

# THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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## Remembering the Reformation Solas

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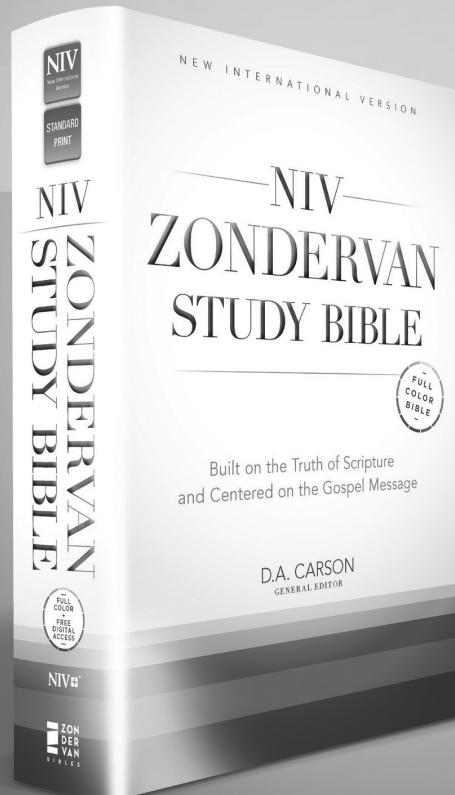
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# **Editorial: Remembering the Reformation by Reflecting on its Solas**

**STEPHEN J. WELLUM**

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Next year the Church will celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Historians usually date the start of the Reformation to the 1517 publication of Martin Luther's "95 Theses." On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a German Augustinian monk, posted his theses on a church door in the university town of Wittenberg. Probably not fully aware of what this act would enflame, Luther was simply following a common academic practice of the day. By nailing his theses to the church door, he was inviting people to debate some of the specifics of Roman Catholic theology and practice, especially the practice of indulgences. But unbeknown to Luther, this act is now viewed as the start of the Reformation which spread like wildfire in the German states, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Scotland, and portions of France, and it produced pastors and theologians such as Huldreich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, and the richness of the entire post-Reformation theological tradition, which reverberates to our own day.

Beyond question, the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century changed Christianity forever. The Reformation was not perfect, but it was a mighty

reviving movement of the Spirit of God which purified the Church and called people back to the fundamentals of the Gospel. In so doing, it removed from our thinking the emphasis of human autonomy and human tradition as equal in authority to God's Word; it recovered the God-centeredness of all of life and thought by glorying in the triune God of the Bible in all of his majestic rule and Lordship; it emphasized the importance yet pervasive depravity of human beings as image-bearers; it stressed the utter inability of humans to save themselves thus proclaiming the need for God to redeem us by his sovereign grace alone; and it exalted the glory, majesty, exclusivity, and sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ who alone has accomplished our salvation fully, completely, and perfectly.

To attempt to capture and unpack the extraordinary impact of the Reformation on the Church and her theology, let alone its impact on the larger society is not possible here. In fact, world history would look quite different apart from the influence of the Reformation in a whole host of areas. Over the next year, as the Reformation is remembered and celebrated, many of the lasting legacies of the Reformation will be discussed in books, magazines, and social media. Yet, one way of remembering the legacy of the Reformation is by reflecting on five *solas*, or Latin phrases that emerged during and after the Reformation, which nicely captured some of the Reformers' crucial theological convictions central to the Reformation and the Gospel. The five *solas* are as follows: 1. *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"). 2. *Sola Fide* ("faith alone"). 3. *Sola Gratia* ("grace alone"). 4. *Solus Christus* ("through Christ alone"). 5. *Soli Deo Gloria* ("to the glory of God alone").

In order to accomplish the task of remembering the legacy of the Reformation by reflecting on its *solas*, on September 24-25, 2015, a theology conference was held on the campus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to do just that. The articles in this issue of *SBJT* are the presentations of that conference. In addition, these articles are also summaries of individual books that have been written by the presenters on each of the *solas*. Zondervan is publishing each of these monographs, and as of the publication of this issue of *SBJT*, two of the books have already been published (*Faith Alone* by Thomas Schreiner and *God's Glory Alone* by David VanDrunen) with the remaining three books to be published this year (*Scripture Alone* by Matthew Barrett, *Grace Alone* by Carl Trueman, and *Christ Alone* by myself).

Why are these five *solas* helpful in remembering the extraordinary legacy

of the Reformation? Ultimately the answer to this question takes us to the heart of Christian theology. The *solas* remind us about the God-centered nature of Christianity and how human beings, as important as we are as image-bearers, are completely dependent upon God's sovereign initiative to create, reveal, rule, and redeem. Everything we have in this life and the life to come is due to God's grace, planning, initiative, self-communication, and self-giving.

Think, for example, of *sola Scriptura*. Apart from God's initiative to speak to us in an authoritative, reliable, and sufficient way, we would not know God in a true, objective manner. No doubt, in creating the world, God has made himself known in creation which reflects his plan (general revelation), but to know God's plan, purposes, and will, we need a specific Word-revelation, which serves as our final and ultimate authority. In addition, we need a Word which is first-order, that is, objectively God's Word through human authors, so that our second-order interpretations, whether as individuals or collectively as the Church, can be corrected in light of Scripture alone. This does not mean that historical theology, tradition, and confessions are not helpful in our reading and application of Scripture. But it is an important reminder that our confessions or "the rule of faith" are secondary standards which must correspond to Scripture otherwise they are not true and reliable. Today, this stress on God's self-communication and his authoritative Word must be heard again by the Church, as we have the tendency to elevate our thought and experience over Scripture which is another way of denying or minimizing God's holy Word.

Or think of the importance of *solus Christus* and its relationship to *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. Given our human sin, we need our triune God to provide for us a covenant head who will not only represent us but act as our penal substitute. In *Christ alone*, we have such a glorious Savior who meets our every need. In God the Son incarnate, we have a Redeemer, who can meet his own demand against us because he is God the Son, yet he can also represent us and act as our substitute because he is the *incarnate* Son. Given *who* he is and *what* he does, it is no wonder that we can add nothing to his work, and the only way to receive him is by raising the empty hands of faith (*sola fide*). And in so doing, we realize that from beginning to end our salvation is a result of God's sovereign grace (*sola gratia*), who loved us before the foundation of the world, planned our eternal salvation, and sent

our glorious Lord and Savior to accomplish everything we need, even to the application of his work to us by the Spirit of God. It is no wonder that our whole life is to be lived *soli deo Gloria*, because this universe is God's and, we as his creatures have been created to know, adore, obey, and serve *him*. To substitute any created thing for him not only is a denial of his glory, but it is utter foolishness on our part. The glory of the Gospel is that the triune God of Scripture has created us for himself and that in Christ, all of God's promises are yes and amen.

In reading this issue of *SBJT*, which seeks to give God thanks for the Reformation and how God worked so mightily, powerfully, and graciously in the Reformers, we do so by remembering what is at the heart and soul of the Gospel itself: the glorious, gracious triune God who deserves all of our worship, adoration, and our lives, for his glory and for the good of the Church. May these articles stir in your heart a renewed appreciation for grace and the centrality, majesty, and worthiness of our great triune Creator-Covenant God. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

# **Sola Scriptura in the Strange Land of Evangelicalism: The Peculiar but Necessary Responsibility of Defending *Sola Scriptura* Against Our Own Kind**

**MATTHEW BARRETT**

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“Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men’s books and human teachers.” —Martin Luther

“I approve only of those human institutions which are founded upon the authority of God and derived from Scripture.” —John Calvin

*Sola Scriptura* “is the corner-stone of universal Protestantism; and on it Protestantism stands, or else it falls.” —B. B. Warfield

## INTRODUCTION

“So what if everything in the Bible isn’t true and reliable or from God. That doesn’t really matter, does it? The Bible still remains an authority in my life.” Though it has been years now, I remember hearing these words like it was yesterday. I had no idea what to say in response.<sup>1</sup>

I was shocked because I was hearing these words from a church-going, Bible-carrying, evangelical Christian. This person saw no relation between the truthfulness of Scripture and the authority of Scripture, as if one had nothing to do with the other.

In that moment I realized two things. First, that the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* is just as important today as it was in the sixteenth-century. In the sixteenth-century the Reformers faced off against Rome because the Roman church had elevated tradition and its magisterium to the level of Scripture. Nevertheless, Rome still believed Scripture itself was inspired by God and therefore inerrant, that is, trustworthy, true, and without error.<sup>2</sup>

Since the sixteenth-century, Protestantism (and its view of the Bible) has undergone an evolution in its identity. Movements like the Enlightenment, liberalism, and more recently postmodernism have elevated other voices to the level of Scripture or even above Scripture and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture have been abandoned, something Rome would never have done in the sixteenth-century. Today, many people reject that the Bible is God-breathed and truthful in all it asserts.

As Carl Henry pointed out in his magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, the church throughout history has faced repeated attacks on the Bible from skeptics, but only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God’s Word now been questioned, criticized, and abandoned by those within the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup> To the Reformers, this would have been unthinkable; yet this is the day we live in. Not only do Bible critics pervade the culture, but now they have mounted the pulpit and sit comfortably in the pews.

If Carl Henry is right, then there is legitimate cause for alarm. Repeated

attacks on Scripture's own character reveal the enmity and hostility toward the God of the Bible within our own souls.<sup>4</sup> One of the most significant needs in the twenty-first century is a call back to the Bible to a posture that encourages reverence, acceptance, and adherence to its authority and message.

Along with the realization that *sola scriptura* is just as applicable today as it was in the sixteenth century, I also saw that many Christians in the church have no idea what *sola scriptura* is or what it entails. What is the relationship of the authority of the Bible to attributes like inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency? Even if we accept that the Bible alone is our final authority, we may have no idea *why* this is true. Is it merely because the Bible is the best guide book we can find?

Questions such as these bring us to the very center of the formal principle of the Reformation and might just help us recover biblical authority for today. Therefore, as we move forward we will (1) return to the sixteenth-century in order to understand Luther's stance for *sola scriptura*, (2) seek to define *sola scriptura* and briefly describe its core components, and (3) turn to address two pressing challenges to *sola scriptura* today.

## MARTIN LUTHER AND SOLA SCRIPTURA

### ***"The Scriptures cannot err"***

Historians have often pointed back to Luther's 95 Theses as the critical moment, the genesis of the Reformation perhaps. However, in terms of the development of *sola scriptura* the debates Luther engaged in after posting those famous Theses are what really proved to be critical.

First, consider Luther's conflict with Sylvester Prierias, a Dominican theologian appointed by Leo X to respond to Luther's 95 Theses. It became clear to Prierias that authority was the issue at stake in all of Luther's arguments. Prierias wrote in his *Dialogue Concerning the Power of the Pope*, "He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic."<sup>5</sup> Luther responded by pointing out that Prierias cited no Scripture to prove his case and wrote to Prierias, "Like an insidious devil you pervert the Scriptures."<sup>6</sup> Luther exposed the contradictions and corruptions of the papacy by pointing to the examples of Julius II and his "ghastly shedding of blood," as well as the "outrageous tyranny of Boniface

VIII.” Luther then asked Prierias, “If the Church consists representatively in the cardinals, what do you make of a general council of the whole Church?”<sup>7</sup>

It’s important to remember that papal infallibility would not be declared official dogma until the First Vatican Council in 1870. However, Prierias’s response to Luther shows how many already believed the pope was infallible and inerrant whenever he spoke *ex cathedra* (“from the seat” as the Vicar of Christ on earth).<sup>8</sup> As Martin Brecht explains, not only were the Roman church and pope infallible, but “the authority of the church stood explicitly above that of the Scriptures,” even authorizing the Scriptures.<sup>9</sup> On this point Luther disagreed with Prierias, not only appealing to Scripture’s authority, but also to Augustine’s letter to Jerome where the former elevates Scripture’s authority, emphasizing that the Bible alone is inspired by God and without error.<sup>10</sup> The “radicalism” of Luther’s reply to Prierias “lies not in its invective but in its affirmation that the pope might err and a council might err and that only Scripture is the final authority.”<sup>11</sup>

Following his dispute with Prierias, Luther faced off against the Dominican Cardinal Cajetan, perhaps the most impressive theologian of the Roman Curia. They met in October of 1518 after the Imperial Diet of Augsburg and an argument between the two lasted for several days.<sup>12</sup> Luther was commanded to recant, which he would not do. When Cajetan confronted Luther with Pope Clement VI’s bull *Unigenitus* (1343)—a bull that, according to Cajetan, affirmed that “the merits of Christ are a treasure of indulgences”—Luther rejected it along with Pope Clement’s authority. “I am not so audacious,” said Luther, “that for the sake of a single obscure and ambiguous decretal of a human pope I would recede from so many and such clear testimonies of divine Scripture. For, as one of the canon lawyers has said, ‘in a matter of faith not only is a council above a pope but any one of the faithful, if armed with better authority and reason.’” When Cajetan responded that Scripture must be interpreted by the pope who is above not only councils but Scripture itself, Luther replied, “His Holiness abuses Scripture. I deny that he is above Scripture.”<sup>13</sup> Harold Grimm summarizes the conflict this way: “The more Cajetan insisted upon the infallibility of the papacy the more Luther relied upon the authority of Scripture.”<sup>14</sup>

Luther’s greatest challenge would come the following year at the Leipzig debate with the Catholic disputant Johannes von Eck.<sup>15</sup> Though the debate would formally be an engagement between Eck and Andreas Karlstadt, Luther

knew that he would have an opportunity to participate. After all, Eck's real target was Luther himself.<sup>16</sup> In the months leading up to the debate, Luther rigorously prepared himself knowing that papal supremacy was the critical point under debate. In his research Luther had to address two key passages Rome relied upon: (1) In Matthew 16:18-19 Jesus calls Peter the "rock" that he will build his church upon, conferring upon Peter the "keys of the kingdom." According to Rome, here Jesus teaches that Peter is the first Pope, giving to Peter (and his successors by default) the foundational position in the erection of his church. Since Peter (and by implication all future Popes) is given the "keys of the kingdom," the Pope possesses supreme authority and control over the church, and infallibly exercises that authority as the supreme ruler when he teaches as the Vicar of Christ on earth. (2) In John 21:15-19 Jesus tells Peter to "Feed my lambs." Again, Rome saw Jesus as conferring on Peter the exclusive right to exercise power over the church.

Luther, however, rejected these interpretations. He believed that Rome was reading the papacy and its claims to power back into the Bible. In interpreting Matthew 16:18-19, Luther followed the interpretive tradition that applies this promise either to Christ's disciples or to the very faith confessing Jesus as the Christ.<sup>17</sup> As Brecht observes, for Luther the "rock is not any particular church, but the invincible church is wherever the Word of God is heard and believed." "It is faith which possesses the keys, the sacraments, and the authority in the church."<sup>18</sup> And in interpreting Jesus' command to feed his sheep, Luther argued that this has nothing to do with the exclusive power of the Pope, but refers instead to preaching. Luther concluded that neither one of these passages supports papal supremacy. Luther rejected papal infallibility as well as the belief that the Pope exclusively possessed the correct interpretation of the Bible.<sup>19</sup> Rome's twisting of Scripture to bolster its ecclesial power only demonstrated to Luther that a Babylonian captivity had indeed come upon the church.<sup>20</sup>

When it was time for the debate, Eck brought the central issue to the table: Who has final authority, God's Word or the pope? For Eck, Scripture received its authority from the pope. Luther strongly disagreed, arguing instead that Scripture has authority over popes, church fathers, and even church councils, all of which have erred in the past.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, said Luther, not only is Scripture our only infallible authority, but a schoolboy with Scripture in his hand is better fortified than the Pope!<sup>22</sup>

Lest we miss the obvious, it is important for us to note that for Luther *sola scriptura* was directly connected to the *inerrancy* of Scripture. Luther did not use the term “inerrancy” in his writings or in debate, yet the *concept* is present throughout his thinking on the matter.<sup>23</sup> If Scripture is not inerrant, then *sola scriptura* is without a foundation. For Luther, what made the Bible alone the supreme authority was that it was not only inspired by God but as a result of being God-breathed the Scriptures, *and the Scriptures alone, could not and do not err*. On the other hand, church councils and popes can and do err. So while Rome believed Scripture *and* Tradition were inerrant authorities, Luther argued that Scripture *alone* is our inerrant authority from God. As Luther would state in his 1521 treatise “The Misuse of the Mass”:

Since the Fathers have often erred, as you yourself confess, who will make us certain as to where they have not erred, assuming their own reputation is sufficient and should not be weighed and judged according to the Scriptures? ... What if they erred in their interpretation, as well as in their life and writings? In that way you make gods of all that is human in us, and of men themselves; *and the word of men you make equal to the Word of God* ... *The saints could err in their writings and the sin in their lives, but the Scriptures cannot err.*<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere Luther would argue that the Fathers “have erred, as men will; therefore I am ready to trust them only when they give me evidence for their opinions from Scripture, *which has never erred*.” Luther quotes St. Augustine in support of this point: “I have learned to do only those books that are called the holy Scriptures the honor of believing firmly that *none of their writers has ever erred*.” Therefore, concludes Luther, “Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth.”<sup>25</sup> Luther believed inerrancy was a necessary corollary to *sola scriptura*, and a key component of biblical authority and sufficiency.<sup>26</sup> Contra Rome, Luther protested that God’s Word *alone* was the church’s *flawless* authority. To deny this, Luther believed, was to reject the *sola* of *sola Scriptura*. It was to make the teachings of men equal to the Word of God, as if they too were not only God-breathed but without error.

At Leipzig, Luther was quickly classified as a heretic, joining the ranks of his forerunners John Wycliffe and Jan Hus. “I see that you are following the damned and pestiferous errors of John Wycliffe, who said, ‘It is not

necessary for salvation to believe that the Roman Church is above all others.’ And you are espousing the pestilent errors of John Hus, who claimed that Peter neither was nor is the head of the Holy Catholic Church.”<sup>27</sup> At first Luther denied such an association with Hus, who was condemned by the Council of Constance and burned at the stake in 1415 as a heretic. But during a break in the debate Luther realized that Hus had taught exactly what he believed about the authority of the church. When he returned to the debate he boldly declared,

It is not in the power of the Roman pontiff or of the Inquisition to construct new articles of faith. No believing Christian can be coerced beyond holy writ. By divine law we are forbidden to believe anything which is not established by divine Scripture or manifest revelation. One of the canon lawyers has said that the opinion of a single private man has more weight than that of the Roman pontiff or an ecclesiastical council if grounded on a better authority or reason.<sup>28</sup>

When Eck responded that Luther was “heretical, erroneous, blasphemous, presumptuous, seditious, and offensive to pious ears” should he defend Hus, Luther then made himself abundantly clear about the fallibility of councils.

I assert that a council has sometimes erred and may sometimes err. Nor has a council authority to establish new articles of faith. A council cannot make divine right out of that which by nature is not divine right. Councils have contradicted each other, for the recent Lateran Council has reversed the claim of the councils of Constance and Basel that a council is above a pope. A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. As for the pope’s decretal on indulgences I say that neither the Church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. For the sake of Scripture we should reject pope and councils.<sup>29</sup>

Luther’s stance was further solidified when the debate moved to the topic of purgatory. Eck defended purgatory by appealing to II Maccabees 12:45, but Luther retorted that the Apocrypha was not canonical and therefore was not authoritative.

After the debate, Eck returned to Rome reporting this “Bohemian virus” to the Pope, and Luther left the debate only to become further convinced

that Scripture, not the Pope, was the Christian's final authority.<sup>30</sup> In the end, Luther realized that if the Pope was to have authority over Scripture then reform from within was impossible. As Reeves observes, "The pope's word would always trump God's. In that case, the reign of the antichrist there was sealed, and it was no longer the church of God but the synagogue of Satan."<sup>31</sup>

The Leipzig debate is one of the most pivotal events of the Reformation. Eck's name in German means "corner," and playing off of Eck's name, many at the time believed that Eck had "cornered" Luther, showing from church history that Luther was aligned with the heretic Hus.<sup>32</sup> Yet while Eck may have cornered the reformer, Luther's appeal to Scripture over popes and councils removed the rug of Rome's authority right out from under Eck's feet. Eck appealed to councils, but Luther went to the fountain itself: Scripture and Scripture alone.

### ***Captive to the Word of God***

Tensions escalated, and in 1520 Luther produced several tracts and essays, writing like a madman. In August came *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, calling into question the authority of the pope, specifically the pope's exclusive right to interpret Scripture and call a council.<sup>33</sup> Luther also denied that the church held a monopoly on the proper interpretation of Scripture. Luther rejected papal infallibility and claimed that the pope must answer to Scripture.

In October came *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* where Luther argued that God's gift of righteousness is received by faith alone (*sola fide*), and therefore Rome is in error to claim that divine grace only comes through the priest's distribution of the sacraments (which Luther argued were limited to two rather than seven). Here again Luther gave clear hints of his belief in *sola scriptura*. "What is asserted," Luther protested, "without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed."<sup>34</sup>

The last of the three treatises came in November. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, dedicated to Pope Leo X, Luther positively put forth the idea of an exchange, that our sin is imputed to Christ while Christ's righteousness is credited to us.<sup>35</sup> Luther made it clear that good works do not merit righteousness but are the fruit that comes from being declared righteous.

Prior to any of these three works being published and disseminated, Pope Leo X had issued a papal bull. The decree, made on June 15, 1520, called

Luther's teaching a "poisonous virus" and demanded that Luther recant in 60 days or be excommunicated. The bull was entitled, "*Exsurge, Domine*," with four summons: "Rise up, Lord," "Rise up, Peter," "Rise up, Paul," and "Rise up, all saints." Leo X declared that Luther was a wild boar, ravaging God's vineyard, a pestiferous virus, as well as a serpent creeping through the Lord's field and he must be stopped. His books were to be burned, and should he not recant in sixty days after receiving the bull, he would be declared anathema!

How did Luther respond? After receiving the bull on October 10 of that year, Luther waited sixty days before publicly burning it on December 10, exclaiming, "Because you have confounded the truth of God, today the Lord confounds you. Into the fire with you!"<sup>36</sup> Luther had declared war. There was no going back now. The break with Rome was inevitable. On January 3, 1521, Luther was excommunicated by Leo X in the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*.<sup>37</sup>

In 1521 Luther was summoned to Worms for an Imperial Diet before Charles V, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire and a committed Roman Catholic. On April 17, a great crowd gathered for the event. To keep Luther safe, he was escorted like a thief through alleys, likely to the rear entrance of the bishop's residence.<sup>38</sup> Wearing the garb of the Augustinian order, Luther appeared before Charles V, who supposedly said upon seeing Luther, "He will not make a heretic out of me."<sup>39</sup>

Luther's publications were set out on a table and he was asked whether he would stand by what he had written or recant. Luther did not take this moment lightly. He feared speaking rashly, not wanting to do harm to God's Word and put his own soul in jeopardy.<sup>40</sup> So Luther asked for time to think about his answer. After thinking the matter through, Luther returned the next day and spoke with boldness, stating that his writings fell into three categories. First, there were books on piety, which were so evangelical that even his enemies acknowledged their usefulness. Second were his books against the papacy, but neither could he recant these since they only spoke against the pope's laws which are contrary to the true gospel. To recant these would be to approve the pope's tyranny! "Good God, what sort of tool of evil and tyranny I then would be!"<sup>41</sup> Third, and last, were his books against specific persons who defended this popish tyranny. But again, he could not recant these for the same reasons. Instead, Luther asked that he be refuted with real proofs of his wrongdoing. The Scriptures, said Luther, should be

determinative in this matter. Should he be shown his errors *from the Scriptures*, he would gladly recant, and not only recant but he would be the first in line to burn his books.<sup>42</sup> By the end of this reply, Luther was sweating profusely due to the hot, overcrowded room.

Johann von der Eck was the official responsible for responding to Luther, and he was not pleased with Luther's reply. He disagreed with the distinctions Luther had made and demanded that Luther recant the heresies taught in these books. Von der Eck was clear that the tradition of the church and its councils could not be questioned by a single individual like Luther.<sup>43</sup> So he demanded that Luther give him a clear answer. Would he recant or not! At that, Luther spoke these famous words:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.<sup>44</sup>

While popes and councils contradict each other, and therefore err, Scripture alone does not err.<sup>45</sup> Scripture, Luther believed, is the *norma normans* (the norming norm), rather than the *norma normata* (the determined, ruled, or normed norm).<sup>46</sup> It is apparent that at Worms Luther rejected the two source theory, which viewed oral tradition as a second, extra-biblical, and inerrant source of divine revelation passed down from the apostles to the magisterium. While Luther greatly valued those Fathers and councils that defended orthodoxy, he argued that Scripture alone is our infallible source of divine revelation.

### **What is *Sola Scriptura*?**

Can we come away from this all-too-brief look at Luther with a definition of *sola scriptura*? Absolutely. For Luther and the Reformers *sola scriptura* meant that *only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church*. Perhaps the best way to unpack this definition is to start at the end and work backwards.

Notice, first of all, that *sola scriptura* means Scripture alone is our *final*

*authority.* Authority is a bad word in our day of rugged individualism. But the Bible is all about authority. In fact, *sola scriptura* means that the Bible is our chief, supreme, and ultimate authority. Notice, however, that I didn't say the Bible is our *only* authority. *Sola scriptura* is too easily confused today with *nuda scriptura*, the view that we should have "No creed but the Bible!"<sup>47</sup> Those who sing this mantra believe that creeds, confessions, the voices of tradition, and those who hold ecclesiastical offices carry no authority in the church. But this was not the Reformers' position, nor should it be equated with *sola scriptura*.

*Sola scriptura* acknowledges that there are other important authorities for the Christian, authorities that should be listened to and followed. Nonetheless, Scripture alone is our *final* authority. It is the authority that rules over and governs all other authorities. It is the authority that has the final say. We could say that while church tradition and church officials play a *ministerial* role, Scripture alone plays a *magisterial* role. This means that all other authorities are only to be followed in as much as they align with Scripture, submit to Scripture, and are seen as subservient to Scripture, which alone is our supreme authority.

Second, *sola scriptura* means Scripture alone is our *sufficient* authority. Not only is the Bible our supreme authority, but it is the authority that provides the believer with all the truth he or she needs for salvation and for following after Christ. The Bible, therefore, is sufficient for faith and practice. As Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Or consider The Belgic Confession (1561): "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein."<sup>48</sup> And the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) says: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men (2 Tim 3:15-17; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thess 2:2)." In short, the Bible is enough for us.

Third, *sola scriptura* means that only Scripture, because it is God's *inspired*

Word, is our *inerrant* authority.<sup>50</sup> Notice that the basis of biblical authority—the very reason why Scripture is authoritative—is that God is its divine author. The ground for biblical authority is divine inspiration. As The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “The *authority* of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church, but wholly *upon God* (who is truth itself) *the author thereof*; and therefore it is to be received, *because it is the Word of God* (2 Pet 1:19, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 5:9; 1 Thess 2:13).”<sup>51</sup> Scripture is the church’s final and sufficient authority first and foremost because Scripture *is* the Word of God.

Scripture and Scripture alone (not Scripture *and* tradition) is God-breathed in its totality and on this basis stands unshakable as the church’s final, flawless authority.<sup>52</sup> As Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” Likewise, Peter says in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” It’s on the basis of verbal, plenary inspiration that the Bible stands unshakable as the church’s final, flawless authority. What Scripture says, God says.<sup>53</sup>

To get a full picture of *sola scriptura* we need to go beyond saying that the Bible is inspired or God-breathed. Inspiration should lead in the very next breath to an understanding that the Bible is perfect, flawless, and inerrant. In other words, inerrancy is the necessary corollary of inspiration. They are two sides of the same coin, and it is impossible to divorce one from the other. Because it is God speaking—and he undoubtedly is a God of truth, not error—his Word must be true and trustworthy in all that it addresses. If it is not, naturally we would begin to question whether the Scriptures are really God-breathed after all. God’s words, in other words, reflect who he is, his very character. So, Scripture is rightly referred to as the *Word of God*. This is why Scripture can identify the words of Scripture with God himself. Should his words prove false, untrue, mistaken, that is a reflection of him!<sup>54</sup> But should his words prove true, that is a reflection of his trustworthiness. As the psalmist says, “This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true” (Ps 18:30).

Because inerrancy is a biblical corollary and consequence of divine inspiration—inseparably connected and intertwined—it is a necessary component to *sola scriptura*.<sup>55</sup> The God of truth has breathed out his Word of truth, and

the result is nothing less than a *flawless* authority for the church. In saying this, I am aware that my inclusion of inerrancy in our definition of *sola scriptura* will prove to be controversial given the mixed identity of evangelicalism today. However, should we divorce the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture from its authority, disconnecting the two as if one was unrelated to the other, then we will be left with no doctrine of *sola scriptura* at all. Should Scripture contain errors, it is unclear why we should trust Scripture as our supreme and final authority.<sup>56</sup> And should we limit, modify, or abandon the total inerrancy of Scripture, we set in motion tremendous doubt and uncertainty regarding the Bible's competence as our final authority. The ground for the believer's confidence that all of Scripture is the Word of God is shaken.<sup>57</sup>

Now, we could spend an entire lecture on each aspect of this definition. However, you might have noticed that the subtitle for each of the books in The 5 Solas Series is: *What the Reformers taught and why it still matters*. It is the second half of that phrase that is especially important because in the twenty-first century *sola scriptura* is now facing new challenges, challenges the reformers could not have anticipated; nevertheless, they are challenges we must answer if we have any chance of retaining the formal principle for the next generation. I want to focus on just two challenges that I believe are especially relevant.

## TWO CHALLENGES TO SOLA SCRIPTURA TODAY

### **1. *The challenge to sola scriptura from limited inerrantist evangelicals.***

In all the treatments of *sola scriptura* very few address the question: What does inerrancy have to do with *sola scriptura*? In other words, while many treatments address authority, inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency individually, rarely will you come across one that connects the dots between them. Rarely does someone ask: What do these attributes have to do with *sola scriptura* precisely?

*Sola scriptura* since the Reformation has come under fire by new opponents. The sixteenth century Reformers opposed Rome because she questioned the sufficiency and authority of Scripture by elevating Tradition, believing it to be divine revelation and just as authoritative as Scripture itself. As a result, the distinctiveness and uniqueness of biblical inerrancy was challenged in the sense that Rome claimed that there was a *second* source of divine revelation

that was inerrant, namely, Tradition. To be clear, Rome did not oppose the inerrancy of Scripture. She affirmed it. The point is that Rome's elevation of Tradition as a second inerrant source of revelation was perceived by the Reformers as a major threat to the exclusivity and uniqueness of Scripture as the *sole* inerrant source of written revelation and final authority for the church. The consequence was devastating: When Rome claimed Tradition to be inerrant (not just Scripture), no longer could Scripture be sufficient and authoritative in and of itself. For Rome, Tradition was equally authoritative because it was considered not only revelatory but also inerrant. Rome's elevation of Tradition to the level of inerrancy had significant consequences for her denial of scriptural sufficiency and final authority.

The situation worsened with the advent of the Enlightenment, liberalism, and eventually postmodernism. The very trustworthiness and truthfulness of the Bible *itself* was now being brought into question, something Rome in the sixteenth century was not willing to do.<sup>58</sup> History demonstrates that when Scripture's trustworthiness is rejected, it is not long before Scripture's sufficiency and authority is abandoned as well.<sup>59</sup> Again, notice the inseparable and natural connection between inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency. Critics of the Bible saw no reason why they should believe the Bible was authoritative when that same Bible was not inspired by God but was errant in numerous ways. There could be no "Thus says the Lord" when the Lord didn't really speak and the text that says he did speak was errant to begin with. It made little sense to believe the biblical text was authoritative in what it addressed and asserted when that same biblical text was believed to be errant and uninspired. Whenever this thinking took root, the Reformation understanding of *sola scriptura* was seriously undermined.<sup>60</sup>

And many of these approaches to Scripture continue today, of course. What makes our day so unique—particularly in the world of evangelicalism—is that some have tried to pave a middle way (*via media*) by holding on to biblical authority and sufficiency while denying biblical inerrancy. While there are some who have abandoned the concept of inerrancy completely, others are dissatisfied with it but are not entirely willing to dispense with the term or idea. While this "limited inerrancy" position (as we can call it) may take on a variety of forms and includes a diverse group of advocates, it essentially argues that there are errors in Scripture but when it comes to the Bible's central spiritual message there are not. Limited inerrancy advocates

will maintain that while Scripture may not be perfect in all of its details (especially those of historical or cosmological nature), or in every subject matter it addresses, nevertheless it is trustworthy in its main message and therefore the Bible remains authoritative and sufficient. Notice that advocates of limited inerrancy do not necessarily believe their view precludes the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. In their view, the two remain mutually compatible. This was the view taken by the progressive Neo-Evangelicals at Fuller Seminary in the 1960s, who denied Scripture's full inerrancy yet insisted that Scripture remains the Christian's final authority.<sup>61</sup> Such an approach continues to pervade the academic world today, and has also infiltrated many church pews.

How should we evaluate the “limited inerrancy” position? It is a view that is riddled with inconsistency. As we have seen, to question Scripture’s reliability is to also question Scripture’s sufficiency and authority. These attributes are intertwined, inseparable, and essential to the existence of one another. One cannot consistently affirm and practice *sola scriptura* while abandoning inerrancy. Indeed, it is because *all* of Scripture is verbally inspired by God, and therefore necessarily without error, that it carries final and ultimate authority and is fully sufficient.

If we think back to the narrative of Luther’s progress to the Diet of Worms, we recall that the issue of *sola scriptura* rested on who does and does not err.<sup>62</sup> As we saw in each of Luther’s debates, Luther strongly believed that what set Scripture apart in terms of authority was not only its divine inspiration but specifically its absolute perfection and flawlessness, much in contrast to the imperfection of ecclesiastical tradition. Luther believed Scripture alone is our *flawless* authority. “For Luther,” observes R. C. Sproul, “the *sola* of *sola Scriptura* was inseparably related to the Scriptures’ unique inerrancy. It was because popes could and did err and because councils could and did err that Luther came to realize the supremacy of Scripture. Luther did not despise church authority nor did he repudiate church councils as having no value. ... Luther and the Reformers did not mean by *sola Scriptura* that the Bible is the only authority in the church. Rather, they meant that the Bible is the only *infallible* authority in the church.”<sup>63</sup>

It is precisely because God’s Word is God-breathed, and therefore necessarily inerrant (i.e., God does not breathe out error) that it possesses unconditional and final authority.<sup>64</sup> *Sola scriptura* means that the Bible alone is our *flawless* authority, something that cannot (and should not) be said

of anything else.<sup>65</sup> The Bible alone is the inerrant source of written divine revelation from God. As Luther believed so emphatically, since church councils, Fathers, and, yes, even popes err, they cannot possess an equal authority to Scripture. Their authority is contingent upon their faithfulness to the biblical text, which alone is inspired and inerrant. At best, they possess a *derivative* authority. Where they are consistent with Scripture, they speak authoritatively. As Luther said, “But everyone, indeed, knows that at times they [the Fathers] have erred as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they prove their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred.”<sup>66</sup> The Reformers considered inerrancy to be a corollary to *sola scriptura*. In his description of Luther’s theology, Paul Althaus explains, “We may trust unconditionally only in the Word of God and not in the teaching of the fathers; for the teachers of the Church can err and have erred. Scripture never errs. Therefore it alone has unconditional authority.”<sup>67</sup> Sproul is right to conclude, “The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* involved inerrancy.”<sup>68</sup> While some, like Rogers and McKim, have popularized the myth that inerrancy was an invention of Reformed Scholasticism and Old Princeton, John Woodbridge has exploded this myth, demonstrating not only that inerrancy was taught by the Reformers, but has a heritage all the way back to the Fathers.<sup>69</sup>

All of this explains why it is necessary to highlight inerrancy in our explanation and defense of *sola scriptura*. And it explains why it is prominently featured in our definition of *sola scriptura*, that only Scripture, because it is God’s inspired Word, is our *inerrant*, sufficient, and final authority for the church. It’s not just the Reformers who saw (and assumed) this connection between inerrancy and biblical authority. The Reformed tradition at large has followed suit. The Belgic Confession (1561) calls Scripture the “infallible rule” for the church, a statement that combines both Scripture’s perfection and authority in one phrase.<sup>70</sup> Or consider the Church of England, whose Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) assert that councils “may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God.”<sup>71</sup> In contrast, the assumption is that Scripture alone, as God’s inspired Word, does not err, and so it stands supreme in its authority over councils.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) states that the “infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the *Scripture itself*,” and by “infallible” these Westminster divines did not mean something less than inerrancy as limited inerrantists do today.

