddle together (cf. Gen. 11). The greatest resource of any nation is its people. The command to multiply has never been suspended either in the OT or the NT.

Overpopulation occurs in cities which keep growing in spite of limited promise for economic success—cardboard cities inside Mexico City and corrugated tin cities in Soweto inside Johannesburg, South Africa. Quite unsurprisingly, such cities are **the focus of overpopulation alarmists** who conveniently ignore vast unpopulated spaces. However, anyone with good eyesight can travel across the globe and see that there is enough space for many more people than the seven billion presently in existence. In the United States, the state of **Wyoming** alone has more than enough unoccupied space for the entire population of Uganda with room left over. Vast expanses of the earth have never been populated; they are awaiting the ingenuity of man to make them fruitful and inhabitable. Mississippi and Alabama have a combined population of 7-8 million people while Uganda, the same geographical size as both states, has a population of 35 million. I have traveled throughout Uganda, and its countryside is relatively open and unpopulated in spite of its 35 million people. The problem is not lack of space, but man’s reluctance in utilizing the resources present. Most of Uganda’s land is not being put to productive use due to an underutilized labor source and a resistance to technological change.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, p. 101

<sup>42</sup> The command to multiply indirectly forbids the sin of homosexuality which insists on the normality of “families” which cannot produce children for dominion. Such “families” are inherently selfish and man-centered rather than God-centered. The homosexual rights agenda in the US is increasingly focused on the right of homosexuals to legally marry and adopt children. The two demands go together, as homosexuals are not satisfied to remain childless. The command to multiply also condemns the materialism of heterosexual couples who do not want children for the selfish reason of having more money to spend on cars, bigger homes, and lavish vacations. But I suppose such materialists are doing everyone a favor for not having children who would grow up as duplicates of their selfish fathers and mothers.

<sup>43</sup> See Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Myth of Overpopulation*; also Darrow L. Miller with Scott Allen, *Against All Hope: Hope for Africa*, in which Miller and Allen argue that the African population is its greatest resource.

When God told man to multiply, it was not simply for the purpose of producing more people, but more people **capable and willing to exercise responsible dominion**.<sup>44</sup> If a father and mother produce ten children who grow up to become irresponsible adults, they have not fulfilled the cultural mandate.

There is no point in producing many children who end up delinquents or in hell. Thus the command carries with it a parental responsibility to educate and train children in the fear of God.<sup>45</sup>

Without the ability to subdue and rule, the dominion mandate is only half-fulfilled and half-obeyed. Some children grow up to be a negative drain on society by turning to a life of crime or being lazy and depending on the productivity of others for their subsistence. Christian children must be taught to be responsible image-bearers of God which requires that we take care of them physically and spiritually, providing godly education either formally in school or informally at home. A balanced approach is essential.

We have to be careful not to go to extremes here. Bearing children is an important dimension of human responsibility, but we have many other duties that also require our attention. Just as we do not evangelize or help the poor every moment of our lives, God does not expect us to have as many babies as we possibly can. We must balance our call to physical multiplication with our other responsibilities. The age and health of the couple, the constraints of extraordinary vocations, responsibilities for aging parents, financial considerations, and many other factors help us determine the timing and number of our children. Balancing the responsibility of bearing children against all of our other duties requires wisdom. There is a time to multiply and a time to refrain from multiplying (Eccl. 3: 1-8). Each couple must determine how God would have them serve him in this way.<sup>46</sup>

Many theologians will dismiss Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2 about male-female role distinctions in home and church as cultural-bound and irrelevant for modern Western culture. After saying that women cannot teach or exercise authority over men in the context of home or church, he says,

But *women* will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (1 Timothy 2:15 NASB)

The reasons Paul gives for role distinctions have nothing to do with individual cultures; they pertain to creation and the fall. Modernists demean the role of women in bearing and nurturing children as if this was a form of male exploitation. Waltke disagrees. Commenting on 1 Timothy 2: 15, he says,

After the Fall, God elevates godly mothers to a high status. In sovereign grace he changes the fallen woman's affection to enmity against Satan (Gen. 3: 15). By his promise to give this new woman a triumphant, though suffering, offspring, he implicitly assigns her the role of bearing the seed that would destroy the Serpent, the adversary of God and humanity. **The quintessential expression of that seed is Christ, who defeated Satan on the cross, but the mandate finds its fulfillment in every covenant child (Rom. 16: 20).** In response to the promise to give the woman seed to defeat

<sup>44</sup> Pratt, *Designed for Dignity*, pp. 27-31. See the previous discussion of the relationship between dominion and the great commission.

<sup>45</sup> Nyirongo, p. 120

<sup>46</sup> Pratt, p. 29.

