

## **Doctrine: Going Deeper Part 1**

**By Dan Jensen (2023)**

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### **Preface**

This work is intended to elaborate on key doctrines that I was not able to fully detail in my “basics” series. It will be split into two books, but it is intended to be read back to back as one work and I will be referring to both books combined as “this work” throughout. This work is also specifically intended to more fully defend Confessional

Presbyterianism for those interested after having read my other works for beginners. To fully benefit from this work, I highly recommend reading all of my works for beginners first, with the exceptions of my essay on apologetics and my essay on the history of Confessional Presbyterianism. I recommend reading those works after you have read this work as the last two of my works for beginners. All of these works can be found on my website.

This work will be split up into four overarching sections. The first will be touching on doctrines that all true Christians must believe. To deny them, is to deny the faith. With that said, I want to reiterate what I made clear in some of my previous works for beginners. And that is that not all true Christians are going to fully understand all essential Christian teachings. Many are new Christians. Many are immature Christians. Many have been poorly taught. Many have been too beaten down by life to have time to study the Bible thoroughly. All I am saying is that no true Christian will emphatically and persistently deny any of these teachings after having been shown that they are in fact taught by the Bible beyond all doubt. We must be patient with our brothers and sisters in Christ and not expect doctrinal perfection across the board. I also want to say that not every word I say in this first section should be considered dogmatic truth. I will often give my opinion on certain secondary matters along the way. I will often explain things in ways that other sound teachers of the faith may not completely agree with. On big matters where I am giving my opinion, I will do my best to state that. With that said, I won't at every point stop to say that this or that is simply my way of understanding or explaining this or that. All I am saying with this section is that the basic gist of all that will be said in this section is touching upon doctrines that pertain to the entire true church of Jesus Christ. What is often called *the universal church*.

The second section will be touching on doctrines that pertain to those, like myself, who hold to Reformed theology. I will be more fully defining what Reformed doctrine is in that section itself, but the reader should already have some idea of what this is from my other works for beginners. While these doctrines are not doctrines that are taught beyond all doubt in the Bible, the reader should not in any way interpret this as these doctrines are not a very big deal. The Bible talks a lot about God's choice of His people. And God discusses this doctrine with clear passion (read Romans 9).

Therefore, this is plainly a doctrine God takes quite seriously. He obviously wants us to do our best to come as close to fully understanding it as we can.

Now, you may ask, "If this is true, why was God not completely clear about this doctrine?" I cannot answer that. God can do things however He wants. But, it is very important to understand that just because God chose not to reveal certain things with absolute clarity does not mean that He sees them as unimportant. They are clearly not as important as the essential doctrines of the faith, but many secondary doctrines are still very important to Him and He wants us to prayerfully do our best to try to understand them. With that said, this does not mean that all secondary doctrines are massively important to God. For instance, one such secondary doctrine that is debated among sound Christian theologians is what Paul's thorn in his flesh was that he discusses in 2 Corinthians 12:6-7. The Bible is definitely not entirely clear about this point. However, we do see some hints here and there. Therefore, we cannot be dogmatic about this question at all, and even further, what conclusion one reaches on this point is not terribly important as the specifics of this thorn are not emphasized in the Bible at all.

This is not true of the doctrine of God's choosing of His people, what is often known as the doctrine of election. While God is not 100% clear here, He is emphatic about this doctrine and He says a lot about it. Thus, the reason why we should do all that we can to try to come as close to the truth as possible on this point in this life. Because of all of this, those who adopt Reformed theology are very certain that Reformed theology is correct. Not absolutely certain, but they do have a very, very high degree of certainty based on a number of key passages in the Bible. With that made clear, we also have to be honest about the fact that there are enough passages that at first glance do not seem to be teaching Reformed theology, that we cannot condemn our brothers and sisters in Christ that do not adopt Reformed doctrine even though we do believe they are woefully mistaken.

You may ask, "Ok, so how certain are you of Reformed theology?" I am personally about 95-99% sure of the truth of Reformed doctrines. I know that sounds ridiculously high, but I do not say that of almost any other secondary doctrines. The only other set of secondary doctrines I would say that about would be the doctrines

associated with young earth creationism. This is not to say that all Christians who hold to Reformed theology would put the number that high. Some would put the number lower than that, and a very small minority would put the number a lot lower than that. But, the vast majority of Reformed Christians would put the number about as high as I put it.

The third section will be addressing doctrines that pertain to Confessional Presbyterianism. Confessional Presbyterianism includes Reformed theology, but it is much broader than that. All Confessional Presbyterians are Reformed, but not all Reformed Christians are Confessional Presbyterians. And while all of these doctrines are of a secondary nature, I again want to reiterate that this does not make them unimportant or mean that I am fairly uncertain about them. I would say that I am about 90-95% sure that Confessional Presbyterianism is true. This does not mean that I just go along with whatever Confessional Presbyterians have said for the past 500 years though. Confessional Presbyterians do not agree on everything and this is a good thing. We never want to be slaves to man-made traditions. But, I am very convinced that all of the doctrines that make up the core doctrines that all Confessional Presbyterians hold to are in fact what the Bible is teaching. I want to be very clear that not everything I say in either the section on Reformed theology or the section on Confessional Presbyterianism, would be agreed upon by all Reformed or Confessional Presbyterian theologians respectively. I am merely seeking to explain and defend the basic gist of those doctrines according to my own approach and perspective.

The fourth and final section will be addressing doctrines that are my personal opinion. This does not mean that I am the only one who holds to these doctrines. In almost all cases, many, many other true Christians hold to the same basic position. In most cases, my position is the same as most other Confessional Presbyterians, but that is not always the case. But the combination of doctrines in that section is not part of any one broader branch or school of thought within the true church. All of these doctrines are part of smaller schools of thought or are sub-doctrines within certain schools of thought. On most of these doctrines, I am about 80% sure of their truth. For some, I am more certain. And for others, I am less certain. But, I am pretty sure of all of them. I am not dealing with deeply secondary doctrines, like Paul's thorn in his flesh spoken of

above, in this work. For my opinion on all such doctrines, you will have to wait for my commentaries on the Bible where I will unpack most of them. Those commentaries, Lord willing, should be done in the next few years.

The last thing I want to say here in this preface before giving people the opportunity to receive Jesus, has to do with the order of the topics throughout the work. As laid out above, there is a general order to this work. And at times, within each of these sections I have placed certain topics where I have in relation to others for strategic reasons. But, for the most part, there is no real concrete order to many of the topics. I have sort of just listed at random the main topics I wanted to hit on in this work that I was not able to cover or fully cover in my “basics” series. Hence, for the most part folks shouldn’t read too much into the order of the topics.

Before diving into the meat of this work I want to give you the opportunity to receive Jesus. If you have never received Jesus as your God and Savior, please do so now. You do not know what can happen even in the next few moments, and so there is no time to wait. If you are not ready at this time, but become ready at any time you are reading through this series, please return to this section and receive Him. When you are ready, pray the prayer below sincerely from your heart and you will become a true Christian. It is very, very important to understand that merely saying the words of this prayer will not save you. There is no ritual, whether it be a prayer or anything else, that saves us. You must actually and sincerely mean these words or they will be of no help to you.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that you are God Almighty and the only Savior. I recognize that I am a sinner and I have come to hate my sin. I ask that you come into my life so that I can have an eternal relationship with you, your Father, and your Spirit. I ask that you forgive all of my sins based on what you did on the cross and through your bodily resurrection from the dead. I ask that you cover me with your righteousness. I ask that you give me your Spirit so that you will become number one in my life, far above all else, and so that I will be completely changed. I want to live my life for you from now on, and I can only do that through your Spirit. I understand that I will continue to sin until I die or you come back, so please give me the strength through your Spirit to always seek your help and to continue to ask for your forgiveness. I now know I will spend all eternity

with you. I now love you and worship you, and I am so thankful and grateful to you for saving me. Amen.”

## **SECTION 1: Universal Church Doctrines**

### **Chapter 1: Part 1 of Section 1**

#### **Hermeneutics Issues**

The term *hermeneutics* is just a fancy word for interpretation. When we speak of hermeneutics in the context of theology, we are talking about interpreting the Bible. As I made clear in the first book of my “basics” series, the primary rule for interpreting any document is to use common sense. With that said, every document presents certain challenges to interpretation and the Bible is no different. Because I could not fully discuss all of these challenges in the book above, I want to take some time to discuss some of these issues here.

The first item I would like to touch upon is the way that the New Testament often quotes or alludes to the Old Testament. The New Testament does not always quote the Old Testament in an exact fashion and it often interprets it in ways that can be confusing at times. The first thing to say about this is that there is nothing wrong with the New Testament paraphrasing the Old Testament. As long as the basic meaning of the passage comes across, God is clearly fine with this. As far as the way the New Testament often interprets the Old, it is very important to understand that it is using what is known as *sensus plenior*. I discuss this principle later in this work (in the subsection on the Messiah) and so please read through that section very carefully and it will help you understand a great deal of the New Testament much better.

The next item to discuss is interpreting the Bible literally. I discussed this principle to some degree in the first book of my “basics” series, but I need to say more about this principle here. This principle is often very abused by many, it is often misunderstood by

many, and it is often mocked by many. You will often hear the enemies of the faith, especially ignorant Atheists, dismiss orthodox Christians as stupid people because they read the Bible “literally.” We will often be dismissed as “Fundamentalists.” Most people who speak this way are pathetically ignorant of the history of the term *Fundamentalist* and the principle of interpreting the Bible literally. For more information on the term *Fundamentalist*, please read my book on church history. It can be found on my website. And the principle of interpreting the Bible literally in no way means that we take every verse in the Bible literally. Please read or reread my section on interpreting the Bible in the first book of my “basics” series. It can be found in the chapter discussing what is the Bible. That section is very important in avoiding many of the errors of the actual Fundamentalists of our day who do interpret far too much of the Bible literally, and also will help you answer those who try to mock the sound use of this principle.

With this principle firmly in mind, let us look at some themes where new Christians do often get confused and where many actual Fundamentalists today are leading many new and unsuspecting Christians astray. The first is the language in the Bible about the foundations of the earth, or the four corners of the earth, etc. This language can often sound like the Bible is teaching a flat earth. And it has become very popular in certain Fundamentalist circles to teach this very thing. The problem is that the fact that the earth is a sphere is a proven fact. Please read *Falling Flat* by Danny Faulkner and you will see that this is the case. Hence, when heretics or new Christians take this position, they are making Christianity look really, really bad. The Bible is quite clear that God is truth and so we should never interpret His word in a way that contradicts proven facts. And all of the passages spoken of above can all easily be interpreted figuratively.

Many will object here by saying that I am inconsistent because I reject the full theory of evolution. I am not being inconsistent though. This is because the full theory of evolution is not an absolutely proven fact. There are many scientific problems with the theory. Even further, adopting this theory leads to a huge theological problem. It has to say that death and carnage existed before the fall. And this certainly seems to strongly go against what the Bible teaches. There exists no theological problems with interpreting the “flat earth” passages figuratively. And the two cases really are not that

comparable. God, in Genesis 1, painstakingly details how He created the earth and filled it. We have no such detailed explanation of God creating the world flat. If in Genesis 1 it said in a lot of very clear detail that God created the earth flat, we would of course have a very big problem on our hands. All of the so-called “flat earth” passages found throughout the Bible are always short statements that can easily be interpreted figuratively without at all affecting the basic meaning of the passage in context. For example, most of these passages are simply talking about how God created the earth in a firm fashion. The earth is not going anywhere. In fact, God is clear in His word that the earth will exist for all eternity.

Another theme that is often found in the Bible is that it will often talk about God riding on the heavens, or shooting His arrows, or language of this nature. Many Christians don't know what to make of this language. Should it be taken literally? No, it should not. This language is clearly poetic language to indicate how powerful God is, especially in His judgments. How do we know this? We know this because if God did literally do these things, we would have evidence of it in the historical narrative sections of the Bible. As I've said in many of my previous works, the Bible is full of history. For the most part, this history should be read fairly literally. Now, this does not mean that the authors of these sections never paraphrased; or used round numbers; or used hyperbole; or used figures of speech. They of course did. But, it does mean that for the most part these sections should be interpreted in a fairly straightforward literal manner.

So, for example, when it repeatedly talks about in Exodus how God manifested Himself in a pillar of cloud, we should take this literally. He did actually do this. Or when in the Gospels it talks about God literally making His voice heard from heaven, we should take this literally. He did actually do this. However, much of the poetic language found in the non-historical narrative sections of the Bible should not be taken literally when they talk about God riding on the heavens and shooting His arrows at His enemies. Now, to clarify, Jesus will return on the clouds of heaven. This is different because this is described on numerous occasions in the Gospels and the epistles, which are for the most part giving straightforward literal teaching. But, this will be a one time event.



And to make one final clarification here, sometimes you will find a very poetic song or section in a section of historical narrative. A great deal of these songs should be interpreted figuratively. The language of them makes this clear. The fact that they are often found within historical narrative sections doesn't change this. This may seem to contradict what was said earlier about interpreting the historical narrative sections pretty literally for the most part, but this is not the case. We should interpret these sections literally in the sense that these songs were actually sung at the exact time and place that the historical narratives say they were sung. But, much of the content of these songs themselves should be interpreted figuratively.

The next hermeneutics item I would like to discuss is the key principle that not everything the Bible records does it endorse. I discussed this principle briefly in my essay on Bible difficulties. That can be found on my website. The failure to understand this very important principle can often lead to a great deal of confusion for new Christians. I remember when I first read the Book of Judges as a new Christian, I was appalled by so much of what was in that book. I thought it was inappropriate to be in God's holy word. It didn't make sense to me at all. And I really didn't understand why God did not more explicitly condemn much of what is in that book in the book itself. I was failing to understand this key principle of biblical interpretation and also that God often doesn't say the obvious in His word. Sometimes it is just best to record how awful humans can be, even God's true people, and let the record stand on its own. Much of what is in the Book of Judges, and much of what is in the Bible, is supposed to gross us out. The purpose of this is to cause us to run to the cross because humanity is so sinful. And we are a part of that humanity whether we like it or not. You are a part of the ugliness of humanity whether you like it or not. It is very easy to look at those "out there" and forget that all of us sin gravely all of the time and thus we all contribute to the ugliness.

The next interpretation issue I would like to discuss is the issue of seeming contradictions. The Bible is a long book that deals with every topic in life to one degree or another. Therefore, it is only natural that it is going to seem to contradict itself at points. This may sound like I am merely being biased. Maybe the Bible does contradict itself and I should let it go. The fact of the matter though, is that most accusations of

contradiction, and not just of the Bible, are not actual contradictions under closer examination. Most people who have not studied a great deal of formal logic do not understand just how hard it is to prove an actual undeniable contradiction. So, let's look at the actual definition of the term *contradiction*.

The term refers to when a statement has violated the law of noncontradiction. This is a law of formal logic. It cannot be proven. It is something we all instinctively recognize, believe in, and utilize all the time. It is a first principle of knowledge, something I talk about more in my essay calling out to Muslims. That essay can be found on my website. These first principles of knowledge are the building blocks for all further knowledge. Again, they cannot be proven. They are the grounds for proving all else. All humans, whether they admit this or not, accept them and use them every single day. The law of noncontradiction states that A cannot be A and non-A at the same time and in the same relationship. What this technical definition is driving at is that you cannot say that something is one thing and is not that thing at the same time and in the same way. So, if I say that the apple on the table is green and is not green, that certainly seems to violate this law. However, the part of the law about "same time and same manner or relationship" is very, very important. The failure to understand this element of the law is what often leads to false accusations of contradiction, and not just towards the Bible.

It is important to understand that the green apple is only green in one sense. The outside of the skin of the apple is green. But, the stem is not green and the inside of the apple is not green. The seeds are not green. The apple is not green in other senses and we all understand this. To point this out is not to engage in contradiction. Also, one could say that the apple on the table is green on October 1st, and then say that the same exact apple is not green on December 1st. This is because the apple has rotted by that time and has changed colors. The two statements are not contradictory even though they are talking about the same apple.

Most accusations of contradiction are merely people being lazy and not listening to the author or speaker very carefully. And this is not me trying to get the Bible off the hook. I often hear true Christians accuse the Koran or the Book of Mormon of contradictions where none actually exist. In other cases, I agree with them that a

contradiction probably exists, but I still maintain that we cannot be 100% sure. Please don't get me wrong. I'm not defending those books in an overarching sense. They are evil books. And they do contain obvious and blatant contradictions. I'm simply saying that this is not the case in every instance where Christians often say certain contradictions exist. And I'm not going to defend even my brothers and sisters in Christ when they get carried away. We don't appreciate it when the enemies of the faith get carried away with the Bible, and so we should not engage in the same behavior ourselves.

With the definition of the law of noncontradiction carefully laid out, it cannot be more emphatically stated that no absolutely proven contradictions within the Bible have ever been demonstrated beyond all doubt. You can call that bias all you want, but it is fact. Whenever someone tries to bring forth a "contradiction" in the Bible, use common sense and carefully apply the law of noncontradiction and you will see that what I have said is true. Let us look at one common example of this. The enemies of the faith often like to say that the Bible contradicts itself because it upholds the ethical principle of "eye for an eye," and yet, allegedly, it condemns the principle in other parts of the Bible. The truth is that no contradiction exists here.

The Old Testament refers to this principle as part of the civil law for God's people, the Israelites. This is a most sound and just principle. It is basically saying that the punishment should fit the crime. It does not always mean that if someone gouges out someone's eye that he should have his eye gouged out. Although, at times, in Old Testament law this principle is commanded in a fairly literal sense. In the New Testament, God is merely making it clear that we should not operate according to this principle in our daily interactions with other people. If someone cuts us off on the road, we should not then cut them off. This is hateful and it is not what God desires. However, the basic eye for eye principle still applies here if this bad driver is seen by a police officer and is given a ticket. The ticket should not be a million dollars. That would not fit the crime. Hence, there is no biblical contradiction here whatsoever. The same is true for all other attempts to make the Bible contradict itself.

The next item I would like to discuss here is the fact that the Bible contains a lot of really detailed history. This is something I have briefly discussed in some of my

previous works, but I want to elaborate on this more here. As I've said in previous works, I understand how frustrating and even boring it can be for many Christians who are not very into history to have to read some of the long history portions of the Bible. Even a lot of the prophetic books contain a lot of history. You do not need to feel guilty about this. And if you follow the Bible reading plan I laid out in my essay on that subject (this essay can be found on my website), I really think it will help you to read all of the Bible throughout your walk with God in a way that will not bog you down. With all of that said, it can still be very helpful to Christians who do not find history very riveting to understand why God inspired so much of His word to have so much history.

True Christianity is a historical faith. It is not an abstract religion like Hinduism and Buddhism. And it is not primarily a code of behavior type of religion like Islam and the LDS Church. It certainly includes abstract doctrine and commands from God, but it also details for us the mighty acts of God throughout history. These acts of God are not myths or nice stories intended to teach us broader principles. They do indeed teach us broader principles, but it is very important to understand that the Bible is clearly conveying that these events actually took place in real time and space. And in order to make this point as emphatically clear as God could, He does not merely summarize these events. He places them within actual historical narratives. This was most wise of God. It helps people like myself, who are theologians and apologists who have to constantly battle with the enemies of God's truth, back up the reality that these events actually happened. Now, I want to be honest, we cannot prove every historical detail recorded for us in the Bible. And in certain areas, there is actually a lot of historical data outside of the Bible that seems to contradict the Bible. And oh boy do the enemies of the faith make a huge deal about this. They almost never tire of pointing to this data.

The problem for them though, is that ancient history is extremely, extremely patchy. Our conclusions are always changing as new data comes forth. There have been numerous times where secular scholars have rejected something from the Bible based upon current data only to have to change their minds based upon newer data. And many, many things from the historical portions of the Bible have been proven by the historical data found outside of the Bible. In fact, most of the major people groups and places described in the Bible have all been confirmed through extra-biblical data. This is

a big deal as this is true for almost no other major religion. So, I understand that all of the very long genealogies in the Old Testament, for example, can seem very tedious to read. It can seem like, “Why did God put these in His word at all? What purpose do they serve?” They serve an enormous purpose. First of all, they were necessary in order to establish the line of Jesus in fulfillment of prophecy. And many of the major names in those genealogies have been proven by historical data outside of the Bible. This shows that the Bible is reliable. We must remember, especially when we are new Christians, that often things don’t make sense to us at first, but as we learn more, we begin to see God’s wisdom behind every aspect of His word.

The next topic I would like to unpack in this subsection is a common question that often comes up with new believers. And it is: Why didn’t God only reveal explicit theology in His word. It seems like it would have made it much clearer and would have led to a lot more unity in His church. It seems like we would have a lot less denominations if God had done things this way. And there is some real truth to this sentiment. But, if God had done things that way, the Bible would lack its wonderful beauty, majesty, and diversity. It would be nothing more than a dry theology textbook. God is so much more creative than that and we should be grateful that He is. The fact that this only makes us work harder in order to properly interpret the Bible is sort of too bad. It is the responsibility God has given to us and it is a small price to pay for such a wonderful word He has blessed us with.

The next thing I wish to discuss is the question that often comes up among both believers and unbelievers, and that is: Do we have to follow every word of the Bible? People ask this because as orthodox Christians we insist on the inerrancy of the Bible and yet we also make it clear that some of the commands in the Bible do not apply to us today. This can seem like a contradiction to a lot of people. As far as the commands of God go, please review the first chapter in the final book of my “basics” series. As far as obeying every word of the Bible, there is absolutely a sense in which we must obey every word of it precisely because it is in the inerrant word of God. However, we must carefully explain what we mean by this. Every word of God must be believed. In that key sense, we are to obey every word of God. Believing what God says is a command of God. This command is found all throughout the Bible. Hence, when we believe what

God says, we are being obedient to this commandment. Even when we are dealing with commands that no longer apply to us today, we are still to believe that God gave these commands when the Bible says that He did and that at that time these commands were perfectly suited to the needs of God's people.

Now, if you have read my other works for beginners as I have recommended, you will know that technically we do not have any of the original books of the Bible. We only have copies and most of us read imperfect translations of those imperfect copies. If you are unfamiliar with this truth, I understand that it can sound disconcerting at first. Please read my essay on Bible difficulties to have this cleared up for you. With all of this made clear, it is still important to say that if God, like through a miracle or something, allowed us to see what was exactly written in the original documents of the Bible (and gave us the ability to fully read the original languages if you don't have that ability [which is of course the case for most people]), we would of course be obligated to believe every single word of those documents as said above. This all may seem like a pointless distinction, but again, please read my essay on Bible difficulties and you will see that this is not the case. And if you want to go even deeper on this point, you can also read my essay on the practical implications of the doctrine of inerrancy. That essay can also be found on my website, in the section on Tony Jones.

The final interpretive issue that I would like to unpack in this subsection has to do with the prophetic portions of the Bible. Remember, all of the bible is prophetic in the sense that all of it was written by prophets. Now, not all of the biblical authors were official prophets. Some were unofficial prophets like David, and I will have more to say about this distinction between official and unofficial prophets later in this work. For now, it is very important for me to reiterate that all of the Bible is prophetic in that all of it was written by prophets. With all of that made very clear, I am here only talking about the side of prophecy known as foretelling as opposed to forthtelling (a distinction I have discussed in my other works for beginners). Foretelling is when the prophets would authoritatively proclaim what was to take place in the future as the Holy Spirit revealed these things to them.

It is very important to understand that these portions of Scripture are only giving us snippets of all that the prophet had to say on these matters. Much of these

prophecies (though certainly not all) use confusing language at times. We can be certain that the prophets clarified much of the meaning of these sections orally to those among God's people that were willing to listen. Because of this fact, we must be very, very careful when interpreting these prophetic sections of the Bible. In order to interpret them correctly, we must interpret them in light of all that the Bible has to say elsewhere, especially in the clearest passages. The failure to do this often leads to some very off and bizarre interpretations.

Many people object to this approach to the prophetic sections by saying that this would be illegitimate because we cannot interpret certain prophetic portions of the Bible in light of later prophetic portions because the people that would have received the earlier prophecies would not have had the later prophecies in order to interpret things correctly. But, this is not so. Again, we don't know all what the prophets said to the people of God orally. And that is a key principle to remember when interpreting any portion of the Bible, not just the foretelling portions.

Many others object to this approach by saying that even if all of this were true, it would still then make much of the apologetic force behind the Old Testament prophecies null and void. They say this because they say that if we cannot interpret the Old Testament prophecies in a straightforward manner, then we cannot turn around and use them to say that they prophesied this and that about Jesus and other matters discussed in the New Testament. This is not so. It is true that apologists should be far more careful in how they use Old Testament prophecies. I don't deny this at all and I often get very frustrated with the carelessness of many apologists and other Christian leaders on this point. With all that said, there are some prophecies in the Old Testament that are so plain and clear (we will examine the primary ones soon) that they must be left alone and they do indeed make very clear and specific predictions about certain things, especially the future Messiah. The key point that I am making here though, is that many of the prophecies in the Old Testament do use confusing language and in those cases we must carefully interpret them in the light of the rest of the Bible, especially the clearest passages.

### **Natural Evil vs. Moral Evil**

It is very important to understand the distinction between natural evil and moral evil. God can both allow and directly cause natural evil, but He can only allow moral evil. God can never be the direct cause of moral evil as He can never commit a moral evil Himself because He is immutably morally perfect. You may be thinking to yourself that you don't want to attribute any evil to God and this is of course a very understandable instinct. However, if we think about it, and if we read all that the Bible has to say, then there is no way to say this. The best way to think about this is to think about when a parent punishes his or her child. When we put a child on a timeout, this is natural evil. It is not moral evil for us to do so; in fact, it would be moral evil for us not to do so as we would be spoiling our child if he or she has really misbehaved. But, it is important to recognize that a timeout is not an inherent good. The only reason timeouts are needed is because we live in a fallen world that is littered with moral evil.

I understand that we generally only associate the word *evil* with moral acts, but that is technically not very philosophically sound. I also know that many of you may be wary of philosophy in general because the Bible warns against it. But, the Bible is warning against thinking that philosophy alone can give us all truth. It most certainly cannot and when people try to make philosophy do so, it inevitably ends up in philosophers coming to ridiculous and philosophically unsound conclusions. We all know deep down that we need God's word if we are to fully understand our reality. Having made that very clear, we are to be philosophically sound in the sense that we are to use logic and common sense. The Bible plainly tells us to love God with our minds and so we are to be philosophically sound in that sense.

With all that made clear, you may still say that you are not comfortable using the term *evil* to describe anything other than moral acts, especially in regard to God. The problem with this approach is that all other terms used to describe naturally bad things are too weak. A rotting corpse is evil. To say otherwise is to make light of how bad it is. But, it is not morally evil for a corpse to rot. The reason corpses rot is indeed due to our moral evil as human beings through the fall of Adam. And many times a corpse is rotting for reasons that are more directly associated with moral evil even beyond the actions of Adam. For instance, someone may have murdered this person. Or perhaps this person



died from suicide. Or perhaps this person did not take very good care of himself and this led to his early death. With all that admitted, the actual process of the corpse rotting is not a moral evil. It is part of the natural processes that God has infused into our now fallen world. It is a punishment for our sin. But, that punishment, far from being morally evil, is actually morally praiseworthy on the part of God because it points to His holiness. And yet, we should still call it evil because it is a gross reality that is part of our fallen world. There would be no rotting corpses had there been no sin in the first place.

Now, this is not to say that God directly causes all of the natural evil that takes place in His creation. Many things God merely allows to take their natural course. However, it must be said that whatever takes place in time is allowed by God and God has chosen to allow it. As we saw in the second book to my “basics” series, God has ordained all that comes to pass. Even further, we should remember that as Christians we are most certainly not Deists. Hence, even when God merely allows things to take place, it is not like God got the laws of nature going in the beginning and then basically sits back and allows nature to take its course. Or, it is also not like God simply changed the natural order after the fall in order to punish us and then at that point allowed the natural order to do its thing. At every point God is sustaining all that exists, including the laws of nature, through the Holy Spirit. The very laws of nature could not even be at all if not for God’s sustaining power. With that made abundantly clear, God does often choose not to intervene beyond this sustaining power. What is important to note though, is that He often does intervene. The Bible is quite clear from beginning to end that God does often supernaturally step in and directly cause natural evil to take place.

It should also be said that none of this means we can never see any beauty in natural evil. Natural evil overall is of course terribly awful. As I said, that is why we should use the term *evil* to describe it. But, we can still always see glimmers of God’s beauty and greatness even in the most evil realities. For instance, erupting volcanoes are a natural evil. They are unimaginably destructive and kill many animals. Sometimes they even kill many people. However, we can still be in awe of the power and color that accompanies volcanoes. Volcanoes only have this power and beauty because God has given it to them.

With all of our basic definitions and clarifications out of the way, the reason this doctrine is so important is because it guards against God being falsely accused of sin. When God directly causes natural evil as part of our punishment for the fall, He is not sinning in any way, shape, or form. He is actually acting according to His holiness and justice. This principle is very important in understanding the principle of the lesser of two evils that we discussed at the beginning of my final book in my “basics” series. When we have to use this principle it is important to understand that while we are not committing moral evil, natural evil is still taking place. And we should be saddened by this because natural evil is only a very real part of our experience because of the fall, which was caused by our moral evil as humans in Adam.

The final thing I wish to say on this topic here is that it is necessary to clarify how all of this works when God brings trials to us as Christians that are not disciplinary, but are being used by God to sanctify us and thus bring us closer to Him. When this happens, God is not using natural evil as a punishment towards us. However, it is still important to note that this natural evil only exists in the first place in our world as a punishment towards humans in general for the fall. Hence, even this natural evil cannot be completely divorced from the principle of punishment. Had we never sinned, God could not use natural evil to draw us closer to Himself. This would have been unjust. But now God can use it even though we are no longer subject to Him as our judge. This may seem confusing and so please allow me to explain.

Let us say that an unruly older teenager in a very small village in the Middle Ages got drunk with his friends. And let's say that the punishment for this sin in that particular village was to spend 4 nights in the local jail or pay a specific fine. Therefore the law righteously demands that this teenage boy be put in the jail for 4 nights until his fine is paid. Now this does not mean that no one can show him mercy while he is in jail. The jailers can certainly choose to lessen his punishment in certain ways. They can let him walk around outside under guard for a time, they can give him extra food, they can play a game with him, etc. Even though the law only calls for them to make sure he has enough food and water while in his cell, they can show these types of mercy and not be breaking the law in any way. However, if they let him free altogether, they would be breaking the law. Now let us say that this teenage boy has a good father. And this father

comes and pays his fine on the first day. By law the boy can now be legally released. This is what God did with us in Jesus. However, the boy's father chooses to tell the jailers to keep him in prison for another day to help him learn his lesson. The father is not doing anything unjust. He is loving his son and trying to better him and the jailers understand this and comply because the father has a lot of standing within the village.

Let us also say that there are nasty rats in this jail cell and that this teenage boy hates rats. Further, let us say that there is a better jail cell across the village and the jailers have offered to take the son to this cell since the father has paid his fee. This better jail cell has no rats. The father says no. Let us further say that when the teenager acts out, the father tells the jailers not to give him his food until an hour or two later as a punishment. The father comes to visit his son multiple times during his short stay in prison. They talk about many things and the boy is sincerely repentant and wants to make changes. However, he does have weak moments and the jailers did have to give him his lunch late. The jailers giving him his lunch late corresponds to when God disciplines us for our sins as our Father, not as our judge. And the rats correspond to the natural evil God allows in our lives in order to strengthen us. The father in this analogy is not doing anything wrong by allowing the boy to stay in jail for an extra day, by keeping him with the rats, and by having him punished when he acts out. The same is true with our Father and in no way takes away from the fact that Jesus has fully paid the price for our sin.

However, if the father took his other completely innocent son and told the jailers to put him in the jail cell with the rats in order to strengthen his character, the jailers would think that the father had lost his sanity. And the same is true with God. We must understand that any natural evil God brings our way that is not disciplinary is still not entirely divorced from our sin. The fall is the only reason this natural evil exists that God uses to strengthen our character as Christians. It also needs to be said that natural evil is not the only thing God uses to bring trials into our lives. He does often use the moral evils of other people and the demons as part of our trials. The key point though, is that this is not always the case. Sometimes God allows us to get sick or something along those lines apart from the moral evil of any other beings.

## Christian Ethics and “Love is Love”

True Christian ethics is based on what God commands alone. We are not to try to figure out what is right and wrong on our own. It also recognizes that often what God tells us to do does not always make a great deal of sense to us. God is infinite and knows all things; we are finite and know very little in the big scheme of things. Just as a child must listen to his or her parents in spite of the fact that often what the parent says does not make perfect sense to him or her, the same is true for us. A child often does not understand why the parent won't allow him or her to eat nothing but doughnuts all day and instead wants him or her to eat the nasty cauliflower. To the child, doughnuts taste great and fill him or her up. What is not to like? And cauliflower makes him or her gag. Is the parent stupid or something? Why does the parent want him or her to gag? Getting shots is about the worst thing most very young children have to experience. It is extremely painful and terrifying. Why does the parent make the child go through this? And yet good children somehow instinctively know that the parent has his or her best interest at heart. The same is true with us and God.

The world hates this type of ethics. The world wants to know why something is right or wrong at all times and if anyone cannot explain why, this person will be rejected. Because the world finds the true Christian ethic so repugnant, many Christians are always trying to soften it and explain the tougher elements away. The temptation to be loved by the world is always present, even within the true church. My friends, stop with this. The world is not going to love you. It is going to hate you as it hated your Savior. Please, I'm begging you, stop expecting something else. You will be so much happier and at peace when you do. You will draw closer to the Lord in humble obedience. I understand that being hated by the world comes with consequences. In some parts of the world, it comes with severe consequences. And in many parts of America, the consequences are getting worse for true Christians. But that is the Christian life. Learn to accept it and you will be far more Spirit led and filled.

This does not mean that we should never use common sense in the realm of Christian ethics. The Bible often talks about using wisdom and it is usually referring to our daily ethical decisions. And many topics are not directly addressed in Scripture and

therefore in all such cases, we should do our best to use the revelation God has given to us outside of His word to come to the best conclusions we can. However, the Bible is very clear that while one can have knowledge without wisdom, one cannot have wisdom without knowledge. This means that all of our ethical decisions must be informed by the core ethical principles and commandments that God has been very clear about for us in His word. That baseline must always be obeyed and must be the grid by which we interpret all other situations that are not directly discussed in the Bible. Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with trying to figure out why God has commanded something as best we can. However, we must understand that even when we do not have great answers, we are still to obey.

Before moving forward, I want to say how much sense this ethic actually makes. I used to coach basketball. For a few years I gave individual basketball lessons to budding players. Many of these players were bursting with natural talent, but were very ignorant of many of the fundamentals of the game and how to properly train. A great deal of what I would tell them would not make sense to them at first. I would often change their shooting form and for a while they would shoot terribly before getting better. When I would first make this change, it would often not make sense to them, it would feel really off to them, and it would often frustrate them as it seemed like they were going backwards. Many would not stick with it and would be worse players in the long run because of it. We think we know everything as humans, but we don't. God sees things from an eternal perspective, and we must trust Him.