Therefore, as the “infallible rule” it alone is the “supreme judge.”<sup>73</sup> The London Baptist Confession (1677), which is largely based on the Westminster Confession of Faith, is just as explicit: “The Holy Scripture is the *only* sufficient, certain, and *infallible rule* of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.”<sup>74</sup>

Reformed theologians and councils today also see inerrancy as essential to our definition and articulation of *sola scriptura*. One of the best examples can be found in The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (1978), which declares:

Recognition of the *total truth and trustworthiness* of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its *authority*.<sup>75</sup>

Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of *infallible divine authority* in all matters upon which it touches.<sup>76</sup>

The *authority* of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine *inerrancy* is in any way limited or disregarded.<sup>77</sup>

Great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the *total truth* of the Bible whose *authority* one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave *loses its authority*, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one’s critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started.<sup>78</sup>

More recently, this explicit inclusion of inerrancy in an articulation of *sola scriptura* was also affirmed by The Cambridge Declaration (1996), signed by a host of today’s leading Reformed thinkers, all part of The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Toward the start of this declaration we read: “Scripture alone is the *inerrant rule* of the church’s life,” and we “reaffirm the *inerrant* Scripture to be the *sole* source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience.”<sup>79</sup>

As can be seen from this brief summary of the historical evidence, it would have been unthinkable in ages past to say that Scripture is authoritative, but *not* inerrant. For those who have come out of the Reformation heritage, one necessarily includes the other.<sup>80</sup> After all, how can we trust and submit to the authority of the Bible if we do not believe it is true? Our knowledge

is derivative of the Scriptures, so should we limit or abandon Scripture's trustworthiness we inevitably bring down the entire structure of theology.<sup>81</sup>

In the midst of the ongoing controversy over inerrancy, Sproul raises an interesting hypothetical (though not one he himself adopts). He notes how someone could argue that Scripture's elevation as the sole and final authority does not "carry with it the necessary inference that it is inerrant."<sup>82</sup> One might believe, for example, that popes, councils and Scripture all err, but nevertheless Scripture is the first among equals. "Or Scripture could be regarded as carrying unique authority solely on the basis of its being the primary historical source of the gospel."<sup>83</sup> Either way, *sola scriptura* is affirmed, but not because Scripture is perfect, but rather because it is primary, either in quality or origin.

Two points need clarification on this position. First, this was not the historic position of the Reformers. Scripture was the sole and final authority not because it was the best of all errant authorities or because it came first, but because its supremacy was derivative of its perfection as divine revelation. Second, it is doubtful that such a person is actually affirming *sola scriptura* (and here I place the emphasis on the word "sola"). Perhaps for him, Scripture, popes, and councils all err; nevertheless, Scripture is the supreme authority because it is the only one of the three that is from God as divine revelation. Scripture, for him, is the first among errant sources.<sup>84</sup> But does this solve the problem for the limited inerrantist? Has he found a way to affirm *sola scriptura* even though he rejects the inerrancy of Scripture?

The answer must be no. For Reformers like Luther and Calvin, to say that Scripture is the sole or final source of authority is an incomplete definition of *sola scriptura*. *Sola scriptura* must mean that Scripture is the sole and final *inerrant* source of authority. If we take out the word "inerrant" we no longer have the doctrine of *sola scriptura* in its totality. Perhaps the point is best seen in the following table, which seeks to pinpoint the dividing line:

**Table 1: Two Views of Authority and Inerrancy**

FULL INERRANCY VIEW	LIMITED INERRANCY VIEW
All of Scripture is our inerrant authority	Only when Scripture addresses matters of faith is it our inerrant authority

Which one is affirming *sola scriptura*?<sup>85</sup> It is the full inerrancy position. Why? Because the limited inerrancy view can only consistently utilize *sola scriptura* when it believes Scripture's main spiritual message of the Bible is in view, yet, in other areas, where it errs, Scripture is neither inerrant, nor authoritative, nor sufficient.<sup>86</sup> Those errant parts of Scripture don't fall under the banner of *sola scriptura*. Indeed, they cannot. Where the Bible is misguided and wrong, it is impossible for it to speak authoritatively and sufficiently on matters it addresses erroneously. Why would we listen, let alone obey, those parts of the Bible we believe are in error and will somehow mislead us? While the limited inerrantist might appeal to other parts of the Bible—the true parts, that is—he is inconsistent to appeal to the errant parts as "Thus says the Lord" passages. Why? Whether he will acknowledge this or not, it is because authority and sufficiency are naturally bound up with inerrancy. Should one be compromised, the others will follow.

Therefore, because the limited inerrantist limits inerrancy he must also limit *sola scriptura*. The two are inseparable. For the limited inerrantist it is not just inerrancy that is limited, but authority and sufficiency as well.

A final question remains: Can the limited inerrantist truly claim to follow in the legacy of *sola scriptura* or do they have a canon reduction? I have sought to demonstrate that the answer must be no because in limiting inerrancy one must necessarily limit authority as well (if one is going to be consistent at least).<sup>87</sup> But what is the limit that some are placing on the Bible? Typically we find the limit defined as the main salvation message of the Bible. Scripture is no longer the sole and final *flawless* authority in *all* it addresses. The only way for a limited inerrantist to still affirm *sola scriptura* is to modify its meaning to something like: Scripture is the sole and final authority *as far as it is inerrant*.<sup>88</sup>

For the full inerrantist, inerrancy and authority extend to all of Scripture, but for the limited inerrantist, inerrancy and authority extend only to certain parts Scripture. For the full inerrantist, there is no limit to the canon's sufficiency because there is no limit to its perfection, but for the limited inerrantist the sufficiency of the canon is limited to those places where it is perfect.

The position held by the limited inerrantist presents several additional challenges. First, since the limited inerrantist has limited Scripture's perfection and therefore its authority, Scripture must be supplemented. Scripture alone is not enough.<sup>89</sup> The perfection and authority of Scripture have been restricted and there has been a canon reduction.<sup>90</sup> Where Scripture is lacking

in perfection and authority, there must be a supplemental authority to take its place (e.g., reason, experience, tradition, science). At this point the limited inerrantist has deviated from the Reformation, from the evangelical path.

Moreover, should we travel down such a path we have now elevated ourselves and our own reason above Scripture. Once we declare that Scripture is in error, it reveals that we stand above the Bible as a superior authority, acting as judge, declaring the verdict. Unfortunately, this is exactly the position the limited inerrantist has taken, declaring which parts are acceptable and which parts are not. Yet if Scripture truly is our supreme authority, then *ipso facto* no one (and I mean no one!) can stand over and above Scripture as judge.<sup>91</sup> The minute we do so we have removed the *sola* from *Scriptura*, and have placed our own human reason there instead. We simply cannot say that Scripture is our supreme authority and simultaneously judge (as the limited inerrantist does) certain parts of Scripture untrustworthy, unreliable, and errant. If we do, we have now become the supreme, final authority, not Scripture.

Second, canon reduction is not a sustainable option for evangelicals. If we limit inerrancy to some parts of Scripture but not others, then two questions naturally arise: (a) What parts of Scripture are inerrant and therefore authoritative and what parts are not? (b) Who gets to determine what parts of Scripture are inerrant and therefore authoritative and what parts are not? To answer the first question, limited inerrantists will respond by saying that those parts of Scripture that address our faith are inerrant and authoritative. But this presents more problems than solutions. To begin with, how much must we know to be saved? This opens the door for a wide variety of opinions, including those who would answer: very little! And if very little is needed for salvation, then very little of the Bible is actually inerrant.<sup>92</sup>

Additionally, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we are now seeking to create a canon within a canon. Given the long history of Protestant liberalism, how do we avoid repeating the practice of throwing away the husk of Scripture in order to find the kernel? For limited inerrantists, the husk is typically the historical or scientific data while the kernel concerns matters related to the main message of Scripture (i.e., matters of “faith and practice”).

However, Scripture never divorces faith from history, the spiritual from the historical. When we look at the big picture of the Bible what we see is that all of redemption is rooted in history, from Adam to the last Adam, from Eden to the New Jerusalem. It is called redemptive *history* for a reason.<sup>93</sup> We

cannot bifurcate matters of faith from matters of history because the two go hand in hand. Moreover, if we do so, Scripture no longer is the determining norm, but our human reason has taken on that role. In the end, the individual decides what parts are from God and what parts are not.

Finally, the limited inerrant viewpoint can be misleading with its emphasis on the macro-purpose of the Bible. We do not deny the distinction between primary and secondary, fundamental and non-fundamental material in Scripture. Indeed, one could go so far as to say that not every passage is directly or explicitly soteriological in nature. Distinctions like these have historically aided Christians and councils in determining what does and does not count as heresy. These distinctions should not lead us to conclude, however, that the Bible is only inerrant in its fundamental, soteriological aspects. This is a misuse of theological categories. As we saw previously, Jesus and his apostles approached *all* of the Old Testament as the very Word of God, having an attitude of total trust and confidence. Jesus and his apostles not only trusted the soteriological, macro-message of the Old Testament, but assumed in every way the reliability of its secondary details (even those historical in nature). In other words, they understood *all* of it to be trustworthy and true.<sup>94</sup>

To conclude, to affirm *sola scriptura* is to affirm inerrancy. These two are mutually dependent upon one another and it is inconsistent to abandon inerrancy and argue that you maintain *sola Scriptura*, at least in the original sense of its meaning. Should we abandon *sola Scriptura*, we no longer stand in the heritage of the Reformation and the evangelical movement. As Greg Bahnsen wisely suggests, “It is impossible to maintain the theological principle of *sola Scriptura* on the basis of limited inerrancy, for an errant authority—being in need of correction by some outside source—cannot serve as the only source and judge of Christian theology.”<sup>95</sup>

## **2. The challenge to *sola scriptura* from science.**

The second challenge to *sola scriptura* today comes from the realm of science. Even that statement is not quite accurate, for it gives the impression that Christianity and science are enemies. So perhaps it is more precise to say that this second challenge comes from those who would elevate science to the authoritative status of Scripture itself.

I want to be very clear from the start: Science is a magnificent means through which our reason explores the natural order, makes discoveries, and, if done

rightly, leads us to worship our Creator (Ps. 19:1-6). Therefore, *sola scriptura*, as J. I. Packer warns, should *not* entail a “Bible-without-science” mentality as sometimes is evident in the worst forms of the Fundamentalist movement.<sup>96</sup>

However, today there is the tendency among Christians to elevate science above Scripture, or at least to a place of equal authority. Science, they would argue, is just as authoritative as Scripture, and should be followed in its findings, even if those findings conflict with Scripture. In such a view, Scripture is to be interpreted through the grid of science, not vice versa. Should science and Scripture meet an impasse, Scripture, not science, must be either rejected or reconfigured.

This is not the place to rehearse the long and ongoing debate over evolution since Darwin.<sup>97</sup> However, we should draw attention to the many ways in which the Bible’s authority can be compromised at the expense of adopting evolutionary claims. The twentieth-century has proven that like-minded Christians have disagreed over evolution. Some evangelicals reject evolution entirely as incompatible with who God is and how the Bible says he created the universe, while others seek to retain theism and reconcile it with an evolutionary view of origins, though one initiated and guided by God (i.e., theistic evolution).

Today, however, this debate has escalated into questioning whether or not Adam was a historical person, though in reality this tussle is an old one.<sup>98</sup> Some have gone so far as to conclude that, in light of evolution, the biblical authors were wrong in assuming or affirming a historical Adam. For example, Peter Enns thinks it’s a fool’s errand to try and reconcile evolution with what the biblical authors say about Adam. These two are incompatible and at odds. We must realize, says Enns, that Paul was mistaken when he referred to Adam as a historical person in texts like Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. As a first-century man with a primitive view of the cosmos, Paul naturally thought Adam was a historical person. But we know now, in light of centuries of scientific inquiry (i.e., evolution), that this cannot be the case.<sup>99</sup> Enns’ “we-now-know-better” approach, itself a remnant of the Enlightenment, has led him to give up the doctrine of inerrancy and to reject something as important as the historicity of Adam.<sup>100</sup>

Others approach the Bible with a similar hermeneutic. For example, Kenton L. Sparks believes there is a *trajectory* in Scripture, whereby more recent revelation (New Testament) corrects older revelation (Old Testament)

that is in error.<sup>101</sup> Sparks believes evangelicals are wrong to assume that the Bible has a unified theology. Instead, there is a diversity of theologies at play, and many of these theologies are at odds with one another. Our job, therefore, is to move beyond the Bible and be open to other authorities, including scientific voices, even if they contradict what we read in Scripture.<sup>102</sup> For Sparks, the Bible is full of errors, and not just factual ones but ethical and doctrinal ones as well, some even misrepresenting God himself. We must look outside of the Bible to fields like science to correct Scripture's primitive anthropology.<sup>103</sup> We must come to grips with the reality that science even "trumps" the Bible's teaching.<sup>104</sup>

Enns and Sparks are just two examples of those who have rejected total inerrancy and Scripture's sufficiency. They are honest in their critique, concluding that the Bible just gets it wrong, it cannot be followed, and the Scriptures alone are not enough. Something more is needed, in this case science. When the Bible collides with science, it is the Bible that must give way. As a consequence, *sola scriptura* is undermined and with it the authority and sufficiency of God's Word. Where, exactly, the Christian should follow the Bible ends up becoming a game of "pick and choose." For one person the Bible's affirmation of a historical Adam must go, for another it is the Bible's stance against homosexuality, and yet for another it is Christ's deity or resurrection. Such an approach is not new.<sup>105</sup> It has a long history, and it's hard to see how it avoids postmodern subjectivism, making each individual his own hermeneutical lord.

In the end, science, when done rightly, will always conform to the truths of Scripture. Science, in and of itself, is not an enemy of Scripture. Indeed, science serves to brilliantly support Christianity. Science only becomes problematic when we misuse it and draw false conclusions, conclusions that are incompatible with the truths of God's Word. As with tradition, we must understand science's role as ministerial, rather than magisterial.<sup>106</sup>

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

We might assume that with the Reformation's recovery of *sola scriptura*, Protestantism had overcome the objections of the Roman church and forever sailed smoothly into the sunset. History, however, tells a very different story! While Luther and Calvin may have succeeded in addressing Rome's papalism

in the sixteenth-century, with the advent of modernism, rationalistic, biblical criticism produced a “new papalism”: the infallibility of the biblical scholar.<sup>107</sup>

The “new papalism” of critical biblical scholarship planted seeds of doubt throughout the biblical text, leading many to wonder if the Bible was truly divine revelation. Where the Reformers urged interpreters to approach the text with reverence and hermeneutical humility, the reader was now encouraged to approach the text as its lord and judge. Consequently, there arose a spiritual deafness, as rationalistic criticism separated man’s witness to God’s Word from revelation itself. “God’s Word was one thing, Holy Scripture was another.”<sup>108</sup> The Bible was now viewed as a collection of fallible books and the Augustinian heritage of the past—which believed that what Scripture says, God says—was discarded. It was now the scholar’s obligation to save the Bible by ridding it of any theological beliefs or assumptions that were out of line with modern scientific methods.<sup>109</sup> Such a critical approach to the Bible continues today, arguing that until inspiration and inerrancy are disposed of, the Bible will never be truly understood.

In the twenty-first century one might be relieved to think that those days are behind us. But are they really? Or do remnants of such approaches to the Bible continue today, arguing that until inspiration and inerrancy are disposed of, the Bible will never be truly set free, let alone understood? If the answer is yes, then how do we, as evangelicals committed to biblical authority, move forward? How do we take strides that do not compromise *sola scriptura* but instead celebrate it in all of its beauty and complexity?

We must be honest about our approach to the Bible. No longer can our starting point be the individual, as if we are the judge who stands over and above Scripture. Whether it be the Enlightenment with its reliance upon autonomous reason, liberalism with its elevation of man’s experience, or postmodernism which has turned Scripture into a wax nose, the individual, not God’s Word, has taken center stage, calling the shots, claiming to be the determining norm.<sup>110</sup> In contrast, *sola scriptura* means we begin by listening to what Scripture has to say about itself, for it claims an authority that comes from God as opposed to one that is derived from man. Rather than imposing a modern or postmodern agenda upon the text, we must have an open ear to the biblical categories that Scripture itself provides in order to guide us in its interpretation.<sup>111</sup> Such an approach seeks to acknowledge the *self-authenticating* nature of Scripture.<sup>112</sup> In other words,

we are seeking to ground authority in the greatest authority that we can find, namely, Scripture itself, for in doing so we are actually grounding Scripture's authority in God, for *he* is its divine author and it is *his* Word.<sup>113</sup> As Calvin said, “God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word … Scripture is indeed self-authenticated.”<sup>114</sup>

*Sola scriptura*—Scripture alone. This formal principle, to echo B. B. Warfield, lies at the foundation of our Christian faith and is nothing less than fundamental to our Christian hope.<sup>115</sup>

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1 This article was first presented at The Southern Seminary Theology Conference on September 24-25, 2015 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. Much of it is taken from chapters in Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

2 Of course, Rome did not use the term “inerrant,” but nonetheless the concept itself was affirmed.

3 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 4, *God Who Speaks and Shows, Fifteen Theses, Part Three* (reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 17, 374.

4 J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (trans. Gerrit Bilkes; ed. M. van der Maas; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 73.

5 Quoted in Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 193. Also see Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 44-52.

6 Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1950), 73.

7 Ibid.

8 To clarify, Rome did not believe the pope was infallible and inerrant by virtue of his own righteousness, but only by speaking *ex cathedra*. See Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 110.

9 Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1484-1521* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 243.

10 George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 111.

11 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 74.

12 See *Proceedings at Augsburg 1518*, in *LW* 31:253-292.

13 As quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 80. For the debate over the Bull *Unigenitus*, see Gordon Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms* (New York: Harper, 1964), 61; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 59-61; Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 252-255.

14 *Proceedings at Augsburg 1518*, in *LW* 31: 256 (cf. 262, 284-285). Also see Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 263-265.

15 See *The Leipzig Debate*, in *LW* 31:307-325.

16 Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 299-322.

17 Ibid., 308.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Rupp, *Luther’s Progress*, 114.

22 For a more extensive overview of the entire debate, see Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 309-322.

23 For Luther’s affirmation of Scripture’s inerrancy, see *LW* 1:121; 4:14; 12:242; 22:254, 259; 31:11, 282; 32:11, 98; 35:128, 150; 36:136-137; 39:165. For defenses of the Reformers’ affirmation of inerrancy, see Robert D. Preus, “Luther and Biblical Infallibility,” in *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 99-142; J. Theodore Mueller, “Luther and the Bible,” in *Inspiration and Interpretation* (ed. John F. Walvoord; Grand

- Rapids: Erdmans, 1947), 87-114; Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); J. I. Packer, "John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 143-88; Kenneth Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 115-155; W. Robert Godfrey, "Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition," in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 225-43; 391-97; Roger R. Nicole, "John Calvin and Inerrancy," *JETS* 25 (1982): 425-42; Eugene F. Klung, "Word and Spirit in Luther Studies since World War II," *TJ* 5 (1984): 3-46; John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 49-100; contra Paul Avis, *In Search of Authority: Anglican Theological Method from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 27.
- 24 Martin Luther, *The Misuse of the Mass*, in *LW* 36:136-137. Emphasis added.
- 25 "If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men's books and human teachers." Martin Luther, *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*, in *LW* 32:11-12. Emphasis added.
- 26 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 6-7; R. C. Sproul, "Sola Scriptura: Crucial to Evangelicalism," in *Foundations of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 105.
- 27 As cited in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 101. Also see Rupp, *Luther's Progress*, 69; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 87-88.
- 28 Cited in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 102.
- 29 Ibid., 103.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation* (Nashville, B&H Academic, 2010), 45.
- 32 Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (rev. ed., Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 81.
- 33 Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, in *LW* 44:115-219.
- 34 Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *LW* 36:29.
- 35 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *LW* 31:327-378.
- 36 For Luther's rationale, see *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned*, in *LW* 31:279-395.
- 37 Oberman, *Luther*, 22-23; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 117.
- 38 Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 452.
- 39 Ibid., 453.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., 458.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 460.
- 44 "Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521," in *LW* 32:112.
- 45 Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 460-461.
- 46 See Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *LW* 36:107.
- 47 See chapter 10 of *God's Word Alone*.
- 48 "The Belgic Confession (1561)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 2, 1552-1566* (ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 427 (Article VII). Also consider two other confessions: The French Confession (1559) says that Scripture is the "rule of all truth, containing all matters necessarily required for the worship of God and our salvation," and therefore it is not right to "add unto or to take from" it. "The French Confession (1559)," in *ibid.*, 142 (Article V). And The Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) says, "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." "The Thirty-Nine Articles (1562/63)," in *ibid.*, 755 (Article VI). Or consider The Westminster Confession (1643-1649): "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men (2 Tim 3:15-17; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thess 2:2)." "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693* (ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 235 (LVI).
- 49 In chapter 10 of *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), I address the complex issue of how we make sense of sufficiency in light of general revelation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and

- extrabiblical sources.
- 50 Some will prefer to use the word “infallible” instead (which does have historical precedent). I am fine with the word “infallible” *as long as* one means by infallible that Scripture (in total) is not capable of erring. However, I would reject those who would use the word to say that Scripture is only true in its saving message but not in its specifics (e.g., historical details). As I will explain in chapter 8, infallible and inerrant are complimentary and compatible concepts, infallible (i.e., Scripture *cannot* err) being an even stronger word than inerrant (i.e., Scripture *does not* err). Therefore, I think it is historically and biblical erroneous to use infallible to convey something less than inerrancy.
- 51 “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693*, 235 (LIV). Emphasis added.
- 52 In chapter 1 of *God’s Word Alone* I show how Rome differs in its elevation of Tradition as a second infallible source of divine revelation.
- 53 To be clear, inspiration refers to that act whereby the Holy Spirit came upon the authors of Scripture, causing them to write exactly what God intended, while simultaneously preserving each author’s writing style and personality. This supernatural work of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors means that the author’s words are God’s words and therefore are reliable, trustworthy, and authoritative. When we speak of inspiration we can refer to it being both verbal and plenary. Inspiration is verbal meaning that it’s not just the concepts or big ideas that are from God but the very words themselves. Inspiration is plenary too, which means that all of Scripture is inspired by God, as opposed to just some of it or only certain parts. When we put this together we can say that we believe in the “verbal, plenary inspiration” of the Bible.
- 54 “If God speaks erroneous words, how can we escape the conclusion that he deceives us?” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 552.
- 55 The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy nicely captures the relationship between inspiration and inerrancy: “Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching.” “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Normal L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 494 (Point 4 of ‘A Short Statement’). And again: “We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.” Ibid., 497 (Article XV). Also consider The Evangelical Theological Society: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is *therefore* inerrant in the autographs.” Emphasis added. Available online: <http://www.etsjets.org/about/constitution#A3>, accessed Sept. 2, 2015.
- 56 Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 547; J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1980), 17.
- 57 Clark H. Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973), 145, 150, 156.
- 58 It should be qualified that movements like the Enlightenment, liberalism, and postmodernism have influenced Roman Catholicism today, so much so that some post-Vatican II Catholics will question inerrancy. However, other Roman Catholics reject such a move.
- 59 See chapters 2 and 3 of *God’s Word Alone*.
- 60 This was not the case with every individual, obviously. However, I would argue that it proved to be a consistent pattern. See chapters 2 and 3 of *God’s Word Alone*.
- 61 See chapter 3 of *God’s Word Alone* with regard to Fuller Seminary. E.g., Jack Rogers, *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977); Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979). It is also an approach that has been utilized by progressive Roman Catholics since Vatican II. Some would argue that there was deliberate ambiguity in its statement, so that Scripture was no longer said to be inerrant in all its assertions. Some saw this ambiguity as a victory for the progressives. See Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 146–148. For the inerrancy debate between Catholics at Vatican II, especially see Cardinal Alois Grillmeier, “The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3 (ed. Herbert Vorgrimler; New York: Crossroad, 1989), 199–246.
- 62 See Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, 69.
- 63 R. C. Sproul, *Sola Scriptura: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 17. Also see Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, 69; Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 6–7.
- 64 An important point must be made to avoid misunderstanding. I am not assuming that inerrancy is the sufficient ground or basis for authority. While inerrancy is necessary for authority, it is not in and of itself sufficient. To say so would be to deny the role of inspiration as the foundation upon which biblical authority is built. At the same time, this should not lead us to conclude that a denial of inerrancy does not affect authority. It does! Remember, inerrancy is the necessary and natural corollary of inspiration (see chapter 5). As B. B. Warfield demonstrated throughout his writings, if the Bible truly is God’s Word, then, *ipso facto*, it is without error. After all, it is the Word of God, and God is a God of truth, perfect in all that he says. Therefore, inerrancy is necessarily bound up with

- biblical authority because it is inseparably connected to biblical inspiration. It is inconceivable, then, to say that Scripture could be authoritative but errant. To the contrary, when we say Scripture speaks with authority what we are really saying is that it speaks with *flawless* authority. All in all, when it comes to Scripture there is no authority without inspiration and there is no inspiration without inerrancy. They all go together and necessarily entail one another. I must give credit to Fred Zaspel who helped me work through this point in personal correspondence. Also see Zaspel's chapter "Bibliology" in *The Theology of B. B. Warfield*, 111-178.
- 65 What about general revelation? It too is a flawless authority, for it is from God. Moreover, there are other forms of revelation outside of the written canon, such as OT and NT miracles, teachings from Jesus not recorded in the Bible, lost epistles by some apostles, etc. However, none of these are canonical and none of these, including general revelation, are sufficient. Therefore, we can conclude that none of these are *sufficiently authoritative* for Christians today. This role belongs to Scripture alone. This point is made beautifully by "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693*, 233 (I.I).
- 66 *LW* 32:11. For other places where Luther affirms the inerrancy of Scripture see *LW* 1:121; 4:14; 22:254, 259; 31:11, 282; 32:98; 35:128, 150; 36:136-137; 39:165. For Luther's affirmation of Scripture's perfection in relation to *sola scriptura*, see Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand*, 249-282.
- 67 Althus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 6-7.
- 68 R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 18.
- 69 See chapters 1 and 3 of *God's Word Alone*.
- 70 "The Belgic Confession (1561)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 2, 1552-1566*, 428 (Article VII).
- 71 "The Thirty-Nine Articles (1562/63)," in *ibid.*, 761 (Article XXI).
- 72 This is, in part, why the next sentence reads, "Wherefore things ordained by them [councils] as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scriptures." *Ibid.*
- 73 "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693*, 236 (LIX). Emphasis added.
- 74 "The London Baptist Confession (1677)," in *ibid.*, 532 (I.I). Emphasis added.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 493.
- 76 "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, 494; emphasis added. One might say the Chicago statement is not necessarily Reformed. True. At the same time, most of its representatives were Reformed or at least came out of the Reformation tradition (Lutheran, Reformed Baptists, etc.).
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 This statement is from the statement's "Exposition." *Ibid.*, 502. Emphasis added.
- 79 "The Cambridge Declaration," available from <http://www.alliancenet.org/cambridge-declaration>, accessed Sept. 2, 2015. The declaration was signed by council members such as John Armstrong, Alistair Begg, James M. Boice, W. Robert Godfrey, John D. Hannah, Michael S. Horton, R. Albert Mohler Jr., R. C. Sproul, David Wells, among others. Similarly, consider Reformed theologian Keith Mathison who states, Scripture "is the only inspired and inherently *infallible* norm, and therefore Scripture is the only final *authoritative* norm. ... It is because the Scripture alone is God's inspired and *infallible* Word that Scripture carries unique authority—binding *final authority* of God Himself." He goes on to add: "Scripture's unique, *infallible* and final authority means that it stands as the Church's supreme norm. This was a primary element of early classical Protestant formulations of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. To Scripture alone can we ascribe the term *norma absoluta*—"absolute norm"—because it is Scripture alone that is God-breathed. The supreme normativity of Scripture is the logical corollary of its inspiration, infallibility, and unique authority. If Scripture truly is the divinely inspired Word of the living God; if it is therefore completely, absolutely, and unconditionally infallible; if it does carry the very authority of God Himself, then it is self-evident that Scripture is our supreme norm or standard." Keith Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001), 260, 264, 266. Also see Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 284
- 80 "To say that the Holy Scripture is the sole source of normative apostolic revelation today is to say that the Holy Scripture has the qualities of perfection and sufficiency." Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 256.
- 81 Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy," 150.
- 82 Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 18.
- 83 *Ibid.*
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 Sproul gives a similar comparison. *Ibid.*, 21.

- 86 Limited inerrantists typically use the phrase “faith and practice” in a way that is contrary to how the Reformers used it. They use it to say that the Bible is inerrant *only when it addresses* matters of faith and practice (notice how this assumes not *all* of the Bible is in view). However, the Reformation tradition has used it to say that the Bible is the only inerrant rule of faith and practice. Notice, however, that the limited inerrantists divides the Bible into two categories: one that addresses issues of faith and practice and one that is occupied with everything else. This is convenient because it then allows the limited inerrants to affirm inerrancy while simultaneously denying that inerrancy applies to *all* of the Bible. In contrast, the Reformers and the Reformed tradition have never divided Scripture up like this and nor should we. Scripture itself never imposes this distinction. Instead, we should say that the Bible is inerrant in all that it addresses (see chapter 8 of *God’s Word Alone*). Saying that the Bible is the inerrant rule of faith and practice was never meant to limit inerrancy but rather expand it so that the Bible applies to all of life. (To clarify, I am not saying that the Bible explicitly or directly addresses every detail of life and the world. It does not [e.g., physics]. However, in what the Bible does address it does so inerrantly. Furthermore, we should pay heed to the Westminster Confession [LVI] when it says that the Bible is authoritative not only in a direct sense [what is expressly set down in Scripture], but also in what may be deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence.)
- 87 On the other hand, it should be qualified that an affirmation of inerrancy does not guarantee that one affirms *sola scriptura*. Roman Catholicism is a case in point. See John D. Woodbridge, “Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century* (ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 113–122.
- 88 Limited inerrantists will prefer to use the word “infallible” instead because they mean by it something far less than inerrancy (i.e., Scripture is infallible in its spiritual message, but not in its totality). However, their appeal to use the word “infallible” for such a purpose only proves my point above, namely, that for the limited inerrantist authority cannot apply to the Bible in its totality, but must be restricted to those portions we know are true.
- 89 Limited inerrantists may object that they believe Scripture is enough for *faith and practice*. But this only brings us back to the original problem of canon reduction. If Scripture can err in apparently insignificant historical details, for example, why would we assume it will “get it right” when it comes to the significant matters of life, like faith and practice? It is hard not to conclude that the limited inerrantist is determining his own canon within a canon.
- 90 Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 33.
- 91 Credit must be given to Fred Zaspel who thought through this point with me in personal correspondence. Not surprisingly, this is a very Warfieldian point!
- 92 Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 150.
- 93 Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 34.
- 94 Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 149.
- 95 Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in *Inerrancy* (ed. Normal L. Geisler; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 183–184. Also consider Saucy who says that inerrancy “logically upholds the final authority of all of Scripture. Only truth has authority, and because the Scriptures are completely true they command ultimate authority.” Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 161. Likewise Sproul: “*Sola Scriptura* as the supreme norm of ecclesiastical authority rests ultimately on the premise of the infallibility of the Word of God.” Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 21.
- 96 J. I. Packer, “The Bible in Use: Evangelicals Seeking Truth from Holy Scripture,” in *Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 78.
- 97 Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 21–26, 187–193.
- 98 For the various views in this debate, see Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, eds., *Four Views on the Historical Adam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).
- 99 Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), especially chapters 5–7, and the Nine theses in the Conclusion.
- 100 Peter Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 83–141; idem, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014).
- 101 Kenton L. Sparks, *Sacred Word Broken Word: Biblical Authority & the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 114–117. Also see idem, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). For a response, see Albert Mohler Jr., “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, especially 55; Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Embattled Bible: Four More Books,” *Themelios* 34.1 (2009): 6–25.
- 102 Sparks, *Sacred Word Broken Word*, 33–39, 91.

103 Ibid., 92.

104 Ibid., 116, 135.

105 See chapter 2 of *God's Word Alone*.

106 For an example of such an approach, see Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

107 J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 26-27.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid., 28.

111 Notice how our approach differs from Sparks and Enns who say we should approach Scripture by interrogating it or as if we are engaging in a wrestling match. Sparks, *Sacred Word Broken Word*, 30, 39; Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So*, 22-23.

112 It is sometimes referred to as the “self-attestation” of Scripture. Some, like James Barr, have rejected this doctrine (*Fundamentalism* [London: SCM, 1977], 78). However, evangelicals have affirmed it: Sinclair Ferguson, “How Does the Bible Look at Itself?” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (ed. Conn, Harvie M.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 47-66; Wayne Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D.A. Carson and John Woodbridge; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 19-59; John Frame, “Scripture Speaks for Itself, in God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 178-181.

113 Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 89.

114 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.4-5. Also see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 vols.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992-1997), 1:89.

115 Here I echo Warfield who said: “The trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine, and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life.” Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, reprinted 2003), 67.

# Justification by Works and *Sola Fide*

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

I want to do two things in this article. First, I am going to give a whirlwind tour of my book on justification by faith alone—*Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification*. Second, I want to defend exegetically justification by faith alone. After considering the use of slogans in our discussion of justification, two themes will be considered in this latter section. I want to consider how the imputation of Christ’s righteousness fits with *sola fide*. And then I want to explain how *sola fide* can be sustained since the NT teaches that works are necessary for justification and salvation.

### A WHIRLWIND TOUR OF FAITH ALONE—THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

#### *The Teaching of the Early Fathers*

Let’s begin with the whirlwind tour. I begin the book by saying that those who claim that the early fathers rejected justification by faith alone are

guilty of being too simplistic. In fact, a few of the early fathers explicitly endorsed justification by faith alone. Such an expression doesn't necessarily mean that they would subscribe to the understanding of the Reformers on the matter. On the other hand, neither can we say that those who omit the slogan would necessarily reject it. We have to remember that the matter wasn't debated or disputed by the early fathers. Conflict or controversies clarify the issues at stake. When we examine what the early fathers wrote we see two themes. Justification is ours by the grace of God through faith, and good works are necessary for salvation. These two themes capture quite nicely the NT writings themselves. In that respect the early fathers were faithful interpreters of the NT.

I am not claiming that the fathers always formulated these matters in a way that accords with the scriptures. Surely there are statements made which the Reformers would not endorse and which we would judge to be less than faithful to the biblical witness. The earliest interpreters of the NT were not infallible, and their lack of precision and even their less than helpful articulations can be forgiven given their context and time. Accuracy and precision are forged in the furnace of controversy. We aren't surprised that one of the most helpful books on *sola fide* was written by John Owen titled *Justification by Faith*.<sup>2</sup> Owen wrote this book more than a hundred years after the Reformation began. He could survey the entire question from the standpoint of church history and after the controversies that had erupted between the Reformers and the Roman Catholics and the Reformers and the Socinians.

Hence, neither Protestants nor Catholics can confidently claim that the early fathers were on their side. What we can say is that there are indications that the early fathers were closer to the biblical witness than many have affirmed. In other words, Thomas Torrance's claim that the early fathers contradicted the Pauline teaching on justification fails to persuade.<sup>3</sup>

I am not suggesting all the early fathers would have endorsed justification by faith alone. Perhaps some would have rejected the notion. But I am saying that those who say that there was a consensus against the doctrine go beyond the evidence. Some of the fathers, as already noted, specifically wrote that justification was by faith alone. Most of them, if we bring our questions to the text, are rather vague and ambiguous. On the other hand, Brian Arnold's recent dissertation on the early fathers rightly demonstrates that some of the earliest evidence actually accords with justification by

faith alone.<sup>4</sup> The matter is complex, and I am not a church historian, and it is probably somewhat foolish for me to be talking about this with church historians in the room! Still, the only point I am making here is that those who confidently say that the early fathers denied justification by faith alone are claiming more than the sources say. Sometimes Protestants are accused of reading their theology back into early fathers, and, of course, we must beware of anachronism. But the opposite is also true. Roman Catholics are also prone to read the early fathers as if they denied what the Reformers taught about justification. And I want to say: not so clear and not so fast. In fact, there is significant evidence on the other side.

