

Doctrine: Going Deeper Part 2

By Dan Jensen (2023)

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SECTION 4: My Opinion on Certain Doctrines

Chapter 1: Part 1 of Section 4

The Development of the Gospel

It is important to understand that God did not reveal all of the details about the gospel to His people all at once. For some of God's earliest followers, they would have not known much beyond the basics of if they trust in God, God will take care of them; if they ask for forgiveness for their sins, God will forgive them; and that the deliverer will one day come. As redemptive history unfolded, God gave to His people more and more details. Many Progressive Christians try to jump on this fact and say that it somehow proves that we don't have to preach the full gospel to people today. Now, don't get me wrong. When we first talk to people about the gospel, we should keep things as simple as possible. We can merely talk about how all people are sinners and God requires

punishment for our sins. We can then say that Jesus took this punishment on behalf of all those that would trust in Him. We can then say that we are saved from this punishment based on the cross and we can receive this salvation by faith alone. We can then say how this salvation entails being saved from both the penalty and the power of sin. However, if people ask us further questions, we need to be able to answer these questions or know where we can point people to find the answers. And true Christians should be learning more and more about all of the biblical details of the gospel as they grow in their relationship with God.

What many Progressive Christians try to say is that we don't have to put so much emphasis on the atonement. We can focus much more on other areas of the gospel, according to them, because after all, when Jesus was on earth He did not preach that much on the atonement when He preached the gospel because He obviously hadn't even gone to the cross yet. This does not follow at all. All of God's followers are obligated to preach the gospel according to the amount of information God has revealed up to that time. Of course Jesus was not going to overly preach on the cross yet because He had not yet been crucified. But, Jesus did clearly preach that the Messiah had arrived, that the kingdom of God was at hand, and that people could receive eternal life through the forgiveness of their sins by placing their faith in Him. Today though, we are obligated to preach the full gospel precisely because God has given us the full gospel. The New Testament constantly pounds home the central importance of the cross and so we must do the same.

Now, it may seem odd that I would include this subsection in this section of this work. Don't all true Christians agree with what I have said above? Sort of. All true Christians agree with me that we must preach the full gospel today and would passionately reject the distorted logic of the Progressive Christians. Unfortunately though, many Semi-Dispensationalists do not believe that Jesus regularly preached the gospel. They agree that He certainly did here and there, but they also say that when the Gospels say that He preached the gospel, they are primarily talking about a different gospel. They say that Jesus was preaching the gospel of the kingdom of Israel to the Jews. And they say that this is different from the gospel of the church. I have already detailed why I would strongly reject this line of interpretation.

The Keys of the Kingdom

On a number of occasions, Jesus gave His apostles the keys to the kingdom of heaven. He talked about how in some sense this gave to them the right to forgive or not forgive sins. He also talked about how this gave to them the right to forbid and permit things. Many Christians don't know what to make of this language and many theologians have debated this down through the ages. I believe that far too many Christians make this language far more complicated than it needs to be. It seems to me that this language is merely talking about how we as Christians now have the full authority to preach the full gospel. This does not mean that we can say to any individual Christian that he or she has certainly been forgiven by God. What it does mean is that we are to boldly go before the world and say that if they repent and believe in Jesus, they will be forgiven eternally. And that if they don't believe, they will be condemned eternally. And we are to tell the world what is and what is not permissible based on the word of God. We are not being arrogant or presumptuous when we do this. We are following the command of God.

If this is true, why then does Jesus specifically give this right to the apostles? This is not difficult to understand. They were the first to officially proclaim the full gospel. All of our doctrines as Christians must ultimately trace back to them as they were Jesus' official representatives. Even the books of the Bible in the Old Testament that were written by the Old Testament prophets are to be interpreted to us by the apostles. They were given the keys in the fullest sense, and we are only given them in a secondary sense as those who are to follow their example in regard to the preaching of the gospel.

This forgiveness of sins is very different from what we see Jesus doing in His ministry. I never have the right to infallibly say to any person that his or her sins are assuredly forgiven. This is because I cannot know the heart of anyone. The same is true for you and everyone else. The same was even true of the apostles apart from God specifically revealing to them that He had forgiven the sins of a particular person or persons. But, I can preach the gospel. So can you. However, Jesus often specifically told people as individuals that their sins were forgiven. The only way He could have

known this, and the only way He could have had the authority to do this, was if He is God. Because He did in fact do this on numerous occasions, clearly Jesus is in fact God.