With all of this firmly laid out, I want to look at one of the most common slogans found in our culture. And this is "love is love." I understand that it was mostly used to defend gay marriage for a very long time, but it actually reflects a much broader mentality in our culture and that is if genuine love is present in any act, the act itself must be good. The problem is that no one actually believes this. If a parent loves his neighbor's child more than his own, we all understand that this is wrong. It doesn't matter that genuine love is present, this is a disgustingly misplaced love and the parent needs to correct himself. I think a lot of our culture thinks that we as Christians are denying that any real love is present in gay relationships or similar controversial ethical

acts. We are doing no such thing. We are well aware of the fact that often very deep love is present. That doesn't justify the love though.

The same is true regarding love of idols or false religion. Many people in our culture assume that if someone sincerely loves her "god" and her religion, that this automatically makes this love holy and beautiful. Many assume that if hate is not present, then only good things can be present. None of this follows. I have known many LDS people very closely since I was a young child. And I can testify that many of them very sincerely and deeply love their "god" and their Church. No one is saying that they are hatefully faking things so as to deceive the world. That doesn't take away from the evil of their idolatry. And it is wrong to think that just because sincere love is present, that no hate of any kind could ever also be present at the same time. Their sincere love for their "god" is a form of hatred of the one true God because they are rejecting the one true God through their love of their false "god." So yes, love is love, but that does not thereby justify all acts of love. People often love evil things or love in evil and very misplaced ways.

## **Chapter 2: Part 2 of Section 1**

### **The Messiah**

#### Introduction

In this chapter I want to more fully unpack all that the Old Testament prophesied about the Messiah. But, before I do so, I want to make it clear that not all true Christians will agree with everything I say in this subsection. As said in the preface, it is important that I make this clear because most of what I say in Section 1 of this work will pertain to doctrines that all true Christians believe in. So, the reason I placed this subsection in Section 1 despite the fact that much of what I say in this subsection will not be agreed upon by all true Christians is because all true Christians do believe that the Messiah

was prophesied about in the Old Testament. All true Christians believe in the reality of the Messiah, that certain specific things were foretold about Him in the Old Testament, and that Jesus of Nazareth is this Messiah. However, with all that made clear, when you start to dive into the particulars, disagreements do arise. So, I will lay out my understanding of the Old Testament prophecies and I will explain where some genuinely godly theologians would disagree with me.

For a very basic breakdown of the concept of “Messiah” that all true Christians would agree upon, please see the second book of my “basics” series, pages 31-38. With that backdrop in mind, let us look more specifically at what the Old Testament foretold about this future Messiah. The full picture of what the Messiah is, is made clear when looking at the entirety of the Bible and that is what I described in my “basics” book above. What we are going to do here is hone in on what the Old Testament said about Him before the fullness of New Testament revelation was given. In order to properly do this, the first concept we need to discuss is what is known as *sensus plenior*. This concept can be a bit confusing at first for those that are not familiar with it. So, please read through what I have to say about it slowly and carefully. Do so repeatedly as necessary in order to avoid any misconceptions.

The phrase is a Latin phrase that means *fuller sense*. It is talking about how often in language people use words to mean more than one thing. Often there is the plain on the surface meaning while there is also a deeper more hidden meaning. I know that this type of talk makes many true Christians very nervous and for good reason. The Gnostics believed that the Bible was basically written in hidden coded language. Many heretics today believe in Bible codes that are utterly ridiculous. Please know that I am not advocating anything along those lines and neither are other orthodox theologians who believe in this very important concept. In fact, all true Christians believe in this concept to some degree whether they admit it or not.

Allow me to give an example of this concept before we look at its application to Scripture. A parent may say to a child, “We are going to play in the water today!” Based on past experience, the child would understand that this meant that he or she would be playing in the sprinklers on the lawn with the parent later that day. And that is exactly what the two do for about an hour in the morning. This represents the basic, plain, on

the surface-level meaning of the words said by the parent, words the parent entirely fulfilled. But, after playing for an hour, the parent says, “Grab your towel and get in the car, I have a huge surprise for you, we are really gonna play in the water today!” The child exuberantly gets in the car and the parent takes him or her to the local water park for an amazing day. This represents the secondary more hidden meaning of the words. At first, only the parent was privy to the full meaning of the words. The child only became aware of the full meaning after they arrived at the water park. No deception whatsoever has been committed here by the parent. The parent has simply used language in a creative and beautiful way to bless his or her child. And God often does the same with Scripture.

The clearest example of this that all true Bible-believing Christians fully accept is the reality of types in the Bible. A type refers to when God does something to bless His people that also points to a greater, fuller fulfillment. All true Christians agree upon and recognize that the Bible is full of types. One of the best examples of a type in Scripture is that of Passover. On the first Passover, God had the Israelites living in Egypt put blood on their doors so that the avenging angel would “passover” their homes and not put to death their firstborn sons as the angel was going to do to the Egyptians. The New Testament makes it clear though, that the ultimate fulfillment of this is in Jesus. His blood will legally cover us at the final judgment and God will “passover” us and not condemn us to hell as He will do so with the rest of humanity.

You may ask, “Ok, if all solid theologians agree on types, why is *sensus plenior* so controversial within the true church?” Again, this is because many theologians want to be very careful so as to avoid the heresies of the Gnostics and the Bible code nonsense today. I appreciate this caution very much, but I think it is taking things too far and this often leads to bad interpretations of certain verses in my strong estimation. Those who are very cautious will often respond to types like Passover by saying that the Israelites understood both meanings when Passover was first given. Hence, they say, there really was no hidden secondary meaning that was to be more fully revealed down the line. I think this is a massive stretch. Others who are very cautious will agree with me that this proposed solution is quite a stretch, but they will say that we should only say that a type exists when the New Testament is completely clear that one exists. They



say that this guards people from getting carried away. And because most of those, like myself, who advocate for *sensus plenior*, believe that the principle is clearly present even in cases where the New Testament does not explicitly say so, these cautious theologians seek to avoid the term *sensus plenior*. With all that clarified, I think only seeing types where the New Testament explicitly specifies one exists is also a major stretch.

For example, in my opinion, and in the opinion of most theologians throughout church history, when Rahab put the scarlet rope outside of her window, this should be seen as a type of Jesus. Think about it: the name Jesus in Hebrew is actually just the name *Joshua*. And Joshua was leading the Israelites to judge and destroy the Pagan city of Jericho. Only Rahab and her family were spared because she put the scarlet rope outside of her window. When Jesus returns to destroy the unbelieving world, He will come with all of His followers who have died and all of the good angels. He will destroy all unbelievers, but He will take all believers still on earth up to the sky to join Him because they are covered by His blood. It hardly seems an accident that the rope Rahab was told to use was to be scarlet. And it hardly seems an accident that Joshua bears the same name as Jesus. He is plainly a type of Jesus in many respects. Unfortunately though, many of these cautious theologians refuse to see the scarlet rope as a type of Jesus because this is nowhere explicitly stated in the New Testament.

While I do think that this is unfortunate and represents bad biblical interpretation, it is not the end of the world. However, where this caution does cause problems is when certain interpretations have to be forced and this makes us as the church look bad. Let me give one example of this. In Matthew 2:14-15, we are told by the Apostle Matthew that Jesus' flight into Egypt with His parents is in fulfillment of Hosea 11:1. But, the Hosea passage is obviously referring to the nation of Israel and not to the Messiah as far as a basic, plain, on the surface-level reading is concerned. Many enemies of the faith point to this passage and to other verses like it in an attempt to say that the New Testament often misquotes and misinterprets the Old Testament. The cautious theologians I talked about try to say that the Hosea passage actually does clearly refer to both the nation of Israel and to the future Messiah and that this would have been

clear to the first readers of Hosea. I encourage you to read the passage in context and with an open mind and I feel confident you will see what a stretch this is.

It is far better to see *sensus plenior* at work here. We don't have a type here, but God was initially referring to the nation of Israel and then later made it clear that the full fulfillment of this passage is to be found in Jesus, God's ultimate Son by nature and not only by adoption as was the case with the nation of Israel. This is a far more natural way to interpret the passage in light of what Matthew says, and trust me when I say from a lot of experience with unbelievers, that it is a far better way to answer the enemies of the faith as they can see what the plain meaning of the Hosea text is in context. If you disagree with me, that is fine. It is not heretical to deny the concept of *sensus plenior* as I understand it. But, I will be proceeding from here as if I have established it because I do believe it makes the most sense out of the Bible as a whole.

With the concept established, it is very important to say that this in no way gives us the right to now interpret the Bible however we want and just say, "*Sensus plenior!*" Before we ever use this principle, we must establish our doctrines based upon the plain reading of numerous texts. This is where the Gnostics went so badly astray. They often said that the plain reading of the Bible is incorrect or is not what the author was actually trying to say. I am not in any way saying this. I am saying that we must fully accept the plain reading as God's absolute truth, but that if we have good reason to do so, we can at times (without getting carried away regarding how often we use this principle) say that there is *also* a deeper hidden meaning going on as well based upon other doctrines that have been well established by the plain reading of numerous verses. Notice that the deeper meaning does not negate or supplant the plain meaning. It only supplements it. And that supplementation can only come from a doctrine that has been well established by the plain reading of numerous verses. The deeper meaning cannot contradict or explain away the plain meaning. That is where the Gnostics went terribly astray. And the Bible code pushers today are in error because they often try to find codes using all sorts of elaborate, complicated, and esoteric methods. Again, we are only to see a deeper meaning after we have established a doctrine from the plain reading of Scripture. If this cannot be done, then we are not to seek to find meanings that are not there.

Let me give a good example of how to properly use *sensus plenior*. Let us look at Ezekiel 28:1-19. This text in context is talking about the king of Tyre. However, we know from the Bible as a whole, as I showed in the second book of my “basics” series, that Satan is a fallen angel. With that doctrine firmly established by numerous passages, and the plain reading of those passages, it is near impossible not to see some *sensus plenior* going on here in this text from Ezekiel. Clearly much of the language here cannot be used for the king of Tyre in a literal fashion. Much of it obviously applies to him in an exaggerated and figurative sense. However, because of this language and the doctrine on Satan, it is almost impossible to say that much of this language is not also talking about Satan on some level. And most theologians throughout church history have agreed with me here. What the Bible code heretics do is they say that if you punch in all these numbers in the Bible into a computer it gives us some prophecy or new teaching that we could not find in the Bible from any plain reading of any passages. That is heresy and I am advocating no such thing.

With the parameters for *sensus plenior* in place, I want to make it clear that I think a lot of the verses from the Old Testament that the New Testament says are fulfilled in a certain way are in fact using *sensus plenior*. And I think that this is true of a lot of verses regarding the Messiah. Hence, I do not think it is wise to look at every single verse that the New Testament talks about in regard to the Messiah and say that all of these verses and their New Testament interpretation are in fact what the Old Testament plainly foretold about the Messiah. I think it is a far better method to first look at the very plain verses from the Old Testament on the Messiah to see what it says about Him, and then look at all of the verses from the New Testament to fill out our knowledge of all that the Messiah is. Please understand me though, I am not in any way saying that I don't believe the New Testament verses on the Messiah. I believe that whatever they say about certain Old Testament verses is absolutely in fact the case. My point is simply to say that I think in many cases the New Testament is using *sensus plenior* to interpret certain Old Testament verses that it says are about the Messiah even though I think many of these verses cannot be used to point to Him on an initial; basic; plain; surface-level meaning.

Before moving forward, I do want to address a quick question that many of you probably have right about now. And that is this: did the Jews at the time have any interpretive methods similar to *sensus plenior*? This question is often asked because it seems that if they did not, then there would be no way that they would understand the apostles when they used this interpretive principle. And the answer to that question is yes, they absolutely did. Now this principle was often abused by the Jews in the centuries leading up to Jesus and this should be a huge caution to us in how we use this principle. But, when the apostles used this principle, it would not have been something that was foreign to those familiar with the Jews and the Old Testament at that time.

With all of this laid out, I want to now look at the plain texts from the Old Testament to discuss what they clearly prophesied concerning the future Messiah. Before I do so though, I want to say a few very important things. The first is that I am not saying that all orthodox Christians agree with me concerning these being the primary plain texts from the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. As said earlier, many of the cautious theologians I discussed above would, based on New Testament precedent, see every New Testament reference to the Messiah in the Old Testament as a clear prophecy of the Messiah from the Old Testament. Second, there are some passages from the Old Testament that the New Testament says are Messianic that are debatable as to their initial plain interpretation and whether or not the New Testament is in fact using *sensus plenior* in those cases. I think one such example is Micah 5:2. Again, please don't get me wrong. There is no question that this passage is ultimately referring to the Messiah. The New Testament is explicit about this. My point is only to say that it is hard to definitively say if this text in its plain sense must be interpreted in that fashion or not. I will not be examining any of these gray texts in this subsection other than the one we just discussed.

Third, I am not in this subsection going to fully discuss what all the Jews thought about the Messiah at the time of Jesus. I will allude to some of their ideas here and there as those are relevant to my discussion, but I will not be providing a full review of all that they believed. It should be noted that not all the Jews believed the same exact things regarding the Messiah. However, with that said, there were certain basic beliefs

that almost all Jews held to at that time. Some of them are the same as what we Christians believe. One example would be that the Messiah would be a descendant of king David. With that said, many Jews, largely due to the influence of the Pharisees, believed that God had not only given His word through Scripture, but had given the Jews an oral law that was to be preserved and passed down through the Pharisees. There is zero evidence of this in the Old Testament and Jesus condemned this oral law. This does not mean that God only revealed Himself through Scripture before the time of Jesus though. As I made clear in the first book of my “basics” series, God often revealed Himself through means other than Scripture. However, there is no evidence whatsoever that this oral word of God was ever to be preserved and passed down by non-prophets. Because of this reality with the Pharisees though, many Jews had very incorrect ideas about what the Messiah would be like. And this was one of the key reasons they rejected Jesus so passionately.

It should also be said that many of the Jews did interpret many of the gray verses as referring to the Messiah. This would at first glance seem to give strong support for not seeing these verses as gray after all. The problem is that we don't know all of the reasons why they did in fact interpret these verses in this manner. In some cases, the verses may indeed not be all that gray and I may just be wrong and overly cautious in these instances. But, it may be the case that the verse is somewhat gray as far as its Messianic meaning, and a prophet revealed the deeper meaning to the people of God down the line and this meaning was carried down among the Israelites and then God put this deeper meaning into writing in the New Testament. If this occurred, and it probably did, we cannot say from the text of the Old Testament alone that these verses were in fact Messianic from a plain reading alone.

My statement about the Israelites carrying down these oral prophecies may seem to contradict what I said about there being no evidence of non-prophets preserving and passing down these oral revelations. This is not the case though. When a prophet spoke the word of God orally alone, this word would have been fully authoritative as long as the prophet lived. But, if God never put this particular revelation into Scripture and the prophet died, then this revelation would no longer have been fully authoritative as there would be no way to authenticate precisely what was said. This is all I am

saying about the notion of the Pharisees that the oral revelations of Moses that did not make it into Scripture were preserved in an authoritative fashion by the Pharisees. There is no evidence for that in the Old Testament, and there is clear evidence in the New Testament that this never happened. That does not mean though, that many Israelites would not have remembered certain prophecies. These prophecies could have been remembered and the Pharisees could have incorporated them into their oral traditions to some degree.

Another very important thing to say about why many of the Jews were so off in regard to the Messiah is because they were so scarred from the Exile. The Israelites were constantly falling into idolatry and God eventually severely judged them with the Exile. After the Exile, the Jews were so petrified of idolatry that it became impossible for them to correctly interpret many of the Messianic passages that speak of how the Messiah will be God in the flesh. Since the Old Testament is so clear that God is not a man, the Jews after the Exile felt it impossible for God to take on a human nature as is prophesied in the Old Testament. This is why the Jews so strongly felt that Jesus was blaspheming when He claimed to be God.

The fourth important item I want to discuss before diving into the plain Old Testament passages on the Messiah, is that I will also not be fully discussing what the Jews of today think about the passages we will examine. Judaism today has been terribly corrupted by the many books that have been added to the Old Testament as authoritative within that religion. Much of what is in these books goes back to the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned in the strongest terms. I will also not be fully covering what many unbelieving scholars say about these verses today. Many of them are trying to appease Jewish teachers today with their interpretations, and many of them cannot believe that the Old Testament actually prophesied many openly manifest things about Jesus Christ. Therefore, they often twist and contort these verses very badly and then couch these twistings in all sorts of fancy sounding scholarly language. They then try to say that we cannot question them because they are the scholars. The problem is that these verses are not hard to interpret and not all scholars agree with these twisted interpretations. I am asking you to carefully read the verses in context and you will see that they say certain very specific things about what the Messiah would be

like. And all of these very specific things were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, and by Him alone.

The fifth and final item I want to discuss here is the fact that not all orthodox theologians believe that the passages we are about to examine teach the full deity of Christ. Most will say that they believe that they strongly hint at the doctrine, but that they alone do not teach the full deity of the Messiah. Now, to be clear, these are godly theologians that wholeheartedly believe in the full deity of Jesus. But, they do so from the New Testament and believe that the Old Testament only hints at the doctrine. I agree that the Old Testament only hints at the Trinity and the full atonement of Jesus, but I think these theologians are very mistaken regarding the fact that the Old Testament certainly seems to teach pretty clearly the full deity of the future Messiah. Most theologians throughout church history have agreed with me. Many of these other theologians are cautious here because they think that if the Old Testament had been so clear here, the Jews would not have been so shocked at Jesus' claim to be God. I think this is a very weak argument based on what was said in the paragraph before the last one.

### The Messiah in the Old Testament

In my strong estimation, the core plain passages on the Messiah from the Old Testament are: Genesis 3:1-15 (especially verse 15); Psalm 2; Psalm 45 (especially verse 6); Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 53; and Daniel 7:9-14. From these key verses, we can conclude 15 core truths about the future Messiah. I have listed them below and then I will expound upon them.

- 1.) The Messiah will be a man.
- 2.) The Messiah will be a mighty deliverer from Satan.
- 3.) The Messiah will be the preeminent anointed one of God.
- 4.) The Messiah will be rejected by the unbelieving world.
- 5.) The Messiah will be God's ultimate human king, especially of God's people, forever.

- 6.) The Messiah will be the Son of God.
- 7.) The Messiah will conquer and reign over the world forever.
- 8.) The Messiah will be God in the flesh.
- 9.) The Messiah will be a descendant of David.
- 10.) The Messiah will be average looking.
- 11.) The Messiah will die for the sins of God's people.
- 12.) The Messiah will be the Lamb of God.
- 13.) The Messiah will be raised from the dead.
- 14.) The Messiah will be called the Son of Man.
- 15.) The Messiah will be worshiped by His followers from all nations.

Many will argue that there is no way to know that each of the above passages are talking about the same person. This is not so. The Genesis 3 passage makes it quite clear that a future human figure will also somehow be a cosmic figure that will defeat the work of the serpent. I agree that going by Genesis 3 alone, we could not know who this serpent character is. However, the rest of the Old Testament does not leave us in the dark here. Therefore, even when going by the Old Testament alone, it is clear that God will raise up a singular human figure of cosmic significance that will defeat the work of Satan. It follows then that whenever the Old Testament subsequently refers to such a cosmic figure, it must be referring to the same individual.

I also agree that we could not know from these passages alone that the Messiah would be the Son of God in a Trinitarian sense. This title could have only been referring to the human nature of the Messiah. We know from the New Testament that this is not the case, but again, we could not know this from the Old Testament alone. I also agree that we could not know from Isaiah 53 alone the full doctrine of the atonement. We could only conclude that the Messiah in some sense died to deal with the sins of God's people. I also agree that Psalm 45 is mostly referring to Solomon. However, verse 6 cannot be primarily referring to Solomon for obvious reasons. Therefore, we have a clear instance of *sensus plenior* going on here even before we get to the New Testament. I also agree that none of these texts explicitly refers to the resurrection of the Messiah. But, it is the clear inference from all of the passages taken together. Isaiah



53 makes it clear that He will die, and yet many of the other texts make it clear that He will reign forever and ever. Hence, He must die and be raised from the dead.

Even unbelievers are constrained to say that Jesus fulfilled many of these prophecies. Almost all scholars agree that a real man named Jesus of Nazareth existed. Almost all scholars agree that He was Jewish. While this does not fully prove He was a descendant of David, it does prove part of that claim as any descendent of David would be a descendant of Abraham. Almost all scholars agree that Jesus died by crucifixion. And everyone agrees that Jesus is today worshiped by millions of people from all nations across the globe. Even those that believe Jesus did not exist have to say that the Jesus “character” is worshiped all over the world exactly as Daniel 7 says. Whether anyone wants to believe this or not, no other religion on the planet can point to prophecies this specific that were fulfilled in such a specific manner by only one person. Only Biblical Christianity is true.

Don't listen to all of the Atheist bozos out there today who say that Jesus never claimed to be God even according to the Gospels. It is true that Jesus was very subtle about His claim to being God and this was His prerogative. We don't get to tell God how He should do things. But, Jesus according to the Gospels referred to Himself as the Son of Man more than any other title Jesus used for Himself! That shows beyond all doubt that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, and as we have seen, a claim to being the Messiah was a claim to being God according to the Old Testament. On top of this title, Jesus often received worship throughout the Gospels, He forgave sins, and He made it clear that He is equal to the Father. Please read through the Gospels slowly and carefully many times and you will not be able to miss all of this. For those with eyes to see, Jesus absolutely claimed to be Almighty God. And that is exactly who the apostles say He was as I showed in the second book to my “basics” series.

### Jesus as Lord

The term *God* is only used in a positive sense for the one true God throughout the Bible. This is not true of the term *Lord*. It can often mean *master* and is used in a positive sense of many who are not God throughout the Bible. However, it is the term

that is used throughout the New Testament to translate the name of God (Yawheh) when quoting from the Old Testament. And often the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament and applies passages that are directed to Yahweh as being about Jesus Himself. This is another very powerful testimony to the full deity of Jesus Christ. With that said, this does not mean that every time Jesus is called *Lord* in the Gospels, He is being called God. Many, including His inner circle of 12 disciples (the apostles), were probably only calling Him *Master* when using this title as they clearly did not always fully understand the full deity of Christ before His resurrection. However, after the resurrection, this would have been fully understood and this is reflected in the epistles where the full deity of Jesus is often asserted. This is not to say that the Gospels don't also assert the deity of Jesus. They certainly do. But, the authors do so through their own commentary on the historical events and by pointing to things Jesus said that clearly show His full deity. The followers of Jesus themselves though, did not fully understand the full deity of Jesus before His resurrection and that is reflected in the Gospel narratives.

With all of this made clear, when Jesus is referred to as *Lord* throughout the epistles, these references are clear references to His full deity. He is *the Lord*! Often the writers of the epistles will refer to Him as both Christ and Lord in the same context. These references are powerful declarations of the full deity of Jesus. He is the Lord (God) precisely because He is the Messiah (Christ).

### **Chapter 3: Part 3 of Section 1**

#### **The Name of God**

Many Christians often become confused over the fact that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, often seems to suggest that we are to worship the name of God itself. This is confusing to folks because it can seem odd to worship God's name rather than God Himself. The reason the Bible uses this language is to emphasize the fact that

the true worship of God can only come if it is done towards the one and only true God. God is not a nameless, faceless figure whom we can pour whatever meaning into that we want. God has a name (Yahweh) and He has defined Himself for us in His word. God does not accept any worship of Him if one is worshiping a “god” of his or her making. Therefore, when we “worship” the name of God, we are not actually worshiping His name, but we are worshiping Him in His name. And the Bible simply poetically reflects this. Even when we “worship” the name of Jesus, we are still ultimately worshiping Yahweh because Jesus is Yahweh. The name *Jesus* refers to the second person of the Trinity in His incarnate state. But, the ultimate name of Jesus is Yahweh as is the case for the Father and the Spirit as well.

### **The Holy Spirit**

I have already said a great deal about the Holy Spirit in my previous works, especially in the second book of my “basics” series. And much more will be said about Him later in this work as well. However, there are some really key sub-doctrines that are part of the broader doctrine of the Holy Spirit that I was not able to hit on, that I would like to explore here. The first thing I would like to discuss is the fact that the Bible often refers to the Holy Spirit in feminine terms. This can confuse people because the Bible for the most part describes God in masculine terms. It is extremely important to understand that God is not a man. The Bible makes this unequivocally clear in Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29. God is not a human being, He is perfect spirit as I make clear in the first chapter of the second book of my “basics” series. Now, many will respond to this by saying that while it is true that God is not a man, He is still masculine. They say that this is plainly proven by the fact that God is usually called “He” throughout the Bible. And this is absolutely true. Having fully admitted that important truth, which we will explore more in a moment, it must be said that God is not only masculine. God is the perfect combination of masculine and feminine and this is precisely why humans are said to be made in the image of God, both male and female.

Thus, it is no surprise when we see biblical evidence of God having both masculine and feminine attributes. The Father and the Son are both described in more

masculine terms, while the Holy Spirit is often described in more feminine terms. This does not indicate that the persons of the Trinity are at all different from each other when it comes to their inherent attributes. All three are entirely identical when it comes to attributes because each of them is fully God. However, as we saw in the second book of my “basics” series, they do have different roles to play. And it is the role of the Father and the Son to more reflect the masculine side of God, while it is the role of the Spirit to more reflect the feminine side of God. The Holy Spirit shows to us more of the nurturing and mysterious side of God, God’s more feminine characteristics.

As to why God usually refers to Himself in masculine terms when speaking of God in general and not of one particular person of the Trinity, this is plainly because it is emphasizing that God is before all things. Just as Adam was created before Eve, God exists before all else. This pattern in Scripture does not in any way indicate any sexism. Be very aware of radical feminists who try to say that God should have revealed Himself in such a way that would make men and women the same. This is radically heretical theology. It is mostly found within Liberal Protestantism, especially Progressive Christianity, and it must be firmly rejected by all true Christians. Men and women are 100% equal. Men and women are both equally created in the image of God. God is not more masculine than He is feminine. He is equally both. However, God did not create men and women the same and it is some of the worst heresy in all of the history of the world to say otherwise.

If you are a woman, you should be very proud of your femininity. You reflect the glory of God in wonderful ways. If you are a man, you should never be ashamed of your masculinity as our current culture tells you. You reflect the glory of God in wonderful ways as well. All of this also means that God is not obligated to deal with men and women in the same fashion. God did not punish men and women in the same manner. Women are punished more severely in this life, and men will be more severely punished at the final judgment. I understand how much our culture hates this truth. I understand how much you may struggle with it as well if you are a new Christian. But, you don’t get to tell God how to do things. One of the most difficult parts of growing in our walk with God is learning to let go of our own authority and submit to God’s. And God does not do things exactly how we want. And He is not obligated to do so either. Get over yourself.

Just as I need to get over myself. Pray that I would do so more and more. You may wonder about men who struggle to be masculine, and women who struggle to be feminine. What are they supposed to do in order to be faithful Christians? We will tackle that topic later in this work.

Does any of this then mean that we can at times call God, or the Holy Spirit in particular, *she* or *her*? No. The Bible never ever calls God or the Spirit in particular *she* or *her*. When radical feminists seek to use these terms for God, they are not seeking to elevate women, they are seeking to downgrade God. God has His reasons for describing Himself the way He does, reasons we have already discussed. And when we seek to go against His reasons, we are trying to set ourselves up as God. It is that simple.

The next item I would like to discuss in connection with the Holy Spirit is the biblical doctrine that the Holy Spirit fills us and indwells us as believers. A lot of new Christians really struggle to fully understand what this means. The first thing to say about these doctrines is that it is of the utmost importance not to take them overly literally. This is because God is infinite spirit and is everywhere. Therefore, God the Holy Spirit does not come inside of us in a literal manner as a force or something like that. What these doctrines are clearly pointing to is the fact that the Holy Spirit makes us more aware of His presence, He changes us from within, and He is empowering us from within as well. And by “within” here, I am talking about our souls. God changes our souls as He sanctifies us, and this in turn naturally affects our bodies as our bodies and souls are joined together. As far as the biblical difference between being filled and indwelt, it seems that the Bible primarily uses the concept of being permanently indwelt with the Spirit to indicate that He is always with us as Christians and that He has changed our natures in salvation. But, the concept of filling refers to the fact that sometimes the Holy Spirit is with us in a far more powerful manner than at other times. The Bible also clearly indicates that we can be more and more filled with the Spirit through prayer and obedience.

The reason a proper understanding of this doctrine is so important is because it avoids so many heresies that are plaguing the church today. Pantheism and Panentheism are both heresies that are becoming more and more common within both

Progressive Christianity and certain facets of the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. For fuller discussions of these understandings of the supernatural, please see my book on the religions of the world. It can be found on my website. While Pantheism is a far less common heresy among those who profess some form of "Christianity," it is growing within the Progressive Christian movement. The idea that God is His creation cannot in any way be reconciled with the Bible. When we say that God, which includes the Holy Spirit, is everywhere, this in no way means that God has become His creation. Even when the Bible figuratively speaks of God being in all things, or all things being in God, none of this means that God is literally in His creation. God is infinite spirit, He created all of His creation, and He is always distinguished from His creation. God is not some impersonal force that is diffused throughout His creation. God in His entire being is mysteriously present to His creation at all times. He knows all that goes on with His creation, He knows all that will go on with His creation, and at all times He is sustaining and guiding His creation according to His predestined plan. This is what God's omnipresence is referring to.

Most of what I just said would also apply to Panentheism as well. And any notion that creation is literally inside of God is absurd because this would imply that God can be measured. In order for anything to be inside of God, God would have to be a measurable finite being, even if He was extremely vast. God is infinite spirit and thus nothing can be inside of Him. With that made clear, many Panentheists understand this and say that all they mean is that God has permanently united Himself to His creation in such a manner that they are now one. There is no way to reconcile such a blasphemous doctrine with true Christianity because the Bible says that the only thing God has permanently united Himself to in this fashion is the human nature of Jesus. The incarnation is completely unique and it only applies to the second person of the Trinity. Therefore, be very careful when reading about how the Holy Spirit indwells and fills us. These doctrines are never to be interpreted in a Pantheist or Panentheist sense. God is present to all of His creation, and He is especially present to His saved people through the Holy Spirit.

The final doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit I want to discuss in this subsection is the doctrine of our growth in the Spirit. Many false teachers say that once a person is

saved, he or she will not grow in the “spirit.” They say that either we are fully perfected at the moment of our salvation or that “god” gives us as much of the “spirit” as “he” is going to give us the moment we are saved. These false teachers say, in contrast to the antinomians, that “Christians” will live a godly life, but that this will always remain the same throughout the “Christian” life. This is not the teaching of Scripture. We know from John 7:37-39 and John 4:10-14 that the Spirit is the source of our spiritual life (we will also discuss these passages in more detail later in this work). Clearly being indwelt by the Spirit is what changes us from being evil people to becoming holy people. It is true that Jesus says that those with the Spirit will never thirst again, and He says in John 6 that those who come to Him will never hunger again. These false teachers badly abuse these verses. From the rest of the Bible it is quite plain that they do not mean that we are not to grow in the Spirit. They are only referring to the fact that as saved people we will never feel completely starved or parched spiritually because we always have the Spirit. That does not mean that we won’t feel somewhat hungry and thirsty spiritually though. The Bible is very clear that we will and that we can grow in the Spirit.

Romans 7 gives us a very honest picture of the struggles of the Christian life. From that section of Scripture it is clear that we are in constant need of help as Christians. And it is also clear that we are not to rely on ourselves. Our sinful nature can produce no good thing. Therefore, if we are going to grow it is obvious that we can only do so through the power of the Spirit who resides within us. And the Bible constantly commands us to grow. We could look at many examples of this, but the fact that God repeatedly chastises lukewarm Christians more than proves the point (two examples of this are 1 Corinthians 3:1-15 and Revelation 3:14-22). These chastisements plainly imply that Christians can choose to not remain in a lukewarm state. Now John 15 is clear that all true Christians will naturally grow through the Father’s pruning to some degree. But, we know that this is only the bare minimum for many lukewarm Christians.

So, how do we grow in the Spirit then? As we saw in the last book of my “basics” series, we primarily grow through prayer and reading the Bible. When we pray, we should fervently pray that the Spirit would in fact grow us deeply. As we saw above, we are not to rely on our strength. This does not mean that we should be constantly praying to the Spirit directly. As we saw in my essay on prayer, we mostly pray to Jesus Himself.

However, even when we pray to the Father or Jesus, we should often be asking God to further and further sanctify us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Also, as we pray and read the word, the Spirit will strengthen us both through internal and external means. As we obey God, God gives us more of His Spirit (John 15:1-3). Praying and reading the word are the most fundamental ways we obey God. But, there is also a sense in which prayer and reading the word externally strengthen us as we are fostering our relationship with God and that naturally causes our spiritual side to feel stronger. From this, we desire to follow all of God's commands more. That leads to more of the Spirit (God blessing our obedience) and to us naturally feeling stronger in our spiritual side. The more we make the commands of God a habit, the more our sinful nature cannot get the best of us. Finally, God also uses outward circumstances, both good and bad, to strengthen us. The Bible is extremely clear about this from beginning to end. The good circumstances cause our spiritual side to be even more grateful to God and thus strengthen us. And the negative circumstances cause us to cry out to God more and in that process we are naturally drawn more closely to Him.

### **Unconditional Love**

I briefly touched upon the concept of unconditional love in my essay on addressing heresy. That essay can be found on my website. But, I want to say a lot more about this here. Far too many people, and even far too many in the true church today unfortunately, greatly abuse this truth. They use it to teach unbiblical doctrines in my estimation, and many outside of the church use it to teach blatant heresy. On the flip side, far too much of the Reformed world today has grossly overreacted to these problems and seeks to deny this truth, at least in God, altogether. All of this is deeply unbiblical in my opinion and needs to be corrected.

In my estimation, both common sense and the Bible clearly teach that God has unconditional love. In my strong opinion, both common sense and the Bible teach us that we should seek to emulate this characteristic in God as much as possible. With that made clear, many people then interpret this truth to say that there should be no justice, only forgiveness. That is an insane proposition and it most certainly cannot be



reconciled with the Bible. Obviously no true Christian would ever assert such madness. However, many true Christians do try to use this truth to say that it leads to the undeniable conclusion that the doctrine of unconditional election must be false. Others also seek to use this truth to say that in the church there should be almost no justice, only forgiveness. They will say that they do understand the need for church discipline in rare cases for the most serious offenses, but they say that these instances should be the exception that proves the rule. None of this follows.

God loves all that exists. But, this does not mean that He loves all things equally. This would not make any sense. God loves Himself (the persons of the Trinity loving each other) far above all else. And while God deeply loves all of His creation, He does not love it all equally. In general, He loves each part of His creation according to how high it is on the spectrum of grandeur. Therefore, God loves bears far more than He loves snails because He created them as higher beings. Hence, God loves humans above all the rest of His creation because He created them as the greatest of created beings. They are even greater than the angels because they alone are created in the image of God. God's love for snails is unconditional. There is nothing they can do to earn it or lose it. Yet, God still does not love them as much as He loves bears.

With God's rational creatures, namely the angels and humans, God loves His people more than He loves unbelievers. In the case of the angels, it is because they have earned this love, but in the case of God's saved humans, it is not because they have earned this greater love, it is because Jesus Christ earned that for them. I understand that at first glance, the idea of any type of earned love can sound like it contradicts the notion of unconditional love, but this is not actually the case. When we are first dating someone, we can speak of how we have a basic level of unconditional love for this person merely as a human being. We should honestly love even the worst among us in this sense because all people are in fact people. We can love people while still hating their actions and seeking justice for certain actions. But, as we get to know a person we are falling in love with, we can speak of how our love for him or her grows and goes beyond the basic level of unconditional love we have for him or her. This person has in a sense earned this greater love from us. The same is true of the good

angels, and the same would have been true of us humans had we earned eternal life in the garden of Eden.