### *The Reformers and Their Successors*

My book is actually like a tour where I dock at certain ports of call. Many important persons are skipped since there is no attempt to be comprehensive. I particularly consider the contribution of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and as I already noted, John Owen. The disagreement between John Owen and Richard Baxter on the issue is most interesting, for it reflects in some significant ways a debate that continues up to our very day. I would argue that Owen got the better of the debate, but I won't linger on that point today. It is fascinating to see that Baxter argued that faith *is* our righteousness, whereas Owen claimed that faith justifies us because it unites us to Jesus Christ who is our righteousness. In other words, Owen presents a powerful biblical and theological defense for the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

I would like to pause and mention a couple of other things that fascinated me. Jonathan Edwards's understanding of justification by faith has been the subject of intense controversy in scholarship. Some maintain that he is faithful to the NT and to the Reformers, while others suggest that he veers into Catholic territory in articulating his doctrine of justification. Protestant scholars line up on both sides in assessing Edwards. I come out with those who say that Edwards is faithful to the Reformers and to the NT witness. Edwards specifically says that justification is by faith alone and dependent upon the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Some think he denies this conception when he explains the role of good works in justification. I wouldn't phrase everything the way Edwards does. Sometimes in formulating his theology Edwards becomes quite speculative. But I would maintain that his statements about the necessity of good works for justification should be

interpreted in light of his clear statement that justification is by faith alone and rests on the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. What Edwards is trying to do, however, is to take seriously what James means when he says that justification is by works. Edwards is a good Protestant; he takes seriously *sola scriptura*, and thus he doesn't just parrot the Reformed tradition but tries to explain it. Perhaps he wasn't entirely successful, but I think it goes too far to say that he actually denied it and wanders into Catholic territory. After all, Edwards had no sympathy whatsoever for Catholic theology.

### ***Some Recent Developments***

I also consider some recent developments and controversies related to justification. Hence, the “New Perspective on Paul” and Doug Campbell’s apocalyptic reading of Paul are examined.<sup>5</sup> The new perspective isn’t so new anymore and sometimes scholars skip it altogether. Joseph Fitzmyer, the great Roman Catholic commentary, doesn’t engage it at all in his commentary on Romans.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Leander Keck’s 2005 commentary on Romans pays little attention to the new perspective.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the new perspective is losing steam and becoming yesterday’s news. Some think Doug Campbell’s post new perspective view is the next thing on the horizon, but Campbell’s reading of Paul is idiosyncratic, and it is hard to see how it will become influential, unless someone tweaks it in a way that appeals to evangelicals.

I also survey the *Joint Declaration on Justification* which represents the fruit of Roman Catholic and Lutheran dialogue. Frank Beckwith’s return to Catholicism which has generated much interest is also considered.<sup>8</sup> Finally, ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) is assessed, especially the contribution and defense of ECT by Richard John Neuhaus and J. I. Packer.<sup>9</sup> Packer rightly says that Augustinianism shouldn’t be condemned and that people may be justified by faith alone even if they deny justification by faith alone. Owen said the same thing long before Packer. Still, the Catholic Church has moved in a much more Arminian direction since the days of Augustine, and despite Packer’s demurral, the document suggests more harmony between evangelicals and Catholics on the gospel than truly exists. Neuhaus is a fascinating case since he was raised in Lutheran circles and converted to Catholicism. Neuhaus has a long discussion on justification by faith alone. When it comes right down to it, he ends up saying that justification by faith alone really isn’t that important and Reformed Protestants should just get

over it. That is a most interesting argument because that is the very point that is disputed. Those who are Reformed and find justification by faith alone to be precious both doctrinally and pastorally aren't moved by an argument that says it is a matter of indifference.

### ***Pastoral Thoughts***

I close the book with some pastoral reflections. Justification by faith alone is important doctrinally, but it is vital pastorally. We will all stand before God on the day of judgment, and what will we plead before him? Will we plead our own righteousness and goodness? Owen especially emphasizes this matter in his book on justification. He says that believers will almost certainly get things right if they reflect on standing personally before the Holy One of Israel. They will not put any trust in their own righteousness but will look to God alone for justification.<sup>10</sup> It is instructive that J. Gresham Machen as he was dying said, “I’m so thankful for active obedience of Christ; no hope without it.”<sup>11</sup> If we die slowly, we will consider our sins, and Satan and our own conscience will accuse us of our sins. We will find no comfort in that hour if we reflect on our own righteousness. For we recognize in that moment that we need the perfect righteousness of another to stand before God, namely, the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us. A short story here might prove to be helpful. I was raised as a Roman Catholic and hence friends occasionally bring to me Protestants who are considering Catholicism. I have a bad track record by the way of turning them away from Catholicism. I tried something else the last time I had this kind of discussion. I said to the person. “You have many secret sins and are you going to plead your own righteousness on the day of judgment?” I don’t know if he was convinced, but I could see he was visibly shaken since we all know in our heart of hearts that we are unworthy to stand before God based on our own goodness.

## **JUSTIFICATION ACCORDING TO WORKS AND SOLA FIDE**

### ***The Use of Slogans***

As we examine the biblical text, three areas will be addressed briefly: 1) the use of slogans; 2) the matter of imputation; and 3) how justification according to works fits with *sola fide*. The longest discussion will be on the last issue since it is the best argument against justification by faith alone.

Reformed Protestants confess that justification is by faith alone, and yet scripture never says such explicitly. In fact, as Roman Catholics never tire pointing out, the scriptures only address once whether justification is by faith alone, and they deny it. James 2:24 says, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (ESV). How is that Protestants who uphold *sola scriptura* have a slogan which is contradicted by the very words of scripture? Have we inadvertently become like Roman Catholics in that justification by faith alone represents our tradition but actually contradicts the scriptural witness? To paraphrase the words of Jesus: are we denying scripture to uphold our tradition (Matt 15:6)?

I will argue that we don’t deny the scriptures in confessing justification by faith alone, but first a word should be said about slogans. Slogans are both helpful and distorting. The slogan justification by faith alone is helpful, for it is time-consuming to explain repeatedly what we mean in expressing a theological truth. The slogan summarizes in short form the theology that has been hammered out exegetically, historically, and theologically. If we didn’t use slogans our conversations would be interminably long.

If we look at it from another perspective, slogans are also distorting. The untutored person might think that the slogan justification by faith alone means that good works are important and unnecessary. They may seize on James 2:24 where James explicitly says justification is not by faith alone and triumphantly reject the notion that justification is by faith alone. Unfortunately, such a rejection is also a kind of sloganeering and suffers from superficiality, for before someone rejects justification by faith alone it is vital to discern what the most articulate and sophisticated advocates of the doctrine meant. None of them denied the importance of good works. Virtually all of them said that justification is by faith alone, but then immediately added that such faith is never alone. Hence, when they affirmed that justification was by faith alone, they were ruling out the notion that our works were a basis of justification. So, the slogan justification by faith alone is useful as long as it is rightly understood.

### ***Faith Alone and Imputation***

Righteousness by faith alone fits with the truth that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. Our righteousness doesn’t depend upon what we do, but upon an alien righteousness—a righteousness *given* to us. Robert

Gundry made a splash a few years ago in his rejection of imputation, and he contended that faith *is our righteousness*.<sup>12</sup> Such a reading isn't new, for Baxter held the same view many centuries earlier. Despite Gundry's demursals, faith justifies because through faith we are united to Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen one. Theologically, this makes perfect sense. It is God in Christ who justifies us rather than our faith. Faith is the instrument by which we are incorporated into all that Jesus Christ is and has done for us. Luther expresses this truth beautifully when he says that righteousness is imputed to us because we are married to Christ.<sup>13</sup> In this marriage, in this union, all that Christ is belongs to us. In our righteousness we look outside of ourselves and to Jesus Christ.

Gundry and others point to Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 where Paul, citing Genesis 15:6, says that Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness. Gundry worries that Reformed theology runs over the lineaments of the text, forcing its theology into Paul's writings. Space is lacking to enter into the dispute step by step. Still, three texts in Paul call into question Gundry's exegesis. First, the truth of imputation is captured simply and yet profoundly in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (ESV). Christ was made a sin-offering or counted as a sinner in our stead and for our salvation. He was counted as a sinner, in other words, because of our sin and not his own, which is to say that he gave himself as our penal substitute. We were reconciled to God because God did "not [count our] trespasses against [us]" (2 Cor 5:19, ESV). As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "one has died for all, therefore all have died" (ESV). Christ died for us as believers, and therefore his death was our death. His death to sin was our death to sin as Romans 6:8 affirms. But it doesn't stop there; we also are given "the righteousness of God" "in him." We are counted as righteous before God by virtue of our union with Jesus Christ. The righteousness of God is ours by virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We read in 1 Timothy 3:16 that Jesus was "vindicated by the Spirit" (ESV). This vindication took place at the resurrection, proclaiming to all that the crucified one was the righteous one. Those who are united to Jesus participate in the death he died and enjoy the vindication which is his by virtue of the resurrection. Since his death is our death, his resurrection is also our resurrection and vindication.

The second text is Romans 5:12-19. I am not going to engage in a close

exegesis for the sake of time, but the whole point of the text supports imputation. Everyone enters into the world as a sinner and condemned because of Adam's sin. Adam functions as our covenant head; we are united to him, and what is true of Adam is also true of us. So too, those who are in Christ are righteous and have life because they are united to him. Adam and Christ are covenant heads, covenant representatives. If we belong to Jesus Christ, and if Jesus is our covenant head, then his righteousness is imputed to us, just as Adam's sin is imputed to us.

Third, how should we interpret Paul's assertion that our faith is counted as righteousness (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6)? Paul doesn't say anything in those paragraphs about the imputation of righteousness, and hence we can understand why some conclude that faith *is our righteousness*. A brief foray into the context of Romans 4 and Galatians 3 demonstrates, on the other hand, that imputation isn't foreign to Paul's purpose. Romans 3:21-26 is the decisive hinge in Paul's argument in Romans. Right-standing with God isn't obtained by works of law since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23, ESV). Righteousness belongs to those who put their faith in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:22). But how does God count believers as righteous through faith in Jesus? It is because Jesus Christ is our redemption and propitiation. He has liberated his people from slavery to sin through his blood (Rom 3:24), and he has taken upon himself the wrath of God as the place where atonement was secured (Rom 3:25-26). Faith counts as righteousness because our faith is in our redeemer and propitiator. It is vital to see that Romans 3:21-26 precedes Romans 4, revealing that it isn't our faith that saves us. Rather, it is the object of our faith which saves us because the faith that saves is faith in Jesus Christ, and righteousness is ours because we are united to God by faith.

We see something similar in Galatians. Paul affirms that we are justified by faith apart from works of law three times in Galatians 2:16. What saves, however, is not ultimately our faith but Jesus Christ himself. Sinners find life only because they have died with him. Paul says in Galatians 2:19 that he died to the law and in 2:20 that he has been crucified with Christ. The life he enjoys is resurrection life, the life of the new age through faith in Christ. But the death Paul died and the life he lives are traced to his death and resurrection in Christ. In other words, Paul has new life because he is united to Jesus Christ. So, faith itself isn't his righteousness. His righteousness is

in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen one. Such a reading is supported by Galatians 3:10-14, and especially verses 13-14. The curse that rests upon all people because of their failure to keep the law has been taken by Christ Jesus, who has “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13, HCSB). Our righteousness is located in Jesus Christ as the crucified one, and hence faith itself isn’t our righteousness. Verse 14 bears this out, for Paul says that “the blessing of Abraham” belongs to the Gentiles “in Christ Jesus” (ESV). By virtue of union with Christ Gentiles participate in the blessing promised to Abraham. Faith links us to Jesus Christ and to all that he is for us.

To sum up, when we speak of justification by faith alone, we aren’t saying that our faith justifies us. We see here how the five *solas* are closely linked together, for righteousness is by faith alone because our righteousness is in Christ alone as the crucified and risen one. And if our righteousness is by faith alone and in Christ alone, then it is by grace alone since our works don’t constitute our righteousness. And our righteousness is also to the glory of God alone since he is the one who has accomplished our salvation. Justification by faith alone doesn’t call attention to our faith but to Christ as the redeemer, reconciler, and Savior.

### ***Faith Alone and Justification by Works***

At this juncture, the most important biblical objection to justification by faith alone will be addressed. It is the objection that Frank Beckwith and many others raise against the notion that justification by faith alone. And it brings us back to the famous text in James where James says that justification is by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24). How can we say that justification and salvation are by faith alone when the biblical text says otherwise, when a number of verses speak of justification or salvation by works? Sometimes Reformed Protestants, in my experience, have a rather fuzzy acquaintance with these texts. In some instances we are more familiar with our theology than the biblical evidence. Because of the limitations of time, the discussion here will be limited to Paul and James.

Paul is famous, and rightly so, as the theologian of grace. He emphasizes repeatedly that justification and salvation are by grace through faith, and thus works are excluded. Paul says in Romans 3:28, “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (NIV). Luther

concluded from this verse that we are justified by faith alone, and the famous Roman Catholic NT scholar Joseph Fitzmyer agrees that Luther's reading catches Paul's meaning here.<sup>14</sup> In Galatians 2:16 Paul tells the readers three times that justification is by faith instead of by works of law. The significance of the statement can hardly be overestimated since it appears in the section of the letter where Paul begins to unfold his theology over against the Judaizers. We could even say that the rest of Galatians unpacks the meaning of what Paul says in Galatians 2:15-21. The new perspective has argued that the focus in this statement is on the boundary markers, the identity badges separating Jews from Gentiles. I think this reading goes astray for a number of reasons. Many don't know that there was a similar argument in some respects during the Reformation. Roman Catholics maintained that works of law referred to the ceremonial law, and Luther and Calvin argued that the reference is to the moral law. I think Luther and Calvin got the better of the argument, but I won't rehearse that here. According to Roman Catholics justification comes in part from our adherence to the moral law, but the Reformers rightly insisted that Paul teaches that our righteousness isn't contributed to by our obedience.

Even if we were to grant the new perspective reading of works of law, we still have the statements where Paul teaches that we aren't justified by works. The word "works" (*ἔργα*) isn't limited or defined by the phrase "of law" (*νόμου*). Hence, the word "works" refers in the broadest sense to anything and everything a person does to obtain righteousness. Paul emphasizes that Abraham wasn't justified by "works" (Rom 4:1-8). This isn't just a boundary marker issue, for Abraham is characterized as "ungodly" (Rom 4:5), since he belonged to a family of idolaters as Joshua 24:2 says. People who attempt to be justified by their own works are trying "to establish their own righteousness" (Rom 10:3, HCSB). The righteousness that saves, however, is not our own but "the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil 3:9, ESV). As Titus 3:5 says we are not saved "because of works done by us in righteousness" (ESV). The last phrase (*τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ*) is most interesting since works are defined in terms of the righteous things we have done, showing that works can't be limited to boundary markers of the new perspective. Works are defined in terms of our righteous behavior. All of this fits with Ephesians 2:8-9, which are signature verses in Pauline theology. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not

your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (ESV).

In this brief survey we have seen a constellation of texts that demonstrate that justification in Paul’s thought is by faith alone. It is by faith alone because works don’t contribute to our justification. We could look at other texts to make this same point (cf. Rom 3:21-31; 4:13-25; 9:30-10:8; Gal 3:1-4:31; Phil 3:2-9). The notion that justification is by faith alone doesn’t come from just one or two texts. It is rooted deeply in Paul’s letters, and Paul’s theology and his thirteen letters are the fullest exposition of the gospel of grace given to us in Jesus Christ.

At the same time Paul emphasizes the importance of good works. The emphasis on good works is pronounced, so much so that Heikki Raisanen says that Paul’s theology is actually contradictory.<sup>15</sup> Saying that Paul’s theology is contradictory is a counsel of despair and quite unlikely even at a human level, for the texts that say justification is not by works and the texts that say justification is according to works are quite close to one another in the same letters. It is unlikely that Paul didn’t see the tension between these two kinds of statements. He would have been rather obtuse if he didn’t see the problem, but before suggesting a solution, I want to present the evidence that justification or salvation is according to works. Such evidence needs to be adduced because in some cases evangelicals don’t attend to these texts often and hence are surprised when presented with the evidence.

When I speak of justification or salvation by works in Paul, I am not restricting myself to texts that specifically talk about good works relative to justification or salvation. I also include texts which emphasize that the obedience of believers is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God or eternal life. For instance in Galatians 5:19-21 the “works of the flesh” are itemized, and Paul follows up with these sobering words. “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (ESV). How remarkable it is to find in a letter that emphasizes the grace of God in salvation and justification by faith that also Paul threatens the Galatians with exclusion from the kingdom if they practice the works of the flesh. We see something quite similar in Galatians 6:8: “the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit” (HCSB). The contrast between “corruption” and “eternal life” clarifies that those who sow to the flesh will experience final judgment and eternal destruction.

We find in 1 Corinthians a warning that reminds us of what we saw in Galatians. The Corinthians are disputing and arguing with one another, and even going to court before unbelievers (1 Cor 6:1-8). The connection between verse 8 and verses 9-10 is captured very well by the NRSV. Paul says in verse 8, “you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that.” And then in verses 9-10 he threatens them. “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.” The Corinthians are wronging each other and wrongdoers won’t enter the kingdom. Paul catalogs some of the sins that bar people from the kingdom, showing again that those who practice evil won’t enjoy eternal life.

The notion that there will be a judgment according to work is pervasive in Paul. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:10. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (NIV). Paul isn’t thinking merely of rewards since the issue in 5:1-10 is one’s permanent home with the Lord which will be the destiny of those who belong to the Lord. In fact, Paul anticipates here what he says later about the false teachers who claimed to be Christians. These teacher are actually “false apostles” and Satanic messengers (2 Cor 11:13-14). Their final “destiny will be according to their works” (2 Cor 11:15 HCSB). Paul makes a similar statement about Alexander the coppersmith who opposed his gospel so virulently. He warns Timothy about him and says, “The Lord will repay him according to his works” (2 Tim 4:14, HCSB). Paul teaches that those who do good works will be saved on the last day, while those who practice evil will be judged. In one sense, what Paul writes is scarcely surprising since the OT taught that judgment was according to works (cf. Exod 34:7; Job 34:11; Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12)

Such a reading fits with what Paul says about works in the most famous passage on this matter. We read in Romans 2:6-11. “He will repay each one according to his works: eternal life to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; but wrath and indignation to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth but are obeying unrighteousness; affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. There is no favoritism with God”

(HCSB). There isn't any need to engage in extensive exegesis here since Paul clearly says that eternal life is according to works, and those who practice evil will experience God's wrath and indignation. Some commentators, however, claim that Paul speaks hypothetically. Yes, they say, judgment is according to works, but all fail to do good works. The set of those who do good works is an empty set. The hypothetical interpretation fits with the major theme of Romans 1:18-3:20 where all, both Jews and Greeks, are indicted as sinners.

The hypothetical argument is a good one but it fails to convince for three reasons. First, Paul gives no indication in the near context that he speaks hypothetically. He could have easily signaled to the reader that reward for doing good never becomes a reality. Second, we have seen elsewhere that Paul teaches that those who do good works will enter the kingdom. We are not surprised, then, to find Paul saying in Romans 2:13, "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (ESV). Remarkably enough, Paul says that those who obey the law will be justified before God on the last day.

The third argument supporting the notion that Paul isn't speaking hypothetically is the final paragraph in Romans 2:25-29. Context is king and the context indicates that Paul is speaking hypothetically. Here Paul addresses Jews who put their trust in the covenant sign of circumcision. Circumcision, of course, was necessary to be a member of the Jewish people. Gentiles who desired to convert to Judaism showed they were proselytes by their circumcision. Paul, however, says that those who are circumcised but fail to keep the law belong to the uncircumcision. In other words, Jews who don't believe in Jesus Christ are outside the covenant people of God.

Paul doesn't stop there. He says in verse 26 that the uncircumcised person who keeps the law will be counted (*λογισθήσεται*) as circumcised. Any Jewish person would be mightily puzzled by the notion that one could keep the law and yet fail to be circumcised! But that is a subject for another day. What is remarkable is that the Gentile who keeps the law is reckoned by God (note the passive verb for *λογίζομαι*) as circumcised. In other words, the Gentile who observes the law is a covenant member. Paul goes on to say in verse 27 that Gentiles who fulfill the law will judge on the last day Jews who enjoy all the advantages of the law and circumcision.

But isn't Paul just speaking hypothetically here? The connection between verses 26-27 and verses 28-29 rules out the hypothetical view. Paul links the

verses with the word “for” ( $\gamma\alpha\rho$ ). So, verses 28-29 function as the ground for verses 26-27. How is that Gentiles can observe the law and be covenant members? We are told in verses 28-29. True Jewishness and true circumcision are not outward matters. Circumcision of the heart fulfills the new covenant promise that God’s people will be circumcised in their hearts so that they are enabled to observe God’s commands (cf. Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4; 31:31-34). Most importantly, Paul contrasts “the Spirit and the letter” here. Wherever we find that contrast Paul refers to the work of the Spirit in the age of fulfillment (cf. Rom 7:6; 2 Cor 3:6). Hence, the reference to the Spirit points to the eschatological work of the Spirit by which Gentiles are truly circumcised and truly Jews. In other words, they are members of the people of God. What Paul says about Gentile obedience and membership in the people of God can’t be hypothetical since he ascribes such to the Holy Spirit! But why would Paul inject the theme of Gentile obedience into a section that emphasizes that all have sinned? Why confuse the readers? Paul anticipates a major theme in Romans: Gentile inclusion in the people of God is intended to provoke the Jews to jealousy. Often in Romans Paul brings up a subject briefly and then circles back to it in his argument.

What we have seen in Romans 2:25-29 helps us interpret Romans 2:6-11 and to reach the conclusion that Paul wasn’t speaking hypothetically when he spoke of judgment according to works. The works that are done, however, aren’t autonomous; they are the work of the Spirit.

Other passages could be adduced in support of the notion that works are necessary for justification. The many texts on the necessity of good works in Paul demonstrate that Paul isn’t so different from James after all. Both Paul and James affirm that good works are necessary for justification.

By now you may have forgotten that this paper was about *sola fide*! I wanted us to see, however, the tension in Paul’s theology between the two affirmations: justification and salvation are *apart from* works, and justification and salvation are *according to* works. Does the emphasis on good works and their necessity for justification contradict *sola fide*? I would say no, and offer the following arguments.

First, good works can’t be the *basis* of salvation in Paul’s theology since Paul clearly teaches, as noted above, that Christ’s atoning work saves us (cf. Rom 3:21-26; 2 Cor 5:14-21; Gal 3:13). What exactly does Paul mean, then, when he speaks of the necessity of good works? He can’t mean that

those works *qualify* us to enter into God's presence in and of themselves, for otherwise, as Paul says in Galatians 2:21 if righteousness comes by the law and our obedience to it, then Christ died for nothing.

Second, and closely related to what was said above about Christ's atoning death: good works can't be the basis of our salvation because God demands perfection. The demand for perfection to enter God's presence is pervasive in scripture. For instance, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden for one sin. God didn't say to them that they could remain in his presence if they obeyed most of the time thereafter. Many scholars say that when Israel entered into covenant at Sinai with Yahweh that perfection wasn't required. The answer is no and yes. No, perfection wasn't demanded, for the Lord in his grace provided sacrifices for the people when they strayed from him. On the other hand, the sacrifices themselves showed that the Lord required perfection. Every disobedience had to be atoned for; otherwise, Israel couldn't remain in the Lord's presence. The presenting of sacrifices shows that perfection was necessary for Israel to remain in God's presence.

In Paul's theology we also see that perfection is demanded. We have already seen that believers need the atoning and redeeming and propitiating work of Christ because God demands perfection. Any sin warrants judgment from God. We are not surprised, then, that Paul (2 Cor 5:21) and other NT writers emphasize that Jesus was without sin (e.g., John 8:46; 1 Pet 2:22; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1 John 3:5). He could scarcely atone for sins if he wasn't a lamb without spot and blemish (1 Pet 1:19), a perfect sacrifice.

Does Paul teach that perfect obedience is required? I think it is clearly taught in Galatians 3:10. "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written: Everyone who does not continue doing everything written in the book of the law is cursed" (HCSB). Note the argument here. We really have a syllogism with the middle step of the argument omitted. The conclusion of the syllogism is in the first part of the verse: those who are of works of law are cursed. The first premise in the argument is in Galatians 3:10b. One must do everything written in the book of the law to avoid being cursed. Paul draws here on Deuteronomy 27:56 and Deuteronomy 28:58. The LXX of Deuteronomy 28:58 can be translated as follows: you must "do all the words of this law written in this book" (*ποιεῖν πάντα τὰ ρήματα τοῦ νόμου τούτου τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ*). Paul emphasizes complete and perfect obedience; one must do *everything* that is written to avoid being

cursed. Interestingly, Andrew Das has shown that the requirement of perfect obedience is reflected in other second temple Jewish writings of the day.<sup>16</sup>

What is the missing step in the argument? It is the notion that no one keeps the law perfectly. Some object that we can't smuggle this notion into the text since Paul doesn't state it. But the reason it is omitted is easy to explain. Everyone agreed in accord with the OT that perfect obedience was impossible for human beings. Listen to these texts:<sup>17</sup>

- “When they sin against You—for there is no one who does not sin (1 Kings 8:46).
- “Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am cleansed from my sin’? (Prov 20:9).
- “There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins” (Eccl 7:20).
- “There is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one” (Ps 14:1-3).

The middle premise in the argument is left out because it was perfectly obvious to everyone from the scriptures (and probably also from experience) that all sinned.

Let's sum up Paul's argument from Gal. 3:10.

- God demands perfect obedience of the law (3:10b).
- No one obeys perfectly (implied).
- Therefore, all who rely on works of law are cursed (3:10a).
- Justification, then, can't be based on works since no one performs what is required. When we combine this with what Paul says about atonement, then we see that the basis of salvation is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, not the works that we do since our works remain imperfect.

Let me add one other argument from Romans 2:26-29. We saw there that Gentiles are considered to be true Jews and covenant members because of their obedience. The obedience rendered, however, is due to the Holy Spirit's work. This fits with Galatians 6:8 where Paul calls upon his readers to sow to the Spirit. Indeed, if we look at Galatians, the emphasis on the Spirit is remarkable. Believers must “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16), “be led by the Spirit” (5:18), manifest “the fruit of the Spirit” (5:22), and “keep in step

with the Spirit" (5:25). This fits with Ephesians 5:18 where a new way of living is ascribed to being "filled with the Spirit."<sup>18</sup>

The emphasis on the Spirit is important, showing that our works are a consequence and result of the work of the Spirit. I would argue, then, that the works necessary for justification aren't the *basis* for salvation and in that sense don't contribute to salvation. They are the *necessary evidence* for and *fruit* of salvation. Such a judgment, I would suggest, isn't an imposition upon the text but represents a careful putting together of all that Paul wrote on the matter.

Grace is a central motif in Paul's theology, so that salvation and justification are of the Lord. Our redemption and reconciliation are a miracle of grace, for we deserved judgment and destruction because of our evil and sin. Our works don't save us since they are woefully lacking. Faith, however, trusts God's promise to save and justify those who believe in Jesus Christ. And it is right to say faith alone saves since imperfect works don't pass muster to make us right with God. Faith unites us with Jesus Christ who is our righteousness. Yes, good works are necessary for life eternal, but they can't be the basis of our right-standing with God since God demands perfection. Good works are a fruit of faith and a result of the Spirit's work. The best advocates of *sola fide* have always said that we are justified by faith alone, and yet it is by faith that isn't alone. So, the necessity of good works doesn't contradict *sola fide*.

### ***Reflecting on James***

Now let's think about James for a moment. We all know the famous passage where James says that Abraham and Rahab are justified by works (Jas. 2:14-26). Furthermore, James denies that justification is by faith alone. What do we make of this? We remember Luther saying that if anyone could harmonize James and Paul on justification he would put his doctor's cap on him and call him a fool. On another occasion, Luther, speaking about the epistle of James said that he would like to throw Jimmy in the fire. Still, Luther didn't exclude James from the canon but said it wasn't one of the chief books.<sup>19</sup>

Part of what Luther says is actually quite helpful. Too many have read James as if the letter is the whole of his theology. The letter is occasional and responds to a particular situation in the life of the church or churches. Many elements in James's theology are doubtless absent from the book. For instance, James says nothing about Jesus's atoning death, but it is hardly warranted to conclude from this that Jesus's death wasn't necessary for salvation

according to James. If James dispensed with Jesus's atoning death, he could scarcely be accepted as a Christian writer. Notice, however, that Paul after rehearsing the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-10, which includes Jesus's death for the forgiveness of our sins, emphatically includes both James and Peter in the preaching of this gospel. "Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed" (1 Cor 15:11 NIV). Paul claims that he and James proclaimed the same gospel, which included the truth that Jesus died for our sins. Also, in Galatians 2:1-10 James is among those who gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul, indicating that "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:5, 14) proclaimed by Paul was also endorsed by James. The full explanation of the gospel found in Paul is lacking in James, but it is hardly fair to compare thirteen letters of Paul to one by James. That is to demand too much. Ironically enough, some NT scholars read James as if his letter is a systematic theology, whereas many systematists often recognize the situational circumstances that called forth the letter.

What stands out in James is the call to live a new life. Perhaps his readers had used the gospel of grace as an excuse to be lax ethically. Interpreting what James means in speaking about justification by works is illuminated by two other texts. In a verse about controlling our tongues James remarks that "we all stumble in many ways" (Jas 3:2, ESV). The word "stumble" clearly means sin. James uses the same word "stumble" ( $\pi\tau\alpha\imath\omega$ ) in James 2:12 where he says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Jas 2:10 NIV). James clearly teaches here that if we violate one command of the law we are lawbreakers instead of law keepers. And then he proceeds to say a bit later in James 3:2 that we all stumble ( $\pi\tau\alpha\imath\omega$  again), we all sin, in many ways. How fascinating that James includes himself in those who are sinners, for he uses the first person plural. And what James says is true of all Christians since he says that *all* believers sin in many ways. Notice also that he doesn't say that we sin in a few ways or a couple of ways but in *many* ways.

If we put James 3:2 together with 2:10, there is a sense in which Christians remain lawbreakers their entire lives, up until the time of their death. And yet James also says that believers are justified by works. We have important evidence here that James means something very similar to Paul. Justification by works certainly doesn't mean perfection since we all stumble in many ways. Nor does it seem likely that such works qualify us to enter God's presence

intrinsically since these works are imperfect. This observation fits with the last two verses of the letter where a sinner who wanders and is restored will have his many sins covered (Jas 5:19-20). Justification by works doesn't rule out for James repentance and restoration after a person has given himself or herself to many sins.

Finally, there is evidence in James 2:14-26 that James wouldn't reject *sola fide*. What James rejects in this section is a *saying* faith, a *claiming* faith where works are absent. It is *this* kind of faith that doesn't save, for it is a faith marked by intellectual assent only. Demons, as James tells us, are orthodox monotheists (Jas 2:19), but their faith doesn't lead to a change of life. In the Gospels the demons confess that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24, HCSB), but such a confession isn't saving. So, when James says that faith without works doesn't save he is thinking of a particular kind of faith, what he calls a "dead" faith (2:17, 26), a useless or idle faith (Jas 2:20). But genuine faith, a faith that embraces all that God is for us in Jesus Christ, saves, and such a faith inevitably produces works. But this accords what we mean when we speak of *sola fide*. We are justified by faith alone and yet our faith is never alone. I conclude, then, that there is important evidence to support the notion that Paul and James agreed on justification by faith alone, and that they both believed that true faith always produces good works.

<sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from a paper presented at The Southern Seminary Theology Conference on September 24-25, 2015 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. Much of it is taken from chapters in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ; Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated in The Works of John Owen*, vol. 5, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> See Brian J. Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> See Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> See Leander E. Keck, *Romans* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> See Francis J. Beckwith, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> See Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Owen, *Justification by Faith*, 9-20.

- <sup>11</sup> See Ned Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (1954; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 508.
- <sup>12</sup> See Robert H. Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration’ ... Even Though I wasn’t Asked to,” *Books and Culture* 7.1 (January–February, 2001).
- <sup>13</sup> See Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 182.
- <sup>14</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 360–362.
- <sup>15</sup> See Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983).
- <sup>16</sup> See A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000).
- <sup>17</sup> All of these texts are from the HCSB.
- <sup>18</sup> All of these verses are from the ESV, but Gal 5:25 is my translation.
- <sup>19</sup> On this point, see Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 37–53, 191–206.

# The Word as a Means of Grace

CARL R. TRUEMAN

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The differences over grace between the medieval Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation are nowhere more obviously apparent than in the architecture of their respective places of worship. To enter one of the great cathedrals of the high Middle Ages, such as that of Cologne, is to enter a space that is focused on and saturated in the sacraments, specifically the Mass. As one enters the building, one's eyes are drawn to the high altar because the architect knew his theology. He knew that the most important thing that happened in the liturgy was the celebration of the Mass, where Christ literally came down to meet his people in grace. As the bread and wine became the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, Christ was present with his people. Heaven met earth and all eyes should thus be focused on the place where this mystery took place.

Enter a Protestant cathedral, say, St. Giles' in Edinburgh, and one enters a very different world. Not only are the usual elaborate aesthetics of medieval piety missing, one's eyes are drawn not to any altar but rather to the elevated pulpit. Again, the architect knew his theology well, for the most important thing that happens in a Protestant service is the reading and especially (to

use the adverb employed in the Shorter Catechism) the preaching of God's word. God's presence is mediated not under the accidents of bread and wine at the altar. It is not the eyes and the tongue that apprehend God. It is the ears. God comes to his people but through the declaration of his word by the mouths of his preachers. Indeed, as the Second Helvetic Confession so dramatically expressed it in the very first chapter:

We believe that today, when this word of God is proclaimed in the Church by preachers who have been legitimately called, then the very word of God itself is proclaimed and received by the faithful.

The language is emphatic: *the very word of God itself*. When the preacher preaches faithfully, the congregation actually hears God's word. We might put this another way: when the preacher preaches faithfully, it is really God who speaks to the congregation.

Of course, Heinrich Bullinger, the Confession's author, did not believe that his sermons were so to be seen as the word of God that they should therefore be inserted into the canon of inspired scripture. The point he was making was this: when God's word was correctly parsed and proclaimed, God spoke to his people through the words of the preacher in an authoritative and powerful way. In so doing, Bullinger stands as representative of the Reformation Protestant tradition: it is the word of God, not the sacraments, which was the primary means of God dealing graciously with his people. God addressed his people through the word proclaimed; the sacraments gained their significance from being attached to the Word, a point which was also architecturally reinforced in Reformed by having the table placed symbolically in front of, and beneath, the pulpit.

Understanding this point is crucial. Protestantism is not simply a set of theological doctrines. Those doctrines stand in direct relation to practice. If the Reformation understanding of grace is taken seriously, then the reading and especially the preaching of the Word of God, will stand at the center of Protestant practice. Preaching the word is a means of grace, in fact the primary means of grace. It is the means God has appointed for bringing his gracious purpose to fruition in the lives of the men and women who make up the church. God acts first and foremost in the proclamation from the pulpit of his mighty saving acts.

That means that preachers need to understand that what they do is perform a theological action which demands care and earnestness because they handle the Word of God and bring the most important message of all to people's ears. And it also rests upon confidence because the power of the message does not reside ultimately in them as messengers but in the God who speaks through the message. Nothing kills churches faster than preachers who do not seem to understand these various elements of the task. Preachers need to understand God's grace, not simply so that they can preach its content but also so that they can preach, period.

### **A THEOLOGY OF GOD'S SPEECH**

At the heart of the Reformers'—indeed, of all anti-Pelagian—understandings of grace is the idea that grace is something which ultimately comes from without. For the Reformers, as indeed for Paul, this grace breaks into the lives of individuals primarily through the Word proclaimed. The gospel is not an experience, it is the declaration of the identity of Jesus Christ, with all of that entails for the identity of human beings made in his image. Yet in order to understand the Reformers' position, we need to understand something of the biblical teaching on speech, specifically God's speech. This provides the foundation for the Protestant understanding of how the Word proclaimed can be powerful unto salvation.

The Reformers took their cue on the Word of God from the description of how God acts which they found presented in scripture. One of the very first things which the Bible reveals about him, beyond the fact of his mere existence, is that he is one who acts primarily through speech. This is how the creation is brought about in Genesis 1. God speaks, he uses words. There was nothing, God spoke, and then there was something, that which God had spoken into existence.