Satan, believing Adam names his wife Eve, “because she would become the mother of all the living” (Gen. 3: 20). Thus, every Christian mother, by being in Christ, bears his holy children (1 Cor. 7: 14; cf. Isa. 53: 10). **If a woman has suffered any loss of leadership through her creation...**(1 Tim. 2: 12-13; cf. Gen. 2: 18-25)...**and through her historical guilt by Satan’s deception**, in contrast to Adam, in connection with the Fall (1 Tim. 2: 14; cf. Gen. 3: 1-14), Paul says she (singular) **will be saved from that loss through bearing children in Christ** if they (*meinōsin*, i.e. the children) continue in the faith, love, and holiness with propriety (3: 15; 1 Tim. 2: 15). In short, the apostle is saying, **“The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”** As a sign of my belief in that truth, I dedicated two benches to my mother at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando): ‘in memory of Louise Daab Waltke, who by faith, though dead, still speaks.’<sup>47</sup>

In spite of the importance of this task, it is demeaning to view women as mere baby factories, as is commonly done in sub-Saharan Africa. Marriage may continue, and should, without the blessing of children. It originates in the covenant agreement before witnesses and is consummated in sexual love, not in the birth of the first child. Failure to understand this principle in African culture has led to polygamy and sometimes the taking of a wife’s sister if the wife is considered infertile (cf. Lev. 18: 18). If the man is considered sterile, he may arrange for a relative to have sexual relations with his wife, thus condoning adultery.<sup>48</sup>

##### 5. The first dominion task given to man was manual labor.

Manual labor is not the only dominion task, but it was the first; and it should not go unnoticed that our Lord Jesus was a carpenter who learned the trade from His earthly father, as did most Jewish boys (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55). He was not a lawyer, physician, political ruler, or anyone else that we would call a “professional”. Thus, we see that in His first 30 years of obscurity (of which we know very little), Jesus accomplished something that He did not accomplish in His last three years of public ministry: **He gave dignity to all kinds of common labor.** There is no distinction in God’s mind between the dignity of one kind of labor as opposed to another. All legitimate labor has dignity. God shows no partiality, so why should we?

The first people specifically mentioned in the Bible who were endowed with the Holy Spirit were tailors or seamstresses who made priestly garments for Aaron, the first high priest of Israel (Ex. 28:1-3). The second person so endowed was Bezalel (Ex.31:1-5), whose genius in craftsmanship for the tabernacle would probably rival that of many of the masters of the Renaissance.<sup>49</sup>

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,<sup>2</sup> "See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.<sup>3</sup> "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in

<sup>47</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 238

<sup>48</sup> Nyirongo, p. 113

<sup>49</sup> The sculptor and artist, Michelangelo, was one of those masters. The Renaissance was the renewal of interest in classical art and literature which began in Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In Italy and France, the Renaissance primarily continued as the glorification of man, moving away from the Medieval religious orientation of humanity subordinate to a sovereign God. However, in Germany and England, it had positive results. The rebirth of interest in ancient literature prompted a man named Erasmus to produce the first Greek New Testament in the last part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This Greek NT was used by the Reformers to translate the Bible into the common languages of the people. See N. R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power*. For a very concise treatment of Erasmus, see McNeill, “Religious Persecution in the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century”, “Positive features of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century humanism”.

understanding, in knowledge, and in all *kinds of* craftsmanship,<sup>4</sup> to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze,<sup>5</sup> and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all *kinds of* craftsmanship. (Exodus 31:1-5 NASB)

His co-worker, Oholiab, is also given honorable mention. It should be noted that this endowment of the Spirit to a laborer was **after** the fall, indicating that the **redemption of man's labor** was included in the promise to Adam that a seed would come who would crush Satan's head. That we hear so little about these people even within church circles is the consequence of a world-wide cultural bias against the dignity of manual labor, a bias which has infected even God's people.

But it would appear that in every culture with any degree of sophistication, professional work requiring more formal education is respected far more than common labor—often to the point of arrogant condescension toward those who provide us with daily goods and services we need, as if they exist solely to make educated people more comfortable. Perhaps this is a throwback to the platonic philosophy of the Greco-Roman world. Arrogant condescension toward common laborers is nothing less than condescension to Christ himself who was a common laborer (Matt. 25: 45). He who created the world and holds it together is not impressed with advanced degrees in medicine, law, mathematics, economics, or theology. He is not impressed by man's power and wealth, "...for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). What does impress God is the man or woman who does his or her work heartily in a way that pleases Him, however lowly the work appears to be in the eyes of others (Eph. 6: 5-8; Col. 3: 22-25).