Therefore, there is nothing illogical about saying that God has unconditional love even for Satan and the demons. He still loves them as His creations. God will never punish them beyond what they deserve because of this unconditional love. This love is unconditional in the sense that even Satan and the demons cannot lose it. But, this does not mean that God cannot still punish them because of His unconditional love. When a judge sentences a murderer to death, he or she has no right to do so out of hate. To hate another human being, even the most evil, is itself an act of grave moral evil. The judge can love this murderer as a human being and can even feel bad for him or her on some level for the fate that awaits him or her. But, a good judge will still sentence him or her to death for his or her horrific crimes. God is no different when He sends people to hell. And there is nothing about God's unconditional love that would preclude Him from choosing to save some people over others. God can show mercy to whomever He pleases. His unconditional love in no way means that He has to treat all people the same. He is only obligated to treat people justly. This means that He cannot fail to reward people for what they have earned, and He cannot punish people beyond what they deserve. And all of this applies to the angels as well. God could have chosen only to create angels He knew would fall. And He could have chosen to save some of them over others. God did not choose to do things this way with the angels though, but He did with humans.

There is nothing that needs to go against Reformed theology when we say that God loves all people unconditionally. God's unconditional love does not mean that He loves all people equally. I agree that God loves all people equally when considered in Adam and Eve as they were first created. God could not love anyone more than another in that sense. God created all people equally. However, God can certainly choose to love certain people more if they choose to earn that love. And He can certainly choose to freely love certain people more in the sense that He chooses to freely pour out His mercy upon them. But, even when He does this, we do not have to say that God loses His unconditional love towards those He is going to condemn to hell for their actions.

This does not follow. I agree that we should be careful about how we talk about God's unconditional love, but this does not mean we should ever deny it.

As far as within the church is concerned, it is true that God can never love any of His children more than He loves any of His other children. Even among the angels who earned the right to become children of God, once they actually did become His children, God loves all of them equally. This may seem to contradict what was said earlier about how God loves His creation according to where it falls on the spectrum of grandeur. If humans are above the angels, then it would seem that God could not love any of the angels as much as He loves any humans. What was said above was referring to angels and humans when first created. At this juncture of redemptive history, God loves all of His children equally, whether angels or humans. And God loves His angelic children more than He loves unbelieving humans precisely because they are His children.

With all of that made clear, God's children can certainly fluctuate as to where they stand with God concerning His favor. It is exceedingly dangerous to tell Christians that God loves them no matter what without any other context. It is even more dangerous, and it is flat out unbiblical, to tell Christians to say that they cannot ever earn or lose God's favor. Yes, we can never earn God's favor in an ultimate sense. We lost that right. Jesus Christ has earned that for us. And we can never fully lose God's favor either. This is true and should be taught. However, just as we as parents never love our children more or less based on their behavior, but we are more pleased or frustrated with them based on their behavior, the same is true of God towards us. And God often disciplines us based upon our actions, just as we discipline our own children based upon their actions. And even in our interactions with fellow believers, these relationships are not to be completely void of justice.

Yes, we should be overwhelmingly gracious with our fellow believers as we are all part of the community of grace. We should leave most of God's justice in the church to Him and to His appointed leaders in the church. However, we are not to be doormats. When someone severely sins against us, we are to confront him or her. Not in hostility, but we are to make it clear that he or she has sinned badly against us. This is the command of Jesus (Matthew 18:15-20). Christians need to stop acting like they know better than Jesus. Finally, the very worldly notion that is growing in popularity by the

day, and that is being picked up by many heretics, especially by those within Progressive Christianity, namely that because of God's unconditional love He will never bring forth His justice in any final sense, is a radically unbiblical notion. Please read my entire "basics" series to see that this is the case.

People are indeed equal in being. God has created us that way. And all of our civil laws and rights must reflect this. But, this does not mean that God is obligated to treat all people the same. I love all people unconditionally, but I don't love all people equally. I always try to treat people with equality, but I don't love all people equally. I don't love any humans as much as I love my children. I don't love unbelievers, other than my parents, as much as I love believers. I don't love those I don't know very well as much as I love my close friends. The same is true for God.

This subsection could have easily been included in the final section of this work because I have been dealing with what I believe to be a lot of problematic notions within the church concerning this doctrine. However, my primary opponents in this subsection are heretics who grossly abuse the doctrine of God's love (what I strongly believe to be His unconditional love towards all of His creation).

### **Judge Not**

It is very common in our day for heretics or new Christians to quote Jesus from Matthew 7:1 and act like this proves that we should never correct anything or stand up for the truth. They will also often use this passage to say that we must accept all people as God's adopted children. Another favorite passage of those spoken of above is John 8:1-11. Many times when the orthodox try to witness to others, especially those in heretical groups, we are told not to cast the first stone. This, of course, comes from John 8. The idea that these two sections of Scripture can be used to pretty much toss out the rest of the Bible is, with the utmost respect, patently ridiculous. The Bible is filled, from beginning to end, with godly people calling people to repent and turn to God in sincerity and truth. Just read through the Gospels alone carefully and many times and you will see this. Jesus Himself often got into heated exchanges with the Jews, and not just with the religious leaders (see John 7-8). And Jesus in the Matthew passage

above goes on to explain that there is a time and a place to bring correction in the right spirit, showing how badly people are taking that verse out of context.

The prophets were often fierce with people. The apostles, especially the Apostle Paul, were as well. And Apollos, who was not an apostle or a prophet, debated vigorously with the enemies of the faith (Acts 18:28; the NLT is not the best here; the original Greek says that he debated vigorously; see the NIV). I am not saying at all that all Christians are called to engage with people in this manner. If God has not given you the temperament for it, you don't need to feel guilty for this. But, you should not condemn those like myself whom God has called to engage with the enemies of the faith in this manner at times. Now, none of us, even those called like myself, should ever look to be contentious. We should avoid it as much as we possibly can. However, when the enemies of the faith aggressively attack God; His word; His truth; and His people; sometimes those like myself have to aggressively push back. If you are not called to this type of ministry, you can simply say to an aggressive person that you do not want to argue and refer them to my website. That is not a cop-out. As far as not judging, we are to avoid precisely that. When preaching the gospel or bringing correction to someone, do not judge his or her heart. You do not know all what he or she has been through, and if you are Reformed, remember that apart from God's grace you would be no different than him or her. If you bring correction to feel high and mighty, you are self-righteous and are judging. If your motives are in the right place though, continue to move forward in a biblical manner.

None of this means that we should be going around correcting everyone all of the time. For the most part, just let things go. However, when something really serious needs to be addressed with someone, don't feel bad about having to do so. And when opportunities arise to preach the gospel, you must take them even if it makes you uncomfortable. And you are not to water things down only because you know the person you are preaching to may really not like what you have to say.

### **The Simplicity of the Christian Life**

As hard as the Christian life should be, as I said in the last book of my “basics” series, it is also one that is full of unbounded joy that we can never fully explain to unbelievers. It is something that can only be experienced through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we must be very careful to not let ourselves get overwhelmed by life and we must also be extremely careful not to overwhelm other believers. Jesus severely chastised the Jewish religious leaders for tying up heavy burdens for the people. I am not saying that there won't be times in the Christian life where we feel completely overwhelmed. There absolutely will and you should expect those times. And for those that are enduring persecution, or war, or severe famine or poverty, it of course can be devastating. With all of that said, for the most part, God does not allow these times to last for extremely long times. He usually delivers His true people, even in this life. The Christian life will always be very, very hard to some extent at all times, but for most of the Christian life we should not feel overwhelmed. And if we do, we must prayerfully ask God to help us see how we can make certain lifestyle changes so that we don't feel so bogged down.

The Old Testament constantly talks about the need for rest. God gave His people the weekly Sabbath and He also gave them numerous feast times throughout the year where they were supposed to rest from work and enjoy God and His people. Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels on numerous occasions, talked or alluded to the fact that we are to have a childlike faith. We are to believe what God says even when it doesn't make complete sense to us and we are to rely on Him to take care of us the way a child relies on a parent or parents. And Paul said that we are to seek to lead a quiet life (1 Thessalonians 4:11). There are exceptions where certain Christians must be public figures, but this is rare. Most Christians are called to get married and raise godly children. This does not mean that all of our children will be automatically saved. But, it does mean that if we train them in the Lord, in most cases, at least some of our children will come to sincerely know the Lord. And after our children have moved out, we should seek to grow in our walk with God as much as we can with His help and to enjoy life as much as possible.

It is wrong when so many pastors today try to push everyone in the church to be heavily involved in ministry. This often leads to burn out, bad marriages, and neglected

children. None of this is biblical and it needs to stop. Those who are called to ministry do not need to be pressured. You can't keep them away. We need to allow them to do the work that God has called them to do. And God will give them the strength to do it. You may ask, "But don't all Christians have spiritual gifts that are to be used to bless the entire church?" We will discuss spiritual gifts more down the line.

With all of this made very clear, the Christian life is not to be simplistic. What I mean by this is that we are called to spend plenty of time with God throughout the week, and as we get older and our children move out this should only grow and grow, and we are to be growing in our knowledge of God all throughout the week. Jesus made it clear that we are to love God with our minds. Do not listen to all of the self-help, pop "Christianity" that is becoming so popular in our day. This nonsense is merely a simplified version of Progressive Christianity. It is heresy and it is disgusting. God is not your guru. He is Almighty God and you are to humbly bow before Him. And He commands you to learn more and more about Him throughout your Christian life. Therefore, you should obey Him here and believe that this is what is best for you. Now, I am not saying that you ever need to get overwhelmed. Learn at whatever pace works for you. But, you must be growing in your knowledge, even if only in small increments, throughout your Christian walk.

### **The Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement**

I have already discussed this movement in some detail in many of my previous works for beginners. Hence, you should already be somewhat familiar with the movement. But, I do want to break it down even further here as this movement is doing so much damage to the true church all over the world. This movement is actually made up of four smaller movements. I wrote essays on each one of them and I recommend reading them. They can be found on my website within the section on this overarching movement. And that overarching movement can be found in the section on the religions of the world.

I also recommend doing some brief research on each one of them to have a better idea of the history and teachings behind each one of them. Even further, I highly,

highly recommend reading *Christianity in Crisis* and *Counterfeit Revival* by Hank Hanegraaff. I no longer recommend his ministry because he fell away from the faith and this was so sad to see. But, he wrote the above books when he was still a Conservative Evangelical and they are still the best books on the subjects. The first is on the Word of Faith Movement and the second is on the Counterfeit Revival Movement. I also recommend reading *God's Super Apostles* by Holly Pivec and R Douglas Geivett. It is on the New Apostolic Reformation. Finally, I also recommend in the highest degree watching the documentary *American Gospel 1*. It is on the Word of Faith Movement. All of these resources will point out all of the false teachers in these subgroups.

### **Progressive Christianity**

I have already said a great deal about this movement in my previous works for beginners. I do want to add a couple quick things here though. The first is that I want to make you aware of some of the newer popular teachers in the movement that I did not list in my book on this movement. Many of the older teachers are still very popular though, and you should be aware of them. Rachel Held Evans tragically died, but her books are still very popular. Some of the big new teachers are Jen Hatmaker; John Pavlovitz; Brenda Marie Davies; and Randal Rauser. I wrote an entire book on Rauser for those who want to go really deep. It can be found on my website within the section on Progressive Christianity. That section can be found in the section on the religions of the world.

The final thing I want to say about this movement is that I want to address a very common argument that can give newer true Christians pause. And this argument is that the Progressive Christians are merely the new Reformers of our day. They say that they are only trying to bring correction to the church as did the Reformers 500 years ago. They say that Conservative Evangelicals today are like the Catholics at the time of the Reformation, stuck to their man-made traditions. Many new Christians find this compelling and often get sucked into or influenced by this poisonous movement for a time before the Spirit brings correction. They often reason that they don't want to be stuck in the past and often the current religious leaders find anything new and different



a threat. None of this follows though. As much as I love God's true church, I am often very critical of a lot of Conservative Evangelicalism today. I think a lot of it is stuck in unbiblical traditions; doctrines; methods; and practices. Me and many other Reformed theologians are trying to call Christians back to Scripture and the Reformation. We are the ones who are following the example of the Reformers. Progressive Christians are trying to throw out huge swaths of the Bible and nothing could be further from the spirit of the Reformers. When they use this argument, they are lying and you must not listen to them. The Bible is always the standard for truth and not whatever group is the most novel theologically.

### **Adoption**

I briefly mentioned this doctrine in the second book of my "basics" series, but space did not allow me to elaborate on this extremely wonderful doctrine. A lot of Christians have the mistaken notion that being adopted as God's children was something that must have automatically accompanied eternal life. However, there is no biblical evidence for this conclusion. God could have given us eternal life and we could have had rich fellowship with Him as His servants, but still not have been given the full privilege of being able to call Him our Father. The fact that God did this shows that the depth of fellowship we are to have with God is as deep as it can get. He is our Heavenly Father and He loves us as such. This should cause us to bask in gratefulness every day. God is for us in every way!

At the same time, we are not to abuse this doctrine the way that many heretical groups abuse it. This doctrine in no way means that we can become so familiar with God that we in any way lose our reverence for Him. Many false "Christians" see the passages about Jesus being our friend and brother and woefully conclude that this means we can be casual with Jesus. Yes, we are to be very familiar with God, especially Jesus, but we are never ever to lose our deep reverence for Him. We can and should go to Jesus all throughout the day as our dear friend and close brother, but He still ever remains God in the flesh. He is and always will be our God; Lord; Savior; Master; and King. The slightest disrespect towards Him cannot be tolerated.

Finally, I must quickly address the very mistaken notion found throughout our society, and even within much of the true church today unfortunately, that all people are God's children. It is true that all people are God's children in the sense that He created all of them in His image and therefore has a very real basic love for all of them (Acts 17:28). But, it is most certainly not true that all people are God's adopted children. That is heresy. Period. When true Christians do not better clarify this it leads many people to believe that God loves them more than He does and that they are entitled to certain privileges they do not possess. True Christians must be more careful when they talk about how there is a qualified sense in which God loves all people.

### **Abortion; Euthanasia; and Suicide**

I briefly talked about how all three of these acts are clearly sinful from a biblical perspective in the third book of my "basics" series. But, because this truth is so controversial in our day, I wanted to take some time here to discuss this doctrine further. Let's start with abortion. So many people on the pro-choice side get so caught up in so many side arguments that they lose sight of the fact that the entire debate boils down to one fundamental question. And that is this: is a full human being present from the moment of conception? Anyone who says that anybody has the right to put to death another human being without grave cause is by definition a very sick individual. Thankfully, most pro-choice people would agree and thus seek to answer the fundamental question above by saying that a full human being is not present from the moment of conception. Hence, if we can show that a full human being is present from the moment of conception, the debate is over. And I'm sorry, the scientific evidence is overwhelming that a full human being is present from the moment of conception.

This is demonstrated by a large body of evidence. All of the human chromosomes are present from the moment of conception. This is not in any way true of either the sperm or the egg before conception. All of a person's basic genetic code is present from the moment of conception. Again, this is not in any way true of either the sperm or the egg before conception. Soon after conception, the baby has brain waves and then a heartbeat. And the pro-choice side can never agree upon when a human

being is present. Think about that. That is unbelievably telling. If there is no other clear moment when a human being is present, we have no right to guess here. Human life is too precious for guesswork. All reasonable people would agree here. And yet otherwise reasonable pro-choice people routinely refuse to apply this sound principle that they would apply in all other areas of life.

Many pro-choice advocates try to say that a human is present when the baby can feel pain. But, when people go under anesthesia and cannot feel pain, we don't say that they stop being a human being. Some say that it is when the baby first breathes. But, when people hold their breath, we don't say that they have ceased to be human. Some say that it is when the baby is born. But, many babies are born prematurely. Hence, the argument must say that these babies magically became human when they were born even though they are far less developed than a baby that comes to term. The 9 month old baby, who is far more developed than the premature baby, is somehow not human because it is still inside the womb. That makes zero sense and is entirely arbitrary. All other points that pro-choice people try to say are just as problematic.

Most pro-choice defenders try to say that it is wrong to force a woman to remain pregnant. It is her body and she should have the right to choose what she does with it. This does not follow. None of us have the right to use our bodies to kill another human being. And if you choose to have sex, you are choosing to take the risk of getting pregnant. That is simply how nature works. We have no right to kill a child simply because of the natural order of things. Many pro-choice folks will retort that many women become pregnant in instances when it is not their choice. This is only the case with rape and in those cases an abortion should be allowed. This falls under the lesser of two evils principle. Most pro-life people agree with me here. But, these cases are extremely rare.

Many pro-choice people say that many married women don't really have a choice to have sex. They say that obviously sex is expected in marriage. And they point out that many women in certain cultural contexts are pressured into getting married at a young age and thus never had much choice in the matter. All of this is very wrong and we should do all in our power to fight against these practices. Even within marriage, women should never be pressured to have sex. If a woman comes to a place where she

no longer feels comfortable having sex, the man must respect this. I understand how hard that would be, but that is just the way it is. Sometimes life is brutally difficult and it is what it is. Many Christians will respond to what I've just said by pointing to 1 Corinthians 7:3-7. This is one of the most abused passages in all of Scripture, even by many true Christians unfortunately. All this passage is saying is that spouses should never use sex as a weapon against each other. If the husband enjoys having sex, he should do all in his power to satisfy his wife in the ways that she likes. And vice versa. But, if for any reason, either spouse becomes uncomfortable with sex, the other spouse must respect this for as long as that season lasts.

Many pro-choice advocates say that this is all unfair to women. This set up puts all of the responsibility on the woman. This is not so. Men should be required by law to financially support any child that results from having sex at the very least. And all men should understand this responsibility whenever they choose to have sex. All cultures that do not follow this rule are acting in an extremely unethical fashion. Many pro-choice people say that abortions should be allowed when a child is going to be deformed or disabled in some way, or will very likely be brought into a very poor and rough environment. This is an absurd argument as if this argument were consistently followed it would mean that we should go around and put to death all deformed, disabled, and impoverished children that are already born. We don't kill human beings without the gravest of causes.

The only legitimate causes for abortion are rape and/or if the mother's life is in danger. Both of these fall under the lesser of two evils principle. The overwhelming vast majority of abortions today do not fall under either of these exceptions. Hence, millions and millions of abortions take place every year that are murder. And the worst sort of murder because we are killing the most innocent and vulnerable among us. This is genocide and that is in no way, shape, or form, exaggerated language.

Many argue that incest should also be an exception. This is wrong. If two consenting adults have sex that is incestuous, this does not give us the right to put to death the child. It is true that this child may be in severe danger of deformity or other serious problems, but again, we do not kill people for such things. The two adults should be punished to the full extent of the law for engaging in such behavior. All cultures that

do not follow this rule are egregiously unethical. As far as the far more common form of incest that takes place when a family member molests a child, this is a form of rape and would fall under that exception. Such rapists must be put to death. It is beyond sick that our society does not do this.

Many pro-choice advocates love to point out that many orthodox Christians of the past defended abortion. This is a highly deceptive and misleading argument. The overwhelming vast majority of sound Christian theologians throughout church history have vehemently opposed abortion. And the only ones who did not were clear that this was only because they did not know when human life began in the womb. If they knew what we know today, they would not hold to the same position because all of them passionately condemned murder as orthodox theologians.

The last thing I want to say about abortion before moving on to the next topics concerns fertility methods and stem cell research and therapy. There is nothing unbiblical about using fertility methods as long as they are not abortive. The problem is that many of them are in fact very abortive and many young unsuspecting parents don't realize this. So, please, please be so careful if you use any of these methods. Stem cell research and therapy is also fine biblically as long as it is not abortive. The problem is that many methods still are abortive. These methods must be condemned by all orthodox Christians.

Let's next discuss euthanasia and suicide. The only justification for suicide apart from extreme cases is to see our bodies as belonging solely to us. There is no possible way to square this with the Bible. All of creation ultimately belongs to God and therefore we have no more right to put ourselves to death without grave cause than we do with other people. And if this is the case, then anyone who assists someone in murder (which is what suicide is as we have just seen) is also guilty of a very serious crime as well. I fully understand that there are very tough cases where sometimes the lesser of two evils principle applies. When a soldier jumps on a grenade to save his fellow troops, he or she is not sinning. This is an act of amazing bravery and sacrifice. But, as much as possible, suicide must be avoided.

For those that are in excruciating pain or are terminally ill, we must do all in our power to alleviate their suffering as much as possible. In the old days, people would be

given enormous amounts of alcohol in order to help. This was not sinning even though usually this would have violated the principle against getting drunk. Today we have morphine and it should be used as much as possible. In cases where someone is on life support and there is absolutely no chance of coming back, there is nothing sinful about removing the life support. This is not actively killing someone, it is merely allowing nature to take its course. For those with severe mental health issues, we must do all in our power to get them as much help as we possibly can.

The final thing I want to say before my concluding paragraph in this subsection is that many people try to say that they are pro-life because they personally believe that abortion, euthanasia, and suicide are wrong, and would never engage in these acts themselves, but they do not believe the government should mandate such things. Many of these people compare this to free speech. Many will say that they do not believe people should say certain things and they would never say certain things themselves, but that they do not want the government enforcing good speech. This is a very popular position among Catholics, including many devout ones. Many will say that they are pro-life in the religious sphere and are pro-choice in the civil sphere. All of this is just fancy rhetoric. Murder must be outlawed and punished by the government. Everyone with common sense agrees here. Therefore, this position makes no sense. This position is simply pro-choice and must not be called anything else. And biblically, it is heresy. Murder can never be defended on any level by any true Christian.

Lastly, none of this means that anyone who has had an abortion or who has supported abortion cannot be forgiven. The same is true for anyone who has attempted suicide or has assisted in the suicide of another. I understand that many of you were deceived, taken advantage of, or found yourself in very, very difficult circumstances. But, the answer is not to continue to defend the indefensible. Please know that Jesus can and will forgive you if you receive Him. You will find your only true fulfillment in Him.

#### **Chapter 4: Part 4 of Section 1**

## Sexual Immorality and Transgenderism

I briefly discussed both of these issues in the third book of my “basics” series. But, because they are both so controversial in our culture, I want to say a lot more about them here. Our culture attempts to give almost every defense under the sun for sexual immorality and transgenderism. I cannot answer all of them in this work. The first thing that must be said is that we all instinctively understand that merely because someone has very strong desires to do something, this in no way gives him or her the right to act upon those desires. Serial murderers desire to murder and enjoy doing so. Rapists desire to rape and enjoy doing so. Child molesters are deeply attracted to young children sexually and enjoy the act of molestation. Desires in no way lead to rights. No reasonable person is denying the fact that fornicators have the desire to fornicate. No reasonable person is denying the fact that homosexuals are deeply attracted to the same sex. No reasonable person is denying the fact that many people do indeed feel like they are the opposite sex and wish to take measures to make themselves look and feel more like the opposite sex. But again, these desires in no way prove that people have the right to act upon these desires. Such a position makes no sense ethically.

I understand that many people feel like they cannot be happy or be themselves unless they do act upon these desires and order their lives accordingly. The same is true for the rapist and the child molester though. And yet we do not allow them to live as they please. Many argue that the difference is that murderers, rapists, and child molesters are hurting other people. But, the Bible is clear that all sin hurts people. Disobeying God will lead to condemnation. God is not obligated to explain to us all of the reasons why He commands what He does. Often parents command things that make no sense to their children. If God says that He does not want us to engage in sexual immorality or transgenderism, then we are to believe that He has good reasons for commanding this. And again, disobedience to God will always bring His judgment. Full disobedience, as in unbelief, will result in hell. Further, it should be said that many things in life can bring us temporary happiness. Junk food; drugs; getting drunk; reckless driving; etc.; all of these things bring people a great deal of temporary pleasure and feelings of intense happiness. But, we all recognize how destructive these things

are in the long run. Hence, all arguments about how certain lifestyle choices bring people happiness and therefore we cannot judge such choices, are illogical in the extreme.

As I've said before, the Christian life is one that is full of suffering. All Christians struggle with certain sinful desires more than others. God is not asking anything of those who struggle with the sins we have been discussing that He does not ask of all His children. All of us must fight against our sinful desires throughout our Christian walk with the help of the Holy Spirit. And some of us are going to struggle with certain sinful desires that other Christians will not struggle over. And some Christians will struggle with certain sinful desires far more than will other Christians who also struggle with the same sinful desires to some extent. This is just how it is. This ties in with what we talked about earlier in this work. Namely, how should male Christians who struggle to be masculine proceed, and how should female Christians who struggle to be feminine proceed? They should proceed like all other Christians. They should make whatever lifestyle changes necessary that will help them be more masculine or feminine. And then they will need to spend the rest of their life trying to be more masculine or feminine with the help of the Spirit. And yes, this process may not always be pretty. It will be difficult, awkward, and often very frustrating. But, that is the sanctification process for all Christians. Most young men struggle with the lust to fornicate in an almost uncontrollable fashion. But, the Bible never lets them off the hook any more than it lets off the hook those who struggle with homosexual or transgender desires.

Many Christians wonder if people who struggle with same-sex attraction and/or transgenderism should get married. In most cases, this is unwise. There is nothing wrong with the single life in the church and we will discuss this more down the road. With that said, there are many people who never really struggled with same-sex attraction or transgenderism and merely got caught up in what was seen as cool or popular. This is becoming an increasing problem in our culture. Such people can often get married after becoming Christian and be very happy in that state. And many others struggle with bisexual desires. This means that they are attracted to both sexes. Such people can also get married and be happy within a Christian context.



Many Christians wonder if it is ok for a Christian to call himself or herself “gay,” or “bi,” etc. They say that maybe this is ok as long as the person means by this label only that he or she struggles with these desires and not that he or she is in fact acting upon these desires. Most Christians, myself very much included, believe that this is not biblical. It would be like saying that a Christian who struggles with his temper is an “angry Christian.” There is zero biblical evidence for us using such terms to describe ourselves. It is far better for a Christian to just say that he or she struggles with homosexual or same-sex attraction or desires when asked, and only to use formal labels such as *Christian, Bible-believing Christian, Conservative Evangelical*, etc. The same would be true for those who struggle with bisexual and/or transgender desires.

Many in our culture often point to the very rare cases where someone genuinely does not fully know if he or she is male or female. Many people have genetic disorders that make this very difficult to discern. Before addressing this issue, I must be clear that just because a person has some genetic anomalies, this does not always mean that the person cannot tell what sex God created this person as. I saw a documentary on a woman where she was intersex, but it was quite obvious that God has created her as a woman. She looked like a woman in every way. She had breasts and a vagina (they did not show any of this, but made that clear). But, she was infertile because she did not have all of the normal female internal reproductive parts and she did have some male ones. It was quite obvious that God had created her as a woman and that the fall had caused these defects. She could also feel sexual pleasure in the normal way for females. Therefore, there was no reason why she could not get married and adopt children with her spouse. Hence, not all anomalous cases are as difficult to understand as many make out.

With all of that clearly spelled out, we must admit that an extremely small number of cases are indeed very difficult to discern. In these cases, the individual should do all that can be done to seek God to try to know which gender this individual is and act accordingly. If, at the final judgment, it is discovered this individual guessed wrong, God will not judge him or her for this. However, these difficult cases are no justification for twisting what the Bible clearly says about the clear cases. Someone who is plainly male, for example, but struggles with feelings of transgenderism is still male. Those feelings

are a result of the fall and he has no right to mutilate what God has created. I know that sounds harsh in our culture, but preaching God's truth is always the most loving thing we can do.

The next two items we need to address here are conversion therapy and purity culture. Both of these were an utter disaster for the church and we must admit this. The church is not perfect and it can get things wrong on secondary issues in very horrible ways. And that is precisely what happened in these areas. If you don't know what these things are, I recommend doing some research on them. There exists no evidence, biblical or otherwise, that any therapy can completely change a person who is solely attracted to the same sex to becoming solely attracted to the opposite sex. Those who are deeply and solely attracted to the same sex will, in most cases, struggle with this to some degree for the rest of their lives. This is part of the fall. This does not at all mean that a great deal of sanctification cannot take place. The true Christian who finds himself or herself in this position can expect these desires to lessen greatly over time and to become less and less controlled by them as well. In some cases, some will even develop legitimate attractions to the opposite sex, but this by no means happens in every instance. And we should not falsely promise people otherwise. The same is true for those who sincerely and deeply struggle with gender dysphoria.

I do want to clarify before moving forward regarding what exactly I mean when I refer to conversion therapy. I understand that many evil people today are trying to call everything under the sun conversion therapy because they know that most people, including many true Christians, are against it. This is extremely dangerous and I don't want people to confuse me with these liars. I am not at all referring to a pastor or Christian leader preaching a sermon, or presenting a teaching, or providing counsel, whereby he or she tells a person or group what the Bible plainly says regarding homosexual acts and transgenderism. I am only talking about the longstanding practice of camps, or seminars, or therapy that promised people struggling with same-sex attraction or feelings of gender dysphoria that if they did certain things, these struggles would disappear and more normal attractions and feelings would magically appear. The Bible nowhere promises this and there is no evidence that any therapist can make this happen on a regular basis. And these false promises hurt a lot of people and made the

church look terrible. It has made our job today as pastors; preachers; counselors; theologians; and apologists; much, much more difficult.

As far as purity culture goes, the Bible is all for sexual pleasure within marriage. However, the Bible nowhere promises married Christian couples the best sex in the entire world. It is deeply frustrating when Christian theologians, apologists, and pastors promise things beyond what the Bible actually promises. God never promises anyone the best sex in the world. Life is not about sex. God, as our loving Father, will shower His blessings upon us. That is absolutely true. But God freely gets to decide what blessings He is going to bestow, and He also gets to decide when and how and upon whomever He pleases. And for some Christians this will mean a mediocre sex life, or a bad sex life, or a non-existent sex life. God will bless all such believers in other key ways freely at His discretion. It also needs to be emphatically said that all sin harms us, but that no sin, other than the blasphemy of the Spirit (which a true believer cannot commit), is beyond redemption. God most certainly can forgive and heal sexual sin just as much as any other. With all of this said, the mistakes of the church on these fronts still do not justify entirely abandoning the Bible's basic ethic on sex. That is heresy whether the Progressive Christians and others want to hear that or not.

The last thing I want to say before my final paragraph of this subsection is that none of this means that we should be callous towards those struggling with same sex-attraction, or with gender dysphoria, or those who have been very hurt by the purity movement in the church. I am so sorry if this is you and I want you to know that there is true freedom and joy only in Jesus Christ.

Finally, many Christians wonder how much the government should be involved in controlling all of these issues. We will discuss that tough topic further down the line.

### **Overcoming Prejudice**

One of the saddest realities of history is how deeply prejudiced humanity has been. Humans have routinely been racist; sexist; xenophobic; and tribalistic. In case that all sounds too eerily close to what critical race theory advocates, namely that racism is normal among humans and infects every aspect of life, please know that I

reject such a notion with all of my being. There were plenty of exceptions to the rule throughout history, and humanity in the last 100 years has shown remarkable progress on this front. This is clearly something that is sinful and that humans can work to overcome. As far as the church goes, as science more and more proved beyond all doubt that all of the various groups of human beings are equal, the church has worked hard to defeat so much of the prejudice that had existed within it in the past. Especially in the American church (which has a lot of other problems unfortunately), unbelievable strides have been made. This is not to say that we have fully arrived, but we should not lessen the greatness of these strides or lie and say that things have gotten worse in the American church, which is objectively false.

As far as the true church around the world today, there is a general spirit that has followed the American church. Most Christians around the world seek to avoid prejudice within the church. With that said, in some ways the church has unfortunately gone backwards. This is not a surprise as the church has become truly global in our day in amazing fulfillment of prophecy. We should rejoice at this beyond measure. With that said, as the church has spread all over the globe, many Christians in pockets of the world have received the gospel while still retaining remnants of their former prejudice. The church universal is working hard to eradicate this, but we must be realistic that there is still a lot of work to be done.

With all of that carefully laid out and admitted, the common notion among many liberals in our day that the church has been a far more prejudiced institution than most others is absurd. I strongly encourage you to do some actual research on this topic and you will see that I am not spouting out my personal opinion. As said earlier, prejudice has been a deep-seated problem in humanity for millennia. The church did not create prejudice, foster prejudice, or exacerbate prejudice. It preached the gospel to people that were already very prejudiced and who were not entirely delivered from this prejudice right away. There are two horrible episodes in history where the church often takes a lot of unfair blame and we need to discuss both of them now.

The first is colonization. Colonization is one of the most ugly parts of humanity. There are few realities in history where the sinfulness of humankind has been more fully on display. The fact of the matter though, is that colonization has existed for as long as

we have historical records. Almost all tribes; cultures; societies; nations; and empires; believed in colonization. It is not a white or European phenomenon. That is revisionist history at its worst. Yet, because there was a phase of almost global European colonization, that was at times extremely brutal, many pseudo-academics try to push this notion in our day because it gains them so much traction in our woke culture. And because almost all of Europe at the time claimed some form of “Christianity,” the church is often blamed or at least heavily blamed for this. The problem is that this is a very overly simplified assessment of what took place under European colonization.

First of all, a great deal of Europe at this time was Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Liberal Protestant. It is not the case at all that all of this colonization was done by orthodox Christians. With that made clear, there is no question that far too many predominantly orthodox Protestant countries were heavily involved in European colonization. It needs to be said though, that the reason European colonization was so dominant was because the entire world was being discovered by Europeans and they also happened to be the most advanced countries at that time because of the Scientific Revolution. At many other times in history, European countries were some of the most backward countries on the planet. And there is no evidence, none whatsoever, that other regions of the world would not have taken full advantage of their situation in the same manner that Europe did had they been in the same situation. The history of the world in every respect leads us to believe otherwise. That is not in any way intended to let Europe and the church off the hook. Great sins were committed here. There is no denying that. It is though, to put things in the proper context.

You may ask, “How could true Christians go along with colonization on any level?” As I’ve said in other works of mine, true Christians are a product of their time and culture. God does not perfect us the moment we are saved. The doctrine of full perfectionism is heresy. We cannot forget this. And most Christians at that time, just like most people throughout history up until very, very recently, thought that conquest was something God used to advance His kingdom. And most Christians were unaware of most of the atrocities or were falsely told that they were justified because of the behavior of the natives. Many missionaries took full advantage of the fact that they could now freely preach the gospel to people they could not preach to before because

of the protection of European governments. Because of this, many true Christians saw colonization as a good thing. Over time though, the church realized that it needed to repent of this and for the most part it has.

As far as the Holocaust goes, there are two errors that need to be avoided here. The first is that the Holocaust was pretty much a Christian crime against the Jews. The second is that the true church bears no blame for what happened. Both of these are extreme and incorrect positions. The Holocaust was perpetrated by the Nazis. They bear the primary blame for what happened, period. And the Nazis were not orthodox Christians by any metric. They rejected the inerrancy of the Bible, they tried to eliminate or blatantly twist huge portions of the Bible (some rejected all of the Old Testament), and they did not believe that Jews could be saved. All of these positions are rank heresy. It does not matter how much “Christian” lingo they often used, all heretical groups use “Christian” lingo.