Now, presumably speech is not predicated of God and humans in a univocal manner: God's speech did not involve the use of vocal chords, for example, and until matter was created there could have been none of the vibrations which we associate with physical sound. Yet by implication the Bible makes it clear that the closest analogy to God's creative act is the human act of speech.

It is one of the great insights of Protestantism that this is central to how we are to understand God and the world he created. We should note that this

creative power of God's speech correlates with what we saw earlier with regard to Luther's understanding of the cross and of justification. Justification by grace through faith depended upon the power of God's declaration to make a thing to be that which it intrinsically was not. God's speech determines reality, creates reality. Thus, the person who is actually sinful is declared by God to be righteous because clothed in the imputed, extrinsic righteousness of Christ. He is not righteous in any way that the world would recognize as being "real." But he is really righteous simply because God has said that he is such. This finds its parallel in the work of the cross. Christ hangs on the cross, apparently a crushed, defeated sinner yet in reality the holy, triumphing Lamb of God. To the world, the cross is obviously a crushing defeat of the one who hangs there. But God declares that it is the opposite, a spectacular and decisive triumph over evil. No empirical observation can lead to this conclusion, only the revelation of the truth via the Word of God can do so. Only faith grasping that word can acknowledge the truth. And thus that word grasped by faith makes the cross the power of God to salvation.

Creation is, of course, described in Genesis 1 as a series of verbal actions by God. "And God said...." is the repeated refrain which punctuates the account and brings into existence various parts of the created realm. God's word is not simply a descriptive thing. It is a powerful, creative thing. Psalm 33:6 summarizes this well: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts."

This transcendent creative power of words lies at the heart of Luther's understanding of the nature of language, as he makes clear in a famous passage in his *Lectures on Genesis*:

Who could conceive of the possibility of bringing forth from the water a being which clearly could not continue to exist in water? But God speaks a mere Word, and immediately the birds are brought forth from the water. If the Word is spoken, all things are possible, so that out of the water are made either fish or birds. Therefore any bird whatever and any fish whatever are nothing but nouns in the divine rule of language; through this rule of language those things that are impossible become very easy, while those that are clearly opposite become very much alike, and vice versa.<sup>2</sup>

The phrase that describes creatures as "nothing but nouns in the divine rule

of language” is fascinating, drawing out the clear implications of Luther’s linguistic philosophy: words constitute reality. It is God’s speech which makes the sea produce birds, a natural impossibility. This is the late medieval nominalism which we noted earlier and which bears some similarities to certain aspects of postmodern literary theory which emphasizes the constructive nature of words. To an extent we can all sense the creative power of language: the use of a racial epithet is regarded as obnoxious because it does something to the people to whom it is applied. It denigrates them and thus transforms reality for them in a negative way. Language is creative and we instinctively know that, as demonstrated by the heated debates over freedom of speech and political correctness.

Yet Luther’s understanding of language here is not that of radical postmodernists in one very important way. For Luther, language is creative because it is spoken by God and he uses this speech as the instrument for determining what exactly reality is. He is in himself unknowable. Prior to his speaking human beings cannot put a limit on what he may or may not do. But when he speaks, his power uses that speech to bring things into being and to constitute reality. That reality has a stability and a certainty to it precisely because it is the speech of the sovereign and omnipotent God who rules over all things. By contrast, I might scream and shout at the ocean all day long, commanding it to give forth fish and birds but it will not happen because I am a mere creature and not creator. It is because it is God who speaks, God who controls all things, that his language is creative. This is a crucial point to understand when it comes to making the transition from God speaking in his Word to the preacher speaking God’s word to the congregation.

There is also a further aspect to God’s speech which is important. As God’s speech creates and determines reality, so the scheme of the Devil is to create an alternative linguistic world which possesses a compelling appearance of reality but which is ultimately false. Here is how Luther describes the temptation in the Garden:

Moses expresses himself very carefully and says: “The serpent said,” that is, with a word it attacks the Word. The Word which the Lord had spoken to Adam was: “Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” For Adam this Word was Gospel and Law; it was his worship; it was his service and the obedience he could offer God in this state of innocence. These Satan attacks and tries

to destroy. Nor is it only his intention, as those who lack knowledge think, to point out the tree and issue an invitation to pick its fruit. He points it out indeed; but then he adds another and a new statement, as he still does in the church.<sup>3</sup>

This point will be critical in understanding what preaching is and why it is important. The serpent is challenging God's Word by presenting another, alternative Word. Calvin puts it this way: "he wished to inject into the woman a doubt which might induce her to believe *that* not to be the word of God, for which a plausible reason did not manifestly appear."<sup>4</sup> The serpent's game is a linguistic one: undermining how God had specified reality to be by hinting at an alternative account. The struggle between God and Satan then, begins a struggle over speech.

The early chapters of Genesis also point to another significant theological fact about speech: one of the things which connect God to human beings and to no other creature is the ability to talk, to communicate and to do things with words. Indeed, speech, particularly as it connotes rule and sovereignty, is part of the image of God in which human beings are made. No other creature is given the power of speech, and no other creature is given the mandate which comes with that power. Thus, as God creates by the word of his power and names Adam. This naming of Adam is the sign of his authority over the man. He then gives to Adam authority over all other creatures, a point made clear by his responsibility to name them. Genesis 2:19-20 makes this clear: the Lord brings the creatures to Adam, that he might name them; and whatever name he gave to each creature, that was its name. Adam is thus responsible for bringing a certain element of order to the creation which God has made. We might thus say that Adam's speech too is "creative" in a subordinate manner to that of God himself. Human words carry power and can be used to order and thus (within creaturely limits) to change reality.

This creative power of speech is not restricted to the early chapters of Genesis. Throughout the Old Testament, God's speech continues to be the primary mode of his action and continues to reshape reality or to bring new things into being. He calls Abraham and gives him a covenant promise. He calls to Moses from the burning bush. He speaks again to Moses on Sinai and gives him the Law. Significantly, Heinrich Bullinger refers to this as "preaching."

In the mount Sina [sic] the Lord himself preached to the great congregation of Israel, rehearsing so plainly, that they might understand those ten commandments, wherein is contained every point of godliness.<sup>5</sup>

By using this language of *preaching*, Bullinger points towards a clear analogy which he sees between the act of God in addressing his people and that which God's servants do when they speak God's words to his people. God does things through his Word. He creates, he commands, he promises. And he does things through his Word proclaimed by his servants. Thus, God in the Bible also speaks through various prophets, giving them detailed words to say to his people or even to foreign nations, or using their words to accomplish his own purposes.<sup>6</sup> This is a very important for understanding the connection between grace and preaching in the Reformation church: New Testament and then post-apostolic preachers are the successors of the Old Testament prophets as they bring God's Word to bear upon God's people and upon the world around. The word they proclaim is the means God uses to accomplish his purposes. Its power is thus rooted in divine action, not in the eloquence of the preacher.

One obvious implication of this is that divine speech is not simply, or perhaps even primarily, a matter of communicating information. It is the typical mode of his presence and power. Speech is how God is present or, to use a more modern idiom, how he makes his presence felt. God's speech created the universe and it also created the people of God. God called Abram and made him the father of all nations. To meet God is to be addressed by him or by his chosen speakers. The Jews were special because God spoke to them in a special way, by means of his covenant promises. His rule was exercised by and through his Word. The Jews were those who had God's Law and his promises. These were the means by which God was gracious to them.

This presence of God by speech is not restricted to the Jews. When God addressed the Gentiles, he was present to them also, whether in general matters, such as the judgment against Babylon or in mercy, as in the particular case of Naaman. His sovereignty over them was also exercised in and through his Word. When God ceased to speak, it was a sign that he had withdrawn his favor from his people. Thus Amos predicts a famine of the Word of God which will cause the people to wander over the face of the earth seeking God but doing so in vain. A silent God was an absent God.

When we move to the New Testament, the power of the speech of God continues to be emphasized. At Jesus' baptism, the Father publicly recognized his Son by speech, as the Holy Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove. The point is clear: God in Christ is now present with his people, a presence signified by the Word. The economy of grace which is manifested in Christ is inaugurated by a verbal declaration. Then, when Christ is confronted with the Devil's temptations in the wilderness, his weapon of choice is the Word of God. The Word is the means by which Christ is upheld. As the Devil does what he did in the Garden, that is, pervert the Word, so Christ aptly applies it and puts his enemy to flight. Then there are the many examples throughout the gospels of Christ's speech casting out demons, healing the sick and even raising the dead. Not all his acts of power are linguistic (for example, the healing of the woman with the flow of blood) but most are. The Word was the means by which Christ demonstrated his sovereignty and brought grace to bear in the lives of individuals.

This Word-oriented means of God's presence and power continued into the post-ascension apostolic church. Preaching is central to the narrative of the Book of Acts and lies at the heart of the practical realization of God's gracious purposes in Paul's New Testament letters. It was by means of verbal declaration that the Reformers saw the apostles expanding the kingdom. The prophetic Word was a word which tore down illusions and built up realities. Thus, the preacher stood at the very center of the spiritual struggle of the present age, both for judgment and for grace.

### **THE WORD PREACHED AND THE GRACE OF GOD**

It is not surprising that the Reformers saw themselves a standing in continuity with this biblical emphasis on God's Words as his means of action, both for judgment and for grace. Thus, in the Reformation, preaching was power and the preaching office was the most significant one within the church. All of the major Reformers were preachers, with the pulpit being the center of their professional lives. Their various reformations were all centered on and driven by the proclamation of the Word.

There were obvious cultural aspects to this: in an age of low literacy, the preacher was often the person through whom many people obtained their understanding of the world around. Thus, Luther's sermons often ended

with an appendix, not connected to the main exposition which offered commentary on some aspect of current affairs.<sup>7</sup> This political significance of preaching helps to explain the constant attempts in England to regulate the practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and even to suppress it entirely at points in the 1630s.

Yet the cultural power of preaching is clearly only a small part of the story and not one which would have interested the Reformers to any significant degree. For them, the biblical theology of the Word which we have noted above was the driving factor. God's preached and so his servants must preach. Preachers had power because their words connected in some way to the Word and were thus the means of God accomplishing his purposes in this world. Indeed, Reformation preachers saw themselves as the successors in some ways of the great prophets of scripture. This is reflected often in the language they applied to the preaching task. The gatherings of ministers in Reformation Zurich and later in London, where they would hear each other proclaim the Word and offer critique and encouragement, were known as "prophesying." William Perkins classic text on how to preach was entitled *The Arte of Prophesying*. The preacher was not merely a lecturer or teacher. His task was not simply descriptive. His task was no less than prophetic: in proclaiming the Word of God he was to tear down human inventions and illusions about the world and to build in their place reality as God had declared it to be through the Word of his power. As the Second Helvetic Confession declared, the Word of God preached is the Word of God.

A good example of such confidence in the Word is provided by Luther in 1522. This was the moment when he returned to Wittenberg from his time at the Wartburg Castle in order to bring order back to a town whose Reformation had fallen under the sway of radical iconoclasts and was quickly descending into chaos. Under pressure from the authorities to restore order, Luther did the one thing he knew would have power to transform the situation: he preached. And during this series of sermons, he made one of his most famous comments about the Word of God:

I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark

4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.<sup>8</sup>

The rhetoric is typical of Luther's exuberance yet the content reflected his theology: the Reformation was above all a movement of the proclaimed Word because that was how God achieved his gracious purposes. As long as Luther preached that Word, he could be confident that God would use it to tear down human pride and bring sinners by grace to Christ.

### **PREACHING AND THE WORD WRITTEN**

Given this, the question of authority—never far from the surface in the Reformation—now becomes acute. If preaching is God's primary means of accomplishing his purposes, what are the authoritative norms for post-apostolic preaching? We have noted a number of times that the fact that the Reformation involved a fundamental critique of the medieval church's sacramentally centered view of grace meant that it was also a basic critique of medieval understandings of church and authority. Given this, the question of the content of this preaching comes to the fore. If the Word is the primary means of grace, is preaching the word simply a spontaneous or ecstatic thing prompted by the Holy Spirit or is it regulated and normed in some way?

The first thing to note in answering this is that the practical content of preaching is shaped both by the understanding of grace—God's freely bestowed favor—and of justification—God's righteousness given to the believer via the instrumentality of faith in God's promise. That salvation has a promissory content demands that preaching must have a specific content too. A promise, any promise, requires content: a thing promised and one who promises. It also assumes certain things, such as the promiser's basic integrity—that he is able, desires and will deliver on the promise.

Thus, preaching must highlight the promise and the character of the God who makes the promise. That means talking about human sin and the grace that is embodied in Christ which is the divine response. Thus, to preach is to preach Christ, and Christ is no empty cypher into which any content can be poured. And that points the preacher back to scripture as the norming authority of all statements made in sermons. For a sermon to

be true preaching, it must express the teaching of the Bible. Then it comes with divine power.

In many ways, while Luther was not the greatest exegete of the Reformation, his theology of justification by grace through faith set the basic criteria for Reformation preaching. The antithesis of Law and Gospel as destroying self-righteousness and creating faith in Christ was foundational to the Christian life and foundational to the content of preaching. As his Catechisms and his liturgies move from Law to Gospel, so the preacher was to do this in his sermons. The pattern of the economy of grace was to be reflected, indeed, enacted, in the preaching which came from the pulpit. Each sermon was to be a microcosm of the human condition and the divine, gracious response. The preacher must first declare the Law and then declare the promise in Christ.<sup>9</sup> This is content regulated entirely by the being and action of God as revealed in his great deeds throughout history, the words of his scriptures and the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of his Son. Both must be taught or else problems ensue, either despair or presumption.<sup>10</sup>

This understanding of preaching as regulated by scripture was another point of contact between the Reformers's understanding of post-apostolic ministry and that of the Old Testament prophets. Indeed, the precedential model for the post-apostolic preacher. Calvin himself describes Moses and the Old Testament prophets in terms that might equally apply to contemporary preachers:

[T]he law was promulgated, and prophets were afterwards added to be its interpreters. For though the uses of the law were manifold, and the special office assigned to Moses and all the prophets was to teach the method of reconciliation between God and man.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin's use of the term ministry of reconciliation resonates with Paul's characterization of his own apostolic ministry (and, by implication, that of those who follow in his footsteps) in 1 Corinthians 6. Post-apostolic preaching was to be like the preaching of biblical times: an exposition of God's revealed truth. Of course, the words of the preachers recorded in the Bible possessed a peculiar authority by virtue of their canonical status. But the principle of a sound sermon—the exegesis and application of divine revelation—remained the same for post-apostolic preachers.

Bullinger expresses the matter thus:

But we read, that the Lord hath used this ordinary means even from the first creation of all things. Whom he meaneth to bestow knowledge and faith on, to them he sendeth teachers, by the word of God to preach true faith unto them. Not because it lieth in man's power, will, or ministry, to give faith; nor because the outward word spoken by man's mouth is able of itself to bring faith: but the voice of man, and the preaching of God's word, do teach us what true faith is, or what God doth will and command us to believe. For God himself alone, by sending his Holy Spirit into the hearts and minds of men, doth open our hearts, persuade our minds, and cause us with all our heart to believe that which we by his word and teaching have learned to believe. The Lord could by miracle from heaven, without any preaching at all, have bestowed faith in Christ upon Cornelius the Centurion at Cesaria: but yet by an angel he doth send him to the preaching of Peter; and while Peter preacheth, God by his Holy Spirit worketh in the heart of Cornelius, causing him to believe his preaching.<sup>12</sup>

Here Bullinger makes it clear that faith is the product of preaching. This is not simply in the sense that preaching sets forth the promise that the human mind can then grasp and trust. Rather the preaching itself is an instrument used by the Holy Spirit as the means for creating this faith or, we might perhaps add in the case of, say, Pharaoh, of hardening the heart.

Indeed, in *The Bondage of the Will*, the case of Pharaoh's hardening is one of the biblical passages to which Luther had to respond at some length because of the use made by it of Erasmus in his *Diatribe*. Luther's resolution of the problems of both the shift in narrative from Pharaoh hardening his own heart to it being hardened by God focuses on the role of the proclaimed Word. Pharaoh is, like all unregenerate people, in bondage to sin. When God's Word comes from outside and the Lord chooses not to have the Spirit use that Word to liberate him, he grows harder and more implacable in his wickedness. This is because God's Word is not simply a collection of facts. It makes moral demands upon people. It condemns their unrighteousness and points them towards the all-sufficiency of Christ whose grace in itself is also a reminder of human insufficiency. Thus, Pharaoh is both hardened by the Lord via the Word and yet chooses to be harden himself by not responding in faith to that which is presented to him.<sup>13</sup>

Behind this, of course, stands the fact that grace rests upon the divine decree of predestination. Preaching the Word thus becomes the means by which election is realized and revealed in time. This is the point Calvin makes in Book 3 of the *Institutes* when he reflects upon why the preaching of the Gospel does not seem to have the same saving power amongst all those who hear it:

The covenant of life is not preached equally to all, and among those to whom it is preached, does not always meet with the same reception. This diversity displays the unsearchable depth of the divine judgment, and is without doubt subordinate to God's purpose of eternal election.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, preaching is not simply a question of describing something; preaching is powerful. It is God's means of bringing into reality his gracious purposes for his people. It is itself a spiritually constructive exercise which confronts the individual and is used by God to transform him through the Holy Spirit or to harden him in his sin. One cannot hear the Word of God and be left indifferent to it, for the Word of God is the means by which God works out his purposes, both of grace and of judgment. As God's Word was God's instrument for creation by the Spirit in the beginning, so his Word remains his instrument for recreation by the Spirit in the ongoing extension of his kingdom.

## **WORD AND SPIRIT**

This connection between Word and Spirit is crucial in the Reformation for dividing magisterial Protestantism from more radical movements. Indeed, early on in the Reformation, more radical voices than those of Luther or even Zwingli emerged which posed a challenge not simply to traditional Catholicism but also to the magisterial Reformers themselves. Thus, in 1521-22, during Luther's absence while he sojourned at the Wartburg, the Wittenberg leadership welcomed the arrival of the so-called Zwickau prophets to the town. These three men were representative of a theological tendency which was to continue throughout the Reformation and indeed finds counterparts even in the church today. What they did was offer a radical separation of Spirit from Word, or at least from the written word of scripture. The result was chaos. In effect, this position cedes church leadership to the

most charismatic and forceful personalities who convey the conviction that their plans are those of God himself.

For Luther, the prime example of this in 1521-22 was his former friend and co-belligerent in the Reformation, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. Karlstadt claimed to be led by the Spirit beyond the Word to a more dynamic and, in practice, socially and politically radical version of the Reformation. Karlstadt had once stood shoulder to shoulder with Luther but by this time he had come under the influence of others. Here is Luther's denunciation of his former colleague's theology:

But should you ask how one gains access to this same lofty spirit they do not refer you to the outward gospel but to some imaginary realm, saying: Remain in "self abstraction" where I now am and you will have the same experience. A heavenly voice will come, and God himself will speak to you. If you inquire further as to the nature of this "self abstraction," you will find that they know as much about it as Dr. Karlstadt knows of Greek and Hebrew. Do you not see here the devil, the enemy of God's order? With all his mouthing of the words, "Spirit, Spirit, Spirit," he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and the oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you, not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit. They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride on the wind. They do not tell you how or when, whither or what, but you are to experience what they do.<sup>15</sup>

The problem was clear: claims to such direct inspiration from the Spirit, separate from the Word, were ultimately immune from criticism through their acknowledgment only of some kind of subjective, mystical authority. This preaching was preaching unregulated by the Word and subject only to the tastes and whims of the preacher.

By contrast, Luther and indeed all the other magisterial Reformers were concerned to keep together both Word and Spirit, such that claims to the latter which did not involve the outward proclamation of the former, and the sacraments which were themselves tied to the Word. It is also worth noting the theological direction which Luther speaks of such a Spirit emphasis implying in the passage above. Detaching Spirit from Word turns Christianity

into a quest for God, a work in which man engages in trying to reach out to the Divine. Tying Spirit to Word makes the Spirit the agent of grace and Christianity into something which seizes hold of the sinner. The spiritualist radicals have a form of works righteousness. Those who see the Word as the instrument of God through the Spirit know that this is of grace.

Calvin is similarly emphatic on inseparability of Word and Spirit:

Those who, rejecting Scripture, imagine that they have some peculiar way of penetrating to God, are to be deemed not so much under the influence of error as madness. For certain giddy men have lately appeared, who, while they make a great display of the superiority of the Spirit, reject all reading of the Scriptures themselves, and deride the simplicity of those who only delight in what they call the dead and deadly letter. But I wish they would tell me what spirit it is whose inspiration raises them to such a sublime height that they dare despise the doctrine of Scripture as mean and childish. If they answer that it is the Spirit of Christ, their confidence is exceedingly ridiculous; since they will, I presume, admit that the apostles and other believers in the primitive Church were not illuminated by any other Spirit. None of these thereby learned to despise the word of God, but every one was imbued with greater reverence for it, as their writings most clearly testify.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the magisterial Reformers emphasized the need to tie together both the Word and the Spirit. They could not be separated, let alone set in some kind of opposition to each other. To separate them would lead simply to a nightmare of subjectivity and chaos. As a result, scripture was set forth as the normative criterion for the public proclamation of God's Word. The content of preaching was to be the content of scripture and thus regulated by the same. Then this would be used by the Holy Spirit to bring God's grace to bear upon those who heard.

Thus, preaching regulated by scripture was no dead letter. As Calvin says just two paragraphs after the above quotation, commenting on 2 Corinthians 3:8, "the Holy Spirit so cleaves to his own truth, as he has expressed it in Scripture, that he then only exerts and puts forth his strength when the word is received with due honour and respect."<sup>17</sup> Thus, faithful preaching of the Word in accordance with scripture brings the Spirit to bear and is the means by which the Spirit works in order to do his deeds of power.

This is important because it helps reinforce the fact noted above, that preaching is not, for the Reformers, simply a matter of the communication of information. It is a means, a real means, of grace. Indeed, it is the principle means of grace because it bridges the gap between the ancient text of scripture and the congregation, bringing the promise of Christ to a present reality. God's Word preached is thus confrontational, creative and transformative, and this is linked to the connection between the preacher and the text he preaches and the Spirit which takes his words and makes them the words of God. For Luther, of course, God's grace is only manifest in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ and thus all preaching must ultimately bring Christ to bear upon the congregation. Christ is the very embodiment and fulfillment of God's gracious purposes as set forth in the Bible. To speak meaningfully about Christ is to explicate what the Bible says about him. That means that the preacher has to regulate his declarations by the facts set forth about Christ in scripture but also by the commands and the promises expressed therein which drive home the personal existential urgency of the gospel message. As Luther declares in *The Freedom of the Christian Man*:

[I]t is not enough or in any sense Christian to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice for the conduct of life; yet this is the fashion among those who must today be regarded as our best preachers. Far less is it sufficient or Christian to say nothing at all about Christ and to teach instead the laws of men and the decrees of the fathers. Now there are not a few who preach Christ and read about him that they may move men's affections to sympathy with Christ, to anger against the Jews, and such childish and effeminate nonsense. Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in us. Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept him.<sup>18</sup>

This a powerful wake-up call to preachers. The purpose of preaching is certainly not to tell people how to live their lives, to handle crises or to reach their full potential, whatever that may be. Nor is it simply to describe Christ to them and outline what he did. Nor is it to inspire warm, fuzzy feelings

about him by playing on their emotions. Christ's story is certainly an emotionally powerful one but that is not where its true significance lies. Christ is not supposed to be an inspiring or moving example. He is the manifestation of God's grace, coming from outside to bring salvation to a sinful and lost people. Thus, the preacher's task is to be focused on that. His job is to press the personal existential significance of Christ upon those who hear, to make them realize that Christ's words and actions are of immediate and eternal significance to them. The preacher must not think of himself as a lecturer, simply explaining some historical events. I cannot as a preacher simply declare that Christ is died and risen. I have to bring out why he has died and why he risen. Then I have to drive home the personal importance of this for each and every person listening. They need to know that what I say to them on a Sunday morning is going to be the most vital thing they hear all week. That is what preaching as a means of grace means.

## **CONCLUSION**

In his Lyman Beecher lectures, delivered at Yale in 1907, the Scottish Congregationalist theologian, Peter Taylor Forsyth, began with this dramatic statement:

It is perhaps an overbold beginning, but I will venture to say that with its preaching Christianity stands or falls. This is surely so, at least in those sections of Christendom which rest less upon the Church than upon the Bible. Wherever the Bible has the primacy which is given it in Protestantism, there preaching is the most distinctive feature of worship.<sup>19</sup>

In saying this, Forsyth stands in the line of Protestant thinking which goes right back to the Reformation. Forsyth understood that preaching is not ultimately about communicating information, still less entertaining a crowd for a few minutes on a Sunday morning. It is about life and death, an utterly serious undertaking through which God confronts people with their sin and his grace in Christ.

For those who hold to the Reformation understanding of salvation by grace alone, the proclamation of the Word of God is the principle means of grace. It is the thing which God uses to force people to reckon with their

sin, to drive them to their knees in repentance and then to draw them to the resurrected Christ by faith. After all, what is faith but the God-given trust in the promise of God's Word as it is declared week by week to the congregation?

For this reason, the Reformers' emphasis on grace alone cannot be separated from the specific form of church life which they advocated. We often think that form and content can be routinely separated. There is a whole industry committed to this, where talk of contextualization seems to trump everything else. Certainly attention to context is important. The Reformers understood this. Luther once bewailed a student who preached on the merits and joys of childbearing to an audience made up of elderly widows and spinsters. All the Reformers were committed to scripture and preaching in the vernacular. But the meat of the message was not a function of context but of the content of the Word of God.

Thus, those things which place the Word central in the church are non-negotiable to those who believe in the Protestant view of grace alone. The reading of the Word must occupy a prominent place in every service. That is foundational to God's grace for it is there that he reveals himself, there that he describes and interprets the human condition and his great saving acts in response. And then preaching must lie at the very heart of the service, for that is where God truly meets his people, as the preacher takes the text of scripture, expounds and applies it, and trusts the Holy Spirit to take those words and use them to transform those who hear them.

This has implications for ministerial preparation. Preachers need to be well-trained and able to speak clearly. They need to be able rightly to divide and apply the word of truth and that means study. Yes, there will always be the occasional Spurgeon or Lloyd-Jones who, with little or no formal training are yet outstanding preachers; but they are the exceptions, not the rule. There is a reason why the Reformers required rigorous study as a prerequisite for pastoral ministry: most aspiring ministers urgently need that if they are to the central task of the ministry, preaching the Word, with any degree of competence.

This view of grace and preaching also puts an onus on congregants. Christians need to attend church with a desire to encounter God primarily by hearing him speak to them through the words of the preacher. It is as they hear God's Word and as they grasp it by faith that their hearts and minds will be transformed.

I used to fret that I could remember very few of the sermons I have heard in any detail. Now I sometimes fret that I can remember very few of the sermons I preach in any detail either. I also remember no details from any of the Latin lessons I took throughout my entire school career, and yet I can still pick up a book of Latin prose or verse and read it. I may have forgotten the details of individual classes but my mind was rewired by what happened there and I was changed from someone for whom Latin looked like an impenetrable code to someone who now delights in the cadences and periods of Cicero and his ilk.

I believe preaching is like that. It is not remembering all the details that makes us into those who grow in grace. It is the slow, incremental impact of sitting under the Word week by week, and year by year, that makes the difference. That is how we mature as Christians. God uses this means of grace to make us into vessels of his grace. And that is why a Protestant theology of grace must place the clear, powerful, unequivocal proclamation of God's Word right at the very center of its existence.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented at The Southern Seminary Theology Conference on September 24-25, 2015 at the The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (LW) 1, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1, 146.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Genesis* (trans. J. King; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010) 1, 148.

<sup>5</sup> *Decades* (trans. H. I.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849) I. i, 38.

<sup>6</sup> "But in times past, and before that the Son of God was born in the world, God, by little and little, made himself acquainted with the hearts of the holy fathers, and after that with the minds of the holy prophets; and last of all, by their preaching and writings, he taught the whole world. So also Christ our Lord sent the Holy Ghost, which is of the Father and the Son, into the apostles, by whose mouths, words, and writings he was known to all the world. And all these servants of God, as it were the elect vessels of God, having with sincere hearts received the revelation of God from God himself, first of all, in a lively expressed voice delivered to the world the oracles and word of God which they before had learned; and afterward, when the world drew more to an end, some of them did put them in writing for a memorial to the posterity." *Decades* I. i, 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, and most unfortunately, his very last sermon of 1546 included an appendix which was simply a tirade against the evil of the Jews.

<sup>8</sup> Luther, LW 51, 77.

<sup>9</sup> "We must bring forth the voice of the law that men may be made to fear and come to a knowledge of their sins and so be converted to repentance and a better life. But we must not stop with that, for that would only amount to wounding and not binding up, smiting and not healing, killing and not making alive, leading down into hell and not bringing back again, humbling and not exalting. Therefore we must also preach the word of grace and the promise of forgiveness by which faith is taught and aroused. Without this word of grace the works of the law, contrition, penitence, and all the rest are done and taught in vain." LW, 364.

<sup>10</sup> As the Reformation progressed, Luther became increasingly concerned that some Lutheran preachers declared only the Gospel without also declaring the Law. This led to presumption and practical laxity in

living the Christian life. On this point, see Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 159-74.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.2.

<sup>12</sup> *Decades* I. iv, 84-85.

<sup>13</sup> Luther, *LW* 33, 183.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1.

<sup>15</sup> Luther, *LW* 40, 147.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.9.3.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, *LW* 31, 357.

<sup>19</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (London: Independent Press, 1907), 1.

# ***Solus Christus: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters***

**STEPHEN J. WELLUM**

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Reformation theology is often summarized by the five *solas*<sup>1</sup>. Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) stands as the formal principle of the Reformation and the foundation of all theology. God's glory alone (*soli Deo gloria*) functions as a capstone for all Reformation theology, connecting its various parts to God's one purpose for creating this world and humanity in it. In between these two *solas*, the other three emphasize that God has chosen and acted to save us by his sovereign grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), which is grounded in and through Christ alone (*solus Christus*).

If we are to learn from the Reformers, we do well to begin with these summarizing *solas*. But if we are to understand the substance of the Reformation *solas* and profit from them, we must bear in mind two points. First, all of the *solas* are interrelated and mutually dependent; you cannot have one without the others. Second, the five *solas* are just as important today as they were in the Reformation for capturing what is at the heart of the Gospel. Without minimizing this mutual dependence, however, we will also need to consider that one *sola* plays a distinct part in connecting the others to bring us the full glory of God in the Gospel.

*Solus Christus* stands at the center of the other four *solas*, connecting them into a coherent theological system by which the Reformers declared the glory of God. For this reason, we need to attend closely to what the Reformers taught about our Lord Jesus Christ. The entirety of Reformation Christology lies well beyond this presentation and my forthcoming book. I can only sketch where the book goes, but the basic point which the book seeks to recover from the Reformers is the *exclusive identity* of Christ and his *all-sufficient work*. Although in recent years the exclusivity and sufficiency of Christ have been rejected by many, if the church is to proclaim the same Christ as the Reformers, we must understand and embrace *solus Christus* with the same clarity, conviction, and urgency as they did.

In this article my goal is threefold. First, I want to consider more closely why *Christ alone* is at the center of the *solas* and the entirety of Christian theology. Second, I want to develop *Christ alone* along the lines of the book, by focusing on the challenge of confessing *Christ alone* yesterday and today. Here I will note the historical context in which the Reformers confessed *Christ alone* and how that context has changed for us, thus creating new challenges for us. Third, in light of our present challenges, I want to offer a sketch of how and why *Christ alone* must be confessed today with the same conviction, precision, and care as the Reformers.

### **CHRIST ALONE AT THE CENTER OF THE SOLAS AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY**

Why is *Christ alone* at the center of the *solas* and Christian theology? I offer five reasons. First, *Christ alone* centers all Reformation doctrine. We come to know the person and work of Christ only by God's self-disclosure through the Scriptures. Yet, God speaks through the agency of human authors not simply to inform us but to save us in Christ alone who we receive by faith alone. Our faith in Christ guards us by the power of God and his grace alone. The purpose of God's grace leads to and culminates in our reconciliation and adoption through Christ alone. In the end, the ultimate goal of God in our redemption is his own glory, even as we are transformed into a creaturely *reflection* of it. And yet, the *radiance* of the glory of God is found in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word spoken by God, the faith given by God, the grace extended by God, and the glory possessed and promised

by God cannot make sense apart from the divine Son who assumed our humanity for our salvation.

Second, the Reformers placed *Christ alone* at the center of their doctrine because Scripture places Christ at the center of God's eternal plan for his creation. Despite the diversity of human authors, Scripture speaks as a unified divine communicative act by which God reveals himself and the whole history of redemption—from creation to new creation. And this unified word of God has one main point: the triune God in infinite wisdom and power has chosen to bring all of his purposes to fulfillment in Christ. The centrality of Christ, then, does not diminish the persons and work of the Father and the Spirit. Scripture teaches, rather, that all the Father does centers in his Son and that the Spirit works to bear witness and bring glory to the Son.

Third, the *Christ alone* of the Reformation reflects the self-witness of Christ himself. Our Lord understood that he was the key to the manifestation of God's glory and the salvation of his people. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained his death and bore witness to his resurrection as the Messiah by placing himself at the focal point of God's revelation: “Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:26-27). He confronted the religious leaders for not finding eternal life in him as the goal of humanity: “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40). And he was remarkably clear-minded and comfortable in his role as the anointed one entrusted with the end of the world: “the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:22-23). To follow Jesus as his disciples, then, the Reformers confessed that Christ alone is the person around whom all history pivots and the focus of all God's work in the world.

Fourth, the Reformers emphasized the centrality of *Christ alone* because they accepted the apostolic witness to the person and work of Christ. The opening verses of Hebrews underscore the finality and superiority of God's self-disclosure in his Son: “In the past God spoke . . . at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being . . .” (Heb 1:1-3a). Paul comforts us with the cosmic pre-eminence of Christ: “For in him all things were

created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17). And Paul encourages our hope in Christ by declaring that God’s eternal purpose and plan is “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:9-10). In other words, Jesus stands as *the most important figure* in God’s new creation work—a work that restores and even surpasses what was lost in Eden. God brings forth a new, redeemed and reconciled new creation by and through Christ alone.

Fifth, beyond the other Reformation *solas*, *Christ alone* is what makes all Christian theology coherent. More than a century ago, Herman Bavinck rightly taught that the center to all Christian theology is Christ: “The doctrine of Christ is not the starting point, but it certainly is the central point of the whole system of dogmatics. All other dogmas either prepare for it or are inferred from it. In it, as the heart of dogmatics, pulses the whole of the religious-ethical life of Christianity.”<sup>2</sup> In short, all of our efforts at theology ultimately rise and fall with *Christ alone*. Only a proper understanding of Christ can correctly shape the most distinctive convictions of Christian theology. *Christ alone* connects all the doctrines of our theology because Christ alone stands as the cornerstone of all the purposes and plans of God himself. But if we misinterpret who Christ is and what he does in his life, death, and resurrection, then all other doctrines will likely suffer. Retrieving and learning from the Reformers’ teaching on *solas Christus*, then, brings both sobriety and joy. Misidentifying Christ will cause confusion in the church and harm our witness in the world. However, if we rightly identify Christ in all his exclusive identity and all-sufficient work, then we can proclaim the same Christ as the Reformers with the same clarity, conviction, and urgency. *Christ alone* is not a slogan; it is the center of the *solas* by which the Reformers recovered the grace of God and declared the glory of God.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF CONFESSING CHRIST ALONE YESTERDAY AND TODAY**

### ***Christ Alone in the Reformation***

What exactly where the Reformers confessing especially given the fact that the Reformers and the Roman Church agreed on *who* Christ is in his unique

and exclusive identity? In fact, from the Patristic through the Reformation era, *all* segments of the Church spoke in a unified voice regarding Christ's identity as God the Son incarnate. So in affirming *Christ alone* what were the Reformers confessing and standing against?