Reverence for God

This is one of those doctrines that could have been put in the first section because all true Christians have the very deepest reverence for God. However, I want to focus here on some of the areas of disagreement between good Christians on this issue today. We live in a day of extreme narcissism and superficiality. I am genuinely not trying to be harsh or too judgmental, but this is absolutely the case. I believe that this is due to many factors, but I believe that the primary reason is social media. When I was growing up in the 90's, one of the most uncool things a person could do was try to draw too much attention to himself. It was seen as lame and obnoxious. One of the worst things a person could be called was a "sell-out." This meant that you gave up your principles for money; or fame; or popularity; or some combination of those. This is no longer the case. Today, people are obsessed with selfies and their social media profiles. The worst thing you can do is not sell-out. The entire goal and ethic is to make money, become famous, and be as popular as possible. I recently watched a documentary that interviewed young people and asked them about the concept of selling out and every single one of them described it in good terms. They thought of it as someone who was willing to do whatever it took to be successful online. I knew things were bad, but I honestly had no idea just how bad things were today.

Unfortunately, one of the grossest truths we as American Christians have to face is that in many respects the church led the charge here. Much of the church was so tired of Fundamentalism (which for the most part was a good sentiment) that it decided to go almost completely in the opposite direction with the seeker-sensitive movement. You can read about these movements in my book on church history if you are not familiar with them. Those churches that were true and orthodox churches in the seeker-sensitive movement were not trying to be irreverent. As said above, if they were, they would have been false churches. They were merely trying to do all they could to

help people see that the true church is full of grace and mercy. They had good intentions as the Fundamentalist movement had left such a bad taste in the mouths of so many in our land. However, the unintended result was a very watered down and superficial church. And as our culture began to shift into a much more superficial state, these churches only became more and more popular and often couldn't help but cater to this shift in our culture more and more as they saw their churches get bigger and bigger.

Making matters worse was the rise of Progressive Christianity. Knowledgeable and devout members of Progressive Christianity are actually quite against the superficiality of so much of the church today. It is one of their biggest selling points with young people raised in these seeker-sensitive churches. However, many younger people not raised in church today often hear a combination of superficiality and questioning of the Bible from many famous people. Many famous athletes, artists, and influencers take from the superficiality of many of the seeker-sensitive churches, while also taking from the notions of the Progressive Christians that one doesn't have to accept all of the Bible in order to love "Jesus." They love the idea that they can still be woke and loved in our culture, while ignoring the fact that most Progressive Christians are actually calling people to a much harder form of "Christianity." This has led to a "pop-Christianity." And this form of "Christianity" is becoming very popular in our day as basically a watered down version of Progressive Christianity.

Hence, today you will often see cheesy signs; bumper stickers; shirts; hats; trinkets; jewelry; etc.; that say all sorts of lame things about "Christianity." "Honk for Jesus" would be a good example. Many true Christians often don't know how to react to all of this. Most can see that something is very wrong here. However, most still want to use some symbols that tell the world that they are believers. For example, I often wear Christian shirts in the hopes of stirring up conversation. I have one that says "Jesus is God;" one that shows the 5 *solas* of the Reformation; and one with a picture of John Calvin on it. So, I'm not against all of this stuff. I know many Christian women who wear modest and beautiful cross necklaces to display for the world that they are followers of Jesus. But, some Christians, including many Reformed ones, believe that we should

avoid all of this altogether. Hence, we need to discuss how we can have some balance in this environment.

My best advice is to keep these things to a minimum and to avoid anything that is blatantly cheesy and superficial. I'm not saying that every person with a "Honk for Jesus" bumper sticker isn't saved. But I do believe that all things along those lines are deeply inappropriate, especially in our current situation in this country. Jesus is not a slogan to be exploited. He is Almighty God and we must ever keep this in mind.