This naturally turns upon the question: **What should I do with my life.** What choices do I make concerning a career? Do I pursue a career which is esteemed by my culture or one which makes lots of money—salary and esteem generally go together. Or shall I pursue something for which I sense a particular **gifting and enjoyment**, regardless of esteem or money? **God was a farmer**, and he placed Adam in the garden to improve it. **God was a carpenter** in the person of Christ. He manifests his attributes and creativity in every conceivable kind of legitimate work.

## The Effects of the Fall on Man's Dominion

### 1. The curse directed to woman

Man's sin in the Garden of Eden had terrible consequences. The curse pronounced upon him is recorded in Genesis 3:16-19. Notice that the curse given to man and woman specifically targets their primary areas of dominion.

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you."

It is the natural and God-given desire of women to have children, and in every culture most married women feel a great loss if they cannot bear children. In pronouncing the curse upon woman, however, God did not say she could not have children but only that she would experience much pain in childbirth. Two kinds of pain may be implied. First, pregnancy itself and the act of childbirth would now become physically painful, inferring that Eve had already given birth before the fall without the experience of pain and suffering or with minimal pain. God now says that He will "greatly multiply [her] pain in childbirth". Had she never given birth before, she would not be able to make a comparison between

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birth pangs before the fall and afterwards. The existence of other children before Cain and Abel is not purely speculative, unless someone can explain why Cain was afraid of being executed after murdering Abel (Gen. 4: 14). Secondly, she would have emotional pain in rearing her children who themselves would follow her example of disobedience to God’s oral word. Her children would think independently of God’s authority and parental authority. Eve will reap the defiance of authority she has sown, and her heart would be broken many times, especially when Cain murders Abel. Nevertheless, the curse is mitigated (made less painful). God shows grace to the woman in promising future children, even the seed who would crush the head of the serpent beginning with the line of Seth.<sup>50</sup>

Another consequence of the curse upon woman is that she and her husband would no longer be in perfect, harmonious cooperation with one another in dominion. Instead of complementing one another’s diverse abilities, they would often work in competition with one another, challenging one another for headship. The words, “Yet your desire shall be for your husband” do not refer to sexual desire for Adam, but the desire (*teshuqah*<sup>51</sup>) to dominate him. The desire (*teshuqah*) of sin to dominate Cain is revealed in Genesis 4:7 and gives us a clue to the meaning of the expression in Genesis 3:16. As Satan desires to rule Cain’s life, Eve desires to rule Adam’s life.

“If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; **and its desire is for you**, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:7 NASB)

This interpretation is further established by what follows in v.16, “And he shall rule over you” which does not fit the context of sexual desire. Since the fall, it is the natural, sinful tendency for women to attempt to dominate their husbands rather than submit to them. This naturally produces tension in their dominion tasks of helping their husbands and the rearing of children since there is no third party to break a tie-vote in decision-making. Despite the woman’s desire to take the leadership for herself, man will remain in charge even as he was at the beginning before the fall. Satan succeeded in dominating Cain’s life, but woman will not succeed in dominating the male. God won’t allow it because it violates the very order of creation—man created first and woman second, man exercising dominion in the garden first and woman second. The fall does not eradicate (remove) man’s headship; it makes it all the more necessary.

However, man’s leadership after the fall will not often be godly leadership and will be more often harsh, unloving, and irresponsible. Men have commonly abdicated (surrendered) their roles as the heads of their families through negligence and irresponsibility. **Headship is confused with control and tyranny.** In African culture, men have repeatedly surrendered the role of family provider to their wives who commonly till the ground with babies strapped to their backs while they are “occupied” with idle conversation in the trading centers.<sup>52</sup> Certainly many African men work hard and long each day, but many have gained a reputation of irresponsibility from their own wives.<sup>53</sup> On a recent news cast a group of Ethiopian women involved in microfinance claimed that men were a bad risk for microfinance loans. Why? As one woman interviewed claimed, “Women spend their money on the home and children. Men get drunk and fall out.”<sup>54</sup> Again, there are many African men who do not fit

<sup>50</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>51</sup> *BibleWorks*

<sup>52</sup> I am not being theoretical; I have seen with my own eyes able-bodied men playing cards under the same shade tree day after day as I made my routine bike ride through a small trading center.

<sup>53</sup> This is also not theoretical. I have heard their complaints.

<sup>54</sup> *Aljazeera*, date unknown



this description, and I personally know several Ugandan and Kenyan men whose work schedules are very demanding. However, this characterization of Ethiopian men was sufficiently wide-spread for the microfinance administrators to avoid submitting loans to them. Moreover, the Ugandan practice of separate bank accounts for husbands and wives also lends support to the theory that women do not trust their husbands' management of money.