Primarily the Reformers were standing against Rome's sacramental theology and confessing the *sufficiency* of Christ's work. As Timothy George notes: Calvin, along with the other Reformers, affirmed Chalcedonian orthodoxy but "he recognized that adherence to correct doctrine was not sufficient to prevent the abuses he saw about him in the dependence on relics, indulgences, the rosary, and the Mass."<sup>3</sup> Alongside the confession of Christ's exclusivity was also required an equal emphasis on the glorious sufficiency of his work *and its direct application to us by the Spirit by sola fide.*

One of the problems bequeathed by the medieval era, partly due to Anselm's work, was filling the gap between the exclusivity of Christ's person and the sufficiency of his work *for us*. Beyond dispute Anselm's *Why God Became Man?*<sup>4</sup> was a key theological work on the atonement in the medieval era. Yet, for all of Anselm's stress on the incarnation, in failing to locate Christ's work within its biblical, covenantal context, he does not adequately develop Christ's covenantal representation and substitution. Anselm does not explain how Christ's obedient life and death as the incarnate Son is the basis for our salvation and how it becomes ours. By not thinking of Christ's mediatorial work in terms of his obedience as our covenant head, Anselm does not unpack the biblical rationale of how Christ's righteousness becomes ours, how Christ's death fully satisfies God's righteousness, and how we benefit from his work by faith union with him.<sup>5</sup>

By not explaining *how* Christ's glorious work is applied to us in fully biblical categories, Anselm opens the door to distortion, which is precisely what happened in Aquinas (1224-1274). Aquinas developed Anselm's idea that Christ did a work of supererogation, which is then applied to us by several means, but most significantly, through the mediatorial role of the church *in the sacraments*. As Aquinas states, "Christ's passion [suffering] works its effect in them to whom it is applied, through faith and charity [love] and the sacraments of the faith."<sup>6</sup>

Specifically, the sacraments include baptism, which removes original sin and actual sins committed before baptism, and penance, which deals with our actual sins subsequent to baptism. In salvation, then, Christ's superabundant

work pays for our eternal punishment, but alongside his work, our actual sins are forgiven by our participation in the sacraments mediated by the church. In Aquinas, the church's role fills the vacuum left unexplained by Anselm on how Christ pays for our sin *and* how it is applied to us. In this way, as Gregg Allison notes, "Aquinas held that a human cooperation with the work of Christ is necessary. Faith, love, and the participation in the sacraments unite people to the atonement of Christ and become a necessary part of it."<sup>7</sup> In this way, the exclusivity of Christ's person is affirmed, but the sufficiency of Christ's work is compromised. Christ's work by itself is *not* sufficient; what is also necessary for our salvation is the role of the church in applying Christ's work to us through the sacraments.<sup>8</sup>

It is on *this* point that the Reformers rejected Rome's sacramentalism and unequivocally affirmed *solus Christus*. For them, Christ alone entails the confession of Christ's exclusive identity *and* his perfect, complete, and sufficient work as our mediator. In Christ alone, given *who* he is and *what* he has done as our representative and substitute, we can add nothing to his work; it is enough in its accomplishment and application to us. By God's grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone, we are complete, and nothing can separate us from God's grace in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:1-4, 28-39).

Here are a few examples of Reformation teaching over against Rome's sacramental theology stressing the *sufficiency* of Christ's work.

- *Heidelberg Catechism Q 30:* "Do such then believe in Jesus the only Saviour who seek their salvation and happiness in saints, in themselves, or anywhere else?" *Answer:* "They do not; for though they boast of him in words yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Saviour: for one of these two things must be true that either Jesus is not a complete Saviour or that they who by a true faith receive this Saviour must find all things in him necessary to their salvation."
- *Ulrich Zwingli.* "The First Zurich Disputation:" "We know from the Old and New Testaments of God that our only comforter, redeemer, savior and mediator with God is Jesus Christ, in whom and through whom alone we can obtain grace, help and salvation, and besides from no other being in heaven or on earth." Or, in "The 10 Conclusions of Berne (1528):" (3) "Christ is the only wisdom, righteousness, redemption, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Hence

it is a denial of Christ when we confess another ground of salvation and satisfaction.” (6) “As Christ alone died for us, so he is also to be adored as the only Mediator and Advocate between God and the Father and the believers. Therefore it is contrary to the Word of God to propose and invoke other mediators.”

The Reformers, then, in affirming *Christ alone*, were predominantly opposing Rome’s sacramental theology that undercut and compromised Christ’s all-sufficient work. Yet, it is important to recognize that *solus Christus* also functioned to oppose other theological errors. No doubt, the Reformers chiefly opposed Rome’s sacramentalism, but they also opposed the rise of various heretical movements that advocated theological views which both Protestants and Catholics held in common with the entire Church. The seeds of these ideas and movements were sown in the Renaissance but in the Reformation era they began to bloom, and eventually they would reach their fruition in the Enlightenment era and beyond.

For example, people like Michael Servetus (1511-1553) and movements like Socinianism (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) rejected *both* the sufficiency of Christ’s work *and* his exclusive identity. And, of course, along with this rejection of orthodox Christology, they also rejected its doctrinal entailments—the Trinity and penal substitution—along with the entirety of Christian theology. In many ways, the rise of these heretical movements was a throwback to the Patristic era where the Church had to stand against heresy and defend the biblical truth regarding the triune nature of God and the exclusive identity of Christ as God the Son incarnate.

In the end, the Reformation confession of *solus Christus* sought to counter *all* of these variant views, chiefly Rome’s sacramentalism, but also increasing errors which denied Christian orthodoxy. Yet, with the increased attacks on orthodoxy, a new era began which would demand a full-blown defense of Christian orthodoxy, something the Reformers did not have to do to the same extent. As the Enlightenment era unfolded, and as it morphed into modernism and postmodernism, the need to confess *solus Christus* shifted to a full exposition and defense of *both* Christ’s unique and exclusive person *and* his all-sufficient work. This is important to remember since the challenge of confessing *Christ alone* today is similar yet different than what the Reformers faced—a topic I now briefly address.

## CHRIST ALONE TODAY

No doubt, today, we face a similar challenge as the Reformers did, but now in a reversed order. Instead, of first responding to Rome's sacramental theology, we now must chiefly expound and defend Christ's exclusivity and uniqueness before we unpack his all-sufficient work. Obviously, these two areas are interrelated, but it is the former which requires our chief attention today which allows us to unpack and account for the latter.

What has brought about this change in focus? In the book, I recount some of this familiar intellectual history which has resulted in this change due to crucial epistemological and theological shifts which occurred in the Enlightenment to our own day. David Wells has nicely captured these shifts in *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*. Wells rightly observes that Christian theology, and specifically Christology, now occur within a twofold reality: first, "the disintegration of the Enlightenment world and its replacement by the postmodern ethos"; second, the increase of religious pluralism. These two intellectual and cultural developments pose a number of serious challenges for *solas Christus*, the most important being the need for a defense of the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ in a day of rampant philosophical and religious pluralism.

In addition, given our present context, it is also crucial to note that the conditions of belief in the Reformation era have been replaced by an entirely different set of *plausibility structures*. No doubt, there is nothing new under the sun, but given these shifts, it is vital to remember that the Reformation era is not the same as our own. Our culture does not begin with the basic truths of Christian theology as a given, which most did in the Reformation period. The secularization and pluralization of the West has altered the way people think, tied to entire worldview shifts.

In his magisterial work on the cognitive impact of secularization, Charles Taylor traces these epistemological changes over three distinct time periods, pivoting around the Enlightenment: before the Enlightenment, people found it impossible not to believe the Christian worldview; starting with the Enlightenment, it became possible not to believe in the basic truths of Christianity; and now 300 years after the Enlightenment and the rise of postmodern pluralism, most people find it impossible to believe in the objective truths and ultimate concerns of the Christian worldview.<sup>10</sup> What

Taylor has observed in Western thought impacts how *Christ alone* will be viewed in terms of its plausibility, credibility, and logical coherence.

One major implication is that for many, *Christ alone* is viewed as inconceivable. Lessing's old question: How could the life and death of this one man nearly 2000 years ago have universal significance and relevance for all humans? Pluralism's response is that if there is a place left for Jesus at all, it is only as another religious leader, but not as an exclusive Lord and Savior. To confess *Christ alone* today, this specific challenge must be taken seriously.

### **HOW DO WE ESTABLISH AND DEFEND SOLUS CHRISTUS TODAY?**

The answer to this question involves a number of areas. It involves the area of apologetics since a defense of Christ's exclusivity requires a full defense of the entire Christian worldview. In addition, it requires a biblical-theological exposition and defense, which is the primary goal of the book. Part of our task is to lay out the internal logic of Scripture by laying out its storyline. It is vital to demonstrate that it is not only a few individual texts that teach Christ's uniqueness and sufficiency; the entire canon teaches it. Individual texts are never isolated from the whole Bible; in fact, they only make sense within the larger storyline. In other words, Jesus does not come to us *de novo*. *Who* he is and *what* he does comes to us rooted in the Bible's storyline and presented to us in the Bible's categories and framework. Thus, a crucial part of our exposition and defense of *Christ alone* is to establish his unique identity and all-sufficient work from the entire Bible.

In fact, in the book, I contend that if we trace the Bible's storyline, through the biblical covenants, the entire Bible teaches that Jesus is *God the Son incarnate* (and thus utterly unique), and that it is *Christ alone* who does a work that no creature can do. Thus, in terms of the Bible's own presentation, Christ is *alone* precisely because of *who* he is and *what* he does and that apart from *him* and his work, there is no salvation as the Bible describes it. In the remainder of this article I can only sketch this overall argument by developing two points. First, discussion of *Christ alone* will be linked to the debate regarding how *necessary* Christ's person and work is for our salvation. Second, four foundational biblical-theological building blocks will be sketched, which help warrant and make sense of *Christ alone*.

### ***The Necessity of Christ and His Work for Our Salvation***

To speak of *Christ alone* requires some kind of *necessity* to God's plan of salvation. In theology, "necessity" is a tricky concept. Our immediate task, then, is to define *in what way* Christ is necessary such that there can be no salvation apart from him.

In historical theology, to talk of the necessity of Christ and his work is fairly common. For example, Anselm begins his famous, *Why God Became Man?* with these words: "By what logic or necessity did God become man, and by his death, as we believe and profess, restore life to the world, when he could have done this through the agency of some other, angelic or human, or simply by willing it?"<sup>11</sup> As Anselm practices a "faith seeking understanding" by wrestling with the *why* of the incarnation and the cross, the question of necessity naturally arises. Was the incarnation and the cross merely *one* of God's chosen ways to save us, or was it the *only* way? Could the triune God, in his omniscience, planned another way to save fallen creatures? Or was Christ the only way? This is the question of necessity. Walking in the footsteps of Anselm, John Murray also stresses the importance of Christ's necessity: "To evade [questions of necessity] is to miss something that is central in the interpretation of the redeeming work of Christ and to miss the vision of some of its essential glory. Why did God become man? Why, having become man, did he die? Why, having died, did he die the accursed death of the cross?"<sup>12</sup>

These questions demand some kind of explanation, especially in warranting and establishing *Christ alone*. Why is Christ the unique, exclusive, and all-sufficient Savior? Scripture answers: because *he* is the *only* one who can meet our need, accomplish all of God's sovereign purposes, and save us from our sin. Christ and his work are necessary to redeem us, and apart from him there is no salvation. But what exactly is the nature of this necessity? Since there are a range of options, we can first reject the extremes and then focus on the remaining two possibilities.

On one end of the necessity issue, some argue that our salvation does *not* require the incarnation and work of Christ. In what I will label *optionalism*, God is able to forgive our sin apart from any specific kind of Savior and his satisfying God's righteous and holy demand. In the Reformation era and beyond, this view is found in Socinianism, various forms of liberalism, and current religious pluralism. In all of its forms, optionalism argues that God's justice is a non-retributive, voluntary exercise of his will uncoupled from his nature.

God is simply under no necessity to punish sin in order to forgive us. Yet on the other extreme, *fatalism* argues that God is under an external necessity to act as he does in salvation. This view removes our salvation in general and the entire Christ event in particular from the sovereign freedom of God. He is bound not by his own divine nature and character but by some standard external to God. The standard for God's actions is not God himself. Both extremes, however, err in the same way. Optionalism and fatalism both fail to understand the nature of God and the biblical presentation of his plan of salvation in Christ.

Within historic orthodox theology, two options remain: *hypothetical* necessity and *consequent absolute* necessity. Throughout church history, many fine theologians have affirmed the hypothetical necessity of Christ and his work for our salvation.<sup>13</sup> This view argues that Christ is necessary because God in fact decreed that salvation would come through Christ as the most "fitting" means to his chosen ends. But this necessity is hypothetical because God could have chosen some other way of salvation.<sup>14</sup> The other orthodox option is consequent absolute necessity, the view favored in post-Reformation theology.<sup>15</sup> This view argues that *consequent* to God's sovereign, free, and gracious choice to save us, it was *absolutely necessary* that God save us in Christ alone. There was no Christless and crossless way of salvation after God made the free decision to save sinners. Obviously, the absolute sense of necessity is stronger than the hypothetical sense because the view of consequent absolute necessity claims that while God was not obliged to redeem sinners, once he did decide to redeem us there is no possible world in which that redemption could be accomplished apart from Christ.

Historic Christianity has affirmed both of these views of necessity, so this is not a matter of orthodoxy. Yet hypothetical necessity appears to have more fundamental problems because it seems to assume that there is nothing about God's nature that makes his forgiveness of our sins depend upon a representative substitute, sacrifice, and covenant mediator who works on our behalf. This understanding focuses exclusively on God's sovereignty, simply positing that in such freedom God could have chosen other ways of salvation. In contrast, the consequent absolute necessity of Christ arises from the perfections of God's own nature. This view understands that the inherent holiness and justice of God are not limits on his freedom but the nature in which God acts perfectly within his freedom.

While both views of necessity are orthodox which is more biblical? This

is an important question because it recognizes that within orthodox Christology, some views make better sense of the biblical teaching than others. The best way to answer the question is to let Scripture speak for itself. As we think through the foundational building blocks of the Bible's storyline, I will argue for consequent absolute necessity: Christ and his work is not merely one way to save us among a number of possible options, it is the only way. Let us now turn to some of these crucial building blocks which not only warrant and establish Christ alone but also point in the direction of the *absolute necessity* of Christ and his work.

### ***Foundational Building Blocks From the Bible's Storyline Establishing Christ Alone***

#### *1. God as the Triune Creator-Covenant Lord*

To establish *Christ alone* biblically, we must first begin with the identity of the God of Scripture. Scripture begins with God creating the world out of nothing and continues with God relating to his creation according to his own character, will, and power. Who God is, then, shapes the entire course of human history and gives unity, meaning, and significance to all of its parts.

Who is the God of Scripture? In a summary way, we can say that he is the triune Creator-Covenant Lord.<sup>16</sup> From the opening verses of Scripture, God is presented as the uncreated, independent, self-existent, self-sufficient, all-powerful Lord who created the universe and governs it by his word (Genesis 1-2; Ps 50:12-14; 93:2; Acts 17:24-25). And this fact gives rise to the governing category at the center of Christian theology: the Creator-creature distinction. God alone is God; all else is creation that depends upon God for its existence. But the transcendent lordship of God (Ps 7:17; 9:2; 21:7; 97:9; 1 Kings 8:27; Isa 6:1; Rev 4:3) does not entail the remote and impersonal deity of deism or a God uninvolved in human history. Scripture stresses that God is transcendent *and* immanent with his creation. As Creator, God is also the Covenant Lord who is fully present in this world and intimately involved with his creatures: he freely, sovereignly, and purposefully sustains and governs all things to their eternally-planned end (Ps 139:1-10; Acts 17:28; Eph 1:11; 4:6). And yet this immanent lordship does not entail panentheism, which undercuts the Creator-creature distinction of Scripture. Even though God is deeply involved with his world, he is not part of it or developing with it.

As Creator and Covenant Lord, rather, God sovereignly rules over his creation perfectly and personally.<sup>17</sup> He rules with perfect power, knowledge, and righteousness (Ps 9:8; 33:5; 139:1-4, 16; Isa 46:9-11; Acts 4:27-28; Rom 11:33-36) as the only being who is truly independent and self-sufficient. And in this rule, God loves, hates, commands, comforts, punishes, rewards, destroys, and strengthens, all according to the personal, covenant relationships that he establishes with his creation. God is never presented as some mere abstract concept or impersonal force. Indeed, as we move through redemptive-history, God discloses himself as tri-personal, a being-in-relation, a unity of three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. In short, as the Creator-Covenant triune Lord, God acts in, with, and through his creatures to accomplish all he desires to do in the way he desires to do it.

Scripture also presents this one Creator-Covenant Lord as the Holy One over all his creation (Gen 2:1-3; Ex 3:2-5; Lev 11:44; Isa 6:1-3; 57:15; cf. Rom 1:18-23). The common understanding for the meaning of holiness is “set apart,” but holiness conveys much more than God’s distinctness and transcendence.<sup>18</sup> God’s holiness is particularly associated with his aseity, sovereignty, and glorious majesty.<sup>19</sup> As the one who is Lord over all, he is exalted, self-sufficient, and self-determined both metaphysically and morally. God is thus *categorically different in nature and existence* from everything he has made. He cannot be compared with the “gods” of the nations or be judged by human standards. God alone is holy in himself; God alone is God. Furthermore, intimately tied to God’s holiness in the metaphysical sense is God’s personal-moral purity and perfection. He is “too pure to behold evil” and unable to tolerate wrong (Hab 1:12-13; cf. Isa 1:4-20; 35:8). God must act with holy justice when his people rebel against him; yet he is the God who loves his people with a holy love (Hos 11:9), for he is the God of “covenant faithfulness” (*hesed*). Often divine holiness and love are set against each other, but Scripture never presents them at odds. We not only see this taught in the OT, but the NT, while maintaining God’s complete holiness (Rev 4:8), it also affirms in 1 John 4:8 that “God is love.” But it is important to note, in light of who God is, an incredible tension results in how God will simultaneously demonstrate his holy justice and covenant love, which is only truly resolved in Christ and his work. It is the Son incarnate alone, who becomes our propitiatory sacrifice and reconciles divine justice and grace in his cross, who alone saves (Rom 3:21-26).<sup>20</sup>

This brief description of God's identity is the first crucial building block that grounds Christ's identity and provides the warrant to *Christ alone*. God's identity as the holy triune Creator-Covenant Lord gives a particular theistic shape to Scripture's storyline and framework, and in turn, it is this interpretive framework which gives the specific theistic shape to Christ's identity. To help make this point, we can quickly consider three specific examples.

First, the *triunity of God* shapes the identity of Christ. Jesus views himself as the eternal Son who even after adding to himself a human nature continues to relate to the Father and Spirit (John 1:1, 14). But it is precisely his identity *as the eternal Son* that gives the Jesus of history his exclusive identity. In fact, it is because he is the divine Son that his life and death has universal significance for all of humanity and the rest of creation. Moreover, Jesus' work cannot be understood apart from Trinitarian relations. It is the Son and not the Father or the Spirit who becomes flesh. The Father sends the Son, the Spirit attends his union with human nature, and the Son bears our sin and the Father's wrath as a man in the power of the Spirit. And yet, as God the Son, Jesus Christ lived and died in unbroken unity with the Father and Spirit because they share the same identical divine nature. Christ is not a third party acting independently of the other two divine persons. At the cross, then, we do not see three parties but only two: the triune God and humanity. The cross is a demonstration of the Father's love (John 3:16) by the gift of his Son.<sup>21</sup>

Second, the *covenantal character* of the triune God shapes the identity of Christ. Here we are not first thinking about the biblical covenants unfolded in history, but what Reformed theologians have called the "covenant of redemption."<sup>22</sup> Scripture teaches that God had a plan of salvation before the foundation of the world (e.g., Ps 139:16; Isa 22:11; Eph 1:4; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:20). In that plan, the divine Son, in relation to the Father and Spirit, is appointed as the mediator of his people. And the Son gladly and voluntarily accepts this appointment with its covenant stipulations and promises that are then worked out in his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. This eternal plan establishes Christ as Mediator, defines the nature of his mediation, and assigns specific roles to each person of the Godhead. None of the triune persons are pitted against each other in the plan of redemption. All three persons equally share the same nature and act inseparably according to their mode of subsistence—as Father, as Son, and as Spirit. Finally, the

covenant of redemption provides for our covenantal union with Christ as our mediator and representative substitute. The work of Christ as God the Son incarnate, then, is the specific covenantal work designed by the Father, Son, and Spirit to accomplish our eternal redemption.

Third, the *lordship* of the triune covenant God shapes the identity of Christ. As noted, Scripture begins with the declaration that God is the Creator and sovereign King of the universe. He alone is the Lord who is uncreated and self-sufficient and thus in need of nothing outside himself (Ps 50:12-14; 93:2; Acts 17:24-25). And as the Lord, he chooses to enter into covenant relationships with his creatures through the first man, Adam. As the Lord he demands from his image-bearers a complete loyalty and perfect obedience, a point we will return to below.

In thinking of God's Lordship, the word which beautifully captures the sense of God's self-sufficiency and independence is *aseity*, literally, "life from himself." But, as John Frame reminds us, we must not think of aseity merely in terms of God's self-existence since aseity is more than a metaphysical attribute; it also applies to epistemological and ethical categories. As Frame notes, "God is not only self-existent, but also self-attesting and self-justifying. He not only exists without receiving existence from something else, but also gains his knowledge only from himself (his nature and his plan) and serves as his own criterion of truth. And his righteousness is self-justifying, based on the righteousness of his own nature and on his status as the ultimate criterion of rightness."<sup>23</sup>

Why is this crucial to stress, especially for correctly identifying Christ and his work? Because it is within this conception of God that Jesus is placed, and especially the emphasis on God as the moral, just standard of the universe. Repeatedly, the triune God is identified as the holy One, the Judge and the King. As the divine king, Yahweh is the just judge, able to enforce his judgments by his power (see Deut 32:4). Abraham pleads God's justice as he intercedes for Sodom. Abraham's appeal binds God to absolute standards of justice—God's own standards: he is the supreme and universal judge. In this important way, the Bible grounds the concept of a moral universe in the nature of God himself, which is crucial to grasp if we are to make sense of human sin before God, and the tension sin creates *for God*, if he chooses to forgive our sin and remain true to himself as the Judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25).

Today, this point is especially significant in light of the “New Perspective on Paul.”<sup>24</sup> Although this view is diverse, it unites in linking “righteousness” and “justice” to the concept of “covenant faithfulness,” that is, God is righteous in that he keeps his promises to save. No doubt, there is much truth in this: God’s faithfulness means that he will keep his word. Specifically, he will keep his promises to his people and he will execute justice for them, and act to save them. Yet, if this is all that God’s righteousness is, it is too reductionistic. At its heart, it fails first to see that in Scripture, “righteousness-justice-holiness” is tied to the nature and character of God, which entails that God’s faithfulness also means that he will punish wrong. It is this latter emphasis which grounds the biblical concept of God’s retributive justice, which many today simply dismiss as a Western construct of law.

But this will not do. If we are rightly thinking of God’s aseity in relation to his moral character, Scripture views God’s holiness, justice, and righteousness as reflective of God’s very nature. And furthermore, as we will develop below, it is such an understanding of God’s moral character that, in light of sin, creates a huge tension regarding how God will forgive sin. Precisely because of *who* God is as the moral standard of the universe, sin against *him* requires or, even stronger, *necessitates* for *him* to judge and punish sin and to stand against it in his holy wrath. Ultimately, in Scripture, death is viewed as the wages of sin (Rom 6:23) and it is a penal suffering, which, as the Bible’s storyline unfolds, either we pay or Christ pays in our place. But such an understanding of Christ and his work makes no sense apart from being viewed in light of God’s identity, and conversely, God’s identity helps us rightly grasp Christ’s identity and work.

## *2. The Requirement of Covenantal Obedience*

At the heart of God’s complex relationship with humanity lies the concept of covenantal obedience. Simply put, it is the demand of God and the joy of human beings to maintain a relationship of love and loyalty. To understand who Christ is and what he does in his new covenant ministry, we must go back to the Edenic roots of the creation covenant between God and man. We need to trace the Bible’s interpretive link between the charge and curse of the first Adam to understand the coming and crucifixion of the last Adam.

The biblical storyline divides the entire human race and every person in it under two representative heads: the first Adam and the last Adam. In the

beginning of time, God created the first 'ādām from the earth; in the fullness of time, God sent his Son from heaven to become the last 'ādām on the earth (Rom 5:14). God covenanted with the first Adam as the head of the human race to spread the image of God in humanity over the whole earth. This Adam's headship then had a deeper privilege than ordinary fatherhood. It also had the dignity of defining what it means to be human: a son of God and his true image-bearer. Yet the first Adam would fail in his headship over humanity, thereby creating the necessity for a final Adam who would prevail in his headship over a new humanity. But if we pursue the necessity for a new Adam too quickly, we will miss an important clue to his identity.

The second major piece to the puzzle of Christ's identity is that God requires covenant obedience from humanity. This requirement flows from God's own identity and becomes apparent in his charge to Adam and in his curse following the rebellion of his first vice-regent. As Creator-Covenant Lord, God requires perfect loyalty and obedience as the only proper and permissible way to live in covenant with him. Also, the Lord created and covenanted with Adam for the purpose of bearing God's image in human dominion over creation. Adam was called to rule over creation under God's rule in obedience to his commands and ways of righteousness. Yet, it is precisely at this point that Adam fails to the ruin of the entire human race.

We can look at the two trees of Eden to see the inherent nature of this requirement for covenantal obedience. When the Creator-Covenant Lord placed Adam in the garden, he gave the man two trees in particular to guide him into the joy of covenantal obedience. The first tree in the midst of the garden held forth the conditional promise of eternal life.<sup>25</sup> The promise is not explicit, but it is clearly implied when God expels Adam from Eden *so that* he could not "take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22). The tree of life was placed before Adam as a sign of his reward for obedience under God's blessing to fill the earth with God's image. But Adam rejected this reward of the first tree by eating from the second tree. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil came with a clear prohibition against eating its fruit under penalty of death. This tree of death, then, was placed before Adam as a test of his willingness to rule under God and in obedience to his word and ways. Adam was to fill the earth from within the abundant provision of Eden through an abundant heritage trained in the righteousness of the Lord. But with ruinous effect, Adam disobeyed God

in an attempt to rule without God by becoming “like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5).

This glimpse back into Eden shows us how the requirement of covenantal obedience shapes the Bible’s storyline to help present us with Christ’s identity. The historical drama of the two trees and Adam’s charge and curse dramatically illustrate that covenant loyalty lies at the heart of the relationship between God and man. It is generally true that where the first Adam failed, the last Adam must prevail for our salvation. More specifically, we can now say that as the last Adam, the Christ must be someone who can walk in complete covenantal obedience with the Creator-Covenant Lord to spread his glorious image over the earth.

This particular covenantal framework establishes the person and work of Christ in representative, legal, and substitutionary terms (Rom 5:12-21). To undo, reverse, and pay for the first Adam’s sin, the last Adam will indeed be a “seed of the woman” (Gen 3:15), but this time one who will render the required covenantal obedience. By his obedience, the Christ will demonstrate what a true image-bearer is supposed to be: a loving, faithful, loyal, and obedient Son of God. Yet, as we will see below, the reversal of Adam’s sin and all of its disastrous effects will require more than a demonstration of true humanity; it will require a representative substitute who will pay the penalty for our sin and give us his righteousness, thereby reconciling us to God. Ultimately, to reverse the effects of sin, a divine Son, a greater Adam, will be needed because he is the only one who can also satisfy God’s own moral demand against us. It is in this covenantal context that the rationale for why the Son *must* become incarnate and do the kind of work he does, is placed. Yet to make sense fully of *why* it is Christ alone who can do this work, we must add a third piece to the puzzle.

### *3. Human Sin and Divine Forgiveness*

With just two of the major building blocks to the puzzle of Christ’s identity, we have already seen the ultimate purpose of God in his relationship with the human race. The triune Creator-Covenant Lord of the universe has determined to display his glory in the world through a humanity that bears his image by walking with God in peace and covenantal obedience. But what happens when humanity rebels against God and fails to bear the image of his righteousness? Can the divine purpose still be accomplished? Must God

choose between covenant peace and covenant obedience? Is covenant peace with God even possible without covenantal obedience? More specifically, can God tolerate sin? And if not, how can God forgive sin against him?

In the Bible's storyline, the importance of Genesis 3 is incalculable. Not only does it describe how, in history, sin and evil entered the human race, and thus the desperate nature of human depravity, which *God alone* can remedy. It also gives us God's initial promise of redemption—a promise that takes on greater clarity and expansion in the subsequent biblical covenants. Let us highlight both of these emphases, and especially the tension that is created by them and how the rationale for the necessity of Christ and his work is further established.

First, let us think about the nature of human sin. Scripture, from beginning to end, takes the reality of sin seriously. In moving from Genesis 1-2, we see how quickly humans move from a “very good” world (Gen 1:31) to an abnormal and cursed one (Gen 3:14-24), one now under God’s judgment and the sentence of death. Adam, as our covenant representative, disobeyed the direct command of God (Gen 2:17), and willfully rebelled against his Creator-Covenant Lord, thus turning the created order upside down. In choosing to worship and serve created things rather than the Creator, the human race is now under the sentence of death (Rom 6:23). But worse than the terrible results of sin on humans, we, who were made to know, love, and serve God, are now enemies of God, living under his judgment and wrath, and no longer in a living relationship with him. As Genesis 3 unfolds, the punishment of sin is described in diverse ways, but in the end, it results in spiritual death before God (Rom 8:7; Eph 2:1-3; 4:17-19), culminating in our physical death. This is graphically portrayed in Eden by God casting Adam and Eve from his covenantal presence and blocking their access to the tree of life, which later culminated in the sad refrain of Genesis 5—“and they died.”

There is also no doubt that Adam’s representative sin is passed on to the entire human race. Genesis 4 recounts the murder among Adam’s children, the genealogical record speaks of everyone’s death (Genesis 5), followed by God’s judgment of sin in the flood (Genesis 6-9), and it only gets worse as the storyline of Scripture provides ample confirmation to Paul’s sweeping statement: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Given the nature of sin and the human problem, Scripture is clear that the only way back to Eden, or the only way to reverse the effects of sin

is death, is if God takes the initiative to save, provide, and rescue us from our helpless estate. Ultimately, the only hope for Adam's helpless race is found in another Adam, the last Adam, who, unlike the first Adam and the entire human race, obeys, and who accomplishes in his life, death, and resurrection our redemption and justification. In fact, that is the significance of the initial promise of salvation in Genesis 3:15, to which we now turn.

Second, Genesis 3 also gives us God's initial promise of redemption—a promise which drives the entire storyline of Scripture and ultimately leads us to Christ. Instead of God leaving us to ourselves and swiftly bringing full judgment upon us, he acts in sovereign grace, choosing to save a people for himself and to reverse the manifold effects of sin.<sup>26</sup> This choice to save is evident in the *protevangelium* (Gen 3:15), given immediately after the fall to reverse the disastrous effects of sin upon the world through a coming deliverer. This promise, in embryonic form, anticipates the coming of a Redeemer, the "seed of the woman," who though wounded himself in conflict, will destroy the works of Satan and restore goodness to this world. This promise creates the expectation that when it is finally realized, all sin and death will be defeated and the fullness of God's saving reign will come to this world as God's rightful rule is acknowledged and embraced.

But how will this come about? By an act of power or deliverance? By a human example? As Scripture unfolds, it becomes clear that to restore the creation, to destroy death, to reverse the effects of sin, to make us right before the triune Creator-Covenant Lord, something more than a power encounter is needed, or even some kind of suffering which upholds the moral governance of the universe. Instead, what is needed is a substitute, who stands representatively and legally in my place. One who will obey perfectly as we ought *and* who bears my sin and guilt before God by propitiating divine wrath and satisfying God's righteous moral demand against me.

Why is this so? Because of *who* God is and what Stott calls the "problem of forgiveness."<sup>27</sup> What is this problem? It is collision course of bringing together God, in all of his holiness, moral purity, and justice, and sin. Since God is, *a se*, holy and personal, he must punish sin; he cannot overlook it, nor can he relax the retributive demands of his justice, since to do so, would be to deny himself. That is why Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that our sin and God's holiness are incompatible. God's holiness exposes our sin, and it must ultimately be dealt with.<sup>28</sup> Also, closely related to God's holiness is

his wrath, i.e., his holy reaction to sin. Scripture speaks of God's wrath in high-intensity language, and it is vital to note that a substantial part of the Bible's storyline turns on it. No doubt, God is forbearing and gracious, yet he is also holy and just.<sup>29</sup> Where there is sin, the holy God *must* confront it and bring it to judgment, especially given the fact that sin is not first against an external order outside of God; it is against God.

Now it is precisely this *necessity* of God to judge human sin which creates a severe *tension* in the biblical storyline and the covenantal relationship. God has promised to redeem us and be our covenant Lord who is present with us, but how will he do so? Two necessities are in collision: the punishment of sinful humanity and the forgiveness of sinful humanity to fulfill God's creation plan. How can God save us and satisfy himself simultaneously? Or, how can God who is righteous forgive sinners he created to be righteous and be both "just and the justifier" (Rom 3:25-26)? How can he initiate in his love and grace to save yet remain just and holy in his forgiving our sin? Ultimately, in order for God to forgive, he must first satisfy himself.

As we fast-forward redemptive history, Scripture's answer to this problem is that *the triune God himself* must solve the problem, given that the problem of forgiveness is *intrinsic* to him. In fact, God himself—the Creator-Covenant Lord—will have to take upon himself the initiative to save; he will have to act in perfect justice consistent with his own righteous requirements, yet also simultaneously demonstrate his amazing grace. If there is going to be a solution at all, *God alone must act to satisfy his own righteous demands*. This is why the problem of forgiveness *necessitates* not only a substitute for us, but a specific kind of substitute—a *divine* substitute. And this is precisely what God has done in Christ—the divine Son who has become flesh. In Christ, God the Son incarnate, the problem of forgiveness is solved. Ultimately, it is this reason *why* it is *Christ alone* in his person and work. Our sin before God is of such a nature that only one person—the divine Son incarnate—can represent us as a man, and pay for our sin as God, and thus satisfy perfectly and completely *God's own demand*.

In current discussions of the cross, it is *this* problem of forgiveness that people often miss. For example, in recent criticisms of penal substitution and denials of the absolute necessity of Christ's person and work for our salvation, the impression is given that God can simply forgive sin without the full satisfaction of his own holy, righteous, and just character. Joel Green

and Mark Baker seem to think this. In their discussion of Charles Hodge, a proponent of penal substitution, they give the impression that they reject a view of God who must be true to his own holy character and thus judge sin. They state in relation to Hodge, “Within his penal substitution model, God’s ability to love and relate to humans is circumscribed by something outside of God—that is, an abstract concept of justice instructs God as to how God must behave.”<sup>30</sup> They state further: “It could be said that Hodge presents God who wants to be in relationship with us but is forced to deal with a problem of legal bookkeeping that blocks that relationship. The solution is having God the Father punish God the Son.”<sup>31</sup> They intensify this criticism by appealing to Robin Collins who wants to ridicule the substitutionary view by trying to insert it into the story of the prodigal son. Quoting Collins, they write: “When the son returns and recognizes the error of his ways, Collins has the Father respond, ‘I cannot simply forgive you … it would be against the moral order of the entire universe … Such is the severity of my justice that reconciliation will not be made unless the penalty is utterly paid. My wrath—my avenging justice—must be placated.’”<sup>32</sup> And remarkably, they think that it is instructive that Jesus pronounces forgiveness to the paralytic in Mark 2 “without reference to the sacrifice of any animal and without reference to his own, still-future death (Mk 2:1-12).”<sup>33</sup>

What are we to make of these statements? Can God simply forgive sin without atonement? In what sense is the cross *necessary* for our salvation? And what is the relationship between sin, punishment, law, and God? If we follow the Bible’s storyline and link together the three pieces of the puzzle so far, we must conclude that there is a major tension between God and human sin—a tension which *necessitates* a unique and exclusive Savior and an all-sufficient work. In fact, this point is reinforced as we turn to the last piece of the puzzle, which further underscores the necessity of *Christ alone*.

#### *4. God Himself Saves through His Obedient Son*

Just as human sin and divine forgiveness bring tension into the biblical storyline, so its resolution raises the question of just *who* it is that will save humans and establish God’s kingdom, i.e., his saving rule and reign on earth. The covenantal development up to this point shows that (1) God will forgive the sins of his people by punishing a substitute for them, and (2) God will establish his kingdom through the rule of a righteous man over the earth when

none can be found on the earth. So who is able to bear the sins of others, forgiven the sins of others, and rule over the world in perfect obedience to God while simultaneously establishing the rule of God himself? When the fourth major piece of our puzzle comes into place, the answer becomes clear: *Christ alone* as God the Son incarnate.