But, the true church did foster negative attitudes towards the Jews for centuries, as I discussed in my church history book on my website. And these attitudes in many respects created an environment in Europe where Nazism could even be possible in the first place. Further, many true Christians did not do nearly enough to stop it. To be fair, almost no one outside of the Nazis themselves knew how bad the Holocaust was until the Americans and our allies began to discover the concentration camps. Most people thought the Nazis were only deporting the Jews. This was disgusting enough don't get me wrong, but many true Christians still believed in pure Christian nations and so did not entirely object to this. When the camps were discovered, all true Christians reacted with horror and this was a major catalyst in causing the true church to begin to examine itself in regard to its relationship with the Jews. Since that time, no religion on earth has been more supportive of the Jews and the nation of Israel than Conservative Evangelicalism. This has been a true triumph for the church.

### **Social Justice and Wokism**

Wokism and the social justice movement have their roots in critical race theory, one of the most evil philosophies in all of human history. The original term *social justice*

was a healthy term and I used to use it. I even used it as recently as in my book *A False Kind of Christianity*, which was published in 2017. If the term is used to describe the fact that all humans, the church very much included, have an obligation to work for social change in a positive direction, the term is a good term. This does not mean that all people must spend the bulk of their time fighting for good social causes like the fight against abortion. But, what all people can do is vote for the right social causes and make it clear where they stand on the important issues of our day when asked. The problem with the term today is it is almost exclusively used in a woke sense. Because of this, it is best for Christians to avoid the term so as to avoid any appearance that we are on the side of the Marxists here. And while critical race theory started out focused upon race, it has bled out into many other areas, most notably to LGBT+ ideology. The BLM movement was started by Marxists who were heavily influenced by this theory. All of this is vehemently against the Bible and all true Christians must shun these movements. For more information on critical race theory and its aftermath, please read *Fault Lines* by Voddie Baucham.

One of the saddest realities he details in that work is how Liberal Protestant most of the black church in America is becoming. Many true African American Christians are leaving the Democratic Party for obvious reasons, but far too many stay and remain awkwardly conservative. And countless African American churchgoers stay in the Party and are more and more embracing Progressive Christianity. However, there are wonderful glimmers of light as more and more African Americans are becoming vocal voices for full conservatism and many of them are genuine Christians. On this front, I highly recommend the following documentaries: *Uncle Tom 1*; *Uncle Tom 2*; *The Greatest Lie Ever Sold*; and *What Killed Michael Brown*.

None of this is to say that all racism, especially towards African Americans, has been eradicated in this country. It most certainly has not and the Black community in our country is still suffering because of our nation's past. This is also not to say that all other forms of racism, or sexism, or prejudice against those who struggle with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria, are all gone either. We still have a long way to go in this country on all fronts. The key point though, is that liberal answers are not helping these problems, they are making them much, much worse. And no matter how often they call

us hateful bigots for saying so, we must continue to speak the truth. When it comes to the madness that is being propagated today surrounding the LGBT+ community, please see the documentary *What is a Woman?*. I want to be clear that I do not agree with everything in any of these documentaries. And I don't agree with everything said by the key figures in these documentaries, either what they say in these documentaries or elsewhere. Many of them do not come off as loving as we should be. We should be very sympathetic towards those who have been hurt by the discrimination that has often taken place in our country. This has led many people to seek refuge in groups that unfortunately do not have their best interest at heart. And that is very discouraging.

Finally, I also highly recommend the documentary *In His Image* to you.

### **Socialism**

As I said in the third book of my “basics” series, even if we had no explicit evidence against socialism in the Bible because it came on the scene far after the Bible had been completed, we still must reject this philosophy of government and society because it has always led to poverty for millions. And the Bible says that we should do all in our power to help the poor. One of the most Satanic aspects about Socialism is the fact that it hails itself as the only system that can truly help the poor. There has hardly been any more insidious lie in all of human history. With that made clear, I do want to discuss some of the biblical evidence that exists against socialism here in this subsection.

The Bible nowhere fully spells out what economic system God most favors, not even implicitly. Why God did things this way was up to Him. Because of this though, this means we must do our best to look at what biblical evidence we have and then use as much common sense as possible to formulate what economic system is best for humankind. The strongest argument against socialism, other than the historic fact that it impoverishes everyone, is that it is fundamentally against wealth and freedom. As we saw in the last book of my “basics” series, God does not condemn wealth and He often uses it for His church and His overall glory. Even in softer socialist systems where people are basically allowed to pursue whatever jobs and work schedules they please,



and the government simply heavily taxes and monitors the economy so that no group of people can ever get far more wealthy than the others (although it should be said that in history there has rarely ever been a socialist state that abides by this consistently, as almost all of them heavily reward high ranking loyal government officials), a person in such a system cannot choose to pursue wealth for the glory of God. That is fundamentally unbiblical. The Bible never ever advocates economic sameness across the board.

It is true that in the Old Testament God says that there shall be no poor among the Israelites, but it is quite clear that all this means is that the Israelites are to do all in their power to keep everyone from being impoverished. The Old Testament everywhere recognizes that some people within Israel will be far wealthier than others and it nowhere tries to change this. And the New Testament recognizes wealthy people as well. Never are these people chastised and God often uses their wealth for His kingdom.

One of the core principles of capitalism, the chief rival of socialism, is that of money lenders for interest. There is no question that the Bible condemns individual believers lending to other believers with interest. However, in the Old Testament God did allow the Israelites to charge interest to foreigners (Deuteronomy 23:20). And Jesus also used the example of interest in what seems to be a positive sense in one of His parables (Matthew 25:14-30, especially verses 26-27). Now, we cannot from these verses alone say that the Bible advocates for capitalism. As far as the Deuteronomy passage, one could argue that God allowed this as a judgment on the nations around Israel, just as God allowed the Israelites to take slaves from these wicked nations. Just as we should not say that this means slavery is universally applicable, we should not from this one verse say that the Bible teaches capitalism. And Jesus did sometimes use negative examples from real life to make certain points in His parables and so we should be cautious about His interest usage.

However, the above verses do constitute a strong piece of evidence in favor of charging interest and capitalism in general. And history has more than shown that capitalist societies produce the most wealth for people across the board by far. Yes, there are predatory lenders and there are greedy corporations that abuse capitalism.

Governments must take reasonable measures to punish such tactics, while always trying to balance not becoming too involved in the economy. This balance is not easy and will never be perfect in this life. We must accept this fact. The answer to this imperfection is not to throw out capitalism altogether in favor of a system (socialism) that has failed every single time it has been implemented.

As far as other systems that have been tried throughout history, such as feudalism, none of them have ever come close to capitalism in their ability to produce freedom and wealth for people across the board. Therefore, while we should be very open to innovations and improvements to capitalism, capitalism is clearly the best economic system to date by a very long way. Now, as technology and the world continues to radically change, we must be open to the fact that a new system down the line could develop that supplants capitalism and that could possibly still be biblical. However, given the massive success of capitalism, we should approach all such changes and any transition to a new system with a tremendous amount of caution and gradualism. For a lot more information on these topics, please read *Money, Greed, and God* by Jay W. Richards.

### **Illegal Immigration**

There are two key errors when it comes to dealing with this controversial issue. The first is lawlessness, and the second is being anti-immigrant. Both are unbiblical positions. The Bible everywhere recognizes the reality and rights of nations. Even evil nations are still nations with certain rights. Even the Israelites could not up and attack a foreign nation without God's permission and approval. And Romans 13 makes it quite clear that governments possess many rights and that we are to obey them. Even if a godly rebellion is underway, those believers that are not directly part of that rebellion must still obey their government as much as possible. And every nation in history has had sovereign borders and immigration policies. Now, clearly godly nations should have the most generous immigration policies possible. And despite all the incessant noise from the left in our day to the contrary, the United States has always followed this sentiment. It still does so to this day. With that made very clear, the United States, like

every other nation today and throughout history, has every right to set its own immigration policies. The idea that if we don't allow any and all immigrants to illegally enter this country means that we are being harsh and cruel is abject nonsense. Every nation has to make decisions as to how to protect its people and how many immigrants can be let in without hurting the overall economy and social structure of its people.

Everything said above more than proves that illegal immigration is sinful in God's eyes. Even further very strong evidence comes from Deuteronomy 13. In this chapter God makes it abundantly clear that false prophets were not to be allowed to live among the Israelites. While this chapter is certainly not directly about illegal immigration, it does plainly tell us something indirectly about it. The Old Testament often talks about the Israelites allowing foreigners into their land and treating them well. And these foreigners could become Israelites if they so chose. All of this is very strong evidence against those who are anti-immigrant. However, none of this evidence ever says that the Israelites must let in all foreigners without discretion. And if God makes it clear that He does not allow false prophets to live in His chosen nation, then it is quite obvious that the Israelites were not to allow them in from without. Such a notion would blatantly contradict the spirit of this chapter. Foreigners were clearly told that they had to abide by the laws of the nation when entering. Therefore, if a known false prophet were to attempt to enter the land, it is plain from this chapter that the Israelites would have denied his or her request. And if this false prophet proceeded to enter illegally, he or she if caught would have been deported or punished even more severely. This chapter alone cannot prove that we should be against illegal immigration, but it does offer very strong support for the overall biblical position.

Before wrapping up this subsection, it should be said that the vast majority of arguments used by the advocates of not enforcing illegal immigration laws only prove that we should not be anti-immigrant. And I fully agree that it is heretical to be anti-immigrant. For example, many people love to quote the statement from the Statue of Liberty. They love to say that this proves that our country has always been pro-immigrant and therefore we need to stop trying to punish illegal immigrants. This argument does not follow. The spirit of the statement from the Statue is that we should be pro-immigrant. This in no way means that we should support people breaking our

laws. The immigrants who came through Ellis Island did so legally. To use this fact to support illegal immigration is like saying that because I love Snickers bars, I must also love the idea of people shoplifting them.

### **Spiritual Warfare**

The Bible is quite clear, from beginning to end, that a cosmic spiritual battle is ever raging between the forces of good in this world and the forces of evil (Daniel 10:12-14 and Jude 1:9 as just two examples). I understand how much our current culture hates this type of language, but the Bible is clear about this. I understand how much certain heretical groups like Progressive Christianity also hate such language, but again, the Bible is not gray here. None of this is to say that all unbelievers are on the level of demons. The overwhelming vast majority are most certainly not. The vast majority of people the world over are very good people from an earthly perspective. It is only about 5-10% of the world that really wreaks havoc on the rest of us. And even many within this percentage of the population are only the way they are because they were raised under abysmal circumstances. And none of this is to say that believers are on the same level with the good angels. They most certainly are not. Believers still struggle deeply with sin.

With all of that made very clear, it is still the case that the good angels and the demons are duking it out, often in ways we can never completely understand, in the heavenly realms, and that they greatly influence humans here on earth. And while the good angels often help unbelievers, and while the demons viciously come after believers, the demons for the most part work through unbelievers and the angels primarily work through God's people. It is hard to know exactly how the angels, both good and evil, interact with our souls, but it is plain from the Bible that they do in fact do so. They cannot completely read our minds or force us to do things, they are not God and we must never forget that. But, in mysterious ways, they certainly influence our souls. None of this means that we each have one demon and one good angel influencing us all of the time. Or that we all have guardian angels. These are all unbiblical notions. With that said, there is no question that good angels and demons are

influencing us all of the time. Satan uses the demons at all times to do his work. And God uses the good angels at all times to do His. However, there is no equality here between God and Satan. Far, far from it. Never forget that God could entirely snuff Satan out of existence in a moment simply by willing it. God is omnipotent and in comparison to Him Satan is less than a pathetic bug. All that Satan does is ultimately a part of God's plan that God uses for His glory.

Now, you may ask, "Why on earth would Satan ever want to fulfill God's plan?" He doesn't. He hates to do so with all of his being. But, he has no choice. He can only ever do what God allows him to do. Satan lives to hurt people and immensely enjoys doing so. At the same time though, he can only do his harm as God allows. Whatever harm God allows him to do, he will take. But, he knows that all he does is futile. He cannot help himself though, whatever evil and harm God will allow him to do, he will in fact act out.

There are times when spiritual warfare will digress into actual physical warfare here on earth. Sometimes nations become so evil that other nations have to step in and stop them with warfare. They have no choice. And to whatever extent believers are involved in these battles, they are doing the work of the Lord. For the most part though, spiritual warfare is not fought in this way. As believers, we fight God's battles by obeying His commands. This is how God advances His kingdom. And spiritual warfare becomes most acute for us when the demons really come after us. Sometimes this can result in actually sensing the presence of a demon or demons. This is rare, but it does happen. When this happens, simply rebuke the demon or demons in the name of Jesus and they will eventually go away. Some demons are far stronger than others, and so some of them will fight much harder for longer, but they all must flee at the name of Jesus eventually. Normally though, demons cause everything to go wrong in our lives for a season. Sometimes this can be for just a few intense hours, and other times it can last months. As you mature in Christ, you will be able to recognize these bouts as they begin to happen. And when they come, follow God's instructions in Ephesians 6.

Next, we need to discuss the important topic of demon possession. This is one of the most intense forms of spiritual warfare that the demons employ. Demon possession is when a demon takes over a person. More than one demon can take over a single

person at one time as well. The Bible is quite clear about this. This often results in insanity, physical problems, and/or heightened abilities. This is not always the case though. Sometimes, it can merely cause a person to become obsessed with certain evil acts as was the case with Saul in the Old Testament and Judas in the New Testament. Believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and thus cannot be possessed. However, we are often influenced by demons. Demon possession was very common at the time of Jesus because the demons knew that Jesus was coming. We should not take that unique period of time and use it to assume that demon possession is a very common occurrence. However, there is no biblical evidence that demon possession stopped after the completion of the Bible. It still occurs in rare instances today, especially in parts of the world where Satanic worship is very common. Such demons should be rebuked in the name of Jesus. This does not have to be done by an exorcist or a pastor. Any Christian can do this, but every Christian should be aware of the dangers here. Demons will not leave a person easily. For some, it takes a great deal of prayer before the demon will be forced to leave. Most Christians will never encounter a demon possessed person and they should be thankful for this.

The last thing that needs to be said here in this subsection is that we should not see demonic activity behind everything. Yes, they are very active. However, there are a limited number of demons and they can each only be in one place at one time. So, for example, if we get food poisoning, we should not necessarily blame this on the demons. We probably merely ate some bad food. Demonic activity works in a general sense and we usually cannot pinpoint exactly what they are doing at all times. The best way to fight against them is to follow God's commands and not overly stress on what exactly they are doing all of the time. With that said, there will be times when you are experiencing intense warfare and you will know that you are being attacked. Again, in these times carefully follow God's instructions in Ephesians 6.

### **Apologetics**

The doctrine of apologetics is plainly taught in the following verses: Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:15-33; Acts 17; Acts 18:27-28; Acts 19:8; 2 Corinthians 10:5;

Philippians 1:16; 1 Peter 3:15-16; and Jude 1:3. However, we must also balance this with the fact that the Bible is also clear that God does not save intellectuals for the most part (1 Corinthians 1). Therefore, we cannot expect the average Christian to be proficient in apologetics. So, how do we reconcile both of these themes that we see in Scripture? We do so by recognizing that God has clearly called some people to be apologists like Apollos, while understanding that most Christians cannot do what Apollos did. Most Christians should therefore support the apologists of the church, learn from them however they can, and refer people to them as necessary. And all Christians can testify of their faith in the manner in which I laid out in my essay "Tips for Witnessing."

It is also of the highest importance to understand that apologetics does not only apply to those people and groups who make no claim to being any form of "Christian." Apologetics also applies to all heretical groups. I understand how deeply unpopular this notion is in our culture. Watch just about any "Christian" movie today and the bad guys are almost always the religious leaders who are concerned with sound doctrine, while the good guys (often including "Jesus" "himself") are those who are being attacked by the "heresy hunters." To even use the word *heresy* in most "Christian" circles is to automatically be seen as being like the Pharisees of old. All of this is horribly unbiblical and it has led to enormous amounts of compromise within the true church. Obviously no true church could ever fully deny the reality of heresy altogether. However, in order to better fit in with the world, many churches will limit those they call heretics to the most bizarre groups that call themselves "Christian." Many otherwise godly churches today routinely compromise with Roman Catholicism; Eastern Orthodoxy; Progressive Christianity; and the LDS Church. This is grave sin and it needs to stop. There is no possible way to read the Bible and not come away with the clear fact that God hates heresy. And every single one of the above groups either denies or severely compromises the gospel of faith alone. Read Galatians 1 very carefully and you will see how God looks upon such compromise.

None of this means that we should obsess over heresy to the neglect of the rest of the Christian life. None of this means that we should ever commit the opposite error of calling everything that does not agree with our little group *heresy*. We must be very

gracious and patient with our brothers and sisters in Christ over secondary issues, even the most important secondary issues. With all that said, it is not like the Pharisees to hate heresy. The Pharisees themselves were heretics as they were extreme legalists, hypocrites, and they added to God's word. Because of this, Jesus regularly condemned them. Many will respond to what I just said by saying that Jesus only condemned their behavior and not their doctrine. This is incorrect (Matthew 16:5-12; especially verse 12; and Mark 7:1-13).

## **SECTION 2: Reformed Theology Doctrines**

### **Chapter 5: Clarifying Certain Reformed Theology Doctrines and Issues**

#### ***The Terms *Reformed* and *Calvinist****

If you read my works for beginners, you should already be somewhat familiar with these terms. Today, these terms are generally used interchangeably to describe Christians who hold to the doctrines of grace. And most Reformed folks, myself very much included, prefer the former term, but understand that the latter term can also be helpful at times as well. What I want to do in this subsection is discuss the fact that these two terms are not always used interchangeably by all Calvinists today. I want to go over this so that you won't be confused if you come across this reality. Since the time of the Reformation, both of these terms have generally been used interchangeably. Initially though, the terms meant something much broader than merely the doctrines of grace. The terms certainly included those doctrines, but they also included a lot of other doctrines as well.

The first major branch on the Protestant tree to develop was the Lutheran branch. And the second branch to develop was the Reformed. And the chief theologian of this branch eventually came to be John Calvin. Thus, the reason the two terms are so closely tied together. Some of the key doctrines of the Reformed branch, along with the



doctrines of grace, were the Sabbath, covenant theology, and infant baptism. The true church had recognized that Sunday was the day for worship after Pentecost. And most theologians believed that this was connected to the Old Testament Sabbath in some manner. However, the Reformed took this much further and said that Sunday is not simply connected to the Old Testament Sabbath in certain principles, but that it is in fact the Sabbath after Pentecost. They said that the day should be a day of rest and worship like the Sabbath in the Old Testament.

Covenant theology basically refers to what I defended in the second book of my “basics” series, on pages 48-53, under the section on the covenants. This approach to the covenants is in strong contrast to the Semi-Dispensational view I have detailed at a number of points in my works for beginners. Most of the church prior to the Reformation held to doctrines that were pretty similar to covenant theology. The theology was not fully developed, but the basic gist was fairly similar to what was later advocated by the Reformed. And most true Christians today who do not fully embrace either covenant theology or Semi-Dispensationalism, usually hold to doctrines that are more in line with covenant theology. Semi-Dispensationalism was a very new approach to the question of covenants in the Bible and I am very convinced that it is not correct. And infant baptism was the position of the church until the rise of the Baptists.

As the 1500's and the Reformation age continued to press forward, other branches of the tree came along that also embraced Reformed theology. And I mean in the broader sense that I just described. They simply had disagreements with many theologians within the older Reformed branch on certain other issues. This led to these other branches being labeled something else, namely *Presbyterian* and *Puritan* (which later became the Congregationalists). And many individuals and individual churches within Anglicanism would also go on to embrace Reformed theology in the broader sense as well. This led to the older Reformed branch being labeled the Continental Reformed. However, the Continental Reformed, the Presbyterians, and the Puritans all considered themselves to be Reformed in the broader sense at this time. In fact, at this time they really didn't see each other as fully distinct branches on the Christian tree. They mostly saw each other as sub-branches within the broader Reformed branch. And they saw Reformed Anglicans as being among them as well.

Things only started to get murky on this front with the rise of the Baptists. Because so many of the early Baptists also believed in the doctrines of grace, the Sabbath, and covenant theology, many wanted to call themselves Reformed as the only doctrine that they rejected from older Reformed theology was infant baptism. And most Reformed people were willing to accommodate them especially since the 1689 Baptist Confession was mostly just a revision of the Westminster Confession. But, over time this change led to the terms *Reformed* and *Calvinist* becoming more and more watered down until in our day pretty much anyone who holds to the doctrines of grace is considered Reformed and/or Calvinist. I think this is a good thing overall as the most important part of being Reformed by far is the doctrines of grace. I think that Christians who hold to the doctrines of grace should band together as much as possible. But, it should be said that I am Reformed in the much older sense as well, and so there is no question that there is a part of me that is saddened by this watered down state of things.

The reason all of this is so important is because there are some Calvinists today who believe that we should distinguish between the two terms more sharply. They believe that the term *Calvinist* should only be used to describe those who hold to the doctrines of grace, while the other term should be used only for those who are Reformed in the more classical sense. I don't agree with this because historically the two terms were used interchangeably. Hence, this seems to be an artificial distinction. And while I think that the term *Calvinist* can be useful at times to indicate our debt to Calvin, I do not think we should be using that title as a primary title in any sense because it can make it sound to people like we are following a mere man, rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, I believe that the terms should be used interchangeably, we should primarily use the term *Reformed*, and that we can simply explain how the terms had a broader meaning previously in church history and that many of us Reformed folks are still Reformed in this older and more classical sense.

### **Predestination is Merely Mystery**

Many non-Reformed Christians often assert that the biblical doctrine of predestination is a mystery, and that both Calvinists and Arminians (Evangelical

Arminians technically) should stop arguing about this. They often like to say that both sides are basically correct and are missing the point and the fuller picture. They say that God chose us unconditionally, but that we also choose God and not only because we were chosen first. They say that we can freely choose or reject God of our own power. But, they say, somehow God ordained that those who would choose Him would be those that He chose and that He did not choose them because He knew they were going to choose Him. Even though this certainly sounds grossly contradictory, they say it is a mystery and we cannot understand the infinite God.

The problem is that this position does not merely sound like a contradiction, it is a blatant contradiction. I am all for mystery in Christian theology. I wholeheartedly agree that we can never come close to understanding the infinite God. But overt contradictions are illogical and it is blasphemous to say that God is illogical. I am not saying that these brothers and sisters in Christ who take this position are in fact explicitly blaspheming God. They are not. But, I am saying that the implication of their position is that God is illogical and this cannot be the case. I am sorry. I know how popular this position is because it feels like you get to have your cake and eat it too. But, either we choose God because God gave us the ability to do so on our own, or we solely choose God because God chose to change our hearts so that we would certainly choose Him. There is no middle ground here. And I am very convinced that the latter position is what the Bible teaches.

### **Inconsistent Arminianism**

Inconsistent (Evangelical) Arminians are those that say that God chose us because He knew we would choose Him, but who nevertheless refuse to adopt all 5 points of Arminianism. What they are failing to realize is that 4 of the 5 points of Arminianism stand together. And this is true of 4 of the 5 counter points of Calvinism. The only point that both sides should agree upon regardless of which side is true, is limited atonement. This is so ironic because this is often the one point that many non-Calvinists have the most trouble embracing. They believe that the idea that Jesus did not die for all people at least in some sense is deeply unbiblical. I actually agree with

them and so do many Calvinists. However, a majority of Calvinists say that Jesus did not die for any of the non-elect in any manner and that is how many people understand limited atonement. I believe that Jesus died for all people in that the offer of the cross is given to all of humankind.

However, it is a terribly unbiblical doctrine in my strong estimation to say that Jesus actually paid for the sins of all people even if we were to take the Arminian position overall. And this is because this would mean that the sins of unbelievers would be punished twice, once on the cross and once in hell. But, this would violate God's justice. God cannot punish any sin beyond what it deserves. And if the full measure of any sin was punished on the cross, then no more punishment of it from God as judge can be left. And yet that is precisely what unlimited atonement teaches.

With unlimited atonement addressed, let us look at the other 4 points. Let us look first at the *t* in the tulip of the doctrines of grace. Arminians reject total depravity. They say that God has left a small vestige of good within unbelievers whereby they choose God if they decide to make that choice. However, many inconsistent Arminians (or non-Reformed folks) will say that they do believe in total depravity, but reject some of the other points of Calvinism. But, this is impossible. If unbelievers cannot receive Jesus because they are so evil, then obviously God has to change unbelievers before they will receive Jesus. And if God is going to do this, He obviously has to make the choice to do this. Think about it: if both of those things are true, then both the *u* and the *i* in tulip have been established as well.

Some inconsistent Arminians say, "No, we could be totally depraved and then God gives to us a vestige of good by which we can choose Him." The problem here is that this fundamentally misunderstands the doctrine of total depravity. When the original Reformed thinkers first articulated total depravity, they took this possibility into account. They fully understood that God had the power and right to do this, but they were saying that they believed that the Bible did not teach this. They felt that the Bible taught that God had punished us in the fall by taking away any and all desires for Him, and that He had chosen in His justice never to give anyone a vestige of good whereby a person could choose Him on his or her own.

For the early Reformed theologians, the 5 points were a package deal and they were understood that way. You are welcome to disagree with them, but you can't turn around and say that you agree with this or that point when you don't actually agree with them on this or that point. And this is because they understood and defined each of these points in a very specific manner, namely in such a way that they were a package deal. To say that God took away all of our desires for Him in the fall, but then chooses to give unbelievers a vestige of good at some point in the life of each unbeliever is to articulate a doctrine that is not total depravity. It is simply a modified form of the rejection of total depravity. And with that rejection, the rejection of unconditional election and irresistible grace must also follow as a matter of logic.

Let us now look at the *p* in tulip, perseverance of the saints. Many inconsistent Arminians will say that they accept all 4 points of traditional Arminianism except for the last point. They say that they believe in perseverance of the saints. Many Semi-Dispensationalists do not like the language of perseverance of the saints and prefer the term *eternal security*. This is because they believe that true Christians can live in sin for short phases. They are not heretics. They reject any notion that a true Christian can live in sin throughout his or her Christian life. But, because they do believe the above, they are very hesitant about the label *perseverance of the saints*. They believe that a true Christian may not persevere and may fall into a lifestyle of sin, and could hypothetically die in that state and still be saved. With that made clear, they still reject the 5th point of Arminianism, which states that a true Christian can reject Jesus and lose his or her salvation.

The problem is that this position is just as illogical as the above positions from certain inconsistent Arminians. If God has chosen to allow people to choose Him or not, clearly He is going to allow them to stay in Jesus or not. Why would He not give them this option when the entire point is to emphasize our free will? If God has chosen a reality where we must choose Him or not, He is not going to go back on this simply because we chose Him at the beginning. Again, this is why the 5 points of Calvinism are a package deal. You can reject 4 of them, but you must reject all 4 of them if you are going to be remotely consistent. And all Christians should embrace limited atonement if they want to be consistent across the board.

### **Passages Seeming to Imply that a True Christian Can Live in Sin for a Time**

In this subsection I want to address the passages in the Bible that seem to support the position of Semi-Dispensationalists that a true Christian can live in sin for a time. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 2 Peter 1:8-9; and Revelation 3:14-22; are all key examples that are used to support this notion. As I've said many times in my previous works, it is imperative that we always seek to interpret the Bible in the most common sense ways possible. We must never pit one section of Scripture against another. All of these passages can easily be interpreted as God using exaggerated and strong language towards lukewarm Christians or towards backsliding Christians. Everyone agrees that Christians can be lukewarm and that even the most faithful can have phases of backsliding. Sometimes these bouts can be severe and can lead to extreme sin as in the case of Solomon. However, this is not the same thing as saying that someone can live in a state where he or she has pretty much given up on living the Christian life altogether.

That is an extreme position that certainly seems to contradict 1 John. Those who take the Semi-Dispensational side will say that I and others are making too much of 1 John. They will say that we are the ones who are trying to pit 1 John against so many other clear passages and sections of the Bible. They will say that the very strong statements in that epistle are merely talking about the Christian life in general and are not addressing pockets or phases of the Christian life. You will have to decide for yourself. But, that epistle in many places certainly seems to me to be saying that we can presently tell with a high (not perfect) degree of certainty if someone is a true Christian or not by his or her lifestyle. This could not be the case if a true Christian can live in sin, even if only for a short time.

Even in the case of Solomon, which is one of the worst phases of backsliding recorded in either the Bible or church history, when we read Ecclesiastes, which was written by him as a description of how he felt during this period, we still see clear signs of his godliness even during this phase. Yes, he said and did horrific things as recorded in Ecclesiastes and other parts of the Old Testament, but he was also clearly depressed

and still says many things that showed that he knew the truth deep down at that time. Further, there is no evidence that this period lasted very long. It was clearly a period of horrible depression where he said and did many things that were terribly uncharacteristic of him and those who knew him best would have understood this. This does not mean he was not responsible for his actions during this time. The Bible makes it quite clear that he was. He was obviously not so mentally ill that he did not understand right and wrong any longer. However, this is not the same thing as a person deciding to brazenly abandon the Christian life. Therefore, in light of 1 John, I believe that the traditional position of the church throughout its history, namely that a true Christian cannot live in sin, is the correct position.

There are many Christians other than Reformed ones who also hold to this correct position, but the Reformed today are the most passionate advocates for trying to correct the Semi-Dispensational position. It should also be said that there are those who hold to Semi-Dispensational doctrine in many areas such as the covenants and the end times, who reject this doctrine along with other doctrines that are often very associated with Semi-Dispensational theology. Many Reformed Christians, like John MacArthur, fall under this umbrella. These Christians are not Semi-Dispensational across the board.

### **Gradual Conversions**

Many theologians from other schools of thought also believe in gradual conversions. I include this discussion in this section of this work though, because Reformed people have always been adamant that gradual conversions are a very real thing. This is in contrast to much of the rest of the Conservative Evangelical world that believes in very clear-cut powerful conversions in almost all instances of when someone becomes a true believer. I want to be clear that all true Christians have always recognized that *conversion* in the strictest sense of the word is a momentary action. It is not progressive in that sense. One never only sort of has saving faith. And even those that believe in powerful conversions in most instances understand that often a lot can happen in one's life before the actual moment of conversion. They understand that God often uses these events to make the conversion all the more powerful.

What Reformed people mean by gradual conversions is that many true Christians cannot point to a specific moment when they were saved. We all know from Scripture that this certain moment did in fact take place, but for many Christians they cannot pinpoint this moment. Reformed Christians are not against powerful conversions. I myself had one. They understand that they occur and that God often uses them in powerful ways. However, we see no evidence in the Bible that this is the norm. Further, we see evidence in the Bible that sometimes God saves people within the womb. Obviously, such babies do not have saving faith the way older Christians do, but they are clearly regenerated and so God acts as if they have saving faith and saves them accordingly. As soon as such people come to an age when they can understand the gospel, they naturally accept it because they are regenerate. Yet, because this often happens at such a young age, they have no memory of this moment. Thus, they have no memory of when they first truly believed in Jesus. They just know that they always have on some level.

Other Christians say that they have always intellectually believed the gospel, but they feel confident that when they were younger they had not yet fully embraced Jesus in their heart for salvation. They know they have saving faith now, and feel confident that they have not always had it, but they have no specific memory of when the change and transition took place. And there is nothing wrong with this. Many times, a person will have a powerful moment in church, or at a Christian camp, or while listening to a Christian song, etc., and will think that this was merely a major breakthrough in his or her walk with God at the time. He or she may not realize that this was the moment God truly brought salvation. And sometimes a Christian will have more of these moments later on, but still struggle with being lukewarm, and so it can be hard to know which of these moments was the moment of salvation. He or she may look back and think that maybe one of these moments was only a moment when he or she was being somewhat emotional, and he or she may not feel totally confident that this was genuinely the moment of salvation. Such Christians do not need to fret about this. The important thing is that they know they are saved now and they should seek to grow in their walk with God accordingly.



## Freedom in Christ

This subsection is honestly something that I could have easily included in the third book of my “basics” series. However, because most Christians instinctively understand this teaching at least to some degree, I chose to leave it out as I was trying to keep that work as short as possible. Because this teaching is fairly universal in the church at least to some degree, it may seem odd to include it in this overarching section on doctrines that pertain to Reformed theology. The reason I do so is because the Reformed world has always been so clear and passionate about it. The stereotype that Reformed people are a bunch of legalists is simply false, and I will discuss that misconception further down the line in this work. The Reformed have always had a specific name for this doctrine, namely *adiaphora*. The term means *things indifferent*. What is meant by that is that if the Bible does not forbid something or command something, then the Christian is free to do that something or not. And by forbid or command, we mean forbid or command across the board in Scripture.

Many Christians get nervous about this principle. They believe that it can lead to license and looseness in the church. They try to say that if we cannot at least find some support in the Bible for a certain practice, we should probably best avoid it. The problem is that no one holds to this principle with any consistency. For example, the Bible does not tell us what type of socks to wear. Now some Christians say that we should still think through our sock choices. They say that we want to make sure we are not wearing anything that could cause offense to anyone else. That is true, but that does not change the fact that often this will still mean that we can choose from a wide number of sock choices without giving any offense. And if we have to have some biblical justification for just about everything, then we would not know which type of sock to choose. It is obvious therefore, that on all such issues we have freedom.

Some Christians object to this by pointing out that the Bible speaks to every issue of life. This is true, but it does not always do so directly. The Bible tells us to love God with our minds. And it tells us that we can know a great deal about God from the world around us. Hence, we should study these things as humanity. And whatever absolute facts we can glean from these studies is what God is saying about these

matters. And the Bible does speak to our sock choices indirectly. It tells us that we have freedom to choose based on our preferences.

All of this is proven by the ministry of Jesus. If there is anything that is clear from His ministry it is that He hated legalism. He constantly severely chastised the Pharisees for their legalism and the way they tried to control every aspect of the lives of the Jews through their oral law. Where the Bible does not forbid something across the board, Christians are free to do it if they so please. Where the Bible does not command something across the board, Christians are free to abstain from it if they so please.

### **SECTION 3: Confessional Presbyterian Doctrines**

#### **Chapter 6: Part 1 of Section 3**

##### **Fully Defining Confessional Presbyterianism**

A Confessional Presbyterian can be defined as someone who holds to Reformed theology in the older sense as defined above (which of course includes all essential doctrines of the faith); who believes in the traditional creeds of the universal church; who believes in all of the Reformed Confessions and Catechisms, especially the Westminster Confession of Faith; who believes in the traditional Protestant doctrine of the church (as defined below); who holds to the presbyterian form of church government; who holds to the view of the sacraments that has been held to by most of those who are Reformed in the older sense (as defined below); who holds to the regulative principle (as defined below); and who believes strongly in the importance of missions and evangelism.

The traditional creeds of the church from the Ancient Church period are the Apostles' Creed; the Nicene Creed; the Chalcedonian Definition; and the Athanasian Creed. The recent universal creeds or statements are the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy; the Nashville Statement; and the Statement on Social Justice and the

Gospel. The Reformed Confessions and Catechisms are the First and Second Helvetic Confessions; the Helvetic Consensus; the Belgic Confession; the Heidelberg Catechism; the Canons of Dort; the Scots Confession; the Westminster Confession of Faith; the Westminster Larger Catechism; and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It is very important that it be made clear that when I say that someone holds to a creed, confession, or statement, I am not implying that he or she holds to every word in that document. None of these documents are infallible, that belongs to the Bible alone. It only means that this person has a few disagreements with the document here and there, but overall holds that the document does an excellent job of summarizing biblical truth.