In Western society, men are generally working off the borrowed capital of the Puritan work ethic exported to American soil in the 1600's. This work ethic still makes the US one of the most productive countries on earth—albeit with much help from industrious and hard-working Asians and Hispanics coming to the US for income and opportunities non-existent in their own countries. However, this spiritual capital is being rapidly depleted among the indigenous US population—white and black—with many in the US considering it their entitlement to live off the productive efforts of others. The most serious consequences have been the rupture of the American home with single moms providing for themselves and their children.

The history of man reveals a sad, tragic testimony of the ill-treatment of women in every culture. As we study the NT, we come to the predictable conclusion that Jesus was **the first true liberator of women**, and those cultures which are the most influenced by the gospel will demonstrate the greatest respect for a woman's role in dominion and her worth as a fellow image-bearer of God. Yet, sadly, the Christian church has often failed to be at the forefront of lobbying for women's rights, proven by the ascendancy of people like Gloria Steinem and organizations like Planned Parenthood.

## 2. The curse directed to man

<sup>17</sup>Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. <sup>18</sup>"Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; <sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:17-19 NASB)

Once again the curse is concentrated upon man's primary emphasis in dominion, in this case the labor of cultivation. The ground which once so readily yielded its produce to man's efforts would now only grudgingly produce fruit. As an additional burden, it would grow other plants not beneficial to man's sustenance, thorns and thistles, thus resisting his efforts. Instead of thoroughly enjoying his work as before, man would labor "in toil" (v.17), i.e. hardship and sorrow. Christ's redemption of man's labor is symbolized in the crown of thorns upon his head, the symbol of God's curse upon the ground. With the death of Christ, the curse begins to work backwards until the entire earth becomes a productive garden.

The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus (Isaiah 35:1 NASB)

The scorched land will become a pool And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass *becomes* reeds and rushes. (Isaiah 35:7 NASB)

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. (Isaiah 65:17 NASB)

Because of God's grace, man's curse, like the woman's, is mitigated (lessened). As she will continue to have children, man will continue to eat from the ground. But now that sin has entered, he shall eat from the ground "by the sweat of [his] face" (v.19), thus implying that cultivation that was once pure enjoyment would now become a burden. God continues to care for the man and does not take away the work of dominion without which life would be meaningless. Nevertheless, life will be hard; man will grow old and die, and his body will return to the dust from which he came. He may no longer exercise dominion in the safe and friendly environment of the Garden of Eden, but in a world filled with hatred, violence, greed, natural and man-made disasters, and shortages. Man's story now becomes the story of Qohelet in Ecclesiastes. Regardless of any success, the value of labor becomes enigmatic (confusing).

Yet, even in a world dominated by sin and sin's hardship, dominion never stops. God will not let it stop. As we carefully read Genesis 4, we notice that the history of Cain's descendants is a history filled with progress and achievement. After he "went out from the presence of the Lord", Cain built a city (v.17), a cultural achievement in itself. His descendants practiced animal husbandry, developed musical instruments and metallurgy (production and use of metals). Their rapid cultural advancement indicates that they had not lost every element of what it means to be God's image. However, their progress is essentially unholy in that it is not motivated by love for God or the glory of God, but the glory of man. As a matter of fact, man's progress became an encouragement to elevate himself to the same level as God, a motivation which becomes apparent in Genesis 11 and the building of the Tower of Babel. It is ironic that human achievement, one element of God's common grace, is used by him to defy God and is interpreted as the reason he does not need God.<sup>55</sup> Since the fall, men become builders of their own kingdoms.

We conclude, then, that although sin complicates dominion and presents the task with many obstacles and hardships, sin does not eradicate dominion. As God's image-bearers, we are still presented the task of "cultivating" the ground and multiplying other image-bearers of God throughout the earth. Cultivating the ground, of course, includes anything by which man makes an improvement to the earth God created. Many examples are apparent, including the products of modern technology—cell phones, automobiles, airplanes, modern medicine (which minimizes the dreadful effects of the fall), modern shelters built with longer lasting materials, labor saving devices like washing machines, tractors, and power saws. One of the most important developments in dominion has been in the task of cultivation itself. Notice Tubal-Cain's forging of labor-saving implements of bronze and iron (v. 22). By using modern methods of agriculture developed after many years of research, we can now spend less time growing ever-increasing amounts of food.

In the United States, for example, in 1982 (30 years ago) less than 4 million farmers grew enough food to feed 234 million US citizens plus food for export—enough for himself and 61 other people.<sup>56</sup> This allows other citizens to pursue different dominion tasks such as computer technology, engineering, medical technology, manufacturing, etc. without the necessity of growing their own food. Wealth (measured in economic terms) in any society is only possible with division of labor and diversification.