This point is demonstrated in the unfolding of God's plan through the biblical covenants, which gives greater definition and clarity to God's initial promise (Gen 3:15). As God's plan unfolds, we see *who* and *how* God will save us and *why* Christ and his work are absolutely necessary. I will develop this last point in three steps.

First, as God's plan unfolds across time and as God enters into covenant relations with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David, step by step, God, by his mighty acts and words, prepares his people to anticipate the coming of the "seed of the women," the deliverer, the Messiah. A Messiah who, when he comes, will *fulfill* all of God's promises by ushering in God's saving rule to this world. This point is vital for establishing the identity of the Messiah, especially the truth that this Messiah is more than a mere man; he is the divine Son incarnate. On the one hand, Scripture teaches that the fulfillment of God's promises will be accomplished *through a man* as developed by various typological persons such as Adam, Moses, Israel, and David, all seen in terms of the covenants. On the other hand, Scripture also teaches that this Messiah is more than a mere man since he is *identified with God*. How so? Because in fulfilling God's promises he literally inaugurates God's saving rule and shares the very throne of God—something no mere human can do—which entails that his identity is directly tied to the one true and living God.<sup>34</sup> This observation is further underscored by the next point which brings together the establishment of God's kingdom through the inauguration of the new covenant.

Second, how does God's kingdom come in its *saving/redemptive/new creation* sense? As the OT unfolds, God's saving kingdom is revealed and comes to this world, at least in anticipatory form, through the biblical covenants and covenant mediators—Adam, Noah, Abraham and his seed centered in the nation of Israel, and most significantly through David and his sons. Yet, in the OT, it is clear that all of the covenant mediators (sons) fail and do not fulfill God's promises. This is specifically evident in the Davidic kings who are "sons" to Yahweh, the representatives of Israel, and thus "little Adams," but

they fail in their task. It is only when a true obedient son comes, a son which God himself provides that God's rule finally and completely is established and his promises are realized. This is why, in OT expectation, ultimately the arrival of God's kingdom is linked to the dawning of the new covenant. This is also why when one reads the Gospels, one is struck by the fact that the kingdom of God is so central to Jesus' life and teaching; he cannot be understood apart from it. But note: in biblical thought one cannot think of the inauguration of the kingdom apart from the arrival of the new covenant.

In this regard, Jeremiah 31 is probably the most famous new covenant text in the OT, even though teaching on the new covenant is not limited to it. New covenant teaching is also found in the language of "everlasting covenant" and the prophetic anticipation of the coming of the new creation, the Spirit, and God's saving work among the nations. In fact, among the post-exilic prophets there is an expectation that the new covenant will have a purpose similar to the Mosaic covenant, i.e., to bring the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant back into the present experience of Israel and the nations, yet there is also an expectation of some massive differences from the old, all of which are outlined in Jeremiah 31. Probably what is most *new* about the new covenant is the promise of complete forgiveness of sin (Jer 31:34). In the OT, forgiveness of sin is normally granted through the sacrificial system. However, the OT believer, if spiritually perceptive, knew that this was never enough, as evidenced by the repetitive nature of the system. But now Jeremiah announces that sin will be "remembered no more," which certainly entails that sin finally will be dealt with in full. Ultimately, especially when other texts are considered, the OT anticipates a perfect, unfettered fellowship of God's people with the Lord, a harmony restored between creation and God—a new creation and a new Jerusalem—where the dwelling of God is with men (see Ezek 37:1-23; cf. Dan 12:2; Isa 25:6-9; Rev 21:3-4). That is why it is with the arrival of the new covenant age that we also have God's saving kingdom brought to this world, which is precisely the fulfillment of the *protevangelium*.

Third, let us now take the Bible's basic covenantal storyline and see how it identifies who Christ is and establishes *why* he is unique and necessary. If we step back for a moment and ask—*Who* is able, or what kind of person is able to fulfill all of God's promises, inaugurate his saving rule in this world, and to establish all that is associated with the new covenant including the

full forgiveness of sin?—in biblical thought the answer is clear: it is *God alone* who can do it. Is this not the message of the OT? As the centuries trace Israel's history, it becomes evident that the Lord *alone* must act to accomplish his promises; *he* must initiate in order to save; *he* must *unilaterally* act if there is going to be redemption at all. After all, who ultimately can achieve the forgiveness of sin other than God alone? Who can usher in the new creation, final judgment, and salvation? Certainly none of these great realities will arrive by the previous covenant mediators since they have all, in different ways, failed. Nor will it come through Israel as a nation for her sin has brought about her exile and judgment. If there is to be salvation at all, God *himself* must come and usher in salvation and execute judgment; the arm of the Lord must be revealed (Isa 51:9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16-17; cf. Ezek 34). Just as God once led Israel through the desert, so he must come again, bringing about a new exodus to bring salvation to his people (Isa 40:3-5).<sup>35</sup>

However, as the biblical covenants establish, alongside the emphasis that God *himself* must come to redeem, the OT also stresses that the Lord will do so *through* another David, a human figure, but a human figure who is also closely identified with Yahweh himself. Isaiah pictures this well. This king to come will sit on David's throne (Isa 9:7) but he will also bear the very titles and names of God (Isa 9:6). This King, though another David (Isa 11:1), is also David's Lord who shares in the divine rule (Ps 110:1; cf. Matt 22:41-46). He will be the mediator of a new covenant; he will perfectly obey and act like the Lord (Isa 11:1-5), yet he will suffer for our sin in order to justify many (Isa 53:11). It is through him that forgiveness will come for he is, “The LORD our righteousness” (Jer 23:5-6). In this way, OT hope and expectation, which is grounded in the coming of Yahweh to save, is joined together with the coming of the Messiah, one who is fully human yet also one who bears the divine name (Isa 9:6-7; Ezek 34).

This covenantal storyline serves as the framework and background to the NT's presentation of Jesus, and it teaches that Christ and his work are utterly unique. *Who* is Jesus? According to Scripture, *he* is the one who inaugurates God's kingdom and new covenant age. In him, the full forgiveness of sin is achieved; in him, the eschatological Spirit is poured out, the new creation dawns, and all of God's promises are fulfilled. But, in light of the OT teaching, *who* can do it? Scripture gives one answer: The only one who can accomplish such a task is the one who is both the LORD *and* the obedient Son, which

is precisely how the NT presents our Lord Jesus.

The NT clearly teaches that this *human* Jesus is also the LORD since he alone ushers in *God's* kingdom. He is the eternal Son in relation to his Father (see Matt 11:1-15; 12:41-42; 13:16-17; Luke 7:18-22; 10:23-24; cf. John 1:1-3; 17:3), yet the one who has taken on our flesh and lived and died for us to redeem us (John 1:14-18). In him, as fully human, the glory and radiance of God is completely expressed since he is the exact image and representation of the Father (Heb 1:3; cf. Col 1:15-17; 2:9). In him, all the biblical covenants have reached their *telos*, terminus, and fulfillment, and by his cross work, he has inaugurated the new covenant and all of its entailments. But it is crucial to point out: to say that he has done all of this is to identify him as *God the Son incarnate*, fully God and fully man, who does a work that is enough.

For this reason, Jesus is in a category entirely different from any created thing. To turn Lessing's on his head: Jesus is the historical particular who has universal significance for all humanity because of *who* he is as the divine Son incarnate. In fact, Scripture so identifies him with Yahweh in all of his actions, character, and work that he is viewed, as David Wells reminds us, as "the agent, the instrument, and the personifier of God's sovereign, eternal, saving rule."<sup>36</sup> In Jesus Christ, we see all of God's plans and purposes fulfilled; we see the resolution of God to take upon himself our guilt and sin in order to reverse the horrible effects of the fall and to satisfy his own righteous requirements, to make this world right, and to inaugurate a new covenant in his blood. In Jesus Christ, we see the perfectly obedient Son, who is identified as the Lord, taking the initiative to keep his covenant-promises by taking upon our human flesh, veiling his glory, and winning for us our redemption. In him we see two major OT eschatological expectations unite: he is the sovereign Lord who comes to rescue and save his people, who is simultaneously David's greater Son. In this way, our Lord Jesus Christ fulfills all the types and shadows of the OT, and as the divine Son, is identified with the Father and God-equal to him. The biblical covenants as developed along the Bible's own storyline beautifully identify who Jesus is, and provide the biblical warrant for his unique identity and work.

In fact, the primary message of the covenants is this: unless *God himself* acts to accomplish his promises, we have no salvation. After all, *who* ultimately can remedy his own divine problem of forgiveness other than *God*? If there

is to be salvation at all, the triune God himself must save, which is what he has done in and through the incarnate Son. The Son is absolutely necessary to act as our new covenant representative and substitute, and apart from *him* there is no salvation.

It on these basic building blocks, that *Christ alone* is established. In the book I develop this point more, but I finish here with this conclusion: it is only Christ, in his exclusive identity and all-sufficient work, that all of God's plans and purposes are fulfilled. In Christ alone, we see the resolution of God to take upon himself our guilt and sin to reverse the horrible effects of the fall and to satisfy his own righteous requirements, to make this world right, and to inaugurate a new covenant in his blood. In Christ and him alone, is our glory! To think anything less of him is to rob him of his glory and to rob us of the Redeemer we need. Before the triune God, we need a Redeemer who can save us completely, fully pay for our sin, stand *for us* as our representative substitute, secure the Spirit's work, and fulfill perfectly God's salvation plan.

But the truth is, we only appreciate this glorious truth, when, by God's grace, we come to realize our own lostness and sin before God. Our greatest need as humans is to be reconciled and justified before the holy, righteous and just Judge. This is something our secular, postmodern era does not understand given its rejection and substitution of Christian truth for false worldviews. But to understand the biblical Jesus correctly we must know something of our own guilt before God and why we need the kind of Redeemer Scripture presents him to be. For it is not until we know ourselves to be lost, under the sentence of death, and condemned before God, that we can even appreciate and rejoice in a divine-human Redeemer who can meet our every need. Once we see ourselves as fallen rebels against God, we gladly rejoice in Christ Jesus. Once again, Wells gets it right: "[T]o understand Christ aright, we must also know something about our own guilt. We must know ourselves to be sinners . . . The New Testament, after all, was not written for the curious, for historians, or even for biblical scholars, but for those, in all ages and cultures, who want to be forgiven and to know God."<sup>37</sup> Unless this is a reality in our lives, it should not surprise us that we, or anyone else, will be baffled by the biblical Jesus and not acknowledge or appreciate the truth and glory in *solus Christus*.

- <sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from a paper presented at The Southern Seminary Theology Conference on September 24-25, 2015 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. It is taken from chapters in Stephen J. Wellum, *Christ Alone—The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).
- <sup>2</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 274.
- <sup>3</sup> Timothy George, *The Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1998), 219.
- <sup>4</sup> Anselm, *Why God Became Man?* in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Oxford World's Classics, intro. and ed., Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- <sup>5</sup> See George, *The Theology of the Reformers*, 221-222, who makes this point. For example, in Calvin, there is a strong emphasis on Christ's active and passive obedience for us (see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960] 2.16.5).
- <sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, reprint, 1981), pt. 3, q. 49, art. 3.
- <sup>7</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 398.
- <sup>8</sup> See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, pt. 3, q. 61, art. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 5.
- <sup>10</sup> See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).
- <sup>11</sup> Anselm, *Why God Became Man?* I:1.
- <sup>12</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 11.
- <sup>13</sup> Notable advocates include Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Hugo Grotius. For further discussion of the hypothetical necessity view, see Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*, 9-18; Oliver D. Crisp, "Penal Non-Substitution," *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 59:1 (2008): 145-153.
- <sup>14</sup> See Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*, 11-12; Crisp, "Penal Non-Substitution," 145-153.
- <sup>15</sup> Notable advocates include John Owen, Francis Turretin, and more recently, John Murray and Donald Macleod. For further discussion of the consequent absolute necessity view, see Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*, 11-18; Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 194-219.
- <sup>16</sup> On God as the "Covenant Lord," see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 1-115.
- <sup>17</sup> For a discussion of God's existence and actions as a personal being, see Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 602; D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 222-238.
- <sup>18</sup> See Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 3:879. For a discussion of the belief by past theologians that holiness is the most fundamental characteristic of God, see Richard A. Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, vol. 3 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 497-503.
- <sup>19</sup> See Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 497-503.
- <sup>20</sup> See D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).
- <sup>21</sup> See Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 90-100; John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 133-162.
- <sup>22</sup> See Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 90-100.
- <sup>23</sup> Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 602.
- <sup>24</sup> On the New Perspective on Paul, see Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004).
- <sup>25</sup> See G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 29-87.
- <sup>26</sup> God's plan is an eternal plan and does not originate in time. Stating it as I have done only seeks to reflect the drama of the story; it is not meant to deny that God's plan is eternal (see e.g., Ps 139:16; Isa 14:24-27; 46:10-11; Acts 2:23; cf. 4:27-28; 17:26; Rom 8:28-29; 9-11; Gal 4:4-5; Eph 1:4, 11-12; 2:10).
- <sup>27</sup> See Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 90-91.
- <sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, 124-132.
- <sup>29</sup> See Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 65-84.
- <sup>30</sup> Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary*

*Contexts*, 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 174.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>34</sup> On this point, see David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester: Crossway, 1984), 21-81.

<sup>35</sup> See R. E. Watts, “Exodus,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000): 478-87.

<sup>36</sup> Wells, *Person of Christ*, 172.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 175.

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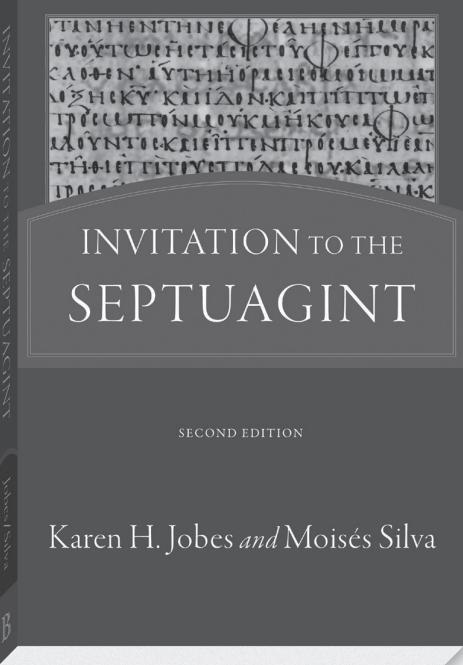
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DAVID VANDRUNEN

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Of the five so-called Reformation *solas*, *Soli Deo Gloria* seems like an outlier in certain respects<sup>1</sup>. While the other *solas* pertain directly to the two chief points of debate between Rome and the Reformation—the doctrine of salvation and religious authority—*Soli Deo Gloria* is a more general idea. Furthermore, it seems initially implausible to think that a professing Christian of any sort would have reason or motivation to deny the idea that all glory belongs to God: “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory” (Ps 115:1) is hardly ambiguous! Yet some writers suggest that *Soli Deo Gloria* is the very heart and substance of the other four *solas*.<sup>2</sup>

Without implying the least disrespect for the life-changing importance of these other four, I too wish to affirm the centrality of God’s Glory Alone. What is ultimately at stake in debates about salvation and authority, after all, is not satisfaction of our curiosity or spiritual needs but the glorification of God Almighty. Every merely human word falls short, every merely human deed misses the mark, every merely human mediator fails to reconcile. Indeed, the Lord was appalled “that there was no justice,” “that there was no man,” and “that there was no one to intercede” (Isa 59:15-16). Thus God himself did

what no one else could: “his own arm brought him salvation” (Isa 59:16). And in so doing, the peoples of the world “shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun” (Isa 59:19). It is for the magnification of his glory that God arises to speak to his people and to save them from their sins. The other Reformation *solas* advance God’s glory as the highest end for which this world exists.

The magnificent theme of God’s glory is an inexhaustible treasure. A humble essay can say so little of what might be said, yet reflecting again on this theme in Scripture’s light promises to reward us afresh. I approach our subject here with a defense and an explanation. Over against a difficulty and a distortion, I wish to defend the idea that *Soli Deo Gloria* is truly about *God*, yet in a way that exalts his image-bearers along the way. In so doing, I aim to explain how the theme of God’s glory develops as a biblical story that is central to Scripture’s narrative as a whole.

### A DIFFICULTY AND A DISTORTION

It is often helpful for us, when trying to understand an important concept, to consider possible objections and common mistakes. These can sharpen our thinking and alert us to weaknesses in our standard ways of thinking. In this brief opening section, therefore, I introduce a potential difficulty with the doctrine of *Soli Deo Gloria* and a distortion that often appears in the way contemporary heirs of the Reformation speak about the doctrine. Keeping this difficulty and distortion in mind should challenge us to speak about this Reformation theme in as helpful ways as we can.

The difficulty is this: If all glory belongs to God alone, does this not implicitly demean human beings? If all honor is God’s, does that not result in dishonor for us? These are serious questions. Genesis 1 says human beings are made in God’s image, the pinnacle of his work of creation, and Psalm 8:5 interprets this as God crowning us “with glory and honor.” Furthermore, the Christian doctrine of salvation culminates with the idea of *glorification*, describing Christians’ resurrection and new-creation life, an idea well grounded Scripture (e.g., Rom 8:17-18). Hence the Reformation doctrine of *Soli Deo Gloria* presents (at least) a challenge: how can we whole-heartedly affirm that all glory is God’s alone without simultaneously undermining other biblical truths that describe human beings originally created in glory and destined for eschatological glorification?

We should also be alert to a common distortion. If anything in our theology seems to be thoroughly theocentric, the doctrine of *soli Deo gloria* is it. Yet many Protestants today speak about this Reformation slogan in ways that seem surprisingly focused upon themselves. *Soli Deo Gloria*, many of us have heard (and perhaps said), is a call to do all things for God's glory; our worship, our family life, our vocations, and our political activity should be pursued for the glory of the Lord. Of course I do not suggest that there is anything heterodox in the idea that Christians should do all things for God's glory, which Scripture itself teaches. But when *Soli Deo Gloria* is presented as if its heart and essence concerns how *we* live, how *we* carry out our vocations, and how *we* formulate and execute political agendas we might ponder whether what was supposed to magnify God alone has taken a puzzling (albeit unintentional) anthropocentric turn.<sup>3</sup> To say that *Soli Deo Gloria* has something to do with Christians' conduct is true, but to make our conduct its main focus is at least a distortion of this Reformation doctrine.

The preceding difficulty and distortion, I suggest, challenge us to sharpen our understanding and presentation of this Reformation *sola*. The difficulty reminds us that in our zeal to ascribe all glory to God alone we must also account for the perhaps paradoxical biblical teaching about humanity's glorification. The distortion encourages us to beware lest zeal to live our entire lives for God's glory unwittingly leads us to focus more on ourselves and our agendas than upon God. As we now consider how best to understand *Soli Deo Gloria* we must strive to account for the proper breadth and depth of biblical teaching in order to avoid one-sidedness that may diminish the helpfulness of our theology of God's glory.

## **GOD'S GLORY ALONE: THE PATTERN OF REFORMED ORTHODOX TEACHING**

Fidelity to Scripture is the surest bulwark against difficulties and distortions, but the theological labors of our forbears in Reformation Christianity can point us in propitious directions. I wish to focus my remarks on perhaps an unlikely source, Reformed orthodoxy. Reformed orthodoxy refers to a period roughly between the mid-to-late sixteenth century and the early-to-mid-eighteenth century in which many accomplished Reformed theologians consolidated and built upon the efforts of the Protestant reformers. They

organized Reformed theology in coherent ways, worked out doctrines that the Reformers had not considered in detail, defended those doctrines against gainsayers, and taught them to subsequent generations of Reformed ministers. The reputation of the Reformed orthodox theologians languished for much of the twentieth century, as many writers (including many Reformed theologians) wrote them off as cold rationalists indifferent to a warm biblical theology of the heart. Of late a number of competent scholars have helpfully debunked this myth and reintroduced us to the wealth of wonderful theology the Reformed orthodox writers produced.<sup>4</sup>

Their treatment of God's glory provides the sort of thoroughness and precision we would expect from them, and hardly leaves the impression that they were cold and detached from their subject matter. They believed that glory was first of all an attribute of God, an attribute that he reveals in this world. But secondarily they recognized that God glorifies himself in part through the glorification of his people, such that believers reflect God's glory back to him through their worship and holistic obedience. This basic pattern for understanding God's glory provides the sort of nuance and depth that could help to account for the difficulty and distortion considered in the previous section.

The work of Reformed orthodox theologian Edward Leigh (1602-71) provides a nice example. Leigh begins his exposition of God's glory by identifying it as "the infinite excellency of the Divine essence." Glory is "the very essence and nature of God." This constitutes the "internal" aspect of God's glory, which makes God "infinitely worthy to be praised, admired and loved of all." He is thus glorious according to his "own knowledge, love, and delight in himself."<sup>5</sup> But God's glory is also "external." He makes "all things for himself or his glory." This external glory of God is expressed in "the Heavens and Earth, all these glorious creatures here below, which are said to show forth his glory." "As the glory of men consists in outward ornaments," he adds, "so God's glory consists in having such creatures, men and Angels to be his followers." This external glory is also manifest "when men and Angels do know, love, and obey him, and praise him to all eternity."<sup>6</sup> When his creatures thus glorify God, they do so "not by putting any excellency into him, but by taking notice of his excellency, and esteeming him accordingly, and making manifest this our high esteem of him."<sup>7</sup>

Although God's internal glory is ultimately unknowable to any other than himself, he manifests his glory in and to his creatures and thereby makes it

known to us. “Ordinarily,” Leigh explains, God manifests his glory in his “word and works.” These works include “those of creation and preservation or providence” and those “upon the hearts of believers.” God also manifests his glory “extraordinarily,” that is, “in the cloud, in apparitions and visions”—he appeals here to the pillar of cloud and fire that led Israel through the wilderness.<sup>8</sup> Leigh also observes that God has “joined our happiness and his glory together.” “God will hereby give us glory,” and thus we often ought “to think of the personal glory and excellency which the Saints shall enjoy when they come to Heaven.”<sup>9</sup> At this time our bodies will be raised, our souls freed from all spiritual evil, and we will image God perfectly; our wills will be fully satisfied with God, our consciences at peace, and our affections of love and joy made perfect.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, the pattern of Leigh’s exposition of God’s glory, which resembles that of important Reformed theologians before and after him,<sup>11</sup> runs like this: God’s glory is ultimately his own internal attribute, known only to himself. But he delights to make his glory manifest in his works of creation and providence, and in extraordinary fashion in visions such as the Shekinah cloud in the wilderness. His glory is also manifest in the worship and obedience of his people in this world, and especially in their glorification in the age to come. This exposition seems to capture what we are looking for. In response to the difficulty considered in the previous section, Leigh understands God to be glorified in part through the glorification of his people. This preserves the truth that all glory is ultimately God’s while accounting for biblical language about human glorification. In response to the distortion noted in the previous section, Leigh does not make human conduct the centerpiece of his treatment of God’s glory. God’s internal glory and his own active manifestation of it in this world enjoy that distinction. Yet Leigh does see an important place for Christians glorifying God in their action, even as he keeps this properly subordinated to God’s action.

Leigh’s work points in helpful directions. But of much greater moment is what Scripture itself says. Thus we turn to consider the Bible’s presentation of divine glory and what it has to do with us. We will find that Leigh’s exposition has quite accurately captured the spirit of the biblical witness.

## **GOD’S GLORY ALONE: THE BIBLICAL PATTERN**

Scripture speaks so often about God’s glory that it presents many options for approaching it in a theological study such as this. One way that provides a

particularly good entry to the subject, in my judgment, is through the story that unfolds around the pillar of cloud and fire that led Israel through the wilderness—the *Shekinah* cloud, that is, that Leigh identified as an extraordinary manifestation of the glory of God. By tracing its story we traverse through central themes of the whole of Scripture, including God’s election and rejection of Israel, the coming of Christ, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the hope of the age to come.<sup>12</sup> We come to see in wonderful ways how glory truly belongs to God alone, and yet also how Christians’ own glorification becomes part of the story of how God glorifies himself.

### ***God’s Glory Revealed to Israel in the Cloud***

The pillar of cloud and fire that guarded and guided Israel through its desert trek toward the Promised Land is a striking part of the Old Testament history. At night the cloud “looked like fire” (Num 9:15-16; cf. Exod 40:38), bright and massive enough to illumine nighttime travel (Exod 13:21). Scripture makes it sound like an imposing storm cloud rather than a puffy white cumulus. It covered Mount Sinai as a “dense cloud” (Exod 19:9), “like smoke from a furnace” (Exod 19:18), and brought forth thunder and lightning (Exod 19:16).<sup>13</sup> Ordinarily it went in front of Israel to show them their path of travel and where and for how long to rest (see Exod 13:21-22; 19:9; 40:36-37; Num 9:17-23). Once it also moved to Israel’s rear, to serve as a protective wall before the advancing Egyptian army (Exod 14:19-20).

What made this cloud of glory so magnificent was ultimately not its visual splendor but its identity as the dwelling place of God, as celebrated by Psalms 97 and 99. These psalms describe the cloud as a brilliant image or replica of God’s heavenly temple, which in turn served as a model for the earthly tabernacle Moses constructed (see Ps 97:1-2; 99:1-2, 7). The reason Exodus 16:10 comments that the “glory of the LORD” appeared in the cloud, therefore, is because God himself was enthroned in its midst. Scripture confirms and deepens this idea of the divine presence by associating the cloud with the Holy Spirit. The Song of Moses alludes to this (Deut 32:10-11; cf. Gen 1:2) and later texts confirm that for Israel to be led by the cloud was to have the Spirit as their instructor and guide (Isa 63:11-14; Neh 9:19-20; cf. Hag 2:5).

God revealed his glory in the cloud, but during this time in the wilderness a certain troubling pattern emerged that would deepen as Israel’s history advanced. The cloud of glory would at one time be a great blessing to his

people and fill them with joy, and yet at other times bring judgment and curse and fill them with terror. The cloud would sometimes draw near to Israel and encompass them in God's intimate embrace, but sometimes seemed intent on keeping Israel at a distance and excluding them from his presence. If the grand story of Scripture is one of God reconciling his estranged people to himself and drawing them into an even greater fellowship with the Lord than that which they lost at the fall, the account of Israel and the cloud seems to create great expectation of reaching this goal while nevertheless indicating that something much more needed to happen in order to attain it truly and lastingly.

We see the troubling pattern already in the wilderness. The cloud seems to have left Israel for a while after they crossed the sea on dry ground, and when it reappeared they saw it only from afar, at a distance (Exod 16:10). But soon, when they arrived at Sinai, the cloud drew near. It covered the mountain (Exod 19:16-18) and Moses "led the people out of the camp to meet with God" (Exod 19:17). It seems that God was drawing near to bless his people, his "treasured possession" (Exod 19:5), yet this encounter simultaneously communicates a strong sense of exclusion. God required Moses to put a boundary around the mountain to keep the people away, upon pain of death (Exod 19:12-13, 21-24), and only Moses and a few others were permitted to climb the mountain and attain a more intimate fellowship with God (Exod 19:20; 24:1-2, 9-18).

After Moses finished constructing the tabernacle a similar pattern developed. The cloud "covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod 40:34). God was truly drawing near to his people! Yet he immediately excluded even Moses from it: "Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod 40:35). Shortly thereafter Aaron and his sons were ordained to the priesthood, and Moses and Aaron were then able to enter the tent of meeting. Leviticus 9:23-24 describes a magnificent scene in which the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people and they shouted for joy. Yet even then all was not well. Only the priests had access to the holy places, and only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, and only once a year at that (Heb 9:7). Even more sobering, immediately after the joyous scene in Leviticus 9, Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu offered "unauthorized fire before the LORD" and were consumed by fire from the presence of the Lord (Lev 10:1-2).

Repeatedly, therefore, we see blessing accompanied by curse, intimacy by exclusion. Clearly Israel enjoyed a great privilege by having God's glory near them in the cloud (see Rom 9:4; Ps 85:9), and they were terrified at the thought of losing it (Exod 33:1-4, 15-16). Yet their persistent sin made the glorious presence of God a liability. A holy God cannot endure a corrupt people (Exod 33:3; Deut 5:24-27). The cloud itself became the executor of God's judgment several times in the wilderness (Lev 10:1-2; Num 14:10; 16:19, 42). The revelation of the glory of the Lord seemed to bring more trouble than benefit.

The pattern repeats itself after Israel entered the Promised Land. Although the cloud itself seems to have disappeared after Israel took possession of Canaan, the people regarded the tabernacle as the place where God's glory continued to dwell (e.g., 1 Sam 4:21-22; Ps 63:2). When Solomon built the temple to replace the tabernacle as the permanent residence for the ark of the covenant and the other holy things, however, God's visible glory made a triumphant return. In a scene reminiscent of the tabernacle's consecration in the wilderness (Exod 40; Lev 9), the ark entered the temple and "the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple" (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chron 5:13-14). Solomon blessed the people and "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD" (2 Chron 7:1-3).

This is another scene of blessing and joy. The Israelites probably judged that they now would enjoy God's glorious presence in the temple on Mount Zion in a stable and secure way that they had not experienced through the portable tabernacle trekking through the wilderness. In certain respects this was the case, yet the housing of God's glory in the temple did not really resolve the problems of exclusion and judgment that had plagued the people before. The holy places in the temple continued to be off limits to most of the people most of the time. The experience of many of the prophets testified that God's glory was in fact far more magnificent than what the people had ever witnessed (Isa 6:1-4; Jer 23:18; Ezek 1; 3:12-15), but even the glory of the Lord with which the people could commune through the temple and

its rituals proved to be too much for them: as in the wilderness, God's holy glory could not abide with a rebellious people.

For many centuries God was longsuffering, bringing many minor judgments on his people but withholding the full brunt of his wrath. Yet the Mosaic law had threatened more than minor judgments. It threatened exile from the Land (e.g., Lev 18:26-28; Deut 28:63-68), and even prophesied that Israel's sin would inevitably trigger this catastrophe (Deut 30:1). First God brought the Assyrians to scatter the northern ten tribes and then he raised up the Babylonians against Judah to dethrone their king, destroy the temple, and drag most of the survivors into exile in Babylon. As these latter events began to unfold, God gave Ezekiel eyes to see what was really going on: the divine glory was departing from Israel. Ezekiel first saw "the glory of the God of Israel" in the temple court (Ezek 8:3), but then "the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple" (Ezek 9:3). At this point "the cloud filled the temple and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD" (Ezek 10:4). Next, Ezekiel reports, "the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground.... They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them" (Ezek 10:18-19). The cloud of glory that came to rest on the tabernacle and later the temple now got up and left. The glory of the Lord abandoned his sinful people. God cast his polluted people away from his holy glory.

### ***God's Glory in the Incarnation of His Son***

The story of God's glory in the Old Testament, focused upon the *Shekinah* cloud, is in many ways magnificent and awe-inspiring. Yet it also leaves us disappointed and puzzled. The Old Testament story provides much reason to declare that all glory belongs to God alone, but also much reason to doubt whether the Reformation's message that *Soli Deo Gloria* is part of the good news of the gospel could possibly be true. The exile brought to culmination a theme building throughout preceding centuries: the advent of God's glory may have exalted Israel for a moment, but in the end it consumed them.

By God's grace, the story of his glory did not end with the exile. While human wisdom could envision no happy ending to this story, divine wisdom

had an answer surpassing all expectation. In the incarnation of his Son God would reveal his glory in yet greater ways and, in so doing, ensure that it meant unambiguous nearness and blessing. In Christ God would glorify himself supremely, in part through the glorification of his people.

The Old Testament itself provided much assurance that the exile would not be the end of God's relationship with his people. Many prophets foretold a day when glory would return to Zion and its new temple in a way much more majestic than in the past (e.g., Isa 4:2-6; Ezek 43:2-5; cf. 44:4; Zech 2:5; Hag 2:7, 9). The nations abroad would stream in to enjoy it (e.g., Isa 60:3; 62:2; 66:19). The experience of the Judean exiles who straggled back home under King Cyrus and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple was obviously not the ultimate fulfillment of these prophecies. The rebuilt temple was less impressive than the first (Hag 2:3) and the nations never flocked to Jerusalem to worship there. What the prophets were really announcing was the glory of God dwelling with his people in a new heavens and new earth (Isa 65:17-18; 66:19, 22), in an eschatological temple (Ezek 40-48). This would not be realized until the coming of the one "desired by all nations" (Hag 2:7). Isaiah, who "saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him" (John 12:41), associated the eschatological glory of Zion with the glory of the Branch, the Root of Jesse (Isa 4:2; 11:1-12). Only through the Messiah would God's glory shine upon his people in unmitigated, everlasting blessing.

The Lord Jesus was indeed "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb 1:3), the "glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), the "Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8). His appearance was not a detour from or alternative to the story of God's glory in the Old Testament cloud, but the organic fulfillment of that story. Of old the cloud came to rest on the temple, and Jesus was the true temple (John 2:19-22), "God with us" (Matt 1:23), the dwelling of God among men (John 1:14). Of old the Spirit manifest himself in the Shekinah cloud, and so also the Spirit overshadowed and empowered the work of Christ (e.g., Isa 4:4; 11:1-2; 42:1; 61:1; Matt 12:28; Mark 1:34; Luke 1:35; 4:17-21; Heb 9:14). As prophesied in the Old Testament, the New Testament shifts attention from God's glory revealed in the cloud to God's glory revealed in Christ, but treats them as aspects of one organically united story.

But the story of God's glory continued in Christ proceeds in a shocking yet profound way—the way of humiliation. God chose to reveal his glory

supremely through a human being, and one who bore humanity's "low condition."<sup>14</sup> Although he had no sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15), Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3). His appearance was "disfigured" and his "form marred" (Isa 52:14), having "no beauty or majesty to attract us to him" (Isa 53:2). He was indeed the "Lord of glory," but became the Lord of Glory *crucified* (1 Cor 2:8). To worldly wisdom it seems appalling that the living God would reveal his glory in his own abasement, yet this truth stands at the center of the Christian gospel and becomes the great explanation for how the message of *Soli Deo Gloria* becomes good news for sinful people. In fact there is no other way for us sinners to enjoy fellowship with God. As Martin Luther put it, "It is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."<sup>15</sup>

The theme of glory revealed in humility emerges at the beginning of the Gospels' account of Jesus' life and continues all the way to Calvary. On the night of Jesus' birth the theme appears perhaps as strikingly as anywhere. An angel of the Lord appeared to a band of shepherds "and the glory of the Lord shone around them" (Luke 2:9), a scene (not coincidentally) reminiscent of the Old Testament cloud. "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests'" (Luke 2:13-14). The message they announced was one of supreme joy, for the Messiah had been born in the city of David (Luke 2:10-11). Yet what a strange detail: this newborn king was "wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). The angelic throng proclaims God's glory above for a child born in a stall below.

This theme of glory-in-humility continued as Jesus commenced his ministry. His first miracle, changing water into wine, "revealed his glory" (John 2:11) but he performed it behind the scenes, in the presence of servants (John 2:1-9). Christ's disciples "saw his glory" at the transfiguration (Luke 9:29-30, 34; 2 Pet 1:16-17), yet Luke sandwiches this account between Jesus' reminders that he and those who follow him must suffer (Luke 9:22-23, 44, 57-62). Christ raised up Lazarus "for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4), but this glorification would only take place by way of death (John 11:25) and the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection resulted not in earthly triumph for Christ but persecution (John 11:45-47).

The glory-in-humility theme especially colors the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry. The Gospel of John reflects on how Jesus had brought glory to the Father through his lifelong obedience (in striking contrast to the Israelites before him) and how the Father in turn had glorified Christ (John 12:28; 13:31-32; 17:1, 4-5). But these texts make clear that this intra-Trinitarian glorification is about to take place *through* Christ's crucifixion (and not simply *after* it). Jesus proclaims, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," and explains that a kernel of wheat must fall to the ground and die if it is to produce many seeds (John 12:23-24). He continues, "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:27-28). On the night he was betrayed Jesus stated, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him" (John 13:31), and he later prayed, "Father, *the hour* has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you ... I have brought you glory on earth by *finishing the work* you gave me to do" (John 17:1, 4). The climactic work of Christ at Calvary was the ultimate in humiliation, shame, and reproach, but this was precisely what sinners needed for salvation. God willed to be glorified through reconciling us to himself, and he accomplished this only by way of the cross.