Images of God

All true and knowledgeable Christians have always understood that we can never make an image of the actual nature of God because it is entirely invisible. And all true Christians have always understood that we are never ever allowed to worship any image of God. We are never ever to worship any image whatsoever! However, most Christians throughout church history and today believe that making images of God in the sense of images that represent Him is not unbiblical. However, most classically Reformed Christians since the Reformation took the opposite position. That is no longer the case today, but we should recognize this history. This was especially true of the Puritans. Therefore, as someone who considers himself classically Reformed and has the deepest love and respect for the Puritans, this is an issue I must seriously grapple with.

What makes this issue so tough is that the Bible nowhere really condemns such images, but it also nowhere recommends them either. Further, the Bible is very clear about the dangers of idolatry. Humans, even true Christians, are always prone to idolatry. And the medieval church did eventually degenerate into fully worshiping these images of God despite the fact that it always denied doing so. So, on the one hand, it would seem that wisdom would say that we should indeed avoid them altogether. But, on the other hand, we have to remember how much God hates legalism. That is very clear from the Bible as a whole, but it was especially the case with Jesus while on earth. This is why so many classically Reformed people like myself have always had a difficult time with this issue. Most try to maintain the balance by saying that they are

permissible, but we must approach them with the absolute highest degree of caution. And that is my position.

With all of this laid out, it should be said that the regulative principle would certainly seem to teach that they should not be in church services. I personally do not even believe that crosses should be in worship services. I think it is fine for people to wear crosses on their person, but I do not believe that crosses should be part of the decor of any church service. I have no problem with crosses outside of where the actual services take place. Hence, I think crosses and other Christian symbols (including modest images of God) are a very healthy and good thing outside of the church building, or on the church building, or in other rooms within the church building. But, I do believe that crosses or other symbols within a church service do violate the regulative principle. I understand that this probably seems extreme to many, but again, we should never call anything worship that God does not clearly consider worship. Many may argue that these symbols are not part of the actual worship service. They are merely there for ambience. We all know deep down that is not the case. We all know deep down that they are there in order to try to enhance the worship of God. But, if God does not tell us to enhance our worship in this way, we should not try to do so.

Cessationism

Before I attempt to defend this doctrine, I must first explain it as there is a lot of confusion surrounding it in the church today. Many believe that it is saying that we can know nothing outside of the Bible. That is not what the doctrine is saying. Many believe that it is saying that miracles can no longer happen today. That is not what the doctrine is saying. Many believe that it is saying that spiritual gifts no longer exist today. That is not what it is saying. All that the doctrine is saying is that the revelatory gifts and all of the gifts in connection with the revelatory gifts have ceased since the completion of the Bible. And by *revelatory*, I mean all of the gifts God used to give His word. If we believe that God is no longer giving His word since the completion of the Bible, then it follows that the revelatory gifts have ceased.

The revelatory gifts include all of the gifts God used to give prophecy. If you remember from the second book of my “basics” series, prophecy is how God gave His word. And prophecy does not only refer to predicting the future. It does indeed include that, but it also includes forthtelling. Forthtelling is when God gives us His word in ways that do not include predicting the future, or what is known as *foretelling*. Forthtelling includes law; historical narrative; poetry; parables; metaphors; analogies; epistles; etc. And God often spoke to His prophets in many different ways. He did so through dreams; visions; angels; directly talking to them; and often by simply impressing upon their minds what He wanted them to say. There were exceptions here. Sometimes God would speak to a large group of His people through an angel or through His own voice. But, these were always exceptions that prove the rule. The rule was that God mostly spoke through His prophets and He gave them His revelation in numerous diverse ways.

God spoke through certain prophets before the writing of Deuteronomy 18, and probably had the prophets orally explain what is given to us in this section of Scripture before it was written. But, Deuteronomy 18 is the first time God had the requirements for prophets written down for His people. Now, much of this section does specifically apply to Jesus. However, it is clear that this section also applies to prophets in general. And this extremely important part of Scripture is Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Here, it makes it clear that only prophets are to speak for God and that we can know that someone is not a true prophet if anything he or she foretells about the future does not come to pass. Now, it is true that often God prophesied certain things that were contingent upon the obedience of the people of God. And sometimes this is not always specified at first, but is implied by the fact that God often gives prophecies in this nature. However, there are times when God is so specific that it is clear He is saying something is or is not going to happen. And when prophets were this specific, they could be tested. False prophets were to be utterly rejected. The Bible also knows nothing of any notion of prophets getting the gist of things correct, but being able to make certain errors when officially giving a prophecy.