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<sup>55</sup> Thus, the only means of denying God are the gifts God provides.

<sup>56</sup> E. Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty—The Compassionate Use of Resources in a World of Scarcity*, p. 86).

On the negative side, the products of dominion can be used to dishonor God as well as to honor him. Cell phones are being used by terrorists to detonate bombs in heavily populated areas, and automobiles and airplanes are used to carry out terrorist attacks. Computers and the internet are used to spread the filth of pornography throughout the world. Nuclear physics can be used to destroy the whole world several times over.

### **3. The curse directed to Satan through the serpent**

Satan had desired to align himself with mankind forever against God, with himself as man's lord and master. This is seen clearly when Satan attempted to seduce Christ into alliance with himself against God the Father, a repetition of the Adamic temptation.

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;<sup>9</sup> and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:8-9 NASB)

The rebellion of Genesis 11 on the plain of Shinar recalls the motive of Satan expressed as a temptation to the woman.

They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:4 NASB)

"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5 NASB)

But Satan's plan was cursed from the beginning. Some of mankind is allied with Satan—the line of Cain representing those who are, and will remain, unbelievers. But God will choose the seed of the woman through the line of Seth—representing all who are, or will become, believers. The offspring of the woman, Jesus Christ, will crush the head of the serpent through His active obedience to the Law and His passive obedience upon the cross (Rom. 16: 20). God's elect people, the extended offspring of the woman, are Satan's enemies whom he seeks to destroy (Rev. 12: 17). While succeeding in Adam's fall, he utterly failed to seduce Christ, the second Adam. Having defeated Satan, Christ will draw all men (i.e. all kinds of elect men and women) to Himself through the message of the cross (Jn. 12: 32), thus forming the predetermined alliance between men and God. Rather than building the city of man and the tower which reaches into heaven to defy God, and rather than defying the creation mandate to fill the earth with His image bearers, the renewed humanity will build the city of God (Heb. 11: 10) by filling the earth and subduing it for the glory of God, not the glory of man (Rom. 8: 18-25).

### **The Creation Mandate and the Great Commission**

There is a close relationship between the cultural mandate and the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18-20.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."<sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 NASB)

Jesus' commission requires that we make disciples ("learners"), not converts. Disciples are those who are continuously learning how to please the Lord, observing all that He commanded His original disciples about living their lives in the presence of God, "Coram Deo". Discipleship is not limited to teaching others how to evangelize, although learning how to share one's faith is certainly part of being a disciple. Rather, it consists in teaching Jesus' disciples how to apply his commandments to every aspect of one's life—marriage, family, work, etc.—and being able to give a reasonable, biblical account of why we think and act the way we do (1 Pet. 3: 15). Christians must conform every thought to the obedience of Christ's word (2 Cor. 5: 10; Rom. 12: 2).

If we understand the Great Commission in this broad, comprehensive sense, then it is not difficult to comprehend its connection with the cultural mandate. Christians are redeemed in order to fulfill the original cultural mandate in Genesis. Therefore, resurrection is not the end game, but the means to the end—the cultivation of the earth according to the creation mandate. God has not changed his mind. This does not mean that fallen man has been unable to subdue the creation in any sense. He has done so through common grace. The cultural achievements of Cain's line in Genesis 4: 20-22 are evident—building cities, the development of animal husbandry and metallurgy (using metal to make tools and implements), and the composition and performance of music. Grammatical analysis shows Lamech's poem (Gen. 4: 23-24) to have the same features of Hebrew parallelism found in the Psalms and Proverbs. However, cultural perversion is also evident in his boast of homicide.

"Adah and Zillah

Listen to my voice,  
You wives of Lamech,  
Give heed to my speech,  
For I have killed a man  
for wounding me;  
And a boy  
for striking me;  
<sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

John Frame has traced the promise of seed and land through the biblical covenants to the Great Commission.<sup>57</sup> The promise begins in the original cultural mandate to Adam and Eve, "God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28 NASB). The command-promise of being fruitful and multiplying is the promise of seed. The command-promise of subduing the earth and ruling over the animal world is the promise of land. This command-promise was not suspended after man fell into sin or even after the earth was so thoroughly polluted with sin as to make it uninhabitable (cf. Gen. 6: 5). God would destroy man and purify the earth with a flood; but afterward, He would repeat the cultural mandate and commence with the original plan of filling the earth with His image-bearers who would subdue the earth: "As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it" (Genesis 9:7 NASB).

<sup>57</sup> *DCL*, pp. 308-311.