Of course, we would hardly recognize the glory of the cross if God had not exalted Christ thereafter. With his resurrection and ascension Christ began to shed the cloak of humility and make his glory manifest in ways he never did during his earthly ministry. Peter proclaimed that God "glorified his servant Jesus" by the resurrection (Acts 3:13, 15) and wrote that God "raised him from the dead and glorified him" (1 Pet 1:21). Paul likewise explained that Christ "was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father" (Rom 6:4) and now has a "body of glory" (Phil 3:21).<sup>16</sup> And as in his earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit was instrumental in Christ's glorification through resurrection (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:44; 1 Pet 3:18).

Following the resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven, entering the new creation and sitting at his Father's right hand. The one who "was made lower than the angels for a little while" is "now crowned with glory and honor" and thereby attains the original destiny of the human race (Heb 2:5-9). What the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem could never fulfill is finally achieved in this new creation, the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. Christ the great high priest ministers there in a sanctuary not made with hands, presenting at

last a blood efficacious to expiate sin and ever living to intercede for us (see Heb 5:7-10; 7:26; 10:10-18). One hundred million angels there proclaim his “power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise” (Rev 5:11-12). And from there Christ will one day return to complete the biblical story of God’s glory. Christ will return in a glorious *cloud* (Matt 24:30), in “his Father’s glory with the angels” (Matt 16:27). The long journey of the *Shekinah* cloud—finally—reaches its destination at Christ’s *parousia*.

On that day Christ will be glorified in the conquest and judgment of his enemies (e.g., Ezek 39:21; Rev 14:7; Matt 25:31-32). More amazing still, Christ “comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed” (2 Thess 1:10). In this light it is no wonder that our “blessed hope” is “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). The New Jerusalem that will then come down out of heaven (Rev 21:1-2) will shine “with the glory of God” (Rev 21:11), not needing “the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (Rev 21:23).

While the story of God’s glory closed its Old Testament chapter with disappointment and unrealized expectations, the New Testament brings the story to its finale, and there is no disappointment in sight. Christians await this finale with sure hope and firm assurance, knowing that, through Christ, the advent of God’s glory will never again mean exclusion or curse.

### ***God’s Glory in the Glorification of His People***

Considering how God brings glory to himself through Christ’s incarnation, humiliation, exaltation, and second coming has required me already to speak about our place in the story. The glorification of God means the salvation of his people. It is now time to bring this idea into focus. In so doing, we return to the difficulty considered at the opening of this essay: if all glory belongs to God, does this not demean human beings? Or to put it more positively, how can the affirmation that all glory belongs to God be compatible with Scripture’s teaching that God crowned human beings in glory at their creation and destines them for glory in the new creation?

The answer, in short, is that as God glorifies himself, he chooses to do so in part through the world he has made. In particular, he delights to glorify himself through human beings, magnifying his love and mercy through redeeming sinful people, enabling them to glorify him in their sanctified conduct, and

glorifying them on the last day. The idea of believers' glorification is not opposed to the principle of *Soli Deo Gloria* because our glorification is God's own work and redounds to the supreme glorification of our Lord.

God made us originally in his image and glory (Gen 1:26-27; Ps 8:5-6; 1 Cor 11:7), but "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Sinful humanity has undertaken a grand project of self-glorification (see e.g., Isa 14:13-14; Rev 18:7), and ironically has ended up degrading itself (Rom 1:21, 23). But God, in Christ, has embarked on a great mission to bring us to the destiny to which he originally called us, ruling with him in the age to come (Heb 2:5). Christ humbled himself and has now attained "glory and honor" (Heb 2:9)—a human being is already glorified at God's right hand. And in Christ God is "bringing many sons to glory" in his train (Heb 2:10). The gospel message is about God's glory: Paul speaks of "the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God" (1 Tim 1:11); but this gospel also entails our glorification: "He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:14). Paul preached Christ, and him alone, but his preaching Christ alone compelled him to proclaim how Christ gives us a share in his glory: "What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord ... For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:5-6). The glory of God, the glory of Christ, the glorification of believers—all, it seems, are part of one grand gospel message.

Three aspects of our participation in Christ's glory are worth considering briefly: the role of the Holy Spirit, the call to suffer here and now, and our glorification on the last day.

We considered above the centrality of the Spirit for the revelation of God's glory, in the cloud and especially in Christ. The Spirit was at work in the Old Testament saints, but Scripture indicated that after Christ's coming New Testament believers would enjoy a much richer measure of the Spirit's power (e.g., Ezek 36:26-27; John 7:37-39; 16:13-14), a blessing they began to enjoy at Pentecost. Texts such as John 7:39 and Acts 2:32-33 clarify that it is specifically with Jesus' glorification to his Father's right hand that believers attained this enriched experience of the Spirit and, with it, a blessed participation in Christ's glory. As Peter puts it, "the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Pet 4:14). More expansively, Paul writes: "Now the Lord is

the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17-18). This Spirit unites us to Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 12:12-13), not only individually but also as a corporate body, the church (1 Cor 12:12-27; John 15:1-11). The nearness of God in the pillar of cloud and fire under the old covenant was only a mixed blessing. But under the new covenant, the nearness of Christ through his Spirit brings us into a most intimate and unbreakable fellowship.

Second, our participation in Christ's glory comes through the way of suffering. The present indwelling of God's Spirit of glory is a great blessing, but Christ also calls us to walk the same path he walked. As he attained his glory only through the dark valley of the cross, so he calls us to take up our cross and follow him (Matt 16:24-25) as a prelude to our glorification. Paul explains: "If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom 8:17-18). When we consider that our sufferings are not random or meaningless, but a share in *Christ's* sufferings, and that the blessing of the glory to come far surpasses the pain of our sufferings now, we can appreciate Peter's very difficult exhortation to rejoice in our hardships. He writes: "rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4:13). Peter never treats sufferings as though they are no big deal or not that bad. But he wishes us to draw strength from the fact that the Spirit of glory rests on us even in the midst of them (1 Pet 4:14), that we "will share in the glory to be revealed" (1 Pet 5:1), and that our rejoicing in trials proves the genuineness of our faith and brings praise, glory, and honor to Christ on the day of his return (1 Pet 1:6-7).

Third, our participation in Christ's glory will be fully realized at his return, what theologians helpfully term our "glorification." From eternity God has predestined his people for eschatological glory (Rom 8:28-30; 9:23-24), and when his Son comes again he will accomplish this great divine purpose. Already our lives are "hidden with Christ in God," Paul explains, but "when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:3-4). Peter adds that the "genuineness of our faith," forged

through various trials through which we rejoice, will “result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet 1:6-7). At this time, when the “Chief Shepherd appears” we “will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Pet 5:4). As the Spirit raised up Christ in glory, so also he will raise up his people (Rom 8:11), and thus we “eagerly await a Savior from [heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:20-21).

At the beginning of this article I noted that many Christians seem to distort the *Soli Deo Gloria* theme by focusing upon how *we* are to do all things for God’s glory. I claimed that although God indeed calls us to live for his glory, we ought to be careful about slipping into anthropocentric ways of thinking that make *Soli Deo Gloria* ironically more about ourselves and our moral agendas than about God. This article has thus discussed God’s glory in terms of how God glorifies himself by his own action—in the pillar of cloud and fire, through the humiliation and exaltation of his Son, and through the glorification of his people. But having established this necessary foundation we now fittingly conclude by considering our vocation to glorify God. In doing so we should not view this as an anthropocentric turn at the end of a theocentric study, for even our God-glorifying conduct is ultimately the power of the Spirit of God at work in us. I mention three primary ways by which Scripture calls us to glorify God: by faith, by worship, and by humble service.

First, we glorify God by our faith. Since our salvation in Christ comes by faith alone, and since faith is the root from which all of our good works flow (Rom 14:23; Heb 11:6; James 2:14-26), it is no surprise to find faith and glorifying God indelibly connected. In a wonderful discussion in 2 Corinthians 1, Paul rebuts suspicion that his message vacillates, for it is never “yes” and “no,” but is always “yes,” “for no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Cor 1:18-20). He concludes: “And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God” (1:20). Paul’s preaching was always “Yes” because it always pointed to Christ, and thus our “Amen” in response can be nothing other than the act of faith. When we hear of God’s promises and their fulfillment in Christ, our basic and fundamental response is to say “Amen”—so let it be. And we utter this Amen “to the glory of God.” We glorify God by faith in his promises. A similar dynamic is at work in Romans 4, in which Paul discusses faith at length and

presents Abraham as the father of all believers (4:16). According to Paul, Abraham had every earthly reason to doubt God's promise that he and his wife would have a son in their very old age, but "without weakening in his faith...he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God" (4:19-20). Instead, he "was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God" (4:20). Paul's reasoning suggests that Abraham gave glory to God precisely through this act of faith.<sup>17</sup>

A second way by which Christians glorify God is *worship*. If faith in God's Christ-centered promises brings glory to God, then we would expect Scripture to describe our good works—the fruit of faith—in the same way. Among the fruits of faith, none is more fundamental than worship, by which I refer to a distinct activity in which we set aside other tasks and set our minds and hearts upon the Lord, in order to receive his word and to respond back to him in prayer and song. Again, therefore, it is no surprise to find abundant biblical exhortation for God's saints to glorify him in worship. I cannot begin to do justice here to all that Scripture says on this matter. What Psalm 86:12 declares—"I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever"—Scripture repeats time and again. In glorifying God in worship we echo the worship of the angels in heaven (e.g., Rev 5:9-12; 7:12; 15:3-4; 19:1-8), and at times God's saints even call the angels to worship (e.g., Ps 29:1-2; 103:20-21). This anticipates the coming day when believers will join the angelic host in person in a great heavenly throng that proclaims: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Rev 5:12-13). The fact that worship is an immensely unproductive activity from an earthly perspective provides helpful reminder that *Soli Deo Gloria* is really not about our own achievements: God most delights to glorify himself through us when we rest from our seemingly productive labors and call upon his name in truth.

Finally, God nevertheless glorifies himself *in all that we do*. This is not a major theme in Scripture, contrary to what we might expect, but it is still important to recognize this great truth and be thankful that we enjoy such a privilege. The most famous text to this end is 1 Corinthians 10:31: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Paul's point is not that eating and drinking are mundane activities that illustrate how glorifying God should permeate even the little things in life. In context Paul has been discussing disputes about food and drink in which

people were trampling on the consciences of those who disagreed with them. In short, Paul encourages us to glorify God in all things by seeking the good of others, for the ultimate goal of seeing people saved and the church strengthened. Perhaps the most sweeping biblical text calling us to glorify God in all things is 1 Peter 4:10-11: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, [he] should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, [he] should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised [literally, glorified] through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.” Peter thus encourages us to use all of our gifts to serve. God glorifies himself through our whole-hearted service to one another.

## CONCLUSION

This discussion of *Soli Deo Gloria* has, I hope, provided an answer to the difficulty and distortion I mentioned at the beginning of this article. The glorification of God alone hardly entails the demeaning of human beings, for God delights to glorify himself in important part by glorifying his people and allowing them to magnify his name. And *Soli Deo Gloria* really does revolve around God and his own action, even while granting a place for us to glorify him through our faith, worship, and humble service. As Reformation believers turn to Scripture alone to hear the message of salvation through Christ and his grace alone, received by faith alone, we find that blessed gospel woven into the great story of God’s glory. Glory belongs to God alone—and that is truly good news for sinners saved by grace.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented at The Southern Seminary Theology Conference on September 24-25, 2015 at the The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., John D. Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 9; and R. C. Sproul Jr., “*Soli Deo Gloria*,” in *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology: Essays in Honor of R. C. Sproul* (ed. R. C. Sproul Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 191.

<sup>3</sup> I have no desire to polemicize against anyone in particular, but there may be something of this unintentional anthropocentric turn in John Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God? Basics of the Reformed Faith Series* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 6-7, 9, 19-35, 38-40; and in Terry L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004), chaps 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*,

ca. 1520 to ca. 1725 (4 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); and *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (eds. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark; Carlisle, PA: Paternoster, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London, 1662), 111-13.

<sup>6</sup> Leigh, *Treatise*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Leigh, *Treatise*, 116.

<sup>8</sup> Leigh, *Treatise*, 114. Cf. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3.541.

<sup>9</sup> Leigh, *Treatise*, 118, 120.

<sup>10</sup> Leigh, *Treatise*, 120.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.5.1; 1.5.3; 1.14.20; 1.15.3; 3.2.1; 3.13.1-2; Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings* (ed. Paul Ramsey; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 252.

<sup>12</sup> For a good short summary of this cloud's story through biblical history, see Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 17.

<sup>13</sup> On the cloud's appearance, see e.g. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 70-71; and Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 2 (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok, 1996), 254.

<sup>14</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Answer 27.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer: I* (ed. Harold J. Grimm, gen. ed., Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 32.

<sup>16</sup> My translation of Phil 3:21.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. the arguments in John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 151; and in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 29.

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# SBJT Forum

## SBJT: Why is *solus Christus* (Christ alone) the sweetest truth known to man?

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J. Stephen Yuille is Preaching Pastor, Grace Community Church, Glen Rose, TX. He also serves as the Associate Professor of Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

**J. Stephen Yuille:** The Reformation was in many ways a struggle between two Latin words: *et* (and) and *sola* (alone). The Roman Catholic Church affirmed the authority of Scripture *et* tradition, salvation by grace *et* effort, and justification by faith *et* works; moreover, it pointed people to Christ *et* saints, masses, pilgrimages, penances, and indulgences, as the way to obtain favor with God. In marked contrast, the Reformers affirmed *solus Christus*—Christ is the only Savior. John Calvin spoke well for the Reformed position when he penned: “We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. [...] If we seek strength, it lies in His dominion; if purity, in His conception; if gentleness, it appears in His birth [...]. If we seek redemption, it lies in His passion; if acquittal, in His condemnation; if remission of the curse, in His cross; if satisfaction, in His sacrifice; if purification, in His blood; if reconciliation, in His descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in His tomb; if newness of life, in His resurrection [...]. Let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other.”

The Reformers’ emphasis on *solus Christus* is a much needed tonic in today’s church. Regrettably, an increasing number of evangelicals question the belief that salvation is found in Christ alone. According to one recent survey, two-thirds of evangelicals are comfortable with the following statement: “Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others all pray to the same God, even though they use different names for that God.” Yet this notion of a “Christ-less” approach to God stands in clear opposition to the testimony of Scripture. As the apostle Paul affirms, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Because of our sin, we are cut off from God.

Yet Christ—fully God and fully man—bridged the expanse. He who made all things was carried in the womb of a woman, and he who upholds all things was held in the arms of a woman. He clothed himself with our humanity—body and soul. He came so close as to experience life in a fallen world, bear our sin and shame, and taste death for us. He did all of this as Mediator. The 1689 London Baptist Confession elaborates as follows: “Christ, and Christ alone, is fitted to be mediator between God and man. He is the prophet, priest, and king of the church of God” (8.9). Here, the Confession ascribes three offices to Christ’s mediatorship.

First, Christ is the Prophet of the church (Deut 18:18; Luke 4:18–19). Why do we need a prophet? We need a prophet to tell us about God. There’s an immeasurable distance between the infinite Creator and finite creature, but Christ reveals God to us (John 1:18). We also need a prophet to dispel the darkness that pervades our minds. We’re insensible to spiritual truth, but Christ opens our eyes so that we can grasp God’s revelation in his Word (Luke 24:44–45).

Second, Christ is the Priest of the church (Ps 110:4; Heb 7:21–25). Why do we need a priest? We need a priest to mediate between God and us by removing our sin and shame. We are sinners and, therefore, under the sentence of death, but Christ satisfies God’s offended justice (Gal 3:13). We also need a priest to mediate between God and us by giving us what we lack—a righteous standing before God. Thankfully, in Christ we become “the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

Third, Christ is the King of the church (Ps 2:6–7; Acts 2:30–33). Why do we need a king? We need a king to break the power of our sin. Christ is stronger than the “strong man” who binds us. He “attacks him” and “overpowers him” (Luke 11:21–22). In addition, he subdues our will, bringing it into line with God’s will (Rom 6:22). We also need a king to protect us. We’re vulnerable to the flesh, world, and devil, but Christ is invested with all power and authority (Matt 28:18), and he breaks our enemies with a rod of iron.

As is evident from the foregoing discussion, Christ’s three-fold office is essential to our salvation. “Salvation,” writes John Flavel, “is revealed by Christ as a Prophet, procured by Him as a Priest, applied by Him as a King. In vain it is revealed, if not purchased; in vain revealed and purchased, if not applied.” In His three-fold office, therefore, Christ alone is “fitted to be mediator between God and man.” God punished Christ, so that he might

forgive us. God condemned Christ, so that he might justify us. In giving himself, Christ revealed the Father's love for us (Rom 5:8). In love, he climbed a shameful cross to bear our guilt and shame, pouring out his soul to death. When we come to Christ in childlike dependence, and look to him alone to save us, God receives us in Christ—his Beloved. By virtue of our union with him, we participate in all of the benefits of his three-fold office. We have communion with Christ in his names and titles; we have communion with him in his righteousness; we have communion with him in his holiness; we have communion with him in his death; we have communion with him in his life and resurrection from the dead; and we have communion with him in his glory.

This makes *solas Christus* the sweetest truth known to man. It's the difference between feast and famine; fullness and emptiness; a refreshing oasis and a crippling desert; an eternity of joy and an eternity of sorrow. And this is the reason we heartily confess with the apostle Peter concerning Christ: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

### **SBJT: What doctrine, in the view of the great Princetonian theologian, B. B. Warfield, lay at the heart of the Reformation?**

**Fred G. Zaspel** is the pastor of Reformed Baptist Church, Franconia, PA. He is also serves as the executive editor of *Books at a Glance*, and as Adjunct Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *The Theology of B.B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary*, and *Warfield on the Christian Life: Living in Light of the Gospel*. (Crossway, 2010).

the principle of equalization had at last come to its rights. He expresses enormous appreciation both for the Reformation's formal (*sola Scriptura*)

**Fred G. Zaspel:** B. B. Warfield relished his Reformation heritage, and his esteem for the magisterial Reformers is evident in his thorough familiarity with their lives and writings and in his expressed delight in their theological advances. Because of the number and depth of his numerous expositions of Calvin's teaching Warfield was sometimes referred to as "America's interpreter of Calvin." In terms of particular doctrines, Warfield notes the significance of Calvin as "the theologian of the Holy Spirit," and he argues with reference to the Trinity that in Calvin's insistence that the Son is *autotheos*,

and its material principle (*sola fide*). He revels at length in Luther's *simul iustus et peccator* and expresses hearty agreement with Luther and Calvin regarding the critical importance of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

But for Warfield the root of the Protestant Reformation lay in something still deeper. "The central doctrine of the Reformation," he said, was the doctrine of *predestination*.

This may seem strange to some, and it is a claim not often made. But Warfield saw the Reformation, above all else, as a recovery of the grace of God in the salvation of sinners, and it is this doctrine, ultimately, that demonstrates that salvation is, in fact, wholly of grace, and it is the doctrine that secures it as such. Thus, Warfield says, in the Reformers' recovery and exposition of the doctrine of predestination we find "the hinge" on which "their whole religious consciousness and teaching turned."

Warfield cites Martin Luther himself as witness that this was indeed the case: in his famous dispute with Erasmus over the freedom of the will and the sovereignty of grace the Reformer congratulated Erasmus for addressing "the top of the question" (*summam caussae*) involved in the Protestant revolt against Rome. "You and you alone," Luther says to Erasmus, "have seen the hinge of things and have aimed at the throat."

It was in this sense that Warfield described the Reformation as a "revival of Augustinianism." Despite Calvin's famous remark, Warfield did not see Augustine as "wholly ours;" in fact, he described the Reformation effort as Augustine *versus* Augustine: "the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church." "It is Augustine who gave us the Reformation," Warfield comments. It was his landmark teaching regarding sin and monergistic grace—so long suppressed throughout the Middle Ages, though glimpses of it arose in Gottschalk and Jansen—that finally "burst all bonds and issued in the Protestant Reformation." This was "the soul of the whole Reformation movement," Warfield says. "The whole substance of Luther's fundamental theology was summed up in the antithesis of sin and grace: sin conceived as absolutely disabling to good; grace as absolutely recreative in effect."

Warfield carefully notes that Luther was not alone in this but was at one with all the great Reformers in it. "The secret of Calvin's greatness," for example, also lay in his profound sense of God and of God's loving, sovereign distribution of grace which not only guards the purity of our theism but is

the “surety of our hope of salvation.” “In one word,” Warfield surmises, this doctrine [predestination] was Protestantism itself. All else that Protestantism stood for, in comparison with this, must be relegated to the second rank.”

When Warfield identifies predestination as “the central doctrine” of the Reformation, it is clear that although he does indeed have predestination itself, narrowly considered, in view as the root issue, he understands it as central to and representative of its necessary entailments regarding the (monergistic) grace of God—a grace that, having determined to save, restores and changes the disposition of the heart, thus bringing us trustingly to take refuge in the only One in whom justifying righteousness may be found.

For this reason Warfield further observes that the Protestant Reformation gave rise to a distinct “evangelical” piety, a piety—again, tracing back to Augustine and then to the apostles—whose leading trait is that of a trusting and grateful dependence upon the grace of God. It is this notion of grace that the Reformers above all else sought to recover—a grace that finds expression in the doctrine of justification by faith alone and a grace that is established, finally, in the doctrine of predestination.

**SBJT: Today many evangelicals misunderstand *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). For example, some think that *sola scriptura* means “me and my Bible” alone and thus approach the Bible with a very individualistic mindset. This typically leads to a suspicion of tradition and the history of the church. How does a proper understanding of *sola scriptura* correct such an imbalance?**

**Matthew Barrett:** Reformers like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin did not pose a strict either/or dilemma: Scripture or tradition. The Reformers may have rejected Rome’s understanding of tradition and upheld the supremacy and final authority of Scripture over tradition. But we would be mistaken to think the Reformers did not value tradition or see it as a subordinate authority in some sense. Indeed, the Reformers believed tradition was on their side!

Naturally, the Reformers became frustrated when certain radicals sought to discard tradition altogether. These radicals did not defend and practice *sola scriptura*, but instead turned to *nuda scriptura* (“bare Scripture”). Perhaps this disregard for tradition is best captured in the bombast of Sebastian Franck: “Foolish Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory—of whom not

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one even knew the Lord, so help me God, nor was sent by God to teach. Rather, they were all apostles of Antichrist.” No wonder Alister McGrath concludes in his book *Reformation Theology*, “In the hands of such radical thinkers, the *sola scriptura* principle became radicalized.”

I wish I could say that all evangelicals today have a crisp, accurate grasp of *sola scriptura*. I am hopeful that many understand how a Protestant view of Scripture and tradition differs from Rome’s position. However, I am less confident that evangelicals understand the difference between *sola* and *nuda scriptura*, for in some cases the latter is assumed to be the identity of the former.

Consequently, some evangelicals, intentionally or unintentionally, have followed in the footsteps of Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) who said, “I have endeavored to read the Scriptures as though no one had read them before me, and I am as much on my guard against reading them today, through the medium of my own views yesterday, or a week ago, as I am against being influenced by any foreign name, authority, or system whatever.” Ironically, such a view cannot preserve *sola scriptura*. Sure, tradition is not being elevated to

the level of Scripture. But the individual is! The final standard is not the Bible but the individual’s opinions. To be sure, such a view lends itself more in the direction of individual autonomy than scriptural accountability.

There are several ways, however, that we can correct this mistake. First, we must guard ourselves from an individualistic mindset that prides itself on what “I think” rather than listening to the past. In order to do so, we must acknowledge that “Scripture alone” doesn’t mean “me alone.”

Second, tradition is not a second infallible source of divine revelation alongside Scripture; nevertheless, where it is consistent with Scripture it can and does act as a *ministerial* authority. The historic creeds and confessions are a case

in point. While the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Creed are not to be considered infallible sources divine revelation, nevertheless, their consistency with Scripture means that the church spoke authoritatively against heresy.

Therefore, it should trouble us, to say the least, should we find ourselves disagreeing with orthodox creeds that have stood the test of time. Innovation is often the first indication of heresy. Hence, as Timothy George explains in his insightful book *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, the Reformers sought to tie their “Reformation exegesis to patristic tradition” in order to provide a “counterweight to the charge that the reformers were purveyors of novelty in religion,” though at the end of the day the fathers’ “writings should always be judged by the touchstone of Scripture, a standard the fathers themselves heartily approved.”

Abandoning *nuda scriptura* does not require us to go to the other extreme, namely, elevating tradition to the level of Scripture. But it does require the humility to realize that we are always standing on the shoulders of those who came before us. For the Reformers, the early church fathers were valuable (though not infallible) guides in biblical interpretation. In that light, we would be wise to listen to Luther: “Now if anyone of the saintly fathers can show that his interpretation is based on Scripture, and if Scripture proves that this is the way it should be interpreted, then the interpretation is right. If this is not the case, I must not believe him” (*Luther’s Works* [LW] 30:166; *Weimar Edition* [WA] 14:31).

**SBJT: Islam is in the news today. How did Martin Luther and John Calvin view Islam in their day? Did Luther and Calvin know about Islamic texts, specifically the Qur'an?**

**Tony Costa:** In order to understand the views of Luther (1483-1546) and Calvin (1509-1564) on Islam, it is imperative to understand the historical context of their day. One of the major cataclysmic events that sent shock waves across medieval Europe was the sacking and fall of Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) by the Muslim Turks of the Ottoman Empire in 1453. Constantinople was the center and bastion of Eastern Christianity, and the capital of the Byzantine Empire. With the fall of Constantinople into the hands of the Turks, the threat of Islam to Christian Europe became a serious concern that could not be ignored. This threat became even more evident in 1529 with

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the Ottoman siege of the city of Vienna, Austria. Muslims had taken control of the Balkans and southern Hungary, and the fear in Luther's day was that the Muslims would inevitably invade Germany. Luther was 46 years of age at this time, and Calvin was 20 years old. Luther wrote more on this subject than Calvin. Prior to 1529, Luther spoke well of the Turks and their virtues including their iconoclastic position on images and relics. However, this gentle tone changed dramatically after the siege of Vienna.

Both Luther and Calvin in their works refer to Muslims as "Turks." Both Luther and Calvin believed that Islam was a false religion, based on blasphemies specifically against Christ. Luther and Calvin saw Islam operating as a false religion in tandem with the Roman Catholic Church.

Luther went so far as to say that the Muslim prophet Muhammad was the "son of the devil," but that he was only second in wickedness to the Pope. Luther wrote a tract *On War Against the Turks*, which was published in 1529, outlining the responsibility of the secular authorities to protect the citizens of Germany against the potential Islamic threat. Luther argued that the Church was not to be involved in any warfare whatsoever with the Turks (Muslims). This was the duty of the civil authorities alone. Calvin's approach to Islam was primarily theological and polemical. In his works, he sought to expose Islam as part of the kingdom of the devil, following in a train of heresies from the beginning of the Church. Like Luther, Calvin also saw the Papacy and Islam as working together in opposing the Gospel, even referring to Muhammad as the companion of the Pope.

Calvin's knowledge of Islamic beliefs was limited in comparison to Luther. Calvin knew that Muslims denied the deity of Christ and the Trinity, and charged them with placing an idol in the place of Christ, namely Muhammad. Both Luther and Calvin held Muhammad responsible for destroying the souls of men through his false teachings. Calvin went so far as to suggest that Muslims who place Muhammad in the place of Christ commit a grievous sin, and would be subject to the death penalty for heresy, a common practice

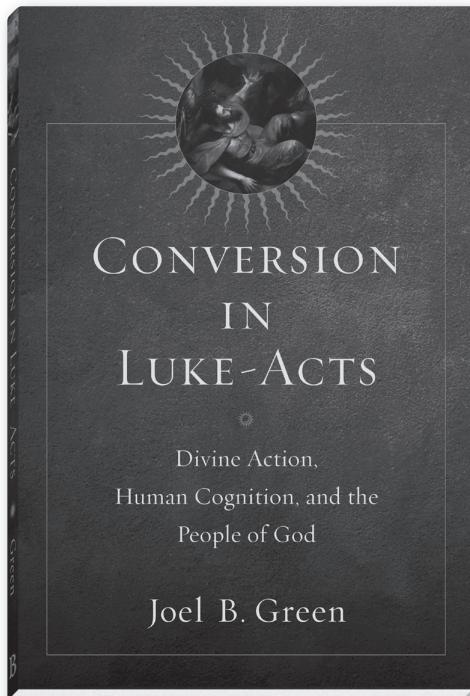
in medieval Europe. An extremely important point to be made in the case of Luther is that he saw the rise of Islam and its militaristic expansion into Christian lands as a judgment from God against Christian Europe. This was due to a lack of repentance. Luther refers to Islam as “a rod of anger and a punishment of God upon the unbelieving world.” He describes the Muslim as “the rod of the wrath of the Lord our God and the servant of the raging devil.” Here Luther views Islam as that which God uses as part of his judgment against apostate and unrepentant Christian nations.

In terms of the familiarity of Luther and Calvin with Islamic texts such as the Qur'an, Luther appeared much more aware of Islamic texts. Luther did have access to some readings of the Qur'an, but not all of them by his own admission. He compared the Qur'an to a German book of sermons and doctrines similar to the Pope's “decretales.” In this respect Luther does show an interesting insight into the textual genre of the Qur'an as it is composed mainly of didactic lessons, discourses, and imperatives, with very little or no interest in narrative materials. Luther had hoped to translate the sections of the Qur'an he possessed into the German language to demonstrate that it is a “foul” and “shameful” book. Luther is aware of the Christology of the Qur'an in that it presents a Jesus who is merely a human prophet and not the divine Son of God. He is also aware of the Qur'an's assertion that Muhammad is the final prophet, and that the Qur'an mandates warfare (*jihad*) against unbelievers who refuse to submit to Islam. Luther saw the Qur'an's denial of Christ's deity as a serious doctrinal breach that virtually eradicates the very truths of Christianity. Luther was also well aware that the Qur'an taught a doctrine of works in respect to salvation. Luther also displays an interesting insight into the Qur'an as a pastiche of beliefs of Jews, Christians, and pagans.

Calvin displayed very little knowledge of the text of the Qur'an. He was aware of the theological claims of Islam found within the Qur'an, and he attempted to refute these claims in his works with biblical proofs. Calvin's approach again was a polemical and theological one.

Luther actually encouraged Christians to study and become acquainted with the Qur'an, in order to better equip themselves to engage Muslims. In this respect, Luther set the stage to some degree in Christian apologetics towards Islam. For modern Christians, it is imperative that if they seek to dialogue and/or reach Muslims for Christ, they need to become familiar with the text of the Qur'an.

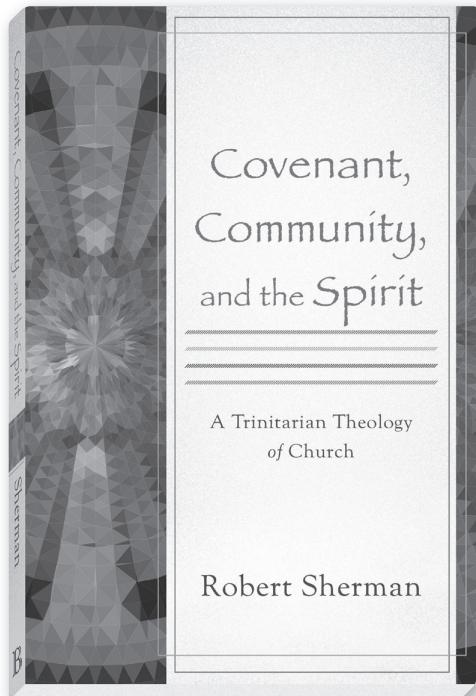
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# Book Reviews

**Editor's Note:** In the previous issue of *SBJT* 19.3 (2015), two corrections need to be made regarding book reviewers. Simon Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, was reviewed by Miguel Echevarria, Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile, and R. Larry Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching*, was reviewed by Jason Mackey, Adjunct Professor of New Testament and Preaching, Boyce College.

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*The God of This Age: Satan in the Churches and Letters of the Apostle Paul.* By Derek R. Brown. WUNT 2.409. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. 243 pp., \$105.00 Paperback.

It might be reasonable to assume, while reading about evil powers and figures in the Pauline letters, that Paul does not have a particular understanding of Satan. The references are all too few, and Paul does not offer a theological explanation when referring to Satan; suggesting that Satan is not important for Pauline theology. But the author of this volume proposes a different conclusion. He cogently argues that “Paul fundamentally characterizes Satan in his letters as the apocalyptic adversary who opposes his apostolic labor” (198).

I confess that until reading this work, I had not fully considered the possibility that, in contrast to when Paul mentions evil powers and figures generically and without concrete referents, whenever Paul mentions Satan he does so with respect to Satan’s specific actions against either himself or his churches. Take 2 Corinthians 4, where Satan appears as an adversary of Paul and his apostolic ministry, not just as a generic opponent of all God’s people. The intriguing question that forms the main thesis of this study—how and why does the Apostle Paul refer to the figure of Satan in his letters—addresses this very notion.

In order to answer this question, the author makes clear that he is only examining ten verses (i.e., Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 4:4; 6:15; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess 2:18; 3:5) from the so-called “undisputed” Pauline letters (i.e. Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians,

and Philemon). Consequently, he is not attempting to present a Pauline theology of Satan. Of the 10 passages in these letters, the author tells us that all but three explicitly use the Greek term σατανᾶς to refer to Satan. Of the rest, Satan is called “Beliar,” “the god of this age,” and “the tempter.”

With the scope of study in mind (Chapter 1), the author spends the next three chapters surveying what he considers to be the most relevant background information for understanding Paul’s references to Satan, such as the literary descriptions of Satan in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Jewish writings. The author makes the case, among other things, that Satan had become a prominent figure within Jewish writings and theology coterminous with Paul’s religious milieu, and that Satan almost always functions as an opponent of God’s chosen people (not an enemy of all humanity). He highlights the fact that Satan is depicted as an active opponent, who plotted against key Jewish figures, like Moses, Job, and David, at crucial points within Israel’s history, such as the exodus. The author further explains Satan’s role within Paul’s theology by providing a detailed review of Paul’s apocalyptic thought. He maintains, “Paul, according to his apocalyptic theology, perceives his apostolic labor as having apocalyptic significance since it is opposed by the great apocalyptic adversary Satan *and* because the gospel which he announced was, at its core, a proclamation of the defeat of all apocalyptic powers” (71).

Before concluding (Chapter 7), the author spends two chapters utilizing his findings from chapters 2-4 to better evaluate Paul’s references to Satan in the verses mentioned above. The author’s points about Paul’s depiction of Satan’s responsibility for thwarting some of Paul’s efforts, like returning to his church in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:18), Satan’s ultimate eschatological defeat (Rom 16:20), and Satan’s schemes against Paul’s apostolic labor and the Corinthian congregation as a whole, are all true and important. Moreover, the author does a good job suggesting a few rhetorical reasons why Paul references Satan in his letters: to name Satan’s activity where it had gone undetected, to inform his readers of Satan’s past opposition to his ministry, and to warn his churches of Satan’s constant schemes to take advantage of them for his own evil purposes. Taken together, the author explains, “Paul’s depiction of Satan is far more subtle and deeply rooted in his apostleship than NT scholarship typically suggests” (197).

Overall, this well-researched study—which includes an excellent orientation to the topic—provides more than just a helpful corrective to the

common perception that Paul speaks of Satan only in a generic sense, without concrete referents. It is also a timely reminder of the Apostle Paul's pivotal role in spreading the gospel at a crucial point in salvation-history and his call to establish and nurture communities of faith based on the gospel. As the author concludes, “[A]lthough Paul’s notion of Satan is derived from his christologically-modified apocalyptic theology, his portrayal of Satan in his letters to his churches is thoroughly contingent upon his self-understanding as an apostle and church-planter as well as his actual experiences of Satan’s opposition to his ministry. This may help account for why Paul mentions Satan within the combative Corinthian correspondence with relative frequency but rarely does so in a more cordial letter such as Philippians. In other words, Paul apparently speaks or warns of Satan’s activity in his letters when he has already discerned Satan’s work among his respective churches” (200).

“The God of this Age” is a grand addition to New Testament studies. Every theological library should own a copy.