If it seems that I am making too much of one section of the Bible, we see this pattern played out throughout the rest of the Old Testament. Only prophets spoke for

God and the entirety of their prophecies were always to be accepted as the pure word of God, whether spoken or written. It is important that we distinguish between official prophets and unofficial prophets. Official prophets were those who were called to be full-time prophets. Examples of this would be Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah. Unofficial prophets were those who were called to some other duty, but who nonetheless still often prophesied. Sometimes they were not recognized as prophets until after their deaths. Two major examples of this would be David and Solomon. Both were kings and that was their calling. However, God often spoke to them directly and they were both used to write Scripture. According to the Bible then, they were prophets. And this is explicitly stated in regard to David in Acts 2:29-31.

The apostles in the New Testament were clearly prophets. They were more than just prophets, but being a prophet was built into their calling as apostles. We see this all throughout the New Testament. Unlike prophets though, they were also the governmental leaders of the church until the completion of the Bible, and they were also the primary evangelists in the early church until the completion of the Bible as well. There were also prophets in the early church alongside the apostles. They also authoritatively gave the word of God. But, they were not apostles. All of the apostles were prophets, but not all of the prophets were apostles. Further, there was no such thing as an unofficial apostle. There are those in the New Testament that are called apostles that were not official apostles. But, this does not mean that they were unofficial apostles the way that unofficial prophets held that position. The word for *apostle* in Greek means *one who is sent*. It did not always refer to apostles in the sense of being part of the 12. It is often used merely to describe those like Timothy that were sent by the apostles or other leaders in the church to do a certain work. All full apostles were official. It was their full-time calling.

And here is where things get tricky and are hotly debated within the church today. Many of the spiritual gifts spoken of in the New Testament seem to have been revelatory gifts, thus making those who possessed them prophets. They may not have been official prophets in the church, but they certainly were unofficial ones. These gifts were the gift of speaking in tongues; interpreting tongues; the word of wisdom; and the word of knowledge. All of these gifts are discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Let's start

with speaking in tongues. In Acts 2, speaking in tongues clearly seems to be equated with giving the full word of God. And in 1 Corinthians 14:5, Paul tells us that when someone interprets tongues, it is on the same level as prophecy. Paul makes it clear throughout chapter 14 that tongues was never a private prayer language the way so many Pentecostals and Charismatics argue today. It was only to be spoken in the church with an interpreter. And when someone spoke in church without an interpreter, the gift was largely useless and was far less in authority than prophecy since no one would know what was being said. However, when the gift was properly interpreted by someone with the gift of interpretation, it became on the same level of prophecy. This shows that when God gave people the gift of tongues, He was giving them the ability to speak the word of God in a language they had never personally learned. In Acts 2, no interpreters would have been needed because the speakers were speaking in the many languages of the foreigners who had come to celebrate Pentecost.

Before plowing forward, I want to address 1 Corinthians 13:1. This verse is often used to say that sometimes Christians with the gift of tongues can speak in an angelic language. Such a doctrine is found nowhere else in all of the Bible and this verse certainly seems to be Paul using some hyperbole. Therefore, I do not believe there is any such thing as a Christian speaking in an angelic language. With all of this information laid out, it seems clear to me that both the gifts of tongues and interpreting tongues were forms of prophecy. If that sounds odd when Paul clearly distinguishes prophecy from these gifts, this is only because Paul is distinguishing between those gifts and the normal use of prophecy. As said earlier, prophets often spoke after receiving dreams, or visions, or through other means. But, the normal means was God simply impressed upon their minds what He wanted them to say or write and then they would go out and say or write these things. That is the normal method of prophecy found throughout the Scriptures, and that is what Paul means when he refers to the gift of prophecy. Therefore, if the Bible is the completed word of God, it follows that the gifts of prophecy; apostleship; speaking in tongues; and the interpretation of tongues; have all ceased. And Paul explicitly tells us that prophecy and speaking in tongues will cease in the future (what was future to him and the Corinthians; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