Although the command to subdue the earth is absent in v. 7, the promise in vv. 9-16 to not interrupt the normal cycle of life indicated that Noah and his family could resume man's original task of ruling. The next thing we find in the narrative is Noah planting a vineyard (v. 20), a resumption of Adam's task in cultivation. This, in turn, is followed by a reminder that despite God's purification of the earth with water, man himself is not yet purified, but still fallen. Noah demonstrates counterfeit culture by misusing the fruits of dominion—he gets drunk. Noah's success mixed with failure foreshadows the history of culture in both discovering the richness of the earth's potential along with its potential for misuse.

The line of Cain will develop the arts and sciences; their seed will “play the harp and flute” and forge “all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron”....They will write poetry that gives full and creative expression to the human spirit, and in due course they will found universities and grant degrees in the arts and sciences. But yet it will all be depraved. They will build cities but name them after themselves and use them to defend themselves against one another. The good gold and wealth outside the garden (2: 11-12), given by the Creator to enrich life, will also arouse their greed and occasion war.<sup>58</sup>

The Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants also reiterate the command-promise of land and seed.<sup>59</sup> God promises him the land of Canaan and descendants through Sarai as numerous as the stars of the heavens and sand on the seashore (Gen. 22: 17). After the twelve tribes of Israel immigrate to Egypt, the promise of seed continues with the rapid multiplication of Israelites. In the text of Exodus 1: 7-20, vv. 8-20a are bracketed [ ] by vv. 7 and 20b which provide the emphasis of the text, land and seed.

But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. (Exodus 1:7 NASB)

So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. (Exodus 1:20 NASB)

God renews the promise of land with Moses (Ex. 3: 7-8).

"So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. (Exodus 3:8 NASB)

The phrase, “a land flowing with milk and honey” is repeated three more times in Exodus and eight more times in the Pentateuch. The sacramental significance of the land is illustrated powerfully by Naboth's refusal to sell King Ahab his vineyard at any price (1 Kings 21:3) and by the seventy years of exile in Babylon to provide the land its Sabbath rest (Lev. 25: 4; 2 Chron. 36: 20-21). The land symbolized a place of rest and refuge and served as a type of salvation rest in the new heavens and earth.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 268

<sup>59</sup> Frame, *DCL*, p. 309).

In the Davidic covenant, God repeats His promise for Israel to have a place of her own to live in safety from her enemies,

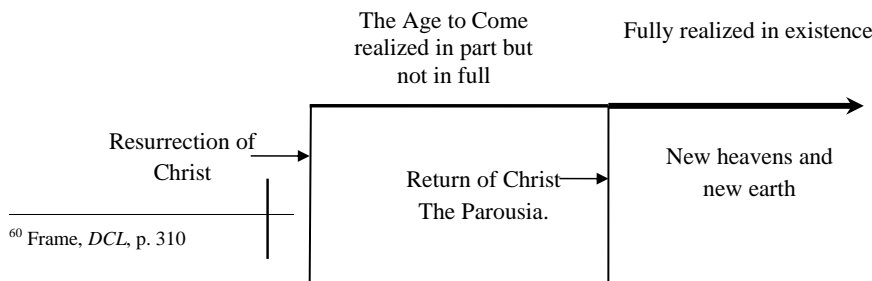
“I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly” (2 Samuel 7:10 NASB).

But not only will the nation enjoy a place of their own, David himself will have a “house”, an enduring dynasty consisting of his descendants (a seed) who will rule the earth (2 Sam. 7: 4-16; Ps. 72, cited by Frame). The promise of a dynasty is typical not only of the kingdom of Christ, but the vice-regency of Christians ruling the earth as kings under the ultimate rule of Christ.

The theme of seed and land is continued into the new covenant by means of the Great Commission. Christ is the promised seed who “takes title” not only to the land of Palestine but to the whole world, even the whole heavenly realm: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18 NASB). Furthermore, Jesus is the Son with whom the Father is “well pleased”, and by His perfect obedience has fulfilled the requirements of the dominion mandate given to man at the beginning of creation. Yet, instead of consummating His rule immediately, Christ sends His disciples into the world to perfect and complete the dominion made possible through His active and passive obedience—His perfect obedience to the law and submissive obedience as the atoning sacrifice for sin. Christians are now equipped to subdue the earth for the glory of God—not the glory of man (Gen. 11)—by obeying everything Christ commanded us.

While the command to fill the earth biologically with new image-bearers continues, the Great Commission gives us a new dimension to the multiplication of children. We are commanded through the Great Commission not merely to multiply physical seed, but disciples (spiritual seed) who are committed to observing Christ’s commandments. Thus, both the church and family coordinate with one another to comply with the original cultural mandate and the Great Commission. Moreover, through the obedience of this spiritual seed throughout the world, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11: 9).