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*Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the Worlds of the Prophets.* By Aaron Chalmers. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015, xiv + 173 pp., \$20.00 paper.

When is the last time you heard a good sermon series on Ezekiel or Zephaniah? Chances are you can count on one hand the *total* messages you have heard from these books. Admittedly, the Prophetic books of the Old Testament can be daunting for preachers and teachers. The world of Israel’s prophets seems wholly different from our own. While much time and geography may separate us from this world, Aaron Chalmers seeks to bridge the gap in his book *Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the Worlds of the Prophets*.

Unlike other introductory works on the prophets that largely summarize the content of individual prophetic texts, Chalmers seeks to provide a “basic conceptual ‘framework’ for understanding these books” (1). Rather

than simply handing the fish to the expositor, Chalmers runs a clinic on a hermeneutical methodology of fishing in the deep water of the Prophets. The opening chapter asks an often neglected question: what is a prophet?

Drawing from both the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible, the author provides an accessible entry point for readers. In contrast to what he views as deficient understandings of prophetic characteristics and functions, Chalmers shows the complex nature of the prophetic office. Among other roles, they served as members of the divine council, intercessors, watchmen, and mediators of the divine word. In short, a prophet was an intermediary (32). This stands opposite the notion that the prophets functioned exclusively to predict the future, whether the messiah or the end of the world. They spoke a divine word to their contemporaries, but one with continuing significance for a later Christian audience.

Chalmers additionally discusses the move from prophet to prophetic text. Through a process of inscripturation, organization and re-contextualization, and final shaping, the words of the prophet were solidified for future generations. In successive stages of this process, later individuals, says Chalmers, supplemented and redacted the material “to meet the needs and questions of later times and different circumstances” (28). Chalmers acknowledges other views, however. He surveys both the traditional evangelical understanding, as well as the standard critical view, to the final shaping of prophetic books. From his discussion, Chalmers would seem to fall somewhere in between. For example, he maintains the multiple authorship of Isaiah, but dissents from a multiple authorship of Zechariah.

Chapters two through four are devoted to understanding the prophets within three distinct contexts: 1) The Historical World; 2) The Theological World; and 3) The Rhetorical World. Each of these sections concludes with potential pitfalls and a brief bibliography for further reading. The first of these sections (Chapter two) looks at the ‘world behind the text.’ Since these books originated in a setting foreign to contemporary readers, interpreters must seek to understand the situation into which the prophets delivered their messages. In essence, Chalmers seeks the original intention of those responsible for the prophetic book. To do this, he details the historical backdrop of the classical prophets from the pre-exilic period to the end of prophecy in the post-exilic period. He concludes the chapter with some guidelines for discovering the historical world of a prophetic book, directing readers to helpful secondary literature.

Chapter three turns to the theological world of the prophets. Chalmers attempts to lay out a theological framework for grappling with these books. Essentially, he highlights the Prophets' worldview, with two traditions as illustrations: 1) Sinai and the covenant with Israel and 2) Zion and the covenant with David. The key to unlock this worldview, says Chalmers, is tradition criticism. This method "essentially enquires into what an author presumes, intends and insinuates through the use of traditional language" (85).

The fourth chapter takes a look at the rhetorical world of the prophets. More than just *what* the prophets said, *how* they said it is of equal significance for interpretation. Chalmers does more than simply outline the mechanics of prophetic communication. He invites the reader to experience the emotive appeal of the prophets. First, he describes the value of discerning the rhetorical structure of a unit, providing practical advice on how readers can themselves identify the structure of a passage. Second, he discusses individual rhetorical features. Here he is interested in what makes the prophet's message uniquely compelling and persuasive.

Chapter five transitions to another relevant area for the study of the prophets, namely, apocalyptic literature. Though Chalmers notes an organic connection between prophecy and apocalyptic, he states that "there seems to be a shift in both the form and content" of the latter (120). As he understands it, apocalyptic literature generally functions to encourage its original audience in the midst of trials (cf. 128). Like the previous chapters, Chalmers offers some guidelines and potential dangers for the interpretation of apocalypticism. The guiding principle, says Chalmers, is to focus on the big picture. When an interpreter becomes obsessive with the details of an apocalyptic text they may very well miss the actual message itself. In short, when reading or preaching apocalyptic, leave your newspaper at home! We cannot forget that though this literature as Scripture continues to speak, it originated in a context far different from our own. As Chalmers concludes, "it is important to recognize that reading apocalyptic is often a sustained lesson in humility" (144).

Building upon the previous sections, the final chapter turns the corner to preaching and teaching from the prophets. Unlike the previous chapters, which focused on hearing the original message of the prophets, this chapter brings the ancient world of Israel's Prophets to the pews. Chalmers puts forward further practical advice on issues such as selecting a text to preach, and the helpful

place of analogies in a sermon. A misstep may be avoided, says Chalmers, if the preacher focuses on the ‘theology of the text,’ over against contingent issues such the ‘moral component’ of the passage. The author acknowledges that theology and morality cannot strictly be separated, but encourages the preacher to uphold what the prophet supposedly held to be primary. To get at the theology of the text, Chalmers advocates for a ‘paradigmatic approach’ to prophetic books. This approach “provides us with recurrent pictures of divine behavior and purpose in the world through which we may catch a glimpse of how God characteristically relates to his people” (151).

Before concluding with the potential dangers in preaching the Prophets, Chalmers includes a section on the New Testament’s role in a sermon on a prophetic passage. After all, “[we] live on the other side of the cross, and this reality must shape the way we read and preach from these texts” (154). Apart from some resources on biblical theology, readers may be disappointed, however, with the lack of depth in the New Testament methodology section.

This summary hopefully captures the great usefulness of this monograph. With each chapter, Chalmers brings the ancient world of the Prophets into the hands of the modern interpreter. The manageable length of the work, frequent summaries, and bibliographies at the conclusion of each chapter make this book accessible to those with even a basic understanding of the Old Testament. But for more serious students of Scripture, namely preachers and teachers, this work affords a reproducible methodology for interpreting a passage in the prophetic corpus.

A point worthy of particular mention is the unique balance Chalmers strikes between an introductory level work and more advanced content. The book is readable, demonstrating Chalmers’ mastery of the field. As such, he includes frequent text-boxes allow readers to go deeper into select topics, often pointing to sources for more detailed study. Yet even in these more advanced sections, Chalmers maintains his consistent accessible style. Numerous pictures and illustrations aid visualizations of many features of the ancient world.

With all of my commendations, there are a couple of items that readers may find unsatisfactory. First, although Chalmers presents both sides of the evangelical/critical approaches to issues Prophetic Literature, readers will detect that he tends to adopt a more critical approach. One example, as stated above, surfaces with his view of the authorship of Isaiah. The significance of this issue is relevant as Chalmers calls for interpretation in the

historical context of the original author. If the book of Isaiah is the product of three separate chronological periods, would it not affect how one would approach preaching the latter sections of the book? Some would also view this as running counter to New Testament attributions of passages from Deutero-Isaiah to the prophet himself (e.g. John 12:38).

A second issue pertinent to an evangelical readership that may be noted is Chalmers approach to preaching. For those committed to an expository ministry in particular, the final chapter of the book may leave much to be desired. For instance, Chalmers cautions against preaching the entirety of a prophetic book, since there is frequent repetition and recurring themes. But the goal of expository preaching is not simply to teach a congregation hermeneutics, but to teach the whole counsel of God in order to present everyone blameless in Christ. This is not “spoon-feeding” a congregation, as Chalmers claims, but giving milk and meat to the hungry. While a sermon is no less than a model of hermeneutics, it is much more than that.

Finally, as noted above, Chalmers pays surprisingly little attention to the role of the New Testament in the proclamation of the Prophets. The brief section on the NT is one of several steps he lists to bridge the gap to the congregation. But with the progression of redemptive history, this step is not tertiary, but rather stands at the center of the endeavor of preaching. Though Chalmers points to other works in the ‘further reading’ section, readers may wish to see more detail on how to appropriate the New Testament data in interpretation of the Prophets.

As should be evident from this review, Chalmers’ contribution is significant. For anyone hesitant to preach the tough prophetic texts, Chalmers provides a good way forward. Preacher and teachers will be better equipped by incorporating this book into their preparation. Though readers may differ in details, they will not regret carefully thinking through this book. It will certainly be listed in the required texts in the syllabi of my own future courses on the Prophets.

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Matthew Levering. *The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. Pp. xviii + 204. \$26.00 Paperback.

Possidius, a life-long friend of Augustine of Hippo, writes the first biography of Augustine. In it he writes,

... so many things were dictated and published by him and so many things were discussed in the church, written down and amended, whether against various heretics or expounded from the canonical books for the edification of the holy sons of the church, that scarcely any student would be able to read and know them all (*Life of St. Augustine* 18.9).

Countless works of Augustine may overwhelm any reader of his works, but then comes Matthew Levering's volume, *The Theology of Augustine*. Here, essential works of Augustine are highlighted and given brief summaries to help and assist modern readers of this ancient figure. "My task in this book," notes Levering, "is to present these seven pivotal works of Augustine" (xii).

In a total of seven chapters, Levering devotes sustained attention to particular works of Augustine. The evaluation does not follow, necessarily, the historical order of composition. Rather, it focuses upon seven key works that help form an adequate portrait of Augustine and his theology. Each chapter attends to classical texts or works that reflect upon major disputations—specifically, with the Manichees, Donatists, and Pelagians. Levering begins with *On Christian Doctrine*, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, and *On the Predestination of the Saints*. In Levering's mind, these four works lay a foundation to approach the subsequent three texts (xviii): *Confessions*, *City of God*, and *On the Trinity*.

Levering, beginning with *On Christian Doctrine*, briefly places the text in the context of the life of Augustine—completed by AD 426 (1). Much in concert with other modern evaluations, he summarizes *On Christian Doctrine* as "an account of biblical interpretation and preaching" that is organized around the double-love concept (1–2). Levering's summary of Book 2 is a clear and succinct summary of the virtue-focused interpretation process (8–12). In chapter two, written on *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, Levering chooses to focus on Books 4, 6, 9, 10, 12–19, 22, and 30–32. Albeit limited, then, these

chapters are chosen particularly because they relate to Christian theology and the use of the Old Testament. It is here that Augustine “enriches it [i.e. his theology] through careful reflection on Scripture’s two Testaments as a unified witness to God’s love” (19).

In the assessment of *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Levering offers a close literary reading of the ten homilies. The homilies can be divided into two sections: Homilies 1–5 and 6–10 (49–50). These homilies focus upon a set of biblical texts that examines “how Scripture and interpreters of Scripture function in building up the Church in love” (49). Even a polemic against a Donatist interpretation can be undertaken without “failing in love” (49).

The final three chapters evaluate classical Augustine texts as well as provide the most amount of attention to secondary scholarship—each chapter containing more than 95 footnotes of comments. On *Confessions*, Levering divides his summary by writing on Book 1, Books 2–6, Books 7–10, and Books 11–13. “The *Confessions*,” Levering helpfully summarizes, “argues that each and every moment of one’s life, and one’s life as a whole, has its true meaning in relation to the eternal living God” (p.110). On *City of God*, Levering divides the work into five parts: Books 1–5, Books 6–10, Books 11–14, Books 15–18, Books 19–22. This five-fold division, as Levering asserts:

... displays Augustine’s achievement in reconfiguring history and its ends. Beginning with the pagan worldview in which strictly immanent gods and ends set the terms for what we can expect from historical existence, Augustine painstakingly transforms it into a biblical understanding of history according to which our lives can only be rightly appreciated in terms of ecclesial participation in the eternal God through Christ and the Holy Spirit (114).

Finally, in *On the Trinity*, Levering begins with a slight critique of Augustine’s self-acclaimed characterization of his work as a “closely-knit development” (151–52). Levering divides his summary by focusing on Books 1–4, Book 5–7, Book 8–11, and Books 12–15. *On the Trinity*, then, seeks “to understand and to model what Christian life is all about” (153). This work is highly valuable to nascent Augustinian readers.

Scholars would be amiss to approach Levering’s volume as an exhaustive study or complete survey of Augustine. He encourages readers to consult the bibliography and footnotes of relevant scholarly literature, as his survey

leaves much out (xviii). The primary helpful feature of this volume is how it helpfully orients readers of Augustine through a mini-commentary of his works. Levering wades through Augustine's literature and summarizes them briefly, succinctly, and constructively. As an aside note, readers have two options when reading his contribution: (1) read Levering's commentary or (2) read through the footnotes and be introduced to relevant modern Augustinian scholarship.

A second helpful feature to this book is the recommended reading list. The final few pages reflect a "Levering's Best" of Augustinian modern texts. Although focusing on English scholarship—which is helpful, considering the intended audience of *The Theology of Augustine*—this list of thirty works reflect Levering's first reads. "If I were stranded on a desert island and could only have thirty items from the works I cited, these recent studies are the ones that I would choose first" (191).

*The Theology of Augustine* is the product of a brilliant idea: a summary introduction of essential and classical texts from a prominent figure in antiquity. We can only hope that more in the fields of Early Christianity, Patristics, Medieval, and/or Reformation studies could do likewise. This book would be a helpful addition for college, university, and introductory graduate level courses on the early Church or the figure of Augustine. Assigning this textbook along with primary text material could make an easy addition. Even for teaching, the text offers simple and adaptable comments for pedagogy.

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*Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology.* By Richard Bauckham.  
Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015, xvii+237, \$24.99 softcover.

Richard Bauckham, the well-respected Johannine scholar and senior scholar at Ridley Hall at Cambridge University, has produced yet another helpful volume in the study of John's gospel. Bauckham's goal is to offer a fresh approach to major Johannine themes that have been neglected or debated

throughout the history of scholarship on his gospel (ix). He identifies eight themes and dedicates a chapter to each.

Chapter 1, “Individualism,” addresses what Bauckham considers one of the most neglected areas of Johannine thought. He builds his argument off a seminal article by C. F. D. Moule, “The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel,” in which Moule emphasized “the relationship of the individual believer to Jesus” (1). Bauckham distinguishes this “individualism” from the Western concept of self-reliance, preferring the term “individuality,” which he defines as, “the individual’s awareness of self as a distinguishable entity, not merely in a physical sense but in terms of subjectivity … [which] makes introspection and inner dialogue possible” (3). He then broadly applies this concept to “individualistic” and “collective” societies, the latter representing the world of the NT.

Within this framework, Bauckham considers the Johannine evidence along three lines. First, are “aphoristic sayings about the individual’s relationship with Jesus” (4). Here he finds sixty-seven passages that demonstrate Jesus dealing with people as individuals, rather than groups. Thus, “Readers or hearers are simply not allowed to forget that responses to Jesus have to be individual and real” (7). Second, are “In-One-Anotherness’ (Personal Coinherence)” statements that demonstrate the intimate relationship individuals have with one another that flow from their shared life with Jesus, whose “life is the life of God” (10). Bauckham distinguishes this from the Pauline emphasis of being “in Christ” (10), citing the unique “reciprocal” nature of the Johannine concept (12). Surprisingly, Bauckham fails to relate this to the more foundational idea of union with Christ. However, he does affirm the Trinitarian foundation of co-inherence, which the believer participates in only through Christ: “the in-one-anotherness of the Father and the Son becomes the source of the in-one-anotherness of Jesus and the believer” (13). Third, he notes “Jesus in Dialogue with Individual Gospel Characters,” noting Jesus’ conversations with Nathanael (1:47–51), Nicodemus (3:1–21), and the Samaritan woman (4:7–26). Each of these conversations “takes place in private” and allows each individual to incite “greater empathy or identification” (14), as well as to demonstrate how “Jesus deals with each of them differently, according to their individual circumstances” (15–16).

Bauckham concludes that John’s purpose in emphasizing the individual is, first, to encourage them “to step outside the social norms and expectations of their group” to follow Christ (17). Secondly, to emphasize the intimacy

of the individual believer with Christ as the foundation reality of the community's mutual love for one another.

Chapter 2, "Divine and Human Community," addresses unity within the Godhead and Christ and His people. Bauckham briefly considers the Hebrew and Greek terms for "one" and delineates two contextual uses: "one" in the sense of "uniqueness or singularity" and "one" in the sense of "unity" (21–23). On this foundation the idea of unity is traced through the "Early Jewish Background" that moves from the meaning of uniqueness captured in the Shema, unity in Second Temple reunification, then to the unity of both in the late prophets in anticipation of the Messianic kingdom, in which "There is a readily intelligible connection between a *unified* people and their *unique* ruler" (28). John's gospel cements this by connecting "the singularity, the uniqueness of Jesus, the one shepherd, the one man who dies of the people, with the uniting of the people of God" (32). Bauckham then moves to the "Unity of God" drawing on Jesus' statement in 10:30, which reveals that the God of Israel "*consists in* the communion of the Father and Son" (32). In turn, this unity within the Godhead is analogous to the unity of Jesus and His followers (cf. John 17), as shown in John's use of *kathōs* (6:57; 10:14–15; 13:34; 20:21). On this last point, Bauckham is not satisfied with mere analogy, but pushes toward the idea of participation, in which it is the love of the Father and Son that overflows into the disciples of Jesus (36).

Bauckham then moves into the theologically hostile waters regarding the "Social Trinity" (36), which understands divine unity "as actually constituted" by the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit within the Godhead. On this point, Bauckham finds agreement in John, particularly in the gospel's presentation of "in-one-anotherness," which also incorporates the concepts of perichoresis and co-inherence. Interestingly, he suggests the role of the Holy Spirit is by "extension" and not exegesis, noting John's overwhelming emphasis on the binitarian relationship of the Father and Son. However, this point seems to miss the exegetical implications of the Spirit in Jesus' baptism and teaching in 14:17–23 and 16:13–15. Bauckham concludes with an evangelistic tone, for the unity of the Father and Son, reflected in His people, has the ultimate end that the world "will recognize God's love as it is at work and reflected in the Christian community" (41).

"Glory" is the theme of chapter 3. After a review of the relevant terms, Bauckham settles on the ideas of "honor, prestige," and "visible splendor"

(44–45). John’s gospel builds on the OT revelation of God’s glory in His name and character to Moses on Sinai, which “echoed throughout the rest of biblical literature” (49). Significantly, God’s glory was removed from His people in Ezekiel, but reappears in the prologue of John (1:14). However, in contrast to Israelite expectation, the glory of God’s character and name is displayed in the humility of the cross, where “Jesus’ deepest humiliation is, paradoxically, also his glorification” (54) and “reveals God” (58). Glory is completed, however, in the resurrection: “It is the degradation and the death, in the light of the resurrection, that constitute the ultimate manifestation of God’s glory to the world” (61). The takeaway of glory is the self-giving love revealed in the Trinity—Spirit glorifies the Son, who glorifies the Father—and reflected in the redeemed’s love for one another.

Chapter 4, “Cross, Resurrection, and Exaltation,” traces this “very large topic” (63) through its display in four themes: love, life, glory, and truth. “Love” comprises the greatest space and is most clearly expressed in Jesus laying “down His life for His friends. This love is the ultimate display of both Divine and human love and was manifest in every act of Self-sacrifice Jesus manifested in His life. The greatest example of this love is the cross, which also forms the foundation of the “new” standard of love for one another. “Life” is eternal life shown in His death, resurrection, miracles, and “joyful fellowship with God” (72). “Glory” covers much of the material in the last chapter and “Truth” is the “manifold way in which Jesus fulfills Scripture” (74). In this way, it is not truth as opposed to error, as much as Jesus is the “true bread,” “true King,” even “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Bauckham tackles the issue of “Sacraments” in chapter 5. He takes a narrow criteria approach and allows the possibility of sacramental references in three passages: John 3:5; 6:52–58; 19:34. He sees baptism as a possible secondary meaning in 3:5 to the primary meaning of the need to have “faith in Jesus the Savior and reception of eternal life” (107). In John 6:52–58, he allows eucharistic language as a possible secondary meaning to the primary point of a call to faith in Jesus who died a violent death for his people (97–98). However, he does allow that John may have had “the eucharistic words of Jesus in mind when he wrote 6:53–56” (98). While Bauckham rejects the idea of a docetic polemic as the purpose of John (101), it is problematic that he allows the words to be as much John’s as Christ’s whom he is purporting to represent. On John 19:34, “The case for any level of allusion to the Eucharist

and baptism ... is very weak" (106). In the end, Bauckham downplays sacramental references in John and concludes that "this Gospel's contribution to a theology of the sacraments is to prioritize the soteriological realities that are focused on the sacraments but always exceed the sacraments" (107).

In chapter 6, "Dualisms," Bauckham admires and then critiques the demythologizing of Bultmann who claimed John borrowed from a Gnostic framework and employed it for his own purpose. However, while the critique is welcome, it seems he finds too much to admire. For Bauckham, John's dualism must not be over generalized, but seen through five specific categories: "I. Creation and Creator ... II. Evil and Good ... III. Provisional Good and Eschatological Good ... IV. Miscellaneous Dualities" (121–123). However, at the heart of John's dualism is a soteriological concern (129), namely, that he entered the world to save it (126).

In chapter 7, "Dimensions of Meaning in the Gospel's First Week," Bauckham spends the bulk of his time exploring what he calls the particular literary "phenomenon" of John's penchant for "*double entendre*" (141–142). Careful to distinguish this from allegory, or a "two-level" reading of Scripture, he argues for an analogous relationship. He first applies this to the disciples' first week with Jesus and introduces the Jewish exegetical methods of "*gezerah shavah*" in which "passages from different parts of Scripture that use the same words or phrases can be brought together and interpreted in relation to each other" (154) and "*gemetria*" that "allows the exegete to substitute for a word or phrase in the text another word or phrase that has the same numerical value" (178). He then applies this method to John's use of "Lamb of God," Nathanael's mention of Nazareth, the ladder of 1:51, the miracle of 2:1–11, and Jesus' use of the "Son of Man." The net result of Bauckham's exercise is to draw a line from the first to the last week of Jesus' life as anticipation and fulfillment.

In the final chapter, "The Johannine Jesus and the Synoptic Jesus," Bauckham is burdened to show the necessary and harmonious relationship of John to the synoptic gospels. After submitting the dangers of Tatian's *Diatessaron* and the liberal attempt to find the "historical" Jesus, Bauckham argues for the need to let each gospel stand as its own witness and together give a complete picture of Jesus. He assumes the readers of John "know Mark" (188), which accounts for John's unique material. Thus, John could elaborate on such matters as prayer, the Spirit, eternal life, Christological terms and titles, the sent motif, "I have come" sayings, his emotional anguish, as

well as his sovereignty, when facing death. A key theme, however, is John's presentation of the true humanity of Christ through which the Father is revealed. Indeed, at the heart of this revelation is the cross: "What John has done is not to dissolve the passion in glory, but to redefine God's glory by seeing the suffering and the humiliation of the cross as the high point of its revelation" (199). Indeed, the glory of God revealed through His humanity is "essential to his Christological project" (200).

Bauckham's *Gospel of Glory* is an evident fruit of years of deep study and contemplation on the Gospel of John. This mature scholarship keeps him from getting bogged down in overly detailed discussions and allows him to extract the core of John's teaching on these key themes. Indeed, he manages to produce a work that is helpful to scholar and layman alike, while manifesting a tone of worship. This is, in fact, the ultimate goal of John and Bauckham, to read John's unique portrait of Christ as "God with us" (201) to redeem and bring His people eternal life.

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*Reviving The Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution.* By Thabiti Anyabwile. The Front Porch in Partnership with Nashville: B&H, 2015, pgs. 269. Cloth

***Introduction and Summary***  
***Jarvis J. Williams***

Thabiti Anyabwile serves as a pastor with Anacostia River Church in Washington, DC. In his new book *Reviving the Black Church*, Anyabwile offers the following: an appreciation of the role of the black church (TBC) in American history, a critical analysis of the traditional black church, and biblical, theological, and practical reflections as to how to help black churches go forward in gospel faithfulness. Curtis A. Woods and I (Jarvis J. Williams), two different African-Americans with different church backgrounds and with both similar and different academic interests, have partnered to write

this review. As a New Testament scholar of color with a multi-ethnic heritage and committed to the work of racial reconciliation, my analysis of the book will focus on a brief summary and a short critique. Woods will bring his extensive knowledge of the history and theology of the black church, of African-American diasporic literature, his personal experience in both black church and white church contexts, and his passion for reconciliation to bear as he reviews the work. His portion of the review will focus on Anyabwile's historical, theological, and practical analyses.

Anyabwile's basic thesis is that there is a better way forward for the TBC than what was both historically and is currently present in certain black churches. For Anyabwile, this better way forward is the way that borrows from the wisdom of "earlier faithful Christians." Moreover, the way forward is the way outlined in the bible. According to Anyabwile, the bible provides the divine wisdom that TBC needs to see every aspect of church live and thrive again by the power of the Spirit of God (paraphrased from the back of the book).

Anyabwile argues his thesis by organizing the book in three major sections with thirteen chapters. Section 1 (Revive by the Word) focuses on the importance of the bible in TBC. Anyabwile skillfully provided an historical survey of the importance of the bible in healthy black churches, a robust biblical and theological defense of the importance of preaching the bible in TBC, and the importance of worship according to the bible in the TBC (15-82). A particular point of emphasis in this section is highlighting healthy black and reformed models of expositional preaching in black contexts (31-62). Related to preaching, Anyabwile also argues that many in TBC neither have a clear understanding of the purpose of preaching (33-62) nor a clear understanding of the gospel (65-81). These pages drip with the importance of making the bible the centerpiece of every aspect of TBC, from the prayers, to the preaching and teaching, and to the congregational worship.

In section 2 (Revive with Godly Leadership), Anyabwile addresses leadership in TBC. He argues that leadership in TBC is often imbalanced and too much power is wrongly invested into one pastor (97-114). He also argues that TBC often has misunderstood pastoral authority, has wrongly created unbiblical offices of authority (115-136) or has appointed unqualified and ungodly people to serve in leadership in TBC (137-153). Regarding ungodly leadership, Anyabwile urges leaders in TBC with great sensitivity and pastoral concern to remove ungodly leaders from leadership with the intent of leading

them to repentance and restoration (137-153). In this section, Anyabwile also urges TBC to rethink pastoral training (154-170).

In the third and final section (*Revive through Membership and Mission*), Anyabwile argues that TBC should pursue revival through a biblical understanding of membership and mission (173-245). He challenges TBC to rekindle personal piety and discipleship (173-188), to prioritize a biblical understanding of regenerate church membership (189-208), to prioritize building up black men, to help foster healthy black families, to help black men understand a biblical understanding of manhood (209-226), and to re-engage in missions (227-245). Anyabwile concludes the book with a short afterword (247-249).

As a New Testament scholar and seminary professor, of course, I have some picky disagreements here and there with Anyabwile's exegesis of certain texts and with his applications of certain texts. At times, Anyabwile's exegesis of certain texts seems strained. For example, he follows the popular "as you go" understanding of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 (183). However, the Greek actually supports an alternative reading that Jesus is commanding these Jewish disciples "go and make disciples of all non-Jewish people." He very well might not be saying "as you go."

Furthermore, although Anyabwile thinks seminaries have a role in training ministers (168), he thinks it's a small one. I see the role that seminaries play in the theological and ministerial training of future ministers as more necessary and more important than perhaps Anyabwile (168). I agree that seminaries cannot teach future pastors everything about pastoral ministry—local churches should be the primary place where future pastors learn how to be pastors. But good seminaries have an enormous amount of biblical and theological resources (i.e. specialists who can offer a wealth of grammatical, historical, analytical, and intellectual resources) that they can pour into ministers in training. Local churches, on the other hand, have a limited amount of resources and an even more limited amount of men equipped with high level biblical and theological tools. And not all pastors have the intellectual skills or the learning to educate their ministers in grammatical historical exegesis. Just look, for example, at the few pastors who are able to read Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Once more, there is an entire biblical and theological intellectual history that is necessary for ministerial training that many pastors in local churches are simply unable to provide.

In my view, ministerial training involves more than can be provided by the local church, but certainly not less than what the local church can provide. Without healthy theological seminaries to train pastors, I would argue many pastors would be less equipped for pastoral ministry. Even those pastors who do not have formal theological training from a seminary have benefited tremendously in their ministries from those who have either been seminary trained (e.g., Mark Dever's influence on Anyabwile) or from those who have benefited from those who have benefited firsthand from a seminary education (e.g., Anyabwile's influence on others). Other critics might complain about the title of the book, asserting that it assumes that TBC is mono-lithic or presupposes that all black churches are unhealthy. But those who offer this criticism should be charged with never reading or altogether ignoring the arguments throughout the book.

With these minor complaints aside, *Reviving the Black Church* is a must read for anyone who loves the church, especially TBC. The book reveals the heart of a pastor who deeply loves TBC and who deeply longs to see her become conformed into the image of Christ instead of being conformed into cultural captivity. The author's big vision of God, God's word, preaching, the church, his love for God's people, and his vast knowledge of the plethora of literature about African-American intellectual history are worth the purchase of the book. The book offers a robust biblical and theological exposition of how dead black churches can be made alive in Christ by the power of the Spirit and the preached word, just like those dry bones in Ezekiel. The book also provides a guide as to how vibrant black churches can stay alive, healthy, and vibrant in Christ by the power of the Spirit and the preached word. However, the book is not only for TBC or for black pastors. All churches, all pastors, and all church leaders from a variety of racial stripes and evangelical traditions can benefit and learn from this book. I highly recommend the work! And I will give it to many pastors in TBC!

### ***Historical, Theological, and Practical Critiques***

**Curtis A. Woods**

Proverbs 11:1 says "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight."

Whenever I read a work on the Black Church (TBC), my protective instincts automatically raise in defense of my beloved ecclesiastical tradition.

In a glance, I position myself into a fighting stance ready to raise intellectual arms against any critic who plans to unapologetically soil, or unjustly sanctify her reputation. These unbalanced critiques of TBC are typically wedded to the pens of those who either lack historical and experiential knowledge of TBC or are so committed to the tradition that they only offer *hagiographic* interpretations. In fact, hubristically false evaluations strain relationships between insiders who wipe their relational hands clean, saying, “I find no fault in her” and outsiders whose sullied perspective finds nothing good in her. That is to say, one observer promotes ontological perfection while the other perceives ongoing pestilence. Both postures siphon the strength of TBC.

Thabiti Anyabwile is no parasite. As an acute intellectual and *participant-observer* of the TBC tradition, Anyabwile understands the calamity that created her and confession that sustains her. To my delight, as I thoughtfully read the work through the lens of African diasporic agency and evangelical theology, my guard was lowered because I sensed an evaluation akin to Christ’s interaction with the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev 2-3). There was proper commendation and poised condemnation. I knew I was in conversation with a groomsman who loves the Bride of Christ. So, what makes this work just and balanced?

First, Anyabwile rightly acknowledges the unspoken “cultural rules forbidding public critique of the Black Church” (12). As such, published criticism of TBC will invariably solicit familial scorn. Jemar Tisby, executive director of the Reformed African-American Network (RAAN), makes note of this phenomenon in his helpful review. Nonetheless, I caution readers to withhold judgment until they have thoughtfully engaged the work. In order to measure any work in a Christian manner, readers must understand the author’s thesis and delimitations before brandishing a polemical sword. We cannot disqualify a person’s work simply because we dislike the title or teacher. The battle lines are drawn at argumentation, not appellation or association.

Anyabwile presents a clear thesis: “The only force capable of reviving TBC in whatever area she needs is the Spirit of God animating the Word of God” (247). Anyabwile begins his journey through various sectors of TBC in the antebellum North and South. He explains how racial hierarchy or white supremacy gave rise to the Black Church in early American history. He distills decades of African diasporic dehumanization from the era of the Transatlantic Slave Trade until present day. In so doing, Anyabwile

invokes the expertise a kaleidoscope of African-American scholars, which, in my opinion, is one the greatest strengths of the work! Anyabwile, as an African-American evangelical, is unafraid to solicit counsel from Black liberation theologians, including womanist intellectuals, along with faithful African-American evangelical witnesses.

Oftentimes, when intellectuals create such exchanges between opposing theological camps, they succumb to theological syncretism. Anyabwile avoids this blunder. Readers will sense a non-threatening dialectical conversation between black evangelicals and liberationists throughout this work. To Anyabwile's credit, he marshals primary and secondary works in African-American religious thought from individuals who, categorically speaking, were Reformed/Arminian *African diasporic abolitionist intellectuals*, evangelicals, liberationists, and prosperity preachers. Anyabwile does not venerate or vilify any camp. He, for example, illustrates how evangelicals, liberationists, and prosperity adherents all have "contributed to the de-centering of the Bible." He states, "Evangelicals have allowed it [Scripture] to be de-centered through neglect, failing to read it and apply it to life and faith. Liberationists have reveled against it, actually calling for its removal from the dominant place in theology and religion. And prosperity preachers have removed it from the center by misusing and misquoting it, using Biblicalism that sounds evangelical while focusing on worldly materialism and success" (25). I enjoyed this section immensely because sometimes "we" (evangelicals) have a hard time with self-critique.

Second, readers should listen closely to Anyabwile's inner dialogue. These dialogues are more than thoughtful anecdotes to pique reading interest. Like the African theologian Augustine, in his *Confessions*, authorial introspection connects well with those who possess common background. For instance, I resonate with Anyabwile's journey from social and spiritual naïveté as a teenager/young adult towards biblical orthodox beliefs and, eventual, behavior. Anyabwile exposes himself with a riveting story of grace and mercy. He weaves his personal narrative into the fabric of TBC, bolstering his love for her, even though, within God's providence, Anyabwile united with a predominantly Anglo church community for a season of discipleship and leadership. Yet, Anyabwile's time in this spiritual setting did not quell his passion for TBC in particular or ameliorating societal ills that hinder African-American progress in general. As such, Anyabwile's provocative query, "When you hear the word pastor, what comes to mind?"

suggests that many pastors burnout because parishioners place inordinate expectations on their shoulders (99). He develops a taxonomy of differing functionalities within pastoral leadership along the lines of “traditional models” (100-102) and “contemporary models” (102-103) in order to lay a foundation for restoring biblical models of pastoral ministry. When Anyabwile discusses pastoral ministry in TBC, he courageously engages the topic of egalitarianism and complementarianism; for anyone familiar with the historic underpinnings of TBC understands this topic cannot be jettisoned (123-136). Anyabwile interacts with some lucid womanist theologians on gender and authority. He offers readers a patiently polemical tone while introducing significant works within the womanist theological corpus. He avoids *ad hominem*s and male privilege. In fact, one could say, Anyabwile appropriately privileges the text above our times.

Third, a work on TBC would be remiss if a writer envisions the well-being of the black family as ancillary to revival. Anyabwile employs a distinctly African diasporic evangelical worldview which repudiates false dichotomies between body and soul or society and spirituality. If the black family suffers, then TBC suffers. With graduate level degrees in social psychology, Anyabwile addresses the common refrain “black men are an endangered species” with clear principles for change. In doing so, he creates needed space for African-American colloquialisms in evangelical literature. I was pleased with his juxtaposition between pain and promise. He states, “No one explained how a statistic [endangered species] could change another statistic, how the collectively ‘endangered’ could change their status. We simply were supposed to. I felt stuck somewhere between *Menace to Society* and *Do the Right Thing*, trying a way to be angry and righteous, all while untutored and confused about true manhood” (210). Biblical manhood, explains Anyabwile, centers on developing men who worship, work, and love “one woman” well (209-213). Moreover, Anyabwile captures the essence of William Julius Wilson’s counsel (213-218). Wilson, framed through Anyabwile’s lens, gives readers the sociological tools to engage black suffering without championing victimization or, to borrow from William Ryan, “blaming the victim.” Anyabwile, once again, offers balanced commentary with Scripture, sound sociological and group psychological suppositions guiding his literary steps. There more to say, but space limitations make it impossible!

Anyabwile provides readers with a full-orbed strategy for reviving certain quarters of the Black Church. He repudiates a “monolithic understanding of

the black experience” since it “crumbled long ago under the shifting weight of African-American progress and hard-earned victories” (40). Therefore, as Anyabwile shows, students of TBC must think biblically in the midst of African-American diversity. One size does not fit all.

I (Curtis) finished the final chapter thinking, “I love learning about TBC, African diasporic evangelical contributions to intellectual history, and more importantly, advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ warms my soul.” Those who read this work will leave hopeful for TBC and, perhaps, gospel-centered racial reconciliation as we better appreciate the untold stories of many African diasporic evangelical pioneers (227-239) and God’s vision for global missions (240-245).

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