All of those Reformed documents before the Scots Confession were produced by the Continental Reformed branch. The Scots Confession was produced by the Presbyterian branch. The Westminster Standards were produced by the Puritans with the help of the Presbyterians, but they ended up becoming primarily Presbyterian documents because the Puritans moved towards Congregationalism. The Continental Reformed always recognized the greatness of the Presbyterian documents, but to some extent did not see them as necessary. The Presbyterians have always recognized the greatness of all of these documents and feel that the Westminster Confession is the best of them by far. That is one key difference between the Confessional Continental Reformed branch and the Confessional Presbyterian branch to this day. Another key difference between the two branches at first was that the Continental Reformed were not completely sold on the presbyterian form of church government at first. Calvin believed that more than one type was biblical. But, the Presbyterians following Knox were very clear about this form of government from the outset. And this is why they were labeled as they were. The Continental Reformed did eventually adopt this form of church government, and this would be a key distinguishing marker of these two branches in distinction to the Congregationalists who rejected this form of church government.

Another key difference of the Presbyterians is the high emphasis on missions and evangelism. Both the Continental Reformed branch and the Congregationalist branch certainly have always believed in these biblical commands, but they have

always placed a much higher emphasis on conversions through family and Christian culture. One other very important doctrine must be discussed here, and that is the doctrine of the Sabbath. As I've said earlier in this work, all classically Reformed people believe in the validity of the Sabbath after Pentecost. However, a disagreement did develop within this Reformed world over the question of rest in the more traditional sense of rest. The Continental Reformed believed that the Sabbath should be taken up with rest and worship. The Puritans and the Presbyterians believed that the entire day should be taken up with worship as much as possible. Hence, you will often hear classically Reformed people talk about the Continental view of the Sabbath and the Puritan or British view of the Sabbath. The "British" here does not mean that most British people adhered to the stricter view of the Sabbath. Most were Anglicans and did not. It is simply referring to the British Isles and the fact that this is where the Puritans and Presbyterians both originated from.

The British view stated that when the Bible so often talks about rest in connection with the Sabbath, it is referring to work that takes us away from worship. For them, the worship on the Sabbath was the rest that the Bible is talking about. The Presbyterians held to this view for a very long time. In fact, it became the view of most Protestants in the Colonies and early America, even those that were not Puritan or Presbyterian. This was because of the massive early influence of the Puritans and the Presbyterians on the Colonies and early America. There were even civil laws that prohibited most work on Sundays in our country well into the 1800's. Over time though, most Presbyterians have adopted the Continental view and this is my view. But, it should be said that there is a minority of true Confessional Presbyterians that hold to the older view and we should be gracious towards them.

With all that laid out, let us briefly summarize the main differences of Confessional Presbyterians today from the other two major branches on the Christian tree that also hold to classically Reformed theology. The two biggest differences between Confessional Presbyterians and Confessional Continental Reformed folks today is over evangelism and missions, and the primacy of the Westminster Standards. At one point, the two branches were not completely on the same page concerning church government, but that quickly changed and is no longer the case today. And for a

very long time the two branches were at odds over the strictness of the Sabbath, but for the most part that is no longer the case today either. The main differences between the Confessional Presbyterians and the Confessional Congregationalists today are over evangelism and missions; the primacy of the Westminster Standards; church government; and the strictness of the Sabbath.

It should also be said that in the earliest days of the Reformation, some Reformed (in the classical sense) theologians held views on the church and the early creeds that were too similar to the medieval view. Many of these theologians either later joined the Anglican branch or heavily influenced that branch. The overwhelming vast majority though, held to what would become the traditional Protestant views on these matters. And very few Christians today who consider themselves Reformed in the classical sense reject the traditional Protestant view on these issues. Finally, it should also be said that in the earliest days of the Reformation, some Reformed (in the classical sense) did not fully hold to the regulative principle (we will discuss the principle below). However, over time, and this is still very true today, the overwhelming vast majority of classically Reformed Christians do hold to this principle.

### **The Definition of the Church**

The Confessional Presbyterian definition of the church is not unique to Confessional Presbyterians. However, I could not place it within the section on Reformed doctrines because not all Reformed Christians (in the broader non-classical sense) hold to it. But, the doctrine does not belong in the section on my opinions because all Confessional Presbyterians agree on a basic definition of the church. But, it must be said that almost all classically Reformed Christians, as well as many Christians in other branches of the tree, also hold to this basic definition. The universal definition of the church among Christians has always been that it is the people of God. The church is not a building. There is nothing unbiblical or sinful about referring to buildings as churches, but that is not the technical definition of the universal church found in the Bible. After this very basic definition, a lot of disagreement begins to develop. I cannot in this work detail all of the different views on the church that have been held to by

orthodox theologians down through the ages of church history, but we will look at the Confessional Presbyterian understanding (again, an understanding that is shared by many non-Confessional Presbyterians) and why we hold to it.

The most basic thing that can be said about the church beyond that it is the people of God is that it is the body of Christ. This is the most prominent image for the church that the Bible uses. Now, all true Christians certainly believe that the church is the body of Christ as that is so clearly taught by the Scriptures. However, how to precisely understand this is where disagreements arise. One of the main reasons there has been disagreement here is because the Bible presents a number of key images to describe the church. The church is plainly a multifaceted reality. And we will examine most of these images in this work. The traditional Protestant view, which is the Confessional Presbyterian view, is that the image of the church as the body of Christ is the most central image given in the word of God. The historic Protestant position is that all of the other images are secondary and only fully make sense in the light of this core image.

This image is found in a number of passages in the New Testament. Some of them are: Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 2:11-16; Ephesians 4:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 1:24; and Colossians 2:18-19. A lot of these passages have a lot to say about spiritual gifts and tie this doctrine heavily into the image of the body of Christ. Many of these passages on the church as the body of Christ specifically come in the context of discussing spiritual gifts. And I will have a lot to say about spiritual gifts later in this work. For now though, I want to focus on the image of the body of Christ itself, which provides Paul with the doctrinal backdrop for his presentation on the spiritual gifts. From all that is said in these passages, it is quite clear that the same basic truths are being presented in John 15, where Jesus gives a different image. This image is that of a vine and its branches. Despite the fact that a different image is being used, a comparison of these two images makes it clear that each image is describing the same basic doctrine.

From all of this biblical evidence it is clear that all of us as true Christians are united to Jesus both legally and spiritually. Theologians often call this doctrine our mystical union with Christ. The term *mystical* here has not nothing to do with the heresy

of Mysticism. It is referring to the mysterious nature of this union. We can never fully understand it. In this union, the Holy Spirit unites us spiritually to God. We feel His presence in the most tangible, but yet indescribable fashion. This is not something we can ever explain to unbelievers. It must be experienced. This does not mean that God is a force like in Star Wars. God is not a part of creation and therefore He cannot be spread out like a force. God is infinite spirit. And this does not mean that God is some spiritual ether that is spread out infinitely. It means that God is invisible spirit and is without limitations. When we say that God is everywhere, we don't mean He is spread out everywhere. We mean all of God is everywhere at once. Our minds cannot ever fully comprehend this. But, God is other-dimensional or other-worldly so to speak. And He is present to all of His creation at all times. In our union with God though, we become aware of God's presence in the most powerful way.

We first become fully legally united to Jesus through faith as we saw in the second book of my "basics" series. Because of this legal union with Him, the Spirit is sent out to fully spiritually unite us to God. And we are most specifically united to Christ out of all three persons of the Trinity because of His human nature and so we can most relate to Him. It in no way means that He is better or above the other members of the Trinity. And in this wonderful union with God, we are also united to all of the other believers around the world and in heaven. God's true people are given a deep love for the people of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Don't listen to the Progressive Christian heretics who are always so negative about God's true church, His people and His beloved adopted children. They will often spout slogans like, "I love Jesus, but I hate the church," or, "Jesus I'm cool with you, it's just your people I have a problem with." They are arrogant and self-righteous faultfinders who are perpetually looking for ways to slander God's church so as to exalt themselves. Yes, we should be honest about the faults of the church, but God's true church is His body and He loves His body and cares for it. All true Christians love the church. You cannot love Jesus without at the same time loving His church. The two are not identical, but they can never be separated. It is as simple as that.

It is very important to make clear though, that our union with Christ as the church does not constitute a second incarnation. The union between the two natures of Jesus

is utterly unique. There is only one incarnation of God period. The church is beautifully united to Jesus both legally and spiritually, but not to the point where we become one person with Him as is the case with His human nature. Thus, we are never to worship the church. We must maintain balance here. Many heretical groups say that their church is the one and only church and they practically worship their church. We must love the church deeply, while never over-exalting her. We must remember that the images given of the church in the Bible are only images and analogies and they are not to be pushed too far.

In the next subsections of this chapter and into the next few chapters, we will look at some of the secondary images and doctrines from the Bible about the church. At every point in these subsections, I will be defending the traditional Protestant view of the church. Before doing so, I want to clarify how I'm using the term *traditional Protestant*. The reason I'm not capitalizing *traditional* here is because I'm not using the title as part of an official title. Almost all true Christians on earth today as Conservative Evangelicals are also Traditional Protestants. Conservative Evangelicalism is merely the continuation of Traditional Protestantism. If you are curious as to why we even need two different labels if that is true, I have detailed this extensively in my previous works for beginners. When I use the term *traditional* here, I am referring to the fact that the basic Confessional Presbyterian view of the church in general is the doctrine that was held to by most Protestants for centuries before the rise of Semi-Dispensationalism. Once we hit the subsection on the classically Reformed view of the Sabbath, we will have hit the end of my summary on the traditional Protestant view of the church and will be transitioning into subjects that are more unique to certain segments of the church. But, at all times it should be kept in mind that everything I defend here is part of Confessional Presbyterian theology as we are in that overarching section of this work.

### **The Bride of Christ**

As we have seen in this work, and in the second book to my basics series, there is a sense in which each one of us as true believers are married to Jesus. Obviously, this is not to be taken overly literally. There are plainly many things about a normal



marriage that of course do not apply to us and Jesus. But, we are both legally and spiritually united to Him and He loves and protects us as the ultimate husband in the universe. And because all of us as true believers are united to one another, collectively we are the bride of Christ. Jesus paid the ultimate bride price for His beloved spouse with His blood.

### **The Temple of the Holy Spirit**

As we saw from the passages above, we as Christians and the church as a whole are called the temple of the Holy Spirit. This image points to the fact that the church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit indwelt the actual physical temple of God. This is where the people of God came to worship God in a very official sense, especially by offering animal sacrifices to Him. The Spirit actually came in a physical manifestation when the temple was first consecrated, but after that His presence was more fully felt in a non-physical manner in the temple until He removed His presence because of the disobedience of the Israelites. Now God brings the fullness of His presence to His people. This does not mean that believers in Old Testament times did not have the Spirit. They certainly did. And thus they were the true temple of God even back then. However, they did not really understand this and they did not have the fullness of the Spirit as we do today after Pentecost. When we speak of *fullness* here as theologians, we are not saying that we have the Spirit to the degree that Jesus did or that we will have on the new earth. We are talking about in this life. The Spirit was given to the people of God internally and within the temple to a very high degree before Pentecost, but He was given to an even higher degree to the people of God after Pentecost.

The Bible is clear (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) that all of us individually as Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit. This is why the Bible says that each individual congregation of believers is a church. This is because collectively they are the temple of the Spirit. God only has one bride, the church, but each of us are a manifestation of this bride. God only has one temple, the church, but each of us are a manifestation of this temple. And each individual church is also a manifestation of this temple. And each truly

godly denomination is a manifestation of this temple as well. I understand that all of this is mysterious language, but it is the language the Bible consistently uses.

### **The Family of God**

As we have seen in this work and in the second book of my “basics” series, we as true believers are the adopted children of God. Therefore, collectively as the church we are the family of God and the Bible uses this language.

### **The Pillar and Foundation of the Truth**

In 1 Timothy 3:14-15 Paul tells us that the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth. This image points to the fact that the church is to uphold the truth of God. Please don't listen to false “Christians” who try to say that doctrine does not matter to God. Also, please don't listen to true Christians that sadly try to minimize the importance of doctrine. Yes, be very careful of those who obsess over doctrine to the neglect of the rest of the Christian life. Yes, be very careful about those who try to make everything under the sun heresy. With all that said, we as the church are given the high duty and responsibility of proclaiming God's truth, as found in His word, to the world. God takes truth in general, but particularly the truths He has revealed to us in His word, extremely seriously. And we as the church are His vessel for proclaiming this truth to the world.

Be aware of the fact that many heretical groups take this image way too far. They try to use it to push the notion that the church must be near perfect and is infallible or close to infallible when proclaiming God's truth. That takes this image much too far and contradicts the rest of the Bible. A pillar does not need to be perfect in order to uphold the building. The same is true of a foundation. The true church will never get the essentials wrong, but it can get things very wrong when it comes to the non-essential doctrines of the Bible. We do not need an infallible church, we have God's infallible Scriptures.

### **The Visible Church and the Invisible Church**

We now move on from the main images the New Testament gives to us about the church and into some of the key secondary doctrines that can be derived from the Bible about the church. The first one we will look at here is the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. This distinction is pointing to the fact that we cannot know with absolute certainty the heart of any other person other than our own. And we often even misinterpret our own hearts, but we do know the truth of our own hearts deep down. Because of this, we can never know who is a real brother or sister in Christ beyond doubt. But, we must treat as our brothers and sisters in Christ all those in the church that seem to be genuine Christians. And when the church functions like this as it must, we refer to this as the visible church. It is made up of all those that we can visibly see and that seem to be sincere Christians. With that said, the Bible is very clear about the reality of apostasy. Most people who seem to be true Christians eventually fall away. Most do not last very long, but some stick around in the church for a very long time. This is one of the hardest parts of the Christian life. But, it is something we must get used to and it should cause us to long for Jesus' return all the more when He will remove all apostasy from His beloved bride.

The invisible church refers to all those that are truly saved. We call it invisible because we cannot know who all is truly a part of it in this life. It is invisible to us in that sense. Not even the angels know who is truly saved or not. This is known only to God until the new earth. At that time, the invisible and visible church will finally be one. Everyone present on the new earth will be truly saved and we will know this with infallible certainty because God has told us plainly in His word that only the truly saved will live with Him on the new earth forever.

Even the vast majority of Christians who believe that we can lose our salvation in this life recognize that there are people who fake being Christians. Therefore, even most of them acknowledge the reality of the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. They would simply say that they believe that many people who are genuinely a part of the invisible church will eventually fall away and lose their salvation. Those like myself believe that anyone that falls away from the faith never really had saving faith in the first place.

Because of all that we have discussed about the church before this subsection, it is very important to say that only those that are part of the invisible church are a part of the true essence of the church. Those that are only part of the visible church are in the church so to speak, but they are not of it. Make sure you understand that we are not saying that the visible church and the invisible church are two totally different realities. A huge percentage of the invisible church is also part of the visible church. You may wonder why it is that not all of the invisible church is also part of the visible as well, and we will tackle that topic down the line. For now though, we can say that there is immense crossover between the visible and invisible church. However, not all those that are part of the visible church are part of the invisible church. In fact, most are not. Most fall away eventually. With all of this laid out, it may seem odd to call anyone part of the church at all on any level if he or she is not part of the essence of the church. This is a good concern to have and some Christians do in fact believe that we should not call such people part of the church in any manner. The problem is how would the church function given the fact that we cannot know hearts? How could we gather as a church when we do not know who is truly part of the essence of the church and who is not? This is why the Bible itself certainly seems to recognize the fact that false “brothers and sisters” are a part of the visible church and we must treat them accordingly until their true nature is manifested.

One of the most striking examples of this reality is the case of Judas. Many believe that Judas was saved at one time and eventually lost his salvation. That is fine; I strongly disagree, but that belief is not heresy. However, all agree that he was not saved well before this was truly revealed to the rest of the apostles. We see this very clearly in John 6:70. Jesus says that Judas was a devil at the time of the feeding of the five thousand. But, this event occurred well before Judas’ open betrayal of Jesus. Before that he seemed like a sincere Christian and apostle and the rest of the apostles treated him as such. And Jesus never corrects them for this. This is all a picture of how we are to function in the church. God knows who His true people are and we are to trust Him to use the visible church even though it is filled with false “believers.” What is even more striking about the case of Judas is that he would have clearly still had certain spiritual

gifts that came with being an apostle. There is no indication that he ever lost these gifts. If he had, the other apostles would have obviously noticed this.

And we see this truth in Matthew 7:21-23. In this passage we are told that many people who have actual and real spiritual gifts will come to Jesus at the final judgment and it will be revealed that they were never saved. It is clear from Jesus here that such people did not merely lose their salvation, but were never saved in the first place, because He specifically says that He *never* knew them. And as we saw from the verses above on the body of Christ, it is clear that God only gives real spiritual gifts to those in His church. Hence, it follows that God does consider many people who are not truly saved to be a part of His church on some level. This is why even those who believe that Christians can lose their salvation still recognize the distinction between the visible and invisible church for the most part.

It may seem odd that a false “believer” could be a part of Jesus’ body in some sense. This sounds like parts of Jesus’ body are dead. The answer to this dilemma is to say yes and no. None of Jesus’ actual body is dead. But, there are parts or branches that are still attached to Him that are dead. Again, they are not of the essence of His body, but they are attached to Him and God uses them as He sees fit for the benefit of His actual core body. Think of this like a dead branch. It is dead and wilted and none of the sap is going to it. It produces no fruit precisely because it is dead. Yet, it still clings to the vine. Eventually it will be cut off, but for a time it remains. And while it remains, it can still serve a purpose. It can make the tree look more formidable and can serve other purposes as well. And think about such a branch: would we say that it is part of the tree or not? We would honestly say that there is a sense in which it is, but that there is also a very real sense in which it is not. It is still part of the tree in that it is technically connected to it in some manner and is even helping the overall tree for the time being. However, we would also say that it is not part of the essence of the tree as it is disconnected from the life of the tree and needs to be cut off.

### **Chapter 7: Part 2 of Section 3**

## The Institutional Church and the Organic Church

Before diving into this subsection, I want to warn you that it may be a little confusing. I highly recommend reading through it a few times to really get the material down. I will be doing my best to keep things as simple as possible throughout, but it is dealing with a lot of fine doctrinal distinctions and so that is only so easy to do.

This doctrine is very closely tied into the doctrine we just examined, the doctrine of the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. The organic church is essentially the same thing as the invisible church, but it is being looked at from a different focus. As we saw, the invisible church refers to the church in its essence. As such, it is a living reality. However, when we speak of the invisible church, we clarify that we are talking about the living church, but we are focusing on the fact that it is invisible to all but God until the final state. When we refer to the organic church in the doctrine under examination in this subsection, we are focusing in on the fact that it is a living and vital spiritual reality. The other difference of the doctrine here is that the organic church is being distinguished from the institutional church, which is not the same thing as the visible church, although they are related.

The institutional church refers to the fact that the church is an institution. This is where the vine and body images break down. Yes, the church is very much like a living human body or a living vine in many respects, but those images do not exhaust the full doctrine of the church, even though the body image is the most important as we have seen. The church has an institutional head, and that is King Jesus. When the Bible speaks of Jesus being the head of the church, it does so in two distinct senses. The first is in a more organic sense. We as the church are the body of Christ and we are connected to our spiritual head, Jesus Christ, both legally and spiritually. The second is that Jesus is the head of the church in an institutional sense as its king. All three persons of the Trinity are the king of all things as God. And all three of them are specifically the king of God's people. However, Jesus is more specifically the king of God's people because we are legally united to Him in salvation because He is our mediator between us and God. He is God's ultimate human king of God's people in

fulfillment of the promises made to king David. Therefore, all of God's people are organizationally united under their monarch, Jesus Christ.

The Bible is also clear that the church is to be led in an organizational sense by pastors. We will discuss church government more down the line in this work, but the Bible is very clear that all true churches are to be governed by pastors or must be working towards that goal. All true Christians have always agreed on this baseline truth. Even when a church does not have any pastors for whatever reason, it must still be working towards remedying this. And even when a number of churches in a certain area are without pastors due to war, or persecution, or other factors, they are still true churches if they are orthodox and their desire is to have pastors. And such churches still reflect the institutional character of the church in that they desire to be rightfully governed by pastors and are still underneath their monarch, Jesus Christ, organizationally. And Jesus always governs His church through His Spirit and His word even when parts of His church find themselves in very difficult situations.

The next item we need to discuss in connection with the institutional church is the fact that the institutional church can often, unfortunately, be an utter disaster. We may wonder why God so often allows this to take place, but at the end of the day we must submit to God's wisdom and know that all bad things (all things period) work for the good of God's true children (Ephesians 1:1-11 and Romans 8:28). God uses the immense challenges that we often face in the institutional church to sanctify us just like He uses all other difficulties in our lives.

One of the primary reasons things can get so bad within the institutional church is because true believers in God will often not fully condemn heresy. They will not embrace heresy themselves, this is impossible for a true believer. To truly embrace heresy is to show that one has not received the Spirit of God. However, what is unfortunately very possible, and what often indeed takes place, is that a true believer will reject heresy personally but will not be willing to call a heresy actual heresy. If all of that was somewhat complicated, allow me to break this down a bit. Let us say we have two men. The first is named Jack. The second is named John. Jack is a true Christian. He is saved and as such has the Holy Spirit. Jack rejects LDS theology. He believes that it is terribly unbiblical. In this sense, Jack rightfully rejects the heresies of the LDS

Church. John is LDS though. He professes to be a “Christian,” but he wholeheartedly and passionately embraces LDS doctrine from a place of deep knowledge and experience. He has no mental health conditions and he has read the Bible cover to cover more than once. He has been LDS for many years and currently wouldn’t give a thought to leaving that religion. He is therefore without question a heretic. So far, pretty straightforward. Here is where it gets tricky though.

Jack refuses to call LDS theology heresy. He believes in the reality of heresy as he knows that the Bible talks about it so much. He believes that groups such as the KKK are heretical. But, he does not believe that the LDS Church is fully heretical on that level. He believes the LDS Church is deeply mistaken and even dangerous doctrinally on some level, but he still accepts John and other LDS folks as his brothers and sisters in Christ. Jack is horribly mistaken in his assessment of the LDS church, but not to the point of actual heresy himself. It is only heretical to actually embrace one or more heresies, it is not fully heretical to fail to call a heresy a heresy. I know this principle can be confusing, but it is quite plain from the Bible that this is the case. Many Fundamentalists make the mistake of condemning all true Christians who accept Roman Catholicism or Liberal Protestants as their brothers and sisters in Christ. Many tend to believe that only fellow Fundamentalists are saved. The correct biblical view is that we should plead with our fellow true Christians to stop joining hands spiritually with heretics, but that we should still love and embrace them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need balance here and unfortunately we see from both the Bible and church history that many Christians often fail to have balance. We don’t want to be too loose and accept heretical groups as part of the church, but we also don’t want to completely condemn our fellow Christians who are too loose.

With all of that laid out, let us now look at how things often get really ugly within the institutional church. Very few devout LDS folks are going to try to join our true churches. Many will visit our churches, but most will not try to fully join our churches without first leaving the LDS religion altogether. That is because of the nature of that religion. However, this is not true of many heretical groups. Many heretical groups do all in their power to infiltrate true churches. This is especially true today of Liberal Protestants (especially Progressive Christians), and most in the



Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. They believe it is their duty to reform and change true churches to be more like their wicked brand of “Christianity.” And where things become very complicated and problematic is that many true churches and denominations will welcome them in the name of “unity.” These true churches and denominations will still make it clear that they disagree with these groups theologically and for that reason they remain true churches. But, they say that these groups are still our brothers and sisters in Christ and so we must embrace them on some level despite our strong disagreements.

Most churches and denominations will allow other true Christians to attend or join their churches even if they do not hold to all of the doctrines of that particular church or denomination. For instance, I was in the PCA for a very long time and one could become a member of most PCA churches even if one did not believe in PCA doctrine. One could simply not be a deacon or elder unless he or she held to PCA theology (women were not allowed to become elders). One only had to be a Conservative Evangelical. Now, I know that many non-denominational churches, as well as others such as Calvary Chapel churches, do not believe in formal membership today and that can make things murky. However, even most of these churches would distinguish between true believers and unbelievers that regularly attend their churches. Most of these will not allow anyone to be in a major leadership position unless he or she holds to the theology of the church. But, most would welcome other Christians who regularly attend as brothers and sisters in Christ, and many would allow such Christians to continue to attend and even be involved in certain ministry positions (like teaching the children) as long as they do not try to sway people towards their particular theological views. Whereas unbelievers are usually welcomed to continue attending and are sort of considered perpetual visitors until they receive Christ, and cannot be in ministry positions. This does not mean that such people cannot participate in any of the ministries. Let us say there is a women’s brunch or something along those lines. Most churches would allow unbelievers to attend such an event. They may even allow them to help with the planning of it. However, they would not be allowed to speak or teach at that event of course.

So, at a PCA church for example, you may have many members that hold to Reformed Baptist theology because there are not solid Reformed Baptist churches in the area. This is a good thing as it promotes unity in the body of Christ and allows churches to serve certain Christians who would otherwise not be able to go to church, which is completely not ok. Here is the problem though. Many true churches will allow heretics to join in the name of this same spirit. And this is one of the primary ways that Satan infects the institutional church. Many Historic Protestant churches have been allowing Liberal Protestants to join for centuries. Throughout the Middle Ages, Mystics and those engaging in severe syncretism were tolerated for centuries. During the Arian controversy, many true churches allowed Arians to join. Throughout the history of Israel, the Israelites were constantly allowing idolaters to join the nation. Eventually, even most of the kings embraced idolatry.

This problem not only causes the institutional church to become more and more heretical and corrupt, but it also inevitably causes huge amounts of division and false accusations. The division comes when discerning Christians begin to call out their churches and denominations for allowing heretics to join. The other less discerning Christians in turn become defensive and start to accuse the more discerning Christians of being harsh and legalistic. Eventually they usually accuse the more discerning Christians of being blatantly divisive. This often leads to long and ugly battles between true Christians that often lead to church or denominational splits. Once these splits happen, often the smaller more discerning churches and denominations struggle to rebuild and the older less discerning ones usually completely abandon the faith altogether in the long run.

Israel actually split in half after Solomon and became two nations on paper even though God still saw both nations as His people for a very long time after this. The northern nation became known as Israel and the southern nation became known as Judah. Eventually Israel (the northern kingdom) got so bad that they had completely abandoned God and God destroyed that nation through the Assyrians. The same eventually took place with Judah, only it was the Babylonians that destroyed them. The Catholic Church eventually fully fell away. The Eastern Orthodox Church eventually fully fell away. Most Protestant denominations eventually fully fell away. And most

Evangelical churches and denominations are falling away today. Apostasy (falling away from God) is very real. A true Christian can never fall away from God, but many false ones can and many true churches and denominations can and often do.

Before moving forward, I want to address the fact that all of this talk about looking at the church from different angles can sound like we are talking about multiple universal churches. And this is not the case. There is only one universal church. I have already briefly touched upon this truth when I talked about how the visible church and the invisible church are not two different churches, but I want to elaborate on this point here. Let's return to the vine analogy as I think it is very helpful. There is only one vine. There are many, many branches on this vine though, and that is where things become nuanced. There are living branches on this vine that produce an abundance of fruit and there are dead branches on this vine that do not produce fruit. It is also the case that many of these branches are clumped together. And it is even further the case that some of these clumps are bunched together with other clumps.

Now let us say that someone comes to this vine who has very, very poor eyesight. He cannot always tell the difference between the branches with fruit and the branches with no fruit. Sometimes there is foliage on certain dead branches that has fallen from the trees and bushes around the vine that looks like fruit to him. Let us also say that there is a gardener who comes to prune and clean up the vine. He often cuts off dead branches. He also often cuts off whole clumps of dead branches, and He also often cuts off large bunches of branches that are made up of a number of clumps of branches. However, he does not cut off every dead branch all at once as they serve various purposes as the vine grows. But, once the vine is fully grown, he will carefully cut off all of the dead branches to be burned.

Think of the vine and the branches combined as the universal church. There is only one vine and there is only one universal church. Even when branches come and go, this still does not change the fact that there is only one vine. When new living branches grow on the vine, they are part of the overall vine and branches. When dead branches are cut off, they cease to be part of the vine and the branches, but the vine and its branches continue on. When dead branches remain on the vine, they are part of the vine and branches in a manner of speaking. But, they are not part of the essence of

the vine and will eventually be removed. The vine itself represents Christ. He is the core of the church. He is what makes the church the church. The gardener represents the Father and we will have more to say about His role soon. The life giving sap that makes the branches alive and produces the fruit within them represents the Holy Spirit. The branches represent the people in the church. Unbelieving visitors to the church are not part of the vine in any sense. Only those that are embraced as believers (even if they are not) by any true church or denomination can be considered actual branches.

Think of the institutional church as all of the branches, regardless of being alive or dead, or whether they are part of a small clump or a big one, or whether their clump is part of a much bigger bunch of clumps or not. The clumps of branches represent individual local churches. Some are very small and some are rather large. The bunches of clumps represent denominations. Some churches are not part of denominations and therefore are clumps of branches that are not part of a broader bunch of clumps. It should also be said that sometimes, for various reasons, individual Christians are not part of a local church. They would be stand alone branches. This is not healthy and it is rare. People who claim to be Christian, even those that are otherwise very orthodox and seem to be godly, who are not a part of a local church willfully and for a long time, show they are not truly saved. There are of course exceptions here. Sometimes people live in war torn areas where they cannot get to a true church. This is why I said *willfully* above. We are not saved by going to church, please don't misunderstand me. But, being a part of a true church eventually is a fruit of the Spirit.

The visible church refers to all of the branches on the vine that look like they are alive and producing fruit. The person with the bad eyesight represents us discerning Christians in this life looking at the church on earth. It is very important to not equate the visible church with the institutional church. They do have some similarities and they must both be sharply distinguished from the invisible church. But, they are not identical. Despite this person having very imperfect eyesight, he can still tell that certain branches are dead. Some have no fallen foliage on them whatsoever and are clearly dead branches. These branches represent professing "Christians" that are members within true churches or denominations that are either blatantly heretical and/or live corrupt lives. These branches should be removed from the church/vine immediately.

Unfortunately, it is often the case that true churches and denominations fail to do this for the reasons we discussed earlier. You may ask, “Why doesn’t this person in the analogy remove these branches?” Because he does not have the authority to do so. Only the governmental leaders in the church, whom we will discuss more down the line, have the authority and responsibility to do this. This man in this analogy represents discerning Christians in general. Even those among discerning Christians that are pastors and have this authority, still do not have this authority outside of their particular church and/or denomination.

And sometimes it is even the case that an entire clump (an individual local church) of branches has become dead. This does not mean that no living branches exist within this clump at all anymore. Sometimes true Christians do mistakenly go to a false church for a time without realizing it. However, this clump as a whole is considered dead. Now, if this clump is not part of a broader bunch, then it will as a whole be cut off by God by the very nature of it fully embracing heresy. Obviously the living branches will remain, but the clump as a clump will be removed. True Christians that are part of such “churches” are considered stand alone branches because they are technically not part of any true church or denomination. And as said above, they will not last in these churches for too long as the Spirit will lead them out.

Therefore true churches that are not part of a denomination, but later apostatize, become false churches and are no longer part of the institutional church. And all of their non-saved members also at that moment cease to be part of the institutional church as well. Yet, there are false “churches” (clumps) that remain a part of true denominations (bunches of clumps) because these true denominations as a whole are not being discerning and are failing to kick these “churches” out as they should. These true denominations still formally hold to orthodox statements of faith, but they also allow members and sometimes even whole churches to be a part of their denomination who reject the statement of faith of the denomination. These false “churches” and all of their members are still part of the institutional church because they are still joined to a true denomination. And sometimes true denominations will become overwhelmed by these false “churches” and “Christians” even though they remain formally orthodox. When this happens, deep problems arise. We saw this with ancient Israel; with the medieval

church; with the Protestant church; and we are seeing it in our day with the Evangelical church.

The visible church only refers to those people that seem to be truly Christian. For those of us that are discerning, we can see the difference between someone who is technically a part of the institutional church, but should not be, and those that genuinely seem to be our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not to have fellowship with the former, but we are to lovingly embrace the latter. That is the key difference between the visible church and the institutional church.

As said above, the invisible church refers to all that are truly saved. The living and fruitful branches represent those in the invisible church. Even though the person with the bad eyesight cannot completely discern which branches these are, he knows they are there. The true fruit on these branches represent the good works of God's true people done for His glory. As said in the previous subsection at the end of the last chapter, not all those in the invisible church are part of the visible church. This is because there are those that are too young or who have severe mental disabilities that cannot show any tangible fruit that are nonetheless saved. Theologians who take the traditional Protestant view of the church that I am defending in this work disagree on how many people fall into this category, and I will detail where I stand on this issue down the line in this work. With that said, all of them believe that at least some fall into this category. And all those in this category are part of the invisible church, but are not part of the visible church. Because they are a branch on the vine at all, they are part of the institutional church, but they are not part of the visible church because we cannot see their fruit. These branches are like branches on the vine that the person with the bad eyesight can't even see at all. Let us say that because they have no fruit yet, and because they have no fallen foliage on them, he fails to see them at all. But, they are still a part of the vine as they are connected to the vine. And they are even of the essence of the vine because they are living (saved) branches. All those like myself who believe in infant baptism believe that all those who have been legitimately baptized at a very young age should be seen as part of the visible church until they show evidence otherwise.

With all of these definitions, explanations, and qualifications regarding the institutional church laid out, I now want to return to more specifically contrasting the institutional church with the organic church. We have already seen how the institutional church is made up of all the branches on the vine. We have seen how we can look at all of these branches in various ways. The institutional church also very much has to do with the Father's role in pruning the church, the vine. As Jesus says in John 15, the Father cuts off all branches on Him that do not bear fruit. Ultimately, the Father will do this in a complete and final way at the final judgment. Then the institutional church, the visible church, and the invisible church will all be completely one and manifest to everyone. In this life though, the Father prunes His church at His pace and at His discretion. And He does so, for the most part, through His pastors in His church. This is why it is called the institutional church. It is because it is so closely tied into the government of God's church. It is the role of God's pastors to do many things, but one of their primary roles is to govern the church. And one of the chief facets of this government is removing the dead branches. Obviously, they cannot remove all of the dead branches as we cannot see all of the clearly dead branches. However, they are to remove all branches that are plainly dead.

This does not mean that we have to kick out all unbelievers from our worship services. We should be delighted that they want to join us. It only means that we must remove from membership all those that fall away from the faith, or are/become heretical, or are living or start living in sin for a prolonged period of time. For those churches that do not have formal membership, they must make it clear to such people and to their congregations that they no longer consider such people to be brothers and sisters in Christ, and they must not allow these people to be involved in any leadership positions in the church. And they must be very firm with such people that they are not allowed to attempt to spread their wicked teachings or lifestyle in any way to those at the church. If they do not comply, then they should not be allowed to attend the services or any ministries of the church. The fact that so many otherwise orthodox and godly true pastors in the church universal fail to do this today is absolutely shameful and it is one of the key reasons the church is so sick right now.

Now obviously the vine analogy breaks down a bit here. Please remember that no image or analogy the Bible uses is ever exhaustive or perfect. They are perfect in that they are the exact right analogy God wanted to use, but they are not perfect in the sense that all of them can be pressed too far. And certainly no analogy from any theologian is ever perfect. While I am definitely borrowing an image from the Bible, I have added my own spice to it and it is important to know that it can never explain every element of what I am trying to get across. The gardener in the analogy does not use any of the branches to get rid of any of the other branches. But, the Father has appointed His pastors in the church to get rid of those branches that according to His word are plainly dead. They should do their duty.