The Great Commission, therefore, can be understood as a **republication of the cultural mandate** for the semi-eschatological age. Unlike the original cultural mandate, it presupposes the existence of sin and the accomplishment of redemption. It recognizes that if the world is to be filled with worshipers of God, subduing the earth as his vassal kings, **they must first be converted to Christ through the preaching of the gospel**. But when the evangelization of the world is complete, the result will be that envisaged in the cultural mandate.<sup>60</sup>



<sup>60</sup> Frame, *DCL*, p. 310

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This Age

Semi-eschatological Age

The above diagram is slightly modified from Frame,<sup>61</sup> and Frame's is a slight modification of Geerhardus Vos' two-age structure.<sup>62</sup> "This age" begins at the fall of Adam and continues until the return of Christ, the Parousia. "The age to come" begins at the resurrection of Christ and continues through all eternity. Therefore, "this age" and "the age to come" co-exist simultaneously (at the same time) between the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ—the "semi-eschatological" age in which we live (represented by bold lines). The age to come (partially realized from the resurrection of Christ until the *Parousia*; 1Cor. 13: 9-12) will be fully realized or consummated at His return and will continue eternally in this fully realized state (represented by the bolder line).

Our salvation is complete in Christ, but sin will not be destroyed until his return. Or, as biblical theologians often put it, salvation is "already" here, but also "not yet" fully here. Christ has all authority, but Satan still has much power....There is much mopping up to be done.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, our task is not **either** the Great Commission of making disciples **or** subduing the earth for the glory of God. It is **both**. The two commands are correlative (mutually dependent on one another). We cannot adequately fulfill the creation mandate of subduing the earth without understanding **how** God wants it subdued. Although the Bible is not a textbook on science, technology, or ecology (earth-keeping), it still gives us the principles necessary in governing such disciplines. Reciprocally, we cannot adequately make disciples without the evangelical witness of doing our work "heartily as for the Lord rather than for men" (Col. 3: 23). Not only must unbelievers hear the gospel, they must see it in practice. Unbelievers have little reason to believe our testimony if we fail to demonstrate our faith on a day to day basis through our work.<sup>64</sup> By all means necessary, Christians must "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" which applies to every aspect of life and work.

### Priestly Dominion

The sacredness of the Christian's labor on earth is further supported by the biblical association between the Garden of Eden and the OT temple and tabernacle. Not only was Adam to rule the earth, he was appointed to rule it as a priest-king. G.K. Beale has suggested a comprehensive biblical theology of the Garden of Eden as the typical, arboreal temple of God and the new heavens and new earth as the antitype and fulfillment of the OT tabernacle and temple.<sup>65</sup> Beginning in Genesis, Beale demonstrates the similarity between the terminology of the cultural mandate of Genesis with the priestly duties found in the Pentateuch. All verses below are cited in Beale except where noted.

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<sup>61</sup> *DCL*, pp. 278-279

<sup>62</sup> Gerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> *DCL*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>64</sup> For a penetrating discussion on the need for pleasure in our work, see Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?*, "Pleasures of Eating," p. 152.

<sup>65</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*. I am indebted to Dr. Julian Zugg for directing my attention to Beale's work and the temple theme in Genesis.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate [*abad*] it and keep [*shamar*] it. (Genesis 2:15 NASB)

As Beale points out, the words “cultivate” and “keep”, within a 15 word range in the OT, are also used of Israelites guarding God’s word or keeping the service of the tabernacle.<sup>66</sup>

"They shall perform [*shamar*—“keep, watch, or preserve”] the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do [*abad*—“work, serve”] the service of the tabernacle.

<sup>8</sup> "They shall also keep [*shamar*] all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do [*abad*] the service of the tabernacle. (Numbers 3:7-8 NASB)

"But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work [*abad*] any more. <sup>26</sup> "They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep [*shamar*] an obligation, but they *themselves* shall do [*abad*] no work. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations." (Numbers 8:25-26 NASB)

"So you shall attend [*shamar*] to the obligations of the sanctuary and the obligations of the altar, so that there will no longer be wrath on the sons of Israel. <sup>6</sup> "Behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to perform [*abad*] the service for the tent of meeting. (Numbers 18:5-6 NASB)

Thus they are to keep [*shamar*] charge of the tent of meeting, and charge of the holy place, and charge of the sons of Aaron their relatives, for the service of the house of the LORD. (1 Chronicles 23:32 NASB)

"Yet I will appoint them to keep [*shamar*] charge of the house, of all its service and of all that shall be done in it. (Ezekiel 44:14 NASB)

Waltke also makes note of Adam’s responsibility to guard [*shamar*] the garden.