I understand that much of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 sounds like it is talking about the new earth. For this very reason, we cannot condemn our wonderful and godly brothers and sisters in Christ who take the Pentecostal/Charismatic position on the continuation of almost all of the gifts. However, there is nothing in this passage that demands that we take that position. The Greek word for *perfect* here does not mean absolute perfection. It means more in the sense of complete or mature. We should not at all underestimate the profound completion of our spiritual knowledge that came with the finishing of the Bible. Before that time, the people of God did not have all of God's special revelation and had to do their best to patch things together. We have the fullness of God's special revelation in this life. We so often as Christians can become jealous over those who got to see the parting of the Red Sea, or many of the other amazing miracles recorded in Scripture. And we of course are especially jealous of those who got to see Jesus in person. And we should be on some level. Those believers were blessed beyond measure in those ways. But, all Christians after the completion of the Bible are blessed beyond measure because we have been given the fullness of God's special revelation in this life. We live in a period of completion or perfection in that sense because of this.

Next, let us look at the gifts of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. The Bible gives to us almost no information on what these gifts were. Hence, we should be very careful how we try to interpret them. It seems clear from 1 Corinthians 13:8 that the gift of the word of knowledge was a revelatory gift. And the word of wisdom sounds so similar to it that most cessationists, myself included, believe that it was a revelatory gift as well. However, that gift may have been nothing more than the special ability to give very wise and godly advice. If that is the case, then this gift is still operational today.

Continuationists (those who believe that almost all of the gifts of the Spirit are still in existence in the church today; most associated with Pentecostals and Charismatics) point to many passages to make their case, but the two strongest are 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and Acts 21:1-14. We have already examined the 1 Corinthians text, so let's look at the Acts passage. It is argued that this section of the Bible shows that some people with the gift of prophecy after Pentecost did not prophesy the pure word of God. They say that this section shows that these "prophets" were wrong in telling Paul not to

go to Jerusalem. This does not follow. Paul was disobedient to their message. It is as simple as that. Paul was not perfect and showed real arrogance here. He knew that God had told him to go to Jerusalem eventually, but he impatiently went before the appointed time.

In order to make the continuationist case work, they have to argue that there was a difference between being an apostle and having the gift of apostleship. And they have to similarly argue that there was a difference between being a prophet and having the gift of prophecy. They say that there are no full prophets and apostles after the completion of the Bible, but that there are those with the gifts of apostleship and/or prophecy. They say that those with the gifts of apostleship have the gift of prophecy, but also have the gifts of evangelism and church planting. And they say that some Christians have the gift of prophecy without having the gift of apostleship. They say that this gift entails giving imperfect messages from God. They say that we should listen to these messages carefully and use them to weigh our decisions, but that they should not be considered the full word of God. To say that there is a difference between being an apostle and having the gift of apostleship is a monumental stretch in my estimation. The same is true regarding the gift of prophecy. All true Christians have always agreed that full apostles ceased to exist with the completion of the Bible. Therefore, it is not such a stretch at all to say that other key spiritual gifts also ceased at that same time.

It should be said that a very, very tiny minority of true Christians around the world today do believe that God's word can be found outside of the Bible. And most of these believe that this word comes through actual prophets today. They do not make a distinction between prophets and those with the gift of prophecy. They understand that to have the gift of prophecy is to be a prophet. However, these brothers and sisters of ours are clear that these prophecies must always be interpreted in light of the Bible and if they ever seem to even come close to contradicting the Bible, these prophecies must be rejected. But, for the overwhelming vast majority of the church today, Conservative Evangelicals, there is absolutely no word of God outside of the Bible for us as Christians today. Therefore, these latter Christians must say that all prophecies and interpretations of tongues today do not constitute the full word of God. And in my very strong estimation, that case cannot be made from the New Testament.

Next, let's look at the gifts associated with the revelatory gifts. These gifts were the gift of miracles and the gift of healing. Healing is a miracle and so it may seem odd to distinguish between these two gifts. However, the two gifts are plainly distinguished from each other in Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; especially verses 9-10), so we must distinguish between them. It seems that the gift of healing was specific only to being able to heal, while the gift of miracles probably included that ability, along with the ability to perform other miracles as well. It is true that many today and throughout church history without these gifts have been used to perform healings or miracles. But, these were exceptional cases and those with these gifts could perform these things on a regular basis. Throughout the entire Old Testament, we never see anyone other than prophets with the ability to regularly perform miracles or healings. And in the New Testament, we are plainly told that the ability to perform these things was the special domain of the apostles (2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3-4). It is true that some in the early church other than the apostles had these gifts, but from the passages above it is clear that this was only as they were in association with the apostles. Many of them probably traveled with the apostles on their missionary journeys. For these reasons, we should not see these gifts as operational in the church today.