Before moving forward, I do need to make one qualification. This is another area where my analogy breaks down a bit. I have now said on a few occasions in this subsection that the true pastors of God's true church must remove the branches that are clearly dead. However, it must be said that in the rarest of cases, it may be the case that a person who seems to meet all the biblical criteria for being seen as a dead branch is actually alive. This is so rare that I think the basic analogy still works and that we are warranted in using this language. But, we should be aware of these very, very rare exceptions. And these exceptions take place because sometimes people have a mental condition that even they do not know about and that cannot be discerned by others on any level. They may indeed be saved, but their condition causes them to believe and act in unsaved ways outwardly.

This is not the same thing as what I talked about with Solomon. Yes, we should be very careful about not judging Solomon too harshly as he was going through a very severe bout of depression. But, Solomon was still aware of his actions and was thus responsible for them on some level. The exceptions I am talking about are not fully aware of their actions. The pastors must still eject such people from the church for the health of the church, and they will not be judged for this at the final judgment as they were being obedient to the Scriptures. With that said, these rare cases are completely invisible branches somewhat along the lines of what I discussed earlier. When pastors remove them it may seem that these branches are being removed from the vine, but God secretly keeps them connected to the vine because they are saved. And those with



mental conditions along these lines must be distinguished from those who have severe mental disabilities and cannot communicate with others in a normal fashion to a very large degree.

The next thing that needs to be clarified here is how can Jesus' body produce bad fruit? The Bible is clear that good trees produce good fruit and bad trees produce bad fruit. And it applies this image to us as humans. Unbelievers produce bad fruit because they are sinful by nature. Believers produce good fruit because they have been filled with the Holy Spirit. And while believers do of course still sin and thus produce bad fruit, and even their good fruit is not perfect, all because they still have a very strong remnant of the sinful nature, they overall produce good fruit in keeping with Jesus' words. But, if Jesus is absolutely perfect, then how can His body produce anything other than perfect fruit? Again, we must remember that analogies can only be taken so far. The analogies of the body and the vine are intended to show us our union with Jesus. They cannot be pressed too far beyond that. Even when most of the branches on the vine (the institutional church) are dead branches and cause all sorts of awful problems, we must always remember that they are not truly of the essence of the vine. Only the living branches that produce good fruit are, and they only do so because of their union with Jesus. And the extent to which they produce both imperfect good fruit and bad fruit as well is not credited to Jesus Himself. They are legally credited to Him as He takes our penalty for those imperfect works and complete sins on the cross, but they are not credited to Him in the sense that He is not the one doing those works.

You are probably noticing about now another example of my analogy breaking down. Clearly unbelievers produce fruit, it is just bad fruit. But, in both my fuller analogy and the image given in the Bible, the unbelieving branches are dead and don't produce any fruit. Again, this is only because the analogies can only represent so much. If either analogy said that these dead branches produced fruit, they would clearly be indicating that these branches are not entirely dead, they are merely connected to a bad vine. Obviously though, we do not want to say that the vine is bad because the vine represents Jesus!

Next, I want to make clear that all of the denominations I recommended on pages 33-34 of the last book of my "basics" series do not allow heretical churches to exist in

their midst. This does not mean that no heretical churches ever do exist in these denominations; they unfortunately do for the reasons I explain in that section. However, none of these denominations ever formally condone this. Now some pastors and churches within these denominations do compromise over Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy in the sense of accepting Catholics and Eastern Orthodox followers as their brothers and sisters in Christ. And this is terribly unfortunate and frustrating. But, they do not allow any churches to adopt the theology of these religions. They merely say that while they strenuously disagree with the theology of these religions, they still accept their people as brothers and sisters in Christ.

And all of them are pretty firm overall on Liberal Protestantism; the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement; the LDS; the Jehovah's Witnesses; and most other heretical groups. An example of a godly denomination that allows heretical churches to exist within its ranks is the National Baptist Convention. While the denomination as a whole still subscribes to historic Baptist theology, and while most of the churches within it are still orthodox, it allows Liberal Protestant churches and these churches are growing both in size and number. It will be interesting to see how much longer this denomination stays orthodox overall. Many other denominations around the world are much, much further along in the process of full apostasy.

The next important item to discuss is the difficult issue of how to classify orthodox and godly churches that remain within apostate denominations in light of my analogy. As I said in the first chapter of my book on the denominations and movements within Biblical Christianity today (it can be found on my website), I believe that such churches should be seen as being part of denominations within an apostate denomination because all such churches usually band together to work for the reform of the overall false denomination (usually very unsuccessfully). Therefore, they should be seen as part of a broader bunch of clumps. However, we must be careful to say that the overarching apostate denomination is not part of the vine at all. It is not part of the institutional church on any level because it has formally repudiated Biblical Christianity.

The next thing I want to discuss in this subsection is numbers within the church. I would say that there are approximately 500 million people in the institutional church today. That number may seem high in light of what I have said in my previous works, but

remember, many of the people in otherwise true denominations and movements are part of Progressive Christianity or the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. I think the number of people in the visible church is around 400 million people. That number may also seem high when in my previous works I have put the number of genuine Conservative Evangelicals at about 300-350 million people. The reason this number needs to be a little higher is to take into account the many people that are hard to tell and we must for the time being give them the benefit of the doubt. My 300-350 million number is referring to regular devout churchgoers who are clearly Conservative Evangelical in their theology. But, there are those that do not attend church for various reasons and there are those who temporarily attend false churches. Many of these people may very well simply be immature Christians. A large number of them eventually join the true church in a more formal manner. However, most of them fall away after not very long. Despite this fact, we must be cautiously optimistic about them and seek to gently nudge them in the right direction. And because of this, we must accept them as part of the visible church until they show undeniable evidence that they are not truly saved (barring a mental condition of course).

As I've said in my previous works, I believe that the invisible church is made up of about 200 million people and about 35-40 million in the United States alone. It is very sad that in America we now make up such a small percentage of the American population. With that said, we still make up a very large percentage of the overall worldwide church. Because of this, we still hold tremendous amounts of sway and influence upon the worldwide church and we should not take this responsibility lightly. When we set a good example because of our numbers and our history, the rest of the church tends to follow. When we set a bad example, the same tends to take place.

As far as proving this doctrine from Scripture, if the church is the continuation of Israel, and I will explain in the next chapter why I absolutely believe that it is, then this doctrine follows from the long history of Israel described for us throughout the Old Testament and from Romans 11 in the New Testament. It is also shown by the doctrine of church government and John 15.

### **The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant**

The doctrine of the church militant and the church triumphant is distinguishing between the church in heaven and the church on earth. Again, we are not talking about two different churches or entirely separated realities. The church is one body and all of us as true believers are united as we have seen. However, we are looking at two very different segments of the church. This is unlike some of the other distinctions we have looked at so far. In those other distinctions, there is a lot of crossover. Much of the invisible church is part of the visible church. And vice versa. All of the organic church is part of the institutional church, and much of the institutional church is part of the organic church. There is no crossover here though. We are looking at two different segments of the church, but again, this does not mean that they are entirely separated from each other either. They are both united in the Spirit, and they will truly become one on the new earth when the church militant will pass away. This doctrine is seen from Scripture by combining all that was said about the end times in the second book of my “basics” series with all that we have discussed so far about the church. The church triumphant is called that because it is no longer fighting the good fight but is with Jesus. The church militant is called that because it continues to fight the good fight of the faith here on earth.

### **Chapter 8: Part 3 of Section 3**

#### **The Church and Israel**

The Semi-Dispensational view on this topic is that Israel and the universal church are two entirely different entities. They say that there is some overlap as far as individuals go, but they say that as entities they are separate. Think of it like when an extremely talented and rare professional athlete plays two different sports for two different professional teams. When I was a kid, one of the most famous examples of this was Bo Jackson. He played both football and baseball. He played professional football

for the Raiders, and he played professional baseball for the Royals (he played for other baseball teams down the line; but, he played for the Raiders and the Royals at the same time). The Raiders were (still are) a professional football organization. The Royals were (still are) a professional baseball organization. The two organizations are separate and are very different in many respects. This does not mean that they have no similarities. They certainly do. They are both sports teams and organizations. And many other similarities could be pointed out. With that made clear, they are still two separate entities. Most of the athletes who played for these teams, and most of the people who worked for these organizations, at the time of Bo Jackson's stint with both of them, only worked for one of the organizations. Jackson was an exception.

Semi-Dispensationalists say the same basic idea exists regarding Israel and the church. They say that while they have many similarities, and that many people exist in both entities, the two entities are separate and must always be kept separate doctrinally. They say that Israel is mostly made up of ethnic Jews and that the church is mostly made up of ethnic Gentiles. They say that saved Jews are part of both entities, and that saved Gentiles can choose to become part of Israel if they are circumcised and choose to become part of Israel by following the law of Moses, not for salvation, but as a way of joining with Israel. This is obviously very rare regarding saved Gentiles, but they say that it can and does happen.

While this position is not heresy, and while it has become wildly popular among Christians today around the world, but especially among white Christians in the Old South, this is an extremely novel position in church history. The traditional position of the church is that the church is the continuation of Israel. Semi-Dispensationalists often accuse us of believing in "replacement theology." They say that we believe that the church has replaced Israel. And they point to the many unconditional promises to Israel as evidence that this cannot be the case. This is very, very frustrating though, because we do not believe in replacement theology. That is a position most associated with Roman Catholicism. We believe that the church is the continuation of Israel and that is not the same thing as replacement theology. We understand that the Bible distinguishes between Israel and the church, but that does not mean that they are two completely separate entities. Allow me to explain.

In our culture, for the most part (obviously this is changing to some extent), when a woman gets married she takes the last name of her husband. When this happens a lot changes for this woman. Her last name changes, her legal status changes, and a great deal about her life changes as well. There is a real sense in which she has transitioned into a very new phase of life. Let us say that there is a woman who was born named Jenny Smith. Let us say that when she got married she took the last name of her husband, Alvarez. Hence, from the time of her wedding she has been Jenny Alvarez. In many respects we can distinguish between Jenny Smith and Jenny Alvarez. Jenny Smith was unmarried. Jenny Alvarez is a married woman. Jenny Smith was free to date whomever she pleased, Jenny Alvarez can no longer date at all. Many other differences and distinctions could be pointed out. A major change and shift took place from Jenny Smith to Jenny Alvarez. However, obviously we are not talking about two different people here. Jenny Alvarez was Jenny Smith at one time. She did not really replace Jenny Smith, Jenny Alvarez is the continuation of Jenny Smith.

The same is true with Israel and the church. A lot changed with the birth of the church at Pentecost. The fullness of the Holy Spirit was poured out on God's people. Because of this, the people of God no longer need to follow the law of Moses. Instead of circumcising the people of God, we now baptize them. Instead of celebrating Passover, we now celebrate the Lord's Supper. However, it is wrong to say that there are now two different sets of people of God. There is one God and He has only one people. I'm genuinely not trying to be too hard on my Semi-Dispensational brothers and sisters in Christ. I also know how hard it is for so many of them to be even remotely open to any other possibility because the leaders and theologians of that school of thought have admittedly done a masterful job of convincing those within that school that they are the conservative theologians that interpret the Bible in the most literal and straightforward manner. All other Christians are too liberal at best. The fact of the matter though, is that Semi-Dispensationalists have to make an absolute mess of much of the Bible. It is true that they barely do not deny anything that is taught beyond all doubt in the Bible, but the entire system is extremely confusing and all over the place.

Most Semi-Dispensationalists say that God put forth many different offers of salvation throughout the Old Testament period. Yes, they are careful to say that no one

could ever fulfill any of these offers and that people were only secretly saved by faith alone, but they do say that God has presented multiple paths to salvation in the past. Most say that the second coming of Jesus is cut into two parts. Most say that there are different rules for Jewish Christians than there are for Gentile ones. Most say that the temple along with all of the animal sacrifices will be reinstated during the millennial kingdom. This doctrine comes frighteningly close to heresy in light of the Book of Hebrews. Many point to the last few chapters of Ezekiel for support on this front. But, Ezekiel is laying out how the temple should be rebuilt when the Jews returned from exile. Despite how obedient and godly the Jews were overall upon their return from exile, they did not fully obey God on this front and built the temple largely after the model of Solomon's temple. Ezekiel cannot be used to support the Semi-Dispensational doctrine in the light of Hebrews in my strong estimation and in the strong estimation of the overwhelming vast majority of godly theologians throughout church history.

Many Semi-Dispensationalists say that Jewish Christians still have to follow the law of Moses, not for salvation, but as a way of life. Many say that this includes being circumcised. This doctrine seems to go wildly against so much of the New Testament. Now, there is nothing wrong with anyone (Jew or Gentile) circumcising their children for health or aesthetic reasons. I am circumcised and so are my three sons. That is not the issue. The issue is making it a requirement of obedience for any child of God today. I could point out many other woeful flaws in this school of thought. And it *must* be remembered that Semi-Dispensationalism has its roots in full Dispensationalism, which was decidedly heretical. We rejoice that Semi-Dispensationalism has cleaned up a lot of this, but it seems unlikely in the extreme that this school of thought is true when it takes most of its doctrines from heretics.

It is true that most of the Old Testament period believers were Jews and this was by design. God made His promise to Abraham that He would grant him many, many descendants and that these descendants would be enormously blessed. A Jew is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The descendants of Abraham were originally called *Israelites* for a very long time because of Israel, the grandson of Abraham. The promise came down from Abraham to his son Isaac, and then through Isaac to Jacob, and then through Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel) to his

twelve sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. These 12 tribes eventually became the nation of Israel. When the nation of Israel split due to the disobedience of Solomon, the northern kingdom became known as Israel because most of the tribes were in the North. The southern kingdom became known as Judah because there were only two tribes left in the South and the primary one was Judah. When God destroyed both of these nations, almost all of the true people of God were part of Judah that was taken to Babylon. Most of the Israelites who returned to the land after the Exile were descendants of those that had been part of Judah. Because of this, the Israelites started to be called *Jews*, as that term was derived from the term *Judah*. Even the Israelites that settled in the northern part of the land after the exile, in Galilee, were still called Jews.

God fulfilled all of His promises to Abraham. But, being an Israelite was never absolute. The OT repeatedly makes it clear that ethnic Jews could be cut off from the people for not obeying God's commandments, and that Gentiles could become full members of the people of God through circumcision and joining with the people of God. A female convert could simply join the people of God by committing herself to marrying a circumcised Jew and to circumcising her sons. If she converted after she was married to a Pagan and the Pagan did not convert, she could not formally become a member of the people of God, but she could certainly become one in spirit by worshiping Yahweh and following His commandments as much as possible given her difficult situation. Full and formal Gentile converts into the nation could be cut off for disobedience in the same manner as ethnic Jews. As we discussed earlier, the Israelites often failed to obey God and cut off those who were disobedient. The church after Pentecost has also often failed to be completely obedient to God in this area.

Semi-Dispensationalists say that the Israelites continued on after Pentecost as a people like they had always done before. Whether the Israelites were dispersed throughout Europe, or after the nation of Israel was reestablished in the last century, Semi-Dispensationalists say that ethnic Jews have always made up Israel and still do so today. Semi-Dispensationalists say that Jews are still obligated to receive Jesus to be saved, and they plead with them to do so, but they still say that Israel is its own independent people. This certainly does not seem to be what the New Testament



teaches. I am asking you to prayerfully, slowly, carefully, and repeatedly read Romans 11; Galatians 3; and Ephesians 2; I believe very strongly that you will see that this is the case if you approach these chapters with an open mind and heart before God.

It is quite clear from these chapters in my strong estimation, and in the strong estimation of most of the best theologians throughout church history, that after Pentecost God cut off most of the Israelites Himself because of their disobedience. God had been patient with His institutional people for a very long time, but the rejection of His Son was the final straw. All ethnic Jews who rejected Jesus were cut off from Israel. The Semi-Dispensational argument that no Jew can ever be cut off from Israel goes against the many passages in the Old Testament that say that disobedient Israelites were to be cut off from the nation.

All Gentile converts to Jesus were joined to the true nation of Israel just as Gentiles were during the Old Testament period. The key difference is that now after Pentecost, most of the true nation of Israel is made up of ethnic Gentiles. This fact though, in no way changes the fact that true Israel remains Israel. It has now radically changed after Pentecost into the church, but it is still Israel.

It doesn't matter that most ethnic Jews around the world still see themselves as the Israelites. It doesn't matter that there is now a reconstituted nation of Israel in the Middle East. The Roman Catholic Church still calls itself *Catholic*, but it is not truly catholic as it has rejected the gospel. The Eastern Orthodox Church still calls itself *Orthodoxy*, but it is not orthodox as it has also rejected the gospel. True Israel is and always has been made up of the people of God, those who are the true descendants of Abraham. You may object that Gentiles are not descendants of Abraham. First of all, that is not entirely true. Many Gentiles assuredly go back to Ishmael or one of the other children of Abraham. With that said, it is true, as stated above, that the promises to Abraham were to go through Isaac and Jacob. And most Gentiles are not descendants of Abraham in this sense. But, Galatians 3 and other parts of the New Testament make it clear that Jesus is the true Israel. He is the fullness of the promise made to Abraham. There is a sense in which the promise made to Abraham was to extend to his many descendants, but there is also a sense in which it is only truly and fully fulfilled in the ultimate descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ. And because we as Gentile Christians

are united to Jesus Christ, we are credited as being the true descendants of Abraham. Even ethnically Jewish believers in Jesus are only fully the descendants of Abraham through their union with Jesus Christ.

Most Semi-Dispensationalists object to all of this by saying that we as Gentile Christians are only the spiritual descendants of Abraham, and that Romans 11 is talking about Jesus. Again, please read Galatians 3 and Romans 11 very carefully and I think you will see that this argument does not hold up in light of those two chapters. Romans 11 is clearly talking about the actual physical people of God. It is plainly talking about the nation of Israel and it states that we as Gentile Christians are grafted into the nation. You may object that certainly the Semi-Dispensationalists have a point in highlighting the similarities between Romans 11 and John 15. We fully recognize the similarity and say that they are missing the point. We are not denying that Romans 11 is ultimately pointing to Christ. We are saying that is not directly what the chapter is about. It is about the nation of Israel. But, of course the two chapters sound so similar because Jesus is Israel! He is the vine. And we are Israelites because we are joined to Him as His branches. There are not two vines; the one being the nation of Israel and the other being Jesus Himself (the church or the body of Christ). No, there is only one vine and it is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, does any of this mean that we as Gentile Christians should go around calling ourselves *Jews* and *Israelites*? No, of course not. We do not want to cause unnecessary confusion or offense to people. This is why we don't go around calling ourselves *catholics* as Christians today. But, that doesn't change the fact that when we are being technical as theologians we should make it clear that as true Christians (Conservative Evangelicals), we are the true Jews, the true catholics, and the truly orthodox today. I understand how arrogant that sounds in our current culture, and again, we should use such language very carefully. With that said, there is nothing arrogant about standing up for biblical truth. To fail to do so is disobedience to God.

Before moving on from this subsection, I want to address three difficult items in connection with this doctrine. The first is the question over when Israel began. If Israel began with Abraham as the Old Testament seems to imply, then what do we make of the people of God before the time of Abraham. If Israel basically is the people of God, it

would then seem no one was saved before the time of Abraham. And yet, we know that not to be the case. It is best to say that Israel/the church technically began with the repentance of Adam and Eve. And to say that Israel was not fully revealed as the concrete people of God until Abraham.

Think of it like a baby. There is of course a sense in which her life begins at conception as we have already discussed. But, the baby is not fully revealed to the world until she comes out of her mother. You may object that we should say that the people of God existed from the moment Adam was created. If he worshiped and knew God on some level from the moment of his creation as Genesis certainly seems to imply, then he was the first person to be part of the people of God and God merely added to His people after that. The problem with this position is that the New Testament always seems to present the people of God as only existing in Christ. It is impossible to conceive of the church as being anything other than the body of Christ. And Christ is the salvific mediator for His body. That is quite clear from the New Testament. And if the church is the continuation of Israel as we have seen, then it follows that Adam and Eve could not have been part of Israel/the church before they were saved.

It seems that before the fall, Adam and Eve knew God, but were in a probationary period. They did not fully know Him with the intimacy that would have taken place had they fulfilled the covenant of works. We should also say though, just to clarify, that there is nothing biblically or philosophically that would demand that God had to fully adopt humanity or bring them into being as a unified people had they fulfilled the covenant of works. In fact, it would seem that it is not even correct to say that God had to give them eternal life. God is not obligated to give anything eternal life and it is too bad that far too many genuine Christians don't understand this. God could have never given to any of His rational creatures (humans and the angels; animals are a different story and we will discuss them more later) any pain or discomfort apart from sin. But, He could have caused them to cease to exist without them feeling either of those things. And God could have given the covenant of works with the promise that if it was fulfilled, humans would continue to live without sin for a very long time. In such a scenario, humans would have had tremendous intimacy with God, but not on the level that we do as His adopted children and covenant people.

With all of this made very clear, God chose to structure the covenant of works in such a way that had we fulfilled it, He would have granted us eternal life, adoption, and made us His covenant people. Obviously, we failed the covenant of works and so we are only granted these immense privileges as a free gift in Jesus. Hence, Adam and Eve would have functioned somewhat independently of God (not entirely of course) until they fulfilled the covenant of works. So, we should not say that the people of God existed before Adam and Eve repented.

The second difficult item we need to address here is the fact that Israel during the Old Testament period often seemed to completely apostatize and yet was still seen as Israel until the Babylonian captivity. Then yes, the people of God underwent a massive shift and became the exiled Jews, which was still Israel, but only in a very different form. This question comes up though, because many wonder how Israel could have been the people of God even in an institutional sense if the nation had entirely apostatized. The answer to this is that there is no evidence that the nation ever *formally* apostatized. Yes, things got so bad in both Israel (the northern kingdom; not Israel as a whole in the sense of the full people of God) and Judah that God eventually took things into His own hands. First with the Assyrians in regard to Israel, and then with the Babylonians in regard to Judah. However, there is no evidence that the nation as a whole ever repudiated Yahweh in a formal sense. There is a lot of evidence from the Old Testament that even at its worst, Israel always formally said that it worshiped Yahweh according to the prophets. Even when the Scriptures had been lost, this seems to be the case. The problem was that Israel rarely lived this out and allowed all sorts of idolatry and heresy to come into the nation.

This may seem like an odd thing to assert since the Israelites often rejected the prophets and were even without the Scriptures altogether for a period of time. The Israelites probably made all sorts of excuses at first just like denominations that are apostatizing do today. They probably said that the idolaters were deeply wrong, but that they were merely immature or confused and God would sort them out eventually. This compromise only festered and got worse and worse until things were out of control. As far as the persecuted prophets, the Israelites usually called them false prophets or felt that they were just overzealous. You may object that this means that Israel was formally

rejecting the prophets, but that is not the case. There was always a remnant of true followers of God within the nation even at its worst points. The persecuted prophets were persecuted by the people because most of the people as individuals did not follow the formal religion of the land. This was even often true of many of the kings. It must be remembered that the kings were only the civil rulers of the nation. Yes, they were supposed to protect the nation from idolatry and heresy, but they alone did not speak for the people as a whole as far as religion is concerned. This is also not to say that there were not many false priests and prophets during this time that did try to speak for the nation on religious matters. There is no question that this took place.

With that admitted and explained, there is no evidence that all of the kings; advisers; elders; judges; priests; and prophets (both the true ones and the false ones); ever got together and decided to formally repudiate the official religion of Israel. Had this ever occurred, the civil nation of Israel would have fully apostatized at that point and the true followers of God would have separated and moved forward as the true Israel from there. There is ample evidence that the godly leaders in Israel, especially the true prophets, were regularly trying to get the nation to come together and make it clear where they stood on these matters. They were almost always unsuccessful. As far as the period when the Scriptures had been lost, again the formal religion of the nation was always Yahweh worship according to the prophets. And I'm sure the true prophets were constantly telling the people that the Scriptures had been lost and needed to be recovered. The people for the most part did not listen. We have seen this same thing happen in church history multiple times. Often a denomination will remain formally orthodox on paper and thus remains part of the institutional church even though the vast majority of leaders, churches, and people within them have embraced rank heresy. But, it is not until they formally repudiate orthodoxy that we can call them an entirely false denomination.

Now you may wonder why the godly Israelites did not leave the apostatizing nation of Israel. We are not to ever leave the church universal no matter how bad it has become. Obviously, no true Christian could ever fully leave the church in the sense that he or she is connected to the vine. But, we are not to separate ourselves from the bulk of the institutional church even when it has become very corrupt. We are to leave false

denominations and false individual churches, yes absolutely. I don't understand why so many individual churches stay in fully apostate denominations. And I would advise that Christians do their best to avoid churches and denominations that are in the process of falling away. And we do have evidence of godly Israelites trying to separate themselves from the overall corruption of Israel as much as possible.

With all that said, we must always try to love and reform the overall universal institutional church as much as we possibly can. We are not to flee from it. And there are times when Christians do not have much choice here. If the only godly church in your area is part of an apostatizing denomination, you absolutely are required by God's law to attend that church. And if the only church in your area still technically holds to orthodoxy, but is a mess and is in many respects apostatizing, you again are still required to attend that church and do your best to push back where you can without becoming too divisive. Ideally though, as much as you can, try to find a godly church that is part of an overall godly denomination.

The third difficult item is the fact that all I've said in this subsection may seem confusing as even I have very strongly distinguished between ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles throughout my works. There is no question that the Bible does indeed strongly distinguish between them in both Testaments. The Semi-Dispensationalists are not wrong on that front. One of the reasons this doctrine is so confusing to most Americans, and one of the primary reasons I believe Dispensationalism became so popular in America, is because we often fail to see that throughout history most nations were made up of a specific ethnic group. In fact, throughout history, and this is still true of much of the world today, most people did not really sharply distinguish between the ethnic group and the nation. The two were largely the same thing. So, as an example, for a very, very long time if one was Japanese, he or she was almost assuredly both ethnically Japanese and also a citizen of the nation of Japan. And this was true of Israel throughout her history until Pentecost. That is when things radically changed and the New Testament highly emphasizes this fact (Ephesians 2:11-22 as just one example).

So, let's use Japan as an example of what we see in the Bible. There is the nation of Japan. There is the ethnic group that is known as the Japanese people. For a very long time, the two could be distinguished but were nonetheless basically one.

However, even when this was true, Japanese people would have still understood this basic distinction on some level. If someone were banished from the country, it would have been understood he or she was no longer a citizen of Japan, but that he or she was still ethnically Japanese. And in the rarest of occasions, someone of another ethnicity could join the nation and become a Japanese citizen despite not being ethnically Japanese. Eventually though, especially after World War II, many ethnically Japanese people began to move to other countries, especially the United States. And these ethnically Japanese people had children and grandchildren that were born as not part of the nation of Japan, but were citizens of the United States. That fact did not change in any way that these children and grandchildren were still ethnically Japanese. And while the numbers are still pretty low, since World War II, more and more people who are not ethnically Japanese have become citizens of the nation of Japan.

This same basic truth is true of the nation of Israel. And by *the nation of Israel* here, I am not talking about the nation in the Middle East. I am talking about the true nation of Israel as God sees it. The true nation of Israel is God's institutional church, His people. At one time, it was primarily an ethnic people like most nations. And that ethnic people was indeed the ethnic Israelites or the Jews. Further, at one time this nation was indeed a formal nation in the Middle East. There were exceptional cases where ethnic Gentiles joined the nation of Israel as I have already detailed. And when the nation was at its healthiest, it often banished ethnic Israelites who were disobedient to God in extreme ways as they were supposed to according to the law of Moses.

Then things radically changed at Pentecost. From that time on, God cut off most ethnic Israelites from the nation of Israel and began to bring in mostly ethnic Gentiles into the nation. True Israelites in the full sense are those that are formally a part of the nation of Israel, those that are part of the institutional church. And true Israelites in the absolutely fullest sense are those that genuinely partake of the nourishing sap of the vine (the Holy Spirit) because they have been truly credited as being a child of Abraham through their legal relationship with Jesus Christ, the real descendant of Abraham (Galatians 3). None of this changes the fact that ethnic Jews are still ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles are still ethnic Gentiles. When we as ethnic Gentiles say that we are true Israelites, we only mean it in the sense in which a non-ethnic Japanese citizen of Japan

would call himself or herself *Japanese*. He or she does not mean by that statement that he or she is ethnically Japanese. He or she merely means that he or she is a genuine citizen of the nation of Japan.

### **The Church and the Kingdom of God**

Many otherwise godly theologians try to make the doctrine of the kingdom of God far more complicated than it needs to be. Many try to make sharp distinctions between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Or many try to define the kingdom of God in very abstract and esoteric ways. None of this is biblical in my strong opinion. It certainly seems to me that the phrases *kingdom of God* and *kingdom of heaven* are used interchangeably throughout the Bible. God has His kingdom and it can be said to be the kingdom of heaven because He rules over it from heaven. There is clearly a sense in Scripture that the kingdom of God refers to all that exists. There is nothing in all of creation that is not under the sovereign authority of God. And there is also a sense in Scripture in which the kingdom of God refers to His people. And this is usually how we speak of kingdoms, in both senses. We talk about all the land that is under the authority of a king, but we also talk about all of his subjects as well. Hence, there is a sense in which the kingdom of God refers to the church in all the various aspects we have discussed so far. And Jesus was very clear in many of His parables that the kingdom would grow exponentially over time before His return. And that is exactly what we have seen with the church throughout her history.

Jesus often referred to the kingdom of God and this is because He was pointing people back to one of the most important sections of the Bible, Daniel 7. As we have seen, this is a major and straightforward Messianic prophecy from the Old Testament. It talks about how the Messiah will be known as the Son of Man. This is to indicate that the Messiah will be human. But, this Son of Man will also be worshiped and thus is God. The Messiah was going to be both and this was/is fulfilled in Jesus. Daniel 7 also talks about how the kingdom of God will radically grow and expand to the Gentiles under the Messiah and that is also precisely what we have seen take place since the time of Jesus. Jesus was telling people in His preaching that Daniel 7 was being fulfilled when



He repeatedly called Himself the Son of Man and often talked about how the coming of the kingdom had arrived. He did not mean by this that the kingdom of God did not exist before His time in any sense. He was only pointing people to Daniel 7 and how it was now being fulfilled by Him.

### **The Unity of the Church**

In the next four subsections, we will discuss the four key attributes or characteristics of the church. Thus far we have looked at the church from a number of different angles. Obviously, along the way we have discussed many characteristics of the church. But, these four attributes are the most summary oriented attributes that we can use to describe the church. The first is unity. There is only one church. Yes, there are denominations; movements; schools of thought; and individual churches within her; but overall, there is only one true church of Jesus Christ. I understand that the church often does not seem very unified because of all the secondary disagreements and all of the idolatry and heresy that far too many denominations and churches allow to come into the church. None of this changes the fact that God only has one true church, that all of His truly saved people are bound together by the Spirit, and that all genuine Christians will do all that they can to unify, love, and work with fellow believers.

I understand that sometimes even genuine Christians can have sharp disagreements and that sometimes even these relationships can be temporarily severed (Acts 15:36-41; Galatians 2:11-16; and Philippians 4:2-3). But, God will always bring reconciliation to these relationships eventually, even if only in the next life, and overall all true Christians will treat other believers as I just described above. Finally, the church will be entirely and perfectly unified when Jesus returns.

### **The Holiness of the Church**

The holiness of the church refers to the fact that the church has been separated from the world by God and that all true Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, all truly saved people will lead godly lives. This does not change the fact that most are

lukewarm. This does not change the fact that even the most godly can have phases of backsliding. This does not change the fact that all Christians will really and habitually struggle with certain patterns of sin in their lives. With all that made clear, no true Christian can ever live in sin as he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, collectively the church will always be holy in this world and will work to change the world according to God's will. It is very important to understand that this does not mean change as the world sees it. Sometimes the institutional church can be very ugly as we have seen. Sometimes other worldviews seem to be doing a lot better than the institutional church. But even the institutional church has done a tremendous amount of good throughout history. Something even most non-Christian historians admit. And even when the institutional church is at its ugliest, God always uses it to bring more and more of His chosen people to Himself. He always uses it to disciple His true people. And that is the primary purpose of the church and in that sense it is always holy. Finally, the church will be made entirely holy when Jesus returns.

### **The Catholicity of the Church**

The catholicity of the church refers to the fact that it is universally open to all who are willing to repent and receive the true Jesus. And it also refers to the diversity of the church. The church is made up of both genders; people from all ages; and people from all backgrounds and personalities all over the world. One does not have to join a specific church; denomination; movement; school of thought; or particular Christian organization; in order to be a part of it. One only needs to repent and place faith in Jesus Christ. Once someone does this, he or she is by definition part of the church. And then out of obedience to God, he or she needs to join a godly church. But, it can be whichever godly church he or she chooses.

### **The Apostolicity of the Church**

The apostolicity of the church refers to the fact that the true church traces its roots back to the teachings of the apostles. The church is founded upon the word of

God. But, it is also important to understand that in the early days of the church, the apostles mostly spread the word of God orally. That is how most of the earliest churches were founded and grown. It was only after this foundation had been laid that the apostles began to die off and the church became solely reliant upon their writings and the rest of the Scriptures. All of the New Testament was either written by an apostle or someone that was close to an apostle. And the apostles accepted all of the Old Testament that was written by God's prophets during the Old Testament period. This is so important because the original 12 apostles were Jesus' chosen instruments to take His word outside of the land of Israel. And any of the other apostles, like Paul, were chosen and anointed to replace one of the deceased apostles until God began to allow the 12 to dwindle. Therefore, the true church traces its roots right back to Jesus Himself.

### **The Marks of a True Church**

In this subsection, we need to discuss what makes up a true individual local church. Those who hold to the traditional Protestant view of the church have debated this question, and I don't want to get into all of those sticky debates here. Suffice it to say, that all Christians agree that at the very least what makes up a true church is a living orthodoxy. If a church embraces heresy, it is a false church no matter how loving it is. And if a church only embraces a dead orthodoxy, it is not a true church. We must believe what God says, but only because we first have an intimate relationship with Him far above all else. If the people at a church do not reflect this, then we do not have a real church on our hands. Again though, this does not mean a church must be perfect to be an authentic church. Many churches, just like many individual Christians, can have many problems. And many true churches, as we have seen, will not embrace heresy in an overall formal sense, but far too many will allow heretics to join with them in fellowship. But, as long as a church does not formally endorse heresy and seems to genuinely love the Lord, we must accept them as a true church. And all such churches by definition will exemplify to one degree or another the four main attributes of the church.

## The Priesthood of All Believers

This doctrine refers to the fact that after Pentecost, we no longer have priests in the church. There is a sense in which all of us as believers after Pentecost are unofficial priests (1 Peter 2:5 and Revelation 1:6). This is because we have direct access to God now through Jesus Christ and we are only to point people to His sacrifice alone. He alone is the church's high priest. He alone is head of the church as its king, and He alone is our prophet today. And He speaks to us in this life now only through the Bible, His final word. Today, there are no prophets in the church, there are no priests in the church, and there are no kings in the church, other than Him alone. Now there were prophets in the church after Pentecost for a short time, but after the completion of the Bible, they were no more.