Ironically, by his not driving Satan from the garden, Adam was expelled by Satan.<sup>67</sup>

Waltke’s statement should be qualified. Adam’s expulsion from the garden was primarily by God’s judgment, but it was through the secondary agency of Satan’s temptation. Had Adam mastered Satan by exercising dominion over the serpent, he would have avoided God’s judgment and expulsion.

“Keeping” and “serving” are also used in the OT context of keeping the commandments of God and serving Him only.

"But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not **keep** [*shamar*] My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and **serve** [*abad*] other gods and worship them, <sup>7</sup> then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house

<sup>66</sup> Beale, p. 68

<sup>67</sup> Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* p. 259



which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. (1 Kings 9:6-7 NASB)

"Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and **keep** [*shamar*] His commandments and hold fast to Him and **serve** [*abad*] Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Joshua 22:5 NASB, not cited in Beale)

Although it has been argued by some theologians that the Adamic probation was not a covenant in the strict sense of the word, the reference in 1 Kings 9 supports the view that Israel's disobedience and its consequences is a repetition of Adam's. Israel was cut off from the land of promise due to disobedience to the covenant. Adam's expulsion from the garden was likewise the result of disobedience.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, as Adam failed to serve [*abad*] God with a whole heart, Israel also failed by serving [*abad*] other gods. In fact, Adam's fall was a foreshadowing for Israel that she would not be able to keep the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, as Moses had prophesied (Deut. 30: 1-3). If a perfect man in the perfect environment becomes a rebel, how can faithless Israel keep the Law in a land racked by debauchery?<sup>69</sup>

In 1 Kings 6, descriptions of Solomon's temple replicate the garden images of Genesis.

Then he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, inner and outer *sanctuaries*. (1 Kings 6:29 NASB)

So *he made* two doors of olive wood, and he carved on them carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread the gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.<sup>33</sup> So also he made for the entrance of the nave four-sided doorposts of olive wood<sup>34</sup> and two doors of cypress wood; the two leaves of the one door turned on pivots, and the two leaves of the other door turned on pivots.<sup>35</sup> He carved *on it* cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers; and he overlaid *them* with gold evenly applied on the engraved work. (1 Kings 6:32-35 NASB)

The garden images of Genesis are also repeated in Ezekiel and Revelation **in association with the temple**.

Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. (Genesis 2:10 NASB)

The symbolism here indicates that Eden was a place of abundant water which in the Scriptures is symbolic of life. Remember Christ's interaction with the adulterous woman at the well. "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." (John 4:10 NASB)

Then he showed me **a river of the water of life**, clear as crystal, **coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb**,<sup>2</sup> in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was **the tree of life**, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, **yielding its fruit every month**; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2 NASB)

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Beale, pp. 68-69

<sup>69</sup> Waltke, p. 255

Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, **water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east**, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. (Ezekiel 47:1 NASB)

We can see in these passages the clear association between the garden and the temple. Adam kept the garden and worked in the garden as the OT priests kept and worked in the temple. Thus, the restored heavens and earth will be the fulfillment of God's original plan to dwell with His people in intimate communion who serve Him day and night in His cosmic temple. As Adam was expelled from the original garden-temple because of disobedience, the new covenant people will be allowed entrance because of Christ's obedience. In the Mosaic economy communion with God was typified by the entrance of the high priest **once a year into the holy of holies**, and by the entrance of the greater High Priest, Jesus Christ, into the heavenly tabernacle with His sacrificial blood. When Christ entered the heavenly holy of holies, the veil separating God from His people was torn, thus allowing all those who believe in Christ into eternal intimate communion with God. The whole earth will serve as the eschatological temple of God with God's people serving him and keeping His commandments. However, as no unclean person was allowed into the OT temple, so also no unbeliever defiled by sin will be permitted into the heavenly temple-city.

He stationed the gatekeepers of the house of the LORD, so that no one would enter *who was* in any way unclean. (2 Chronicles 23:19 NASB)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2 NASB)

<sup>27</sup>and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:27 NASB)

The garden-temple is the archetype<sup>70</sup> of harmonious existence enjoyed between God, man, and creation unmarred by human sin.

The garden of Eden represents a territorial space within creation that is qualitatively better than the rest of creation, a unique blessed place. In this special space, God invites human beings to enjoy a state of bliss consisting of harmony with God, with one another, with animals, and with the land. It is peace and wholeness, "the celestial city" with the wide expanse reserved for humanity. Human beings sense they were designed to belong in the garden; it is their home in the ultimate sense.

The garden, by extension, is a temple—God is uniquely present in a way he is not elsewhere. In this garden people meet God and walk and talk with him. As a temple, it is the axis between heaven and earth.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The original type

<sup>71</sup> Waltke, p. 255