Things were very different before Pentecost. From the time of Moses until Pentecost, all true followers of God had to be under the authority of the priests. This did not mean that they could not pray directly to God. They certainly could and often did. And they were not saved by going through the priests. They were saved by placing their faith in the one true God, just as we are today. However, they did not fully understand this back then the way we do today. They only understood that they needed to trust in God and God would take care of them. The Old Testament hints at a number of New Testament doctrines, but it nowhere makes them clear beyond all doubt. And they understood that as part of trusting in God, they had to submit to the priests. None of this meant that the people of God could not read whatever Scriptures God had inspired up until their particular time. They certainly were allowed to do so and many did. However, most were illiterate and had to have the priests read the Scriptures to them. And the Old Testament law was very complicated, far more complicated than our requirements today as Christians after Pentecost. Because of this, again, the people had to be in submission to the priests who would explain the law to them and make sure they were following it.

Today as Christians, we are to be under the authority of our pastors. And we are to benefit from the teachers in the church. But, we are much more responsible for reading and interpreting the Bible for ourselves. Further, we have far greater access to

God in that we can feel far more close to Him because we have the fullness of the Spirit after Pentecost, something the Old Testament believers did not have. Many often wonder why the law of Moses was so complicated and detailed. It is because all of those rules and rituals helped to keep the people of God in line as they did not have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. You may ask, "Well then, what about those before the time of Moses?" They were in a tough spot because they did not have the law of Moses or the fullness of the Spirit. And this is why even the most godly at this time often acted in extremely ungodly ways. But, God was more patient with them for this reason.

### **Chapter 9: Part 4 of Section 3**

#### **Church Government**

All true churches agree that churches must be governed. All agree that all true churches must at least have pastors and deacons or must be moving towards that if they do not. Even those true churches that adopt the congregational model and place primary authority in the members of the church, still recognize that the pastors must authoritatively preach the word of God and explain to the people that church government is not optional. In that sense, all true churches are governed by pastors to some extent. Each individual church must make governmental decisions that the government of that particular church feels are best for that church. The members and visitors must abide by these decisions unless a church government tries to tell a believer to do something that is blatantly not biblical. Those that do not obey the government of the church must be asked to leave. And those who claim to be Christians, but embrace heresy, should be told that they can only continue to attend the church as visitors. The church government must be clear with people like this that the church does not consider them to be brothers or sisters in Christ. We will examine the specific Confessional Presbyterian view of church government down the line in this work.

## Church Discipline

All true churches agree that church discipline must take place. Now, not all genuine churches agree on the methods of church discipline. Even those churches that hold to the traditional Protestant view of the church do not always agree here. However, those that are considered by the individual local church to be authentic Christians who fall into serious sin are to be addressed and disciplined to some extent. We will examine the specific Confessional Presbyterian view of church discipline below.

## The Sacraments of the Church

All authentic churches agree that the sacraments or ordinances of the church are very important to the life of God's people. God commanded holy symbolic rituals all throughout the Old Testament, and God plainly commands baptism and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. Hence, these holy symbolic rituals are very important to God and therefore we as Christians must take them with the utmost seriousness. Some Christians prefer the term ordinance because they believe that these holy symbolic rituals are only that, symbolic. The term *sacrament* is primarily used by those churches that believe that these rituals go beyond merely the symbolic. The classical Reformed position is that they go beyond the symbolic, and therefore the term is generally used within that world. Hence, the Confessional Presbyterian position has always been to call them *the sacraments*. And the view of all traditional Protestants has always been that there are only two sacraments or ordinances after the time of Pentecost. This is because all of the other alleged sacraments/ordinances that otherwise good Christians have put forth as potential ones are based on only one or two verses. That is not enough to establish that we should be doing something as a perpetual ritual until Christ returns.

Let us look at one example here to establish this point. A minority of Christians throughout church history have believed that foot washing is a sacrament/ordinance based on John 13:1-17, specifically verses 14-15. They say that this sounds like Jesus

is instituting this ritual for His people beyond this specific event. In fact, they point out that the language sounds somewhat similar to the language Jesus used when He instituted the Lord's Supper. The problem is that washing people's feet was a very common practice in a Jewish context. What made what Jesus did so special here is the fact that He did this as their master. It was almost always slaves or servants who washed the feet of the master or lord. So, it seems that Jesus is saying that within the church there are no masters or lords. Hence, in that context, Christians should wash the feet of other Christians as needed as a gracious and humbling gesture. That doesn't mean that this should be done as a perpetual symbolic ritual within church services. That is quite a stretch and we would need a lot more biblical evidence for coming to that conclusion. And that biblical evidence is absent. We will examine the specifics of the Confessional Presbyterian doctrine of the sacraments beyond what we have looked at here below.

### **Creeds and Confessions**

All true Christians believe in the core doctrines found in the creeds and confessions of the universal church. Therefore, all genuine Christians are confessional in that sense. But, it should be said that many Christians do not like creeds and confessions because they believe far too many Christians give them far too high a place in the church. The traditional Protestant position is that creeds and confessions are biblical and have been immensely useful in church history in proclaiming core beliefs to the world in a clear and concise fashion. Now, some confessions, like the Westminster Confession, are fairly long. However, this is because they are fairly comprehensive and each section is relatively short and explains a core doctrine of the faith clearly and concisely. Creeds are found scattered all over the Bible. One of the most important of these is found in Philippians 2:6-11.

Those who oppose creeds and confessions today say that while yes these were originally creeds used in the church, they were first authoritatively given orally by the apostles and then made their way into Scripture. This does not prove that uninspired creeds and confessions from non-prophets/apostles should be created in the church

after the completion of the Bible, according to them. The problem is that there is zero evidence that these creeds were first created by any prophets or apostles in the early church. They seem to simply be short summaries of Christian belief that were used in the early church to help new converts remember key doctrines and as an easy way to explain to the Jewish and Pagan worlds what Christians believed.

However, we on our side must admit that we cannot fully disprove what our brothers and sisters in Christ assert here. With that said, Acts 15 is a much bigger problem for them. Here we have an official council of the early church that produced a short creed to help the earliest Christians. And elders were at this council and fully participated. If creeds are only supposed to be produced by prophets or apostles, then why were the elders fully involved in this council? That just doesn't add up. And as we will see down the line, there is strong New Testament evidence that elders of multiple churches often got together and made binding decisions upon the churches they represented. Hence, it seems that elders being present at the Acts 15 council was not an accident. It seems that this was a regular practice of elders and since elders continue to today, there is no good reason to believe that creeds and confessions should not either.

Now, it is true that the short creed from Acts 15 was infallible because there were apostles present. But, that does not negate everything else I have just laid out. It only makes this creed exceptional. There is no evidence that the creeds found in the Bible were considered infallible to begin with. That does not mean that I am saying that there are any errors in those creeds found in the Bible. They were only included in the first place because the apostles put them in the Bible and thus testified that they had no errors and God wanted them in the Bible. But, there were in all likelihood other creeds in the early church that had minor errors in them that for that reason never made it into the Scriptures.

### **The Classically Reformed View of the Sabbath**

The classically Reformed (and thus Confessional Presbyterian) view of the Sabbath is that Sunday was made the Sabbath after Pentecost as part of the major shift



that took place among God's people with the giving of the fullness of the Spirit. There are a number of key reasons for our position. The first is that Sunday (the first day of the week), as I described it in the last book of my "basics" series, just sounds far too much like the Sabbath of the Old Testament. We find it an enormous stretch to say that one day of the week is set aside for worship after Pentecost and this is not intended to be a fulfillment and continuation of the fact that one day of the week was set aside for rest and worship in the Old Testament. It is true that the New Testament never explicitly spells out the rest element of the day, but this seems to be strongly implied by what I just said. Even further, the Sabbath was not simply a part of the Mosaic law. It goes all the way back to creation itself. God set aside one day as holy at creation, He commands the observance of the Sabbath throughout the Old Testament, and there is one day set apart for worship in the New Testament. How is this not all connected? That seems like a massive stretch to us. Finally, 9 of the 10 Commandments are clearly found in the New Testament as obligatory after Pentecost. No true Christian denies this. It makes little sense to say that God would only abrogate one of His 10 Commandments. Thus, we believe that Sunday should be a day of rest and worship, and that this must go beyond merely attending one worship service.

None of this means that we have to follow all of the strict rules connected to the Sabbath found in the Mosaic law. The law of Moses as a whole was put aside after Pentecost. But, the basic spirit of one day being set aside per week as holy for rest and worship is found outside of the law of Moses and thus should be obeyed in our strong estimation.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ who do not believe in the legitimacy of the Sabbath under the new covenant usually appeal to Romans 14:5-6 and Colossians 2:16. But, these passages are plainly referring to the Jewish holidays found throughout the Old Testament and the question of Christian holidays. The term *Sabbath* can refer to any of the commanded times of rest under the Mosaic law. Paul is quite clear throughout his writings that we are no longer to observe those, and we are especially not to require that other Christians (especially Gentiles) observe them. And in Romans, Paul is discussing the question of Christian holidays. He makes it clear that this is a freedom in Christ issue. We are free to celebrate them as long as we do not violate the

regulative principle, but we are not to judge those who don't celebrate them. Many Christians think it is almost sacrilege to not celebrate Easter and Christmas, and they can be very judgmental of Christians who don't celebrate these holidays. When they act like this, they are in violation of Romans 14:5-6.

### **The Continental View of the Sabbath**

The Continental view of the Sabbath has become the view of most Confessional Presbyterians today, as stated earlier in this work. The Puritan view is based almost solely upon Isaiah 58:13-14. We believe that they are making way too much of just one section of Scripture. And we believe that the passage is saying that we should not waste time on that day. Our rest should be intentional. We should be intentional about doing things that refresh us. There is certainly nothing wrong with taking a nap that day in our estimation, but we do not believe that people should just sit around on the couch all day either. One should read; watch uplifting movies or tv shows; hike; play games; watch sports; spend time with family; go out to eat; etc. And while this is not absolutely required, it is also a wonderful time for worship beyond the worship service. Now, if you can fit in your prayer and Bible reading times in other parts of the week and prefer to have all of Sunday off, that is fine. However, a lot of Christians find it very hard in our busy schedules to make that work and so Sunday is usually the perfect day for our long prayers and Bible reading times.

Before moving forward, it must be said that all who accept the continued validity of the Sabbath after Pentecost must be extremely careful to avoid legalism. The Sabbath is to be a blessing, not drudgery. The Pharisees had made the day a strict nightmare by the time Jesus came on the scene and this was one of the primary things Jesus placed His focus upon, namely challenging their heretical view of the Sabbath. And unfortunately, many true Christians have gotten carried away with the Sabbath over the years as well. Obviously not to the point of the Pharisees, but still being too much. One of the most important things Jesus emphasized was the appropriateness of doing good on that day. Hence, if we see someone in need, we must not hesitate to help him or her out of fear that we may be working on the Sabbath. Volunteering on this day is

also very appropriate. Now, we should be careful not to turn the day into a work day as that would seem to violate the basic principle of the day. But, if a Christian wants to volunteer at a soup kitchen for a couple hours and this is something that is so enjoyable to him or her that it does not take away from the general rest of the day, that is a wonderful way to honor the Sabbath.

### **The Classically Reformed View of the Sacraments**

The classically Reformed (and thus Confessional Presbyterian) view of the sacraments is that they are neither literal nor completely symbolic. We do not believe that the water in baptism has any magical powers, and we do not believe that the bread and wine/grape juice turns into the literal body and blood of Jesus. With that made very clear, we also do not believe the sacraments should be seen as purely symbolic. This symbolic view was held by almost no one in church history until Zwingli at the time of the Reformation. And despite Zwingli's greatness, almost all of the other major Reformers rejected his view. In our minds it is truly unfortunate that this view has become the view of most true Christians today. This view states that the ordinances are purely symbolic and we are to partake of them in order to proclaim to the world that we are Christians. I reject this stance. Before plugging forward, I do want to say that my view became the view of the vast majority of those that adhere to classical Reformed doctrine. And that is why I am basically calling it the classical Reformed view in this subsection. But, it needs to be said that this was not as universally held by all of the earliest classically Reformed thinkers, most notably by Zwingli, as the other classically Reformed positions. Hence, this is not the classical Reformed view in the purest sense.

The classically Reformed view recognizes that the sacraments do have the function of publicly proclaiming to the world that we are followers of Jesus Christ. However, we do not believe that this is their only role or even their primary role. We believe that their primary role is to be a reminder *to us*, and not to the world, of what God has done for us and in this process we are ever more filled with the Holy Spirit. The primary evidence for this is that over and over again in the Old Testament God tells the Israelites to offer the animal sacrifices for their sins and that God would forgive them.

We know from Hebrews that these sacrifices never actually brought forgiveness to them, but were used to symbolically remind the Israelites of God's forgiveness. The point though, is that these sacrifices were obviously not only meant to be statements to the world, but were clearly for the blessing and benefit of the people offering them. And we know from the New Testament that when we obey God, He gives us more of His Spirit. Therefore, if you see the sacraments of the New Testament as being of the same spirit as the symbolic rituals of the Old, then plainly the sacraments must have this same function. One of the primary reasons that the symbolic view became the view of most of the true church was due to the rise of Semi-Dispensationalism. Once you see a huge separation between Israel and the church, you are not going to see the many connections between the New Testament and the Old Testament.

As far as the views of many Christians throughout church history that the literal body and blood of Jesus are taken in at the Lord's Supper, this view seems to be blatantly contradicted by John 6. The primary argument of the literalists here is what they say is the very strong language of Jesus found in the Gospels when He instituted the Lord's Supper. They say that Jesus' language is so strong that we must indeed believe that the bread *is* the body of Christ. The problem is that Jesus used figurative language constantly throughout His ministry. He described Himself as a shepherd; as a gate; as a vine; as a hen; etc. And in John 6, Jesus uses language about eating His body that is even more striking than what we see at the Last Supper. But, if Jesus is speaking literally in John 6, He would be contradicting Himself. This is because He says in that chapter that we must eat His flesh to have eternal life. This would mean that we are saved by faith and by eating the literal flesh of Jesus somehow. That would overtly contradict faith alone. It is very clear from John 6 as a whole that when Jesus says that we are to eat His flesh, He means that we are to receive Him for eternal life. And if Jesus is speaking figuratively in John 6, there is zero reason to believe He was not also speaking figuratively at the Last Supper.

### **The Classically Reformed View of Baptism**

The classically Reformed view of baptism is that it symbolizes our cleansing from sin by the blood of Jesus and that it is to be given to all adults who make a credible profession of faith, and to all of the children (including infants) of Christian parents. It also states that baptism can legitimately be done by immersion; dunking; pouring; or sprinkling. The doctrine of infant baptism has become very controversial in the church today, and most Christians who reject the doctrine believe it to be a very dangerous teaching. They will not call it heresy, but many believe that it comes very close. For this reason, I understand that many of you will have a very hard time even giving me a hearing here. When I was first saved, I thought this doctrine made no sense whatsoever. Why would we give a symbolic rite to a baby who cannot understand it, who is not even saved yet, and that is nowhere commanded in the New Testament? I did not understand how so many great theologians throughout church history could hold to it. I was so confused. So, if you are very wary of this doctrine, I fully get it. But, I am asking you to hear me out with an open mind and heart.

Most Christians don't realize that before the time of Semi-Dispensationalism, the primary argument from Baptists relied almost solely on Hebrews 8. And we will get to that section soon. It is not an accident that with the rise of the popularity of Semi-Dispensationalism in the church that infant baptism has been more and more denied and hated within the church. And this makes sense because if Israel and the church are two separate entities, then trying to see almost any connection between circumcision and baptism makes no sense. And for most Christians today that is all they need. The connection seems bizarre to them. However, if Semi-Dispensationalism is wrong, then almost all of the arguments against infant baptism fall apart. If you come across any of them, just ask yourself if the argument still works in light of baptism fulfilling circumcision. In most cases you will see that if baptism truly does fulfill circumcision, then the argument doesn't work. Again, this is why most people who deny infant baptism that are not Semi-Dispensationalists, especially Reformed Baptists, rely almost completely on Hebrews 8. Most of them admit that baptism fulfills circumcision, but they say that God changed the infant requirement.

So, the key question for us before we look at Hebrews 8 is does baptism fulfill circumcision? And the evidence in our opinion is extremely strong that it does. God first

instituted circumcision in Genesis 17. And in this section, God uses the term *household* on numerous occasions to describe the fact that all the males in each Israelite household are to be circumcised. And the same exact term is used on numerous occasions in the New Testament in connection with baptism (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33-34; and 1 Cor 1:16).

Many object to this by saying that these full households were baptized only because all within the household were saved. We even see evidence in Acts of God promising some people that He was going to save the entire household (we also see this in John 4:53). However, these are general promises made to all of God's people and not just these exceptional cases in Acts. We have already seen this in Genesis 17, and we see this in Acts 2:14-41 as well, specifically in verse 39. This also seems to be what is in view in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14, particularly verse 14. We know from the rest of Scripture that when God promises to save our children, this does not necessarily mean He will save each one of our individual children.

What it does mean is that if we are obedient, God promises to save a solid portion of our household. I have hardly been a perfect Christian, but I have been faithful, and God has saved two of my children very powerfully. Even though my ex-wife left us and two of my children walked away from the Lord, we functioned as a Christian family throughout the upbringing of my children (despite immense challenges), and two of my children walk passionately with God today. And that is all God was saying to these families when He promised to save all of their household. I understand the verses themselves, if taken very literally, may not seem to be saying this. But, we see very similar language in Romans 11:26. Almost no orthodox theologian believes that Paul is saying in this verse that literally every single Israelite is going to be saved during the end times. It is a somewhat hyperbolic statement, meaning that the bulk of the Jews will be saved. And when taking into account the totality of Scripture, the household promises almost assuredly should be interpreted in the same manner.

Even further evidence of baptism fulfilling circumcision is that God very clearly says in Genesis 17 and elsewhere in the Old Testament that circumcision was to go on forever with the people of God. Yet, the New Testament clearly put an end to circumcision as a requirement for God's people. If baptism doesn't carry on

circumcision, what does? You may object that this argument proves too much because obviously neither circumcision or baptism will go on forever in the new earth. But, this is not so. All those who have not been either circumcised or baptized on the new earth will be baptized and after that there will be no more need for baptism. It is not that God will abrogate baptism, it will simply be the case that all of God's people will have received the initial rite of being part of God's people, either through circumcision or baptism.

Even further evidence of baptism being the fulfillment of circumcision is found in Colossians 2:11-12. Even more evidence is found in Romans 4:11. Here Paul states explicitly that circumcision was a sign of Abraham's faith. But, in most cases circumcision was to be given to infants! Those who object to infant baptism really have to twist themselves into a pretzel with this passage. They are forced to say that God made an exception with Abraham and used circumcision as a sign of Abraham's faith, but that circumcision did not have this function for the rest of the Israelites. Please read Romans 4 carefully and you will see that this is not the case. Paul's entire point throughout Romans 4 is that what was true of Abraham is true of the rest of the Israelites. If the sign of faith was given to infants in the Old Testament, then we can have no objection to the sign of faith (baptism) being given to infants today unless we see clear evidence in the New Testament that God has drastically changed things on this front.

Even more evidence for the doctrine that baptism is the continuation of circumcision is in the fact that the Lord's Supper is the fulfillment and continuation of Passover. As we have seen, God only has two sacraments after Pentecost. He had many, many more under the Old Testament system. But, the two that most stood out were always circumcision and the Passover. Circumcision was the initiatory rite of the Israelites and set them apart from the nations. It also reminded them of God's covenant in Genesis 17. And Passover was the chief festival and the chief sacrifice that was to be offered. It more than any other ritual the Israelites celebrated symbolized God's deliverance of them from Egypt. Baptism is the initiatory rite of Christians after Pentecost. And the Lord's Supper was instituted at a Passover feast and symbolizes our deliverance from sin through Jesus' death on the cross. Passover was to be repeated, while circumcision was not. As we saw in the last book of my "basics" series,

the Lord's Supper is to be repeated in our lives as Christians, while baptism is only to be given to us once. The striking similarities are almost impossible to miss.

Infants are not to eat of the Lord's Supper for obvious reasons. The same was obviously true of the Passover lamb. And yet, circumcision was to be given to infants. Why then should baptism be withheld from them? There is no biblical evidence that it should. Many object that circumcision and baptism are very different because girls could not be circumcised. This argument does not follow because girls and women could not do a lot of things under the law of Moses as part of their punishment. Women are punished more in this life, and men will be punished more at the final judgment. But, most of these punishments were taken away after Pentecost, and if God chose to take away the exclusion of girls and women from the initiatory rite of God's people, He was free to do so. Women were not to be circumcised, but clearly women are baptized in the New Testament. God made a change. If God made a change regarding infants, so be it. But, you have to show us the clear New Testament evidence for it.

Let us now look at Hebrews 8 as this is the section that most more sound theologians (in my opinion) who reject infant baptism point to as their evidence for this change. Remember, Semi-Dispensational theologians don't believe a change occurred because they don't believe there ever was a connection between the two rites, but I have shown what a stretch that is. And that view was held by almost no one throughout church history before the rise of Semi-Dispensationalism. And I hate to harp on it, but it must be remembered that Dispensationalism was begun by heretics. This should give you great pause before you reject infant baptism. If the evidence from Hebrews 8 is not extremely strong, infant baptism certainly seems to be the biblical doctrine.

Before we tackle Hebrews 8, it should be noted that this is just one section of Scripture. It should also be noted that Hebrews is a very hard book to interpret at certain points. It is probably the second hardest book in the New Testament to interpret behind Revelation. Therefore, already we should be rather skeptical of basing one's doctrine of rejecting infant baptism almost solely on this section of the Bible. With that made clear, let us actually look at Hebrews 8. This chapter is talking about the inadequacies of the old covenant. The old covenant refers to God's way of doing things before Pentecost, while the new covenant refers to God's way of doing things after Pentecost. And the old



covenant reached its apex with the law of Moses. It may seem odd to say that God instituted anything with inadequacies, but the inadequacy was not with God, or His word, or even the actual covenant technically, it was with the people who did not have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This is why the new covenant was prophesied in the Old Testament and was fully implemented in the light of the work of Jesus at Pentecost. And Hebrews 8 is discussing this reality. The key section in the debate over infant baptism is verses 10-12.

Those who deny infant baptism say that this section is saying that everyone in the covenant community, the church, will truly know the Lord. Many Reformed Baptists actually agree with us that God can regenerate infants, but say that since we do not know what infants God has regenerated, we should wait until the children of believers are older. Many Reformed Baptists and many Baptists in general hold to the traditional Protestant view of the church. But, they say that this section of Scripture is highlighting the fact that the true church, the core essence of the church, is only made up of true believers. They say that this was not fully understood under the old covenant and God had His people give the initial rite of the church to infants because the church was a national church and the full understanding of salvation had not yet come before the new covenant.

This interpretation does not add up to me at all. It seems to me that a straightforward reading of this passage is clearly pointing to the new earth when everyone will know the Lord. Those who deny infant baptism object to this common sense interpretation by saying that the new covenant was inaugurated well before the new earth. The new covenant is not presented as a future reality, but as a current blessing at the time that Hebrews was being written. And I completely agree with that. The new covenant seems to have begun at Pentecost. But, just because the covenant itself has begun does not mean that all of the promises of that covenant are given all at once. Pentecost was the beginning of the new covenant and all of the promises of that covenant were formally presented then. And many of those promises were given to God's people at that time, but it is rather obvious from the New Testament as a whole that some of the promises would not be fully given until Jesus returns. And this seems to be the case with the promises being discussed in Hebrews 8:10-12.

Next, we need to attempt to answer why God did command the baptism of infants when they are incapable of conscious faith. The answer seems rather evident when we remember what we saw earlier about the fact that God has promised to save our children, to save our households. Baptizing our infants is a strong reminder that we are to raise them in the Lord in the hope that they will be saved according to God's promises. This may seem to take away from what we talked about earlier, namely that God uses the sacraments to further fill us with His Spirit. It would seem that those baptized as infants miss out on this. This is not the case though, as those baptized as infants who do come to genuine saving faith later can remember that God set them apart as His own from their earliest days.

Next, we need to discuss the proper mode or way of performing baptism. All Confessional Baptists and most Confessional Pentecostals, Confessional Independent Bible Christians, and Confessional Charismatics believe that immersion is the only proper mode of baptism. They base this on the word *baptism* itself and by the fact that often people are described as coming out of the water after their baptism. The classically Reformed and many other Christians reject this argument. And so did almost every theologian before the rise of the Baptists. This is because this view seems to strongly contradict 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 and 1 Peter 3:19-21. In both of these passages we are told that certain events symbolized baptism. But, in both of these events, there was no immersion. The people would have only been sprinkled by the water as they went through the parted Red Sea, and the Ark was never submerged under water at any point. From this evidence it is clear that as long as water is in some way applied to the person being baptized, by a legitimate elder in the name of the Trinity, a legitimate baptism has taken place. This evidence is confirmed by the fact that under the Mosaic law, many times people and sacred items are commanded to be sprinkled by water for their ceremonial cleansing.

It is true that the original Greek word for *baptism* did mean immersion. But, that is to fail to understand how language works. We often use words in new and creative ways. The meaning of words must be determined by their context and how they evolve in particular cultures. For instance, the word *sick* in English technically means *to become ill*. However, my kids often use it as a positive word to mean *cool*. It is plain

from the evidence we saw above that the New Testament does not always use the word in the sense of immersion. As far as people being described as coming out of the water, this does not mean that they were coming out of the water after having been submerged under the water. Water was not nearly as accessible in the ancient world as it is for us today. Hence, when John the Baptist was baptizing large numbers of people, even if he was only sprinkling them, he would have had to do it at a large body of water. And that is why he baptized at the Jordan River. People would have come to him in the water and he probably either poured water on them or sprinkled it on them. We have no explicit statements that he ever dunked or immersed people. The descriptions of people coming out of the water are referring to people walking out of the water. This is confirmed by Acts 8:36-39. Here both Philip and the eunuch are described as coming out of the water. But clearly Philip was not immersed as he was the one doing the baptizing.

Finally, we need to discuss the fact that some false teachers have said that baptism should only be done in the name of Jesus. They base this on a number of statements in the Book of Acts where people are commanded to be baptized in the name of Jesus. Many of them also deny the core essential doctrine of the Trinity. These statements in Acts prove nothing. They were simply summary statements commanding people to be baptized. The Bible often commands us to have faith in Jesus. Does this mean we are not to have faith in the Father and the Spirit as well? Of course it doesn't. Jesus is always most emphasized throughout the New Testament because of the incarnation. None of these statements are directly talking about the precise formula that is to be used in baptism. When Jesus first instituted baptism, He gave to us the proper Trinitarian baptismal formula and we are to obey Him (Matthew 28:18-20). All of the baptisms before this time were the baptism of John the Baptist. This was not full Christian baptism. This was merely a baptism in preparation for the Messiah and would have been in the name of Yahweh. Even when Jesus' disciples baptized in His authority before the institution of full Christian baptism, they were simply carrying on the work of John the Baptist. And the Trinitarian baptism makes perfect sense in light of the doctrine of the Trinity.

## The Regulative Principle

The classically Reformed view of worship is what is known as the regulative principle. Now, this is another instance where this cannot be called the classically Reformed view in a fully purist sense. And this is because there were some in the early Anglican branch that were classically Reformed that did not hold to this view. However, over time this became the view of almost all who held to classical Reformed doctrine, and this remains so to this day. And therefore it is often referred to as the classical Reformed position. This position states that nothing can be considered the true worship of God unless there is very strong biblical evidence for the practice. Those who oppose this position state that anything can be considered the worship of God as long as it does not blatantly contradict the word of God at any point. Most of the church today does not accept this principle and we as classical Reformed theologians believe this is one of the key reasons the church is so corrupt today.

Some churches have gone so far as to have laser shows; strobe lights; motorcycles; movie clips; you name it; within church services. They say that since none of these things violate any clear commandment of Scripture, they are acceptable. Most more traditional churches say that these things do violate Scripture. They say that they violate the command to be reverent towards God found all throughout the Bible. But, many of these churches will have tons of stained glass windows; incense; robes; etc. All things that are nowhere commanded in the New Testament. These things may seem harmless or even helpful to many, but we must not forget that the medieval church became obsessed with all such things and it became more and more corrupt.

The primary passage in favor of the regulative principle is found in Leviticus 10:1-3. This verse should cause us to shudder in horror. It makes it unequivocally clear that no one has the right to offer unauthorized worship before God. You may object that this is only one section of Scripture. This is not at all the case though. This is by far the most striking example of the regulative principle found in the Bible, but the principle is seen all over the Scriptures. God gave the Israelites extremely detailed descriptions of His worship all throughout the law of Moses. Can you imagine one of the priests bringing a sacrifice to the tabernacle or the temple and him carefully following all of the

detailed requirements and then right in the middle he starts dancing? Even if he only paused to dance and then got right back to following the guidelines, this would have been scandalous. There is no evidence in the Gospels that Jesus ever reversed this principle. He often told people to go offer the sacrifices required by the law of Moses. Many often point out that Jesus did not always follow the letter of the Mosaic law. This is true. Jesus hinted at the coming of the new covenant all throughout His ministry. And He often chastised the legalistic religious leaders for not making more room for the principle of the lesser of two evils. But, there is no evidence of Jesus ever softening the regulative principle.

As far as the rest of the New Testament is concerned, if the regulative principle were not true then churches could add their own sacraments as they pleased. And some churches have indeed done this very thing. But, how on earth does this not take away from the sacredness of baptism and the Lord's Supper? These two rituals are commanded, explained, detailed, and discussed on numerous occasions throughout the New Testament. And read 1 Corinthians 11 to see how seriously God takes the Lord's Supper being honored. From this evidence it is plain that God takes these rites every bit as seriously as He took the symbolic rituals He commanded in the Old Testament. And if God did not soften His stance on the regulative principle in regard to the sacraments, there is zero reason to believe He has done so in any other areas of worship unless we see clear evidence of that in the New Testament. And we do not.

While this command primarily applies to official worship services, it also applies to our private worship as well. Families cannot make up their own sacraments as they please either. With all of this spelled out, the only acts that God considers to be legitimate forms of worship after Pentecost are those I laid out in pages 30-31 of the last book of my "basics" series. And only ordained pastors have the right to officially preach and teach in worship services on a regular basis. Many others can teach the word of God in other contexts, but this should not be considered worship. Evangelists, missionaries, apologists, and others can preach the word of God in other contexts as well, but this also should not be considered worship. We should be reverent in all we do, but a special reverence attaches to worship.

You may ask, “Ok, what if we make up our own sacraments, but we just don’t consider them to be worship?” This is not acceptable because certain acts are inherently worshipful, while others are not. Prayer is inherently worshipful. Bowing down in a worshipful manner before God, as we often do in prayer, is a worshipful act. Preaching and teaching are not always inherently worshipful. Politicians often preach or teach about government affairs. Teachers teach in school. Singing songs is often not an act of worship. However, singing a song in total praise to a being is an inherently worshipful act though. And engaging in symbolic spiritual rituals to honor any being is worshipful. Therefore sacraments are an act of worship at all times. Hence, we can only engage in them according to God’s guidelines.

It must be said that not all those who hold to the regulative principle agree on what constitutes worship. These disagreements in no way negate the principle itself. All who hold to it agree that we must be extremely careful in our worship services and in calling anything outside of those services *worship*. I think many churches in the PCA take a very loose interpretation of the regulative principle, but I rejoice that they still hold to it. All Confessional Presbyterians believe in this principle, but some are more strict than others in their interpretation of what constitutes worship.

Before plowing forward, it must be said that there were certain things, like speaking in tongues, that were a part of the worship of God’s people after Pentecost that most who hold to the regulative principle believe were abrogated by God with the completion of the Bible. We will discuss that doctrine more down the line.

The last thing I want to touch upon in this subsection is the accusation that classically Reformed people are stuffy and legalistic. Some would go so far as to call us blatantly pharisaical. There are three primary reasons we receive this unfair label. The first has to do with what is known as hyper-Calvinism. The second has to do with our stance on only believing what has support from the Bible. Even when believing things only from general revelation that are not addressed in any concrete way in the Scriptures, we must be very careful to be sure that we are not believing anything that even remotely contradicts the Bible in any way. And the third is the regulative principle itself.

The label *hyper-Calvinist* actually is used pretty broadly. It basically refers to anyone who technically holds to the doctrines of grace, but takes things in certain other areas way too far. Many hyper-Calvinists are heretics. However, the label is also often used for orthodox Calvinists who can indeed be very legalistic and rigid. Many believe that there are almost no true Christians outside of Calvinist churches. That is not heresy, but it certainly comes very, very close as it is divisive. Hyper-Calvinists tend to be very loud and vocal and get a lot of attention. Because of this, they make the rest of the Reformed world look very bad. The fact of the matter though, is that the orthodox ones make up a tiny, tiny minority within the overall Reformed world. And they are even less common in the classically Reformed world.

The far, far bigger problem within the classically Reformed world has always been softness and looseness and not legalism. Because classically Reformed Christians so emphasize loving God with our minds, far too often this leads to idolatry in the area of academics. And that can lead to wanting to compromise with the world in the area of academics. This is why liberalism has always been a major problem within the classically Reformed world. And because we hate legalism so much, because Jesus was so clearly against legalism, it can often lead to being too loose on certain things. A lot of people don't know this, but when I was in the PCA, many more conservative Christians often joked that PCA stood for *pipes*, *cigars*, and *alcohol*. And this was because as Confessional Presbyterians we do not believe that indulging in such things in moderation is wrong. But, the joke was not intended as a compliment. It was intended to say that we are too loose. This alone should show you that the legalistic label is not entirely accurate and many Christians know it.

As far as being very firm about the Bible, no apologies there. I don't know what else anyone wants me to say, but being firm about the Bible is not legalism. And it is heresy to say otherwise. Hence, many true Christians should be more careful in how they judge us on that front. And as far as the regulative principle goes, it must be said that this only applies to worship. We believe that we as Christians have a tremendous amount of freedom outside of worship. We should use that freedom with joy and we should often be doing things that are outside of the box. Many Confessional Presbyterian foreign missionaries often did things in ways that were outside of the box

and this is one of the reasons they were so successful. With that said, when it comes to worship, we believe that we must be unbelievably cautious, and we don't apologize for that.

There are two very controversial subjects that are often discussed in American Christianity that I do want to hit upon here in this discussion on the regulative principle and legalism. They are contemporary Christian music and attire at church. Let's look at the second one first as it is a little easier to address. It is true that many Reformed people can be a little legalistic in my opinion concerning attire at church. Unfortunately, this can even be true of a lot of Reformed folks that are otherwise not legalistic at all overall. The reason this principle is so important to so many Reformed folks (including many who do not even hold to the regulative principle) is because of the principle of being reverent before God. And I do think they have a point here. However, this in no way means that we all need to wear suits or dresses to church. That just doesn't follow. Christians should be showered up and should be wearing clean and nice clothes to church. If that means jeans, a T-shirt, sneakers, and a hat, that is fine. But again, this is only if these clothes are clean and nice. If one cannot afford this, the church should provide this for him or her. And we should be most gracious towards those who may first come to visit our churches and don't understand this principle. I believe that this best maintains the balance here.

As far as contemporary Christian music goes, I understand that a lot of Reformed folks are very against it. I know that a lot of other very conservative folks within the true church are as well. It should be said that this is not true of all Reformed folks, including many who hold to the regulative principle. I am not against contemporary Christian music and actually like a lot of it. I do agree that it is legalistic to reject all of it out of hand. However, I do have concerns and I reject any notion that these concerns make me a legalist. Many of these songs are not worship songs and should not be classified as worship songs. There is nothing wrong with Christians writing songs that talk about Jesus, but if they are not specifically designed to worship Him, they should not be called worship songs and they should not be treated as such. I have no problem with Christian concerts where such songs are sung. I have no problem with things going on at these concerts, such as laser shows, that we would associate with secular concerts. But,



these songs should not be considered worship songs and worship songs should not be mixed in at these concerts. If one wants to have a Christian concert where worship songs are sung throughout, that is fine. But, these concerts must be approached differently. There should be a much higher reverence and all such things as laser shows; smoke machines; turning down the lights; etc.; should be avoided.

I am also concerned about the fact that often these Christian songs, whether worship ones or not, are often very superficial and sometimes include lyrics that seem to be advocating very questionable teachings. Even more concerning is the fact that the industry routinely allows blatant heretics to not only make music under their labels, but often pushes them on Christian radio and gives them awards at Christian music award ceremonies. This is awful and has caused immense problems and confusion within the church. Even most of the orthodox artists refuse to reject these heretical artists. Shame on them.

### **The Means of Grace**

The classically Reformed view is that there are two primary means of grace, and that these are the sacraments and the preaching of God's word. Most would also say that prayer can at times be a means of grace, but that this is not always the case. Let me first explain what is meant by the means of grace. As we have seen from the final book of my "basics" series, we primarily grow in our walk with God through Bible reading and prayer. Secondly, we grow in our walk with God by obeying His commands. These things take effort. Now, the Christian life should never be a terrible drag overall (Matthew 11:28-30). Yes, the Christian life is extraordinarily difficult. And we will have really bad moments, days, and even phases. However, through all of this the Spirit will be with us and will show us many of the ways God is using all of the difficulties to sanctify us. He will give to us unimaginable joy throughout our Christian journey, including through these painful valleys. That is what Jesus was referring to. So, while the Christian life is easy in that sense, it is hard in other senses. And doing the things above does take effort. Again, we need to be careful to not overwhelm ourselves and

others in order to avoid violating what Jesus said to us in the verse above. But, they do take effort.

The means of grace refer to those gifts God has given to His church whereby we for the most part simply sit back and allow God to feed us. Obviously, some effort is required to partake of these blessings. However, for the most part, we should be resting in the passivity of these gifts. I do not even like it when people take a lot of notes during sermons. I think such an activity is very helpful when listening to a teaching, but the sermon should be something where we just allow God to powerfully speak to us through His preacher. Prayer is often not something that is a means of grace in the sense in which we are using that term here. Clearly, everything God gives to us is a grace in some sense of the word. However, prayer often takes a great deal of effort. Again, it should not be a drag. It should be something we enjoy immensely. But, we do need to make time for it and we should be thinking through our prayers, even our short and quick ones, very carefully. However, there are times when we come to God and just ask for His forgiveness and help. In these times, we are passive for the most part. We allow Him to help us in our deepest weakness.

### **Chapter 10: Part 5 of Section 3**

#### **The Presbyterian Form of Church Government**

The core component of the presbyterian form of church government is that the church is to be ruled over by *pastors*. Other terms that are used for this position are *bishop*; *elder*; *presbyter*; *minister*; and *church leader*. Most Confessional Presbyterian churches call these leaders in the church *elders*, and mostly use the term *pastor* for senior pastors. But, sometimes you will hear all of these terms, and often the term *pastor* is used interchangeably with these other terms, including the term *elder*. The two leading sections of the Bible that establish this core element of the presbyterian system of church government are 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These verses make it

abundantly clear that the churches are to be ruled over by these church leaders. These leaders are not simply there to lead by example and through the preaching and teaching of the word as in the congregational model. These verses certainly seem to strongly teach that these church leaders are the governmental leaders of the church. They are to make binding decisions for each local church. And there is no evidence in the Bible for any positions of complete authority above or below these church leaders as in the episcopal system. By *complete authority* I mean authority over an entire church or an entire group of churches.

Even most theologians who hold to the episcopal system admit this. Let that sink in. They basically admit that the core element of their system cannot be defended from the Bible with a great deal of strength. The main case of those who hold to the episcopal system is to say that wisdom seems to demand it. And they say that they do not believe that the New Testament ever spells out a full government for the church after Pentecost. Hence, they say that the church has freedom here and can use wisdom as it sees fit. This is a very weak case indeed.

Those who defend the congregational model mostly rely on Matthew 18:15-20. They say that the church is the people of God and not just the pastors of the church. And since Jesus here gives the church as a whole the authority to engage in church discipline, this must mean that the church as a whole is in charge of governance. Hence, they support a more democratic form of church government, with pastors being given the authority to teach and preach the word in the church. None of this follows. Yes, when church discipline takes place, the whole church should be involved. Things should not be done in secret. And the members should have a say in what they think about the case against a member. However, none of this means that the church as a whole is responsible for making final decisions. The passages we looked at above make it clear that final governance is placed in the hands of the elders and not in the hands of the members.

The key passages about elders that we examined also lay out the requirements for being an elder. It is important to recognize that these requirements are not exhaustive and are for the most part not entirely unique to elders. Most of these requirements are the requirements of all Christians, especially men. The point of these

lists is primarily to say that elders must not be lukewarm in their walk with God. The only truly unique gifts they must have that not all Christians have are the gifts of leadership and teaching. Not all Christians who have the gift of teaching are called to be elders, but all who are called to be elders must have the gift of teaching. The same is true regarding the gift of leadership. Before moving forward, it is my strong belief and the belief of many Confessional Presbyterians today (it was also the belief of all Confessional Presbyterians until very, very recently in church history) that only men can be elders and deacons. I will defend my position on that later in this work.

The next important item to talk about regarding the presbyterian form of church government is that the reality of elders does not imply that there can be no other forms of leadership in the church. What it does mean is that the church universal and all denominations cannot create any other mandatory positions of leadership. Hence, each individual church can create its own ministries and appoint leaders over those ministries at its discretion. And some of these positions can even be given the title of pastor even if this person is not an elder in the church. The New Testament repeatedly talks about our freedom in Christ and thus each individual local church should be given a tremendous amount of freedom to run itself as it sees fit. However, all such ministries and positions must be under the authority of the elders. The passages on the elders that we looked at earlier make this very plain.

The next very important component of the presbyterian form of church government is the distinction between ruling elders and teaching elders. The main passage for this distinction is found in 1 Timothy 5:17. This passage makes a distinction between elders in general and those who specifically focus upon preaching and teaching. As we saw earlier, all elders must have the gift of teaching. But, this verse is clear that some also have the gift of preaching and they are to do the bulk of the preaching and teaching. This doesn't take away from their role as governmental leaders of the church. As we have seen, all elders have this role. The passage is saying that some elders are primarily only governmental leaders who can teach on occasion, and other elders are governmental leaders and do the bulk of the preaching and teaching in the church. Thus, the distinction between ruling elders (those who mostly just govern), and teaching elders (those who do the bulk of the preaching and teaching). This doesn't

mean that non-elders can never preach or teach in the church. What it does mean is that they can only do so with the permission of the elders, and that the bulk of the preaching and teaching should be done by the teaching elders as much as possible.

Now, it may seem that this doctrine is being based on only one verse. But, this is not so, although this is the key verse for sure. This doctrine can also be seen in the fact that in the Old Testament, Israel was to be governed by elders and the priests. There were other governing positions for sure, especially judges, but for the most part the elders were supposed to govern the civil affairs of the people, while the priests were to govern the religious affairs of the people. As we saw in the second book of my “basics” series, the priests were also supposed to teach the people of God. Because of this fact, they were almost assuredly in charge of preaching to the people as well. Therefore, it seems that God carried over this basic principle into the new covenant. Teaching elders are not priests, don’t get me wrong. But, they do have a lot of similarities with the priests from the Old Testament. And the ruling elders seem to be very similar to the elders of the nation of Israel under the old covenant.

This is also why Confessional Presbyterians have always believed that only teaching elders should be allowed to administer the sacraments. Only the priests could administer the sacrifices during the old covenant after the law of Moses was given. Therefore, because we see the teaching elders as being the continuation of the priests to a large extent, we see it as best to say that only the teaching elders should administer God’s sacred sacraments.

God calls very few people to be teaching elders. Very few people have all of the requirements for being one. Hence, most churches only have one teaching elder. And these teaching elders are often called *the pastor* or *the senior pastor*. However, unlike many churches, Confessional Presbyterians are emphatic that he has no more governing authority in the local church he serves than any other elder. And there is absolutely nothing unbiblical about having multiple teaching elders in one local church. In many Confessional Presbyterian churches there are multiple teaching elders, but one is still known as the senior pastor. This is because he is usually the teaching elder that has been at the church the longest. But, this is merely a tradition and is not required by Scripture.

The next important aspect to the presbyterian form of church government is the doctrine that elders are to be elected by the members and appointed or anointed by other elders. The passages on elders that we looked at above make it clear that elders are to be appointed by other elders. And the teaching that they are to be elected by the members of the local church comes from Deuteronomy 1:9-13. Here we are explicitly told that the Israelite people were to choose their own leaders who were to be appointed by Moses himself. This is another example where it may seem like we are basing too much off of one passage, but the new covenant gives to the people of God more responsibility, not less. We see this all throughout the New Testament. Hence, it makes no sense to say that the people of God under the old covenant could choose their own leaders, but the people under the new covenant cannot. Now, it may seem that this would only apply to the ruling elders as the priests in the Old Testament were definitely not chosen by the people. One can make that argument. This is absolutely not an essential doctrine. However, it seems to me and the rest of Confessional Presbyterians that while the teaching elders must be distinguished from the ruling elders, they are still elders at the end of the day. They are all in the same basic elder class. Hence, it would seem rather odd that the people of God could choose some of their elders, but not others.

The next aspect of the presbyterian form of church government we will examine is the system of layers of government. What this means is that the presbyterian model believes that church government should exist beyond the local church. It teaches that all of the local elders at a local church are to govern that church, but that all of the local churches in a particular region of a denomination should get together to make decisions that pertain to the life of those churches jointly. And that all of these regional bodies should get together on a denominational level to make decisions that pertain to the denomination as a whole. And when I say get together, I am referring to elders getting together to make decisions. Different labels are used for these different levels and these labels are simply a matter of convenience. They are traditions and are not binding. Hence, Confessional Presbyterians tend to use a certain set of labels, while Confessional Continental Reformed churches tend to use another set of labels. Both

believe in the presbyterian form of church government, but different labels are used. The labels are not important, the doctrine behind them is.

Most denominations that believe in the presbyterian form of church government use a three layer system. However, this is not entirely binding either. There is nothing in the Bible that says it has to be 3. There could hypothetically be more layers and some Confessional Presbyterian denominations, especially large ones, have had 4. The labels used by most Confessional Presbyterian denominations today are *session*, *presbytery*, and *general assembly*. The session refers to all of the elders of a local church coming together to make binding decisions for that local congregation. The presbytery refers to a number of churches in a specific region within a denomination. At presbytery meetings, representative elders are sent from each of these local congregations and they make binding decisions upon all of these local congregations. Each local congregation must obey Scripture and the decisions of the denomination and their presbytery. Beyond that, they have a great deal of freedom to govern their particular congregation as they see fit. The general assembly refers to all of the churches of the denomination coming together to make binding decisions upon the entire denomination. Representative elders are sent from each presbytery to these general assembly meetings.

The term *presbyter* comes from the Greek word used in the Bible *presbuteros*. It is one of the words used in the Bible for church leaders. It is often translated as *presbyter* or *elder* in English translations. And the term *presbytery* refers to a body of these presbyters coming together to make decisions. And this is where we get the label *presbyterian*. The biblical basis for these layers comes from Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 16:1; and Galatians 1:2. As we have seen, Acts 15 provides for us a clear model of church councils. It is true that this council came together to make a binding decision for the universal church, but this was only because apostles were still present in the church at that time. The fact that elders were present and fully participated in this council shows that this council was a template for future councils. And if the elders are in charge of governing their local congregations, it is quite plain that they must meet together to make decisions. Further, both the Corinthians passage and the Galatians text above make it clear that multiple churches made up the one broader “church” of Galatia.

Clearly this was one church in a manner of speaking because Paul addresses them as one body throughout his epistle to them. They are judged as a whole and that clearly implies that these multiple churches made decisions as a whole. And that implies that these churches must have come together for councils or meetings similar to what we see in Acts 15.

If it is asked why other churches are not referred to in the plural in the New Testament, it is in all likelihood that it was because they had not yet reached that size. All of the Christians in these areas probably met at the same home or place in the earliest days of the church. However, it is very clear from the passages above that the Galatians church had gotten to the point of having multiple churches and these churches functioned as one broader church. The Galatians church was scolded sharply for allowing heretics to infiltrate their ranks, but they are not scolded for their system of church government. They were clearly following the pattern that the apostles must have laid out for them. Now it should be said that the churches referred to in the early chapters of Revelation all probably were made up of multiple churches by that time. They were probably referred to in the singular because Revelation was written late in church history and the pattern of referring to multiple churches in one region as being one church overall had become the norm.

Now one could argue that we only have evidence for two layers regarding the Galatians church. But, we don't know that for sure. The Galatians church could have been made up of smaller groupings of churches within that region. And we also have the witness of the Old Testament. God split up His people into twelve tribes, these tribes were split up into clans, and these clans were split up into cities; towns; villages; and families. Therefore, the principle of multiple layers is seen throughout the Bible. This principle is also why those who hold to the presbyterian form of church government do not believe in one giant denomination that encompasses the whole church. We don't see evidence for this in the Bible. The 12 tribes had independence from one another and when they tried to unite under one king, God was not pleased.

Further, we see no evidence for this in the New Testament either. Each regional church was somewhat independent of the others and was judged on its own merits. This is why we believe that denominations should be limited to nations or regions within



nations. And that within these denominations, they should be split up into presbyteries according to the regions within the general region of the denomination. And that each of these presbyteries should be broken up into the individual congregations. None of this means that denominations around the world should not work together. They should do so as much as possible. We are all one under our monarch, Jesus Christ. However, there is no evidence that they should be organizationally united beyond that.

Next, we need to discuss church membership. Church membership is plainly implied by the discipline discussed in 1 Corinthians 5. It is also strongly implied by Matthew 18:15-20. While we as Confessional Presbyterians certainly disagree with how much congregationalist defenders make of this passage, it certainly seems to give all Christians a great deal of authority and say within the church. I understand that those who reject formal church membership believe that some forms of church discipline can still take place, but that does not seem to do justice to these passages. The elders should give church members as much say as they can. They should be allowed to make their voices heard at congregational meetings (not the same thing as meetings of the session), and they should be allowed to vote on many matters as well. But, the elders have the final say regarding all matters that the session does not put to a congregational vote, and only the elders can decide whether or not to allow the congregation as a whole to vote on something. The only exception to this is actually voting in elders. That belongs to the congregation.

At this juncture, we need to discuss church discipline itself. Not all Confessional Presbyterians have agreed upon all of the particulars of this doctrine. Having said that, all have always agreed on the importance of church discipline and the need for excommunication when that is required. All true Christians believe in at least some form of excommunication, but many have a very, very soft doctrine on this point. All true Christians believe that the basic parameters of Matthew 18:15-20 must be followed when it comes to church discipline. However, some Confessional Presbyterians believe that once repentance has taken place, no formal discipline is required. Others believe that certain sins are so serious that even after repentance, some form of discipline is required. But, all agree that excommunication can never take place if there is repentance.

Not all Christians, and not all Confessional Presbyterians, have agreed upon the particulars of excommunication either. Excommunication refers to the practice of putting into place what Jesus talks about regarding treating an unrepentant brother or sister as a Pagan or a corrupt tax collector, and what Paul talks about in regard to handing over the offending brother to Satan. Some Christian theologians have gone so far as to teach that we as Christians can never even speak to an excommunicated person. All Confessional Presbyterians agree that at the very least, excommunication must entail removing a member from being an official member of the church. The statement of Paul in regard to not even eating with an excommunicated person would seem to give support to the above stern view. But, this is only one statement that is found nowhere else in the Bible. It is very possible that Paul is using this statement as a figure of speech to say that we should not have Christian fellowship with an excommunicated person.

We now come to the topic of deacons. Deacons are to be in charge of all of the ministries of the church that have to do with helping the poor. It is very sad that many churches give deacons other responsibilities. In many churches, the deacons or the deacon board is the governing authority of the local church. This does not seem to be the biblical teaching. The role of the deacons is laid out in Acts 6:1-6. It is true that the term *deacon* is not used here, but if this section of the Bible is not describing the institution of deacons, then we have no idea what deacons are supposed to do. This is because every other time deacons are referred to in the Bible, their roles are not specified. Yes, we are given the requirements for becoming a deacon, but we are not given their role as we are with the elders in the passages that discuss the requirements for the elders. The requirements for deacons are laid out in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The deacons are under the authority of the elders and the elders can override any of their decisions at any time. However, the elders should give the deacons as much freedom to do their work as possible. Many Christians believe in other official positions within the church, and we will discuss that view later in this work. Most Confessional Presbyterians believe in only two, elders and deacons, and that certainly seems to be the teaching of 1 Timothy 3.

Finally, it must be said that church life can unfortunately become terribly messy and complicated because the church is made up of sinful people. Because of this, church government can become very messy and complicated. Therefore, I cannot cover in a work such as this all of the complicated ways the presbyterian system is and has been applied to all of the various difficulties the church often faces. What I have done is laid out all of the basic elements of the system and defended them to the best of my ability in a concise fashion from the Bible. If you do decide to become Confessional Presbyterian and you join a Confessional Presbyterian church, you may wonder why your particular church or denomination does this or that. Please ask your pastor about this and also feel free to email me any questions in this regard and I'll do my best to help answer them. My email can be found on my website.

### **The Importance of Missions and Evangelism**

Confessional Presbyterians have always highly emphasized the importance of missions and evangelism. An evangelist is anyone with the gift of evangelism. This gift is the ability to preach the gospel effectively to people on a regular basis. You do not have to be an official pastor or elder to have this gift. A missionary is someone with the gift of evangelism who specifically feels called to take the gospel to a foreign place. *Evangelism* and *evangelist* are terms that are found in the Bible. The term *missionary* is not, but is merely a convenient term the church uses to describe those who have the gift of evangelism in this very specific manner. All true Christians believe in the importance of missions and evangelism. However, some place a much higher premium on them than others. Certain Christian groups have more emphasized the family and Christian culture than missions and evangelism.

It is true that the Bible does not give to us any specific program or roadmap for how to go about fulfilling the Great Commission. This means that we have to largely be led by the Spirit and the experience of the church down through the ages. And the church has repeatedly seen the kingdom of God advance in tremendous ways when it has funded and supported in large ways the work of missionaries and evangelists. And the branches on the Christian tree today who have not emphasized these gifts as much

are two of the smallest branches and are often very limited to certain geographic regions. It therefore seems clear that the Spirit has most blessed the branches of the Christian tree that have emphasized these gifts more heavily.

### **The Primacy of the Westminster Standards**

Confessional Presbyterianism is made up of those Christians who hold to a certain combination of doctrines. Most of those individual doctrines can be found in one or more of the other branches on the Christian tree. This is the one major doctrine that truly separates Confessional Presbyterians from the rest of the Christian tree. This is obviously not a doctrine I can directly prove from the Bible. You will have to read the Westminster Standards for yourself, but there is no doubt in my mind that they make up the best confession and catechisms in the history of the church.

### **Revisiting the Body of Christ Image**

Now that we have detailed all of the basic elements of the Confessional Presbyterian doctrine of the church, I want to reiterate how all of them flow to one degree or another from the core image of the church as the body of Christ. For instance, the church is only the family of God because we are the adopted children of God. But, our adoption is only possible because of our union with Christ. The church is the temple of God because we are all collectively filled with the Holy Spirit, but we are only filled with the Spirit because of our union with Christ. Even our marriage to Christ, which would seem to be identical with our union with Christ, in some sense follows this union because our marriage to Jesus is not fully consummated until He returns. Everything comes back to our union with Christ in salvation. This is the grounds for the church. And for this reason, this is why it is the primary image of the church. This concludes our long survey of the Confessional Presbyterian doctrine of the church. However, there are still some remaining doctrines and points that I want to cover that directly pertain to Confessional Presbyterianism.

### **Chapter 11: Part 6 of Section 3**

#### **The Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

This doctrine does heavily tie-in with the doctrine of the church, but it also is a key part of the doctrine of salvation. What I will be defending in this section is the traditional Protestant doctrine. Most medieval Christians; most Confessional Methodists; all Confessional Pentecostals; all Confessional Charismatics; most Semi-Dispensationalists; and some other Christians have held or hold differing views. Some theologians have tried to say that while believers before Pentecost were saved by the Holy Spirit in the sense that He changed their natures and continued to sanctify them throughout their lives, these theologians say that He did not indwell them or fill them in any sense. They do recognize that some believers before Pentecost are described as being filled with the Spirit, but they say these were exceptions that prove the rule. This does not seem to be the biblical teaching.

We know from John 7:39 that when Jesus refers to living water, He is referring to the Holy Spirit. And we know from John 4, especially verses 10 and 14, that this giving of the Holy Spirit is connected with eternal life. It is also clear from all of this language that Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit will be in believers unto eternal life. Therefore, if believers before Pentecost were not indwelt by the Spirit, then they were not saved. Now, many true Christians have asserted this very thing throughout church history. They have said that God treated these believers as saved based on their faith, but that they were not truly saved until after Jesus rescued them from a holding place during the days while His body was in the tomb based upon His work on the cross. This teaching certainly seems to be in direct contradiction with Romans 3-4. It also makes no sense of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman, where He certainly seems to be strongly implying that she can have that water right then and there. The opposite position also appeals to John 7:39 and John 14:17. These verses at first glance do seem to make a distinction between the Spirit being with believers before Pentecost, but within them

afterwards. With that admitted, the opposing side can never really tell us what the difference is between the Spirit being with us and the Spirit living in us. In light of that fact and all that I said above, it seems much better to interpret John 7:39 and John 14:17 as saying that the Spirit was given to believers before Pentecost unto eternal life, but that the fullness of the Spirit was not given until Pentecost itself.

Being filled with the Spirit is clearly presented as closely connected with being indwelt by the Spirit, but not as identical to it. Being indwelt by the Spirit seems to be referring to the Spirit changing our natures from wicked ones to holy ones, and to Him being our permanent possession in the sense of us being perpetually and acutely aware of His presence. Being filled with the Spirit seems to refer to being more aware of the power of the Spirit in our lives and comes from obedience. This seems to be the presentation throughout the Book of Acts, and seems to be the clear teaching of Ephesians 5:18. We are not commanded to be indwelt by the Spirit throughout our Christian lives because we already are indwelt by Him at the first moment of salvation. Yet, we clearly are commanded to be filled with the Spirit well after the initial moment of salvation.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit seems to refer to us receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit and to the spiritual gifts that come along with this. This would seem to make this primarily a doctrine that is part of the overall doctrine of the church, but it is also a part of the doctrine of salvation as the Bible seems to say that all saved people receive this baptism at the moment of salvation after Pentecost. All of this seems to be plainly taught by John 7:39; John 14:17; Acts 2; and 1 Corinthians 12-14 (especially 1 Corinthians 12:13). Many Confessional Methodists, all Confessional Pentecostals, and all Confessional Charismatics try to say that the baptism of the Spirit comes after saving faith. They point out that everyone in the upper room in Acts 2 was already saved. They also say that we see this pattern throughout Acts. None of this follows. Of course it is the case that those who were already saved before Pentecost received the baptism after faith because the Spirit had not yet been given. There was no way for it to be otherwise. And the other examples given in Acts are simply of those who seemed to have faith but did not, and were only saved later when they were baptized by the Spirit. They also point out how often the baptism seems to be given at the laying on of hands.

But, this was not always the case (see Acts 10), and when this happened it only did so to emphasize the authority of the apostles. Sometimes people were not truly regenerated until the apostles laid their hands on these people or baptized them.

Confessional Pentecostals say that speaking in tongues should always accompany the baptism of the Spirit. They say that this is the pattern given to us in Acts 2, and they also point to other examples in Acts where those baptized in the Spirit immediately spoke in tongues. However, even they recognize that this is not always what is recorded for us in Acts. They respond to this by saying that even though there are instances in Acts where people are baptized in the Spirit and it does not explicitly say that they spoke in tongues, we can know that they did based on the example of Acts 2. None of this follows. Acts 2 was a unique situation so that the people in the surrounding area could hear this miracle taking place very clearly. And this position seems to be blatantly contradicted by 1 Corinthians 12:29-31. Later in this work, I will discuss even more reasons why I believe the Pentecostal position on tongues to be deeply mistaken.

Next, we need to discuss the fact that the Old Testament often seems to describe certain people as receiving something that sounds very similar to the descriptions given of the baptism of the Spirit in the New Testament. It never uses the precise language of *baptism of the Holy Spirit*, but the descriptions of what they experienced do have many similarities to what is described when people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. It seems that the best way to deal with this is to see these experiences as being temporary fillings of the Holy Spirit whereby the person was given special power or abilities in order to fulfill a specific calling from God.

When the Spirit would come upon people in these instances in the Old Testament, He is often described as coming upon them. This language seems to be used in order to distinguish these events from the saving work of the Spirit within us. However, there are times when people would be described as filled with the Spirit. Hence, it seems that those who were saved probably felt these events within in ways that those who were not saved did not. It is also clear from the Old Testament record that the Spirit could be lost in the sense of Him no longer coming upon a person. This is obviously very different from the baptism of the Spirit after Pentecost. And the Spirit

would come upon some non-saved people like Saul, and this also is very different from the baptism of the Spirit in the New Testament. Now, it is true that God does give some unbelievers in the church certain gifts that look like spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church. So, God still does act in similar ways today to some extent. But, no unsaved person is given the full baptism of the Holy Spirit. And as said earlier, the Spirit was only given in the sense described above to some Old Testament saints. This was not something all of the true people of God experienced. The baptism of the Spirit is given to all of God's true people. All of God's genuine children are given spiritual gifts. That is a huge change from before Pentecost. And we will discuss these spiritual gifts further down the line.

This Old Testament phenomenon was often called being anointed by the Holy Spirit. This was not the same thing as being anointed in general. Anointing in general was done with oil and was most used for the kings of Israel. And the New Testament says that all believers are anointed with the Holy Spirit because all of them have been baptized by the Spirit and have been given at least one spiritual gift (1 John 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 12; the NLT is not the best when it comes to 1 John 2:20, the original Greek very clearly says we have been anointed and most English translations say this).

Next, the fact that I've made it clear that I and all those who take the traditional Protestant position on the baptism of the Spirit believe that being filled with the Spirit is distinct from both the indwelling of the Spirit and the baptism itself, could be confusing because when people are baptized with the Spirit in Acts, they almost always are described as being filled with the Spirit. This can sound like being filled and being baptized by the Spirit are identical. This language should not be surprising though, because when someone is first saved and baptized by the Spirit, he or she feels a sense of the power of the Spirit as this is an extremely powerful moment. Now, many people do not understand all of these feelings when they are first saved and many feel this power in a much stronger fashion than others. There is nothing wrong with this and there is no competition here. But, just because we experience a filling of the Spirit at the moment we are baptized by the Spirit does not mean that the two experiences are the same thing. As we have seen, the filling of the Spirit is something that we can



experience throughout our Christian walk, whereas the baptism of the Spirit is a one-time occurrence at the moment of salvation.

The last thing I want to touch upon in this subsection is the doctrine of perfectionism. I am not here talking about the heretical version that states that Christians can reach a state of absolute sinlessness in this life. I am here only addressing the orthodox version of perfectionism that says that Christians can get to a state where they commit no overt and fully conscious sins. I do so because many Confessional Methodists state that this often takes place with the baptism of the Spirit or seek to tie it into the baptism in some way.

Orthodox perfectionists point to many verses in support of their position, but all of the arguments seem extraordinarily weak to me. For instance, many will point to the verses that describe people as being blameless. It seems that all these verses are simply saying that certain saints could not be accused of not living a godly life in any way. That is a far cry from avoiding all overt and conscious sin. Or they will point to the fact that God's law demands perfection. So, the argument goes, we must be able to achieve that. This does not follow. Yes, certainly when God originally created us, He was not going to command the impossible for us. That would have been unjust and cruel. But, merely because we are sinners now does not mean that God is obligated to change His perfect standards. Hence, the standard of God's law never changes, but that in no way means we can live up to that standard any longer. And orthodox perfectionists are not consistent with this argument anyway because they don't hold that Christians can ever attain to absolute perfection in this life as they understand that view is heretical.

In my very strong opinion, any and all forms of perfectionism are deeply unbiblical. Many verses could be cited to support this, but the most important is Romans 7:7-25. Here the Apostle Paul describes in detail how he still struggles deeply with remaining sin in his life after his conversion. Paul also details the major failing of Peter (Galatians 2). If the apostles had not reached this alleged form of perfectionism, then no other Christian can expect to do so either.

In this subsection, I want to take some time to examine the Presbyterian denominations on the earth today. There are 30 major Presbyterian denominations in the world today. Not all of these are Confessional Presbyterian, but I list all of them here because each of them has at least some very solid Confessional Presbyterian churches within them. Below, they are presented in list fashion and then I will discuss them further. In this list I have also put about how large they are in terms of people who claim to be part of these denominations. The “Mil” stands for *millions*.

- 1.) Presbyterian Church of East Africa - 4 Mil
- 2.) Presbyterian Church of Nigeria - 4 Mil
- 3.) Presbyterian Church of Africa - 3.5 Mil
- 4.) National Presbyterian Church in Mexico - 3 Mil
- 5.) Church of Christ in Congo-Presbyterian Community of Congo - 2.5 Mil
- 6.) Presbyterian Church of Korea (TongHap) - 2.5 Mil
- 7.) Presbyterian Church in Korea (HapDong) - 2.5 Mil
- 8.) Presbyterian Church in Cameroon - 2 Mil
- 9.) Presbyterian Church of Cameroon - 2 Mil
- 10.) Church of Central Africa Presbyterian - 2 Mil
- 11.) Presbyterian Church in Korea (BaekSeok) - 1.5 Mil
- 12.) Presbyterian Church of India - 1.5 Mil
- 13.) Church of Scotland - 1.5 Mil
- 14.) Presbyterian Church (USA) - 1 Mil
- 15.) Presbyterian Church in Sudan - 1 Mil
- 16.) Presbyterian Church of Ghana - 1 Mil
- 17.) Presbyterian Church of Brazil - .5 Mil
- 18.) Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana - .5 Mil
- 19.) United Church of Christ in the Philippines - .5 Mil
- 20.) Uniting Presbyterian Church in South Africa - .5 Mil
- 21.) United Church of Canada - .5 Mil
- 22.) Presbyterian Church in America - .5 Mil (often called *the PCA*)

- 23.) Presbyterian Church of Pakistan - .5 Mil
- 24.) Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koshin) - .5 Mil
- 25.) Korean Presbyterian Church - .3 Mil
- 26.) Presbyterian Church in Rwanda - .3 Mil
- 27.) Uniting Church in Australia - .2 Mil
- 28.) Presbyterian Church in Taiwan - .2 Mil
- 29.) Presbyterian Church in Ireland - .2 Mil
- 30.) Orthodox Presbyterian Church - .1 Mil (often called *the OPC*)

It should be said that it could be argued that #30 does not belong on this list. This is because there are other Presbyterian denominations that are larger than this one. It could seem like I am only including it because it is my current denomination. This is not the case though. I included it because it is well recognized that this denomination has had a huge impact on the overall Presbyterian world for around 100 years now as it has produced some of the best and most recognized Confessional Presbyterian theologians and apologists. Of these 30, I would only place 5 as being very sound across the board. These would be #'s 4; 12; 17; 22; and 30.

Many of the other ones are pretty sound, but are very off on one or more doctrines. For instance, many of them are very Confessional, but do believe in and practice women's ordination. Others though, such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), are apostate Liberal Protestant denominations. However, even these denominations still have many true Confessional Presbyterian churches within them. I have talked about how when I first became Confessional Presbyterian, I joined a church that was within this denomination because there were no other Confessional Presbyterian churches in my entire county and it was an excellent church. The only issue where I disagreed with them was over women's ordination. The pastor even believed in the young earth position, something that was not true of any of my PCA pastors, and the PCA is a true Confessional Presbyterian denomination.

There are also a number of other much smaller Presbyterian denominations in the world. Some of them though, are not Confessional Presbyterian. Others are Confessional Presbyterian, but have Fundamentalist and hyper-Calvinist tendencies.

Please look up both the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, and the World Reformed Fellowship. Both of these can be found on Wikipedia, and Wikipedia provides lists of all the denominations that are part of these organizations. All of these denominations are very sound, but some of them are Confessional Continental Reformed and you should be aware of this. This does not mean that there are no rogue churches within these denominations. Hence, you should always have your antenna up when looking for a good church if you decide to become Confessional Presbyterian. With that said, for the most part, if you choose a church within any of those denominations, or within any of the 5 major ones I listed above, you will probably be pretty safe.

There are also some decent Confessional Presbyterian denominations in the United States that are smaller and are not part of either of those organizations because of women's ordination or some other doctrine. I recommend avoiding these denominations if possible, but if the only Confessional Presbyterian church in your area is part of one of these denominations, you will still be in good hands for the most part. Two examples of denominations along these lines would be the ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (often just abbreviated as *the ECO*), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (often just abbreviated as *the EPC*).

If you find yourself outside of the U.S. and need help finding a good Confessional Presbyterian church, please email me and I will do my best to help you. My email can be found on my website. If you are in the U.S., I strongly recommend doing your best to find a PCA or OPC church. Just be aware of the fact that OPC churches can be a bit stuffy. Many pastors believe in the Puritan view of the Sabbath and the older Presbyterian view regarding images of God (something we will discuss down the line). Almost all of the pastors wear suits in church and worship bands tend to be looked down on, two practices that I think are very unfortunate. However, the preaching is excellent and you will not have to worry about the denomination trending in a liberal direction. In the PCA, far too many pastors are way too soft on the age of the earth, and many refuse to fully condemn Roman Catholicism as they should. And there are pockets of the denomination that are trending liberal and so you will want to be very careful. This is why I eventually left the denomination. However, the denomination has

taken strong steps recently to push back against these churches. My two saved sons both attend a wonderful PCA church here in St. George. So, I still recommend the denomination overall. For the time being though, I am more comfortable commuting to my OPC church.

If you are in a region of the United States where there are no PCA or OPC churches, or you are wary of a PCA or OPC church near you, please email me and I will do whatever I can to help you find the best church near where you live. Before moving to the next section of this work, I want to say that I am sorry that the Confessional Presbyterian world is messy. Satan does all he can to mess with it and he is very talented at his craft. But, you will find many problems in any of the branches on the Christian tree. As we have seen in this work, sometimes the institutional church is not pretty. And in my strong estimation, we live at a time when the overall institutional church is very, very weak and we are in desperate need of reformation. So, don't be surprised or overly discouraged by this reality. Do your best to find a solid Confessional Presbyterian church and fight for God's truth in whatever ways you can. Sometimes that is as simple as teaching your children the truth. But, if God calls you to do more, do more as the opportunities arise as long as you are not getting overwhelmed. If you would like a very brief summary on the history of Confessional Presbyterianism, I wrote an essay on that. It can be found in the section on my works for beginners on my website.