So, what do we make of the claims of Pentecostals and Charismatics and some others that they see these gifts in their churches? First of all, many of these churches are false churches. Satan can perform miracles as we saw in the second book of my "basics" series. The Bible calls these miracles *counterfeit*. Some solid theologians have argued that these "miracles" are not actually supernatural occurrences, but simply Satan using deceptive methods to make it look like supernatural occurrences have taken place. Based on Exodus 7-8, the early chapters of Job, and many other sections of Scripture, I think this is quite a stretch. It seems that when the Bible calls these miracles *false* or *counterfeit*, it means that they are not directly of God and are being used deceptively to entice people away from God. Most of what goes on in the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement is not supernatural. It is nothing more than sleight of hand. It is still Satanic in that Satan is the one ultimately responsible for all of this, but it is not done by the supernatural power of Satan. However, a great deal of

what goes on in that movement should be attributed to the counterfeit miracles of the enemy.

As far as true and godly Confessional Pentecostal, Confessional Charismatic, and other true churches go, let me say that I was closely associated with a very godly and sound Confessional Pentecostal church for a very long time. I worked at an interdenominational school that was under the umbrella of a very large Assemblies of God church in Honolulu for almost ten years. During this time I heard an enormous amount of talk about miracles, but never once saw anything that could be considered a full-blown miracle. And in the rare cases when a genuine miracle does take place in these churches, they are exceptions and are not done by anyone who has the ability to regularly perform miracles. As far as speaking in tongues, I heard countless good Christians “speak in tongues” during my time there. And this “speech” was not language. It was just babbling sounds and syllables mashed together. I am sincerely not trying to be harsh, but that was absolutely the case. The vast majority of these good Christians understood this completely, but said that they were speaking in an angelic language. Why is it that almost everyone with the gift speaks in that alleged language? Even if we grant their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:1, there is nothing in the New Testament that seems to indicate that this angelic language would be the norm. Therefore, these godly brothers and sisters of ours are not being deceived by Satan, but I do believe that they are badly misunderstanding and misapplying the Scriptures.

The vast majority of classically Reformed Christians have adopted cessationism down through the centuries. And that is still very much true today. But, there is a minority that has not and does not today. And some in this minority group are Confessional Presbyterians. This is why it was necessary for me to defend cessationism in this overarching section of this work.

Finally, I want to very briefly address the school of the prophets discussed in the Old Testament. The reason I bring this up here is because in this subsection we have talked so much about the nature of prophets. And some orthodox Christians try to use this school to prove that there were secondary prophets. Many false teachers, especially Liberal Protestants, try to use this to say that prophets did not always give the pure word of God. The reason they try to use this school is because the argument goes

that if God directly inspired His prophets to say exactly what He wanted them to say in all instances when they were prophesying, this school would have been entirely pointless and unnecessary. They say this because according to them it wouldn't make any sense for such prophets to learn anything. Everything they needed to say would be given to them from God. This does not follow at all. God's prophets were always those who were educated to some degree. If they were not educated to some degree, then when they gave God's messages it would have sounded like they were awkwardly reading from a script. Think about some of those God called to write large chunks of His word. Moses as an Egyptian prince would have been highly, highly educated. Solomon was very educated and knowledgeable. And Paul was an extremely educated man. Thus, at one point in Israel's history, God appointed a school for those whom He had called to be prophets and that makes perfect sense.

Now, it may be objected that the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus Himself and many of the earliest apostles were not formally educated. I am not saying that all of God's prophets needed to be formally educated. But, they would have needed at least some education. And Jesus could read. The New Testament is very clear about this. So, for His day, He would have been far more educated than most. And while it is true that most of the original 12 disciples were probably illiterate when they were first called, they would have been given at least a moderate education before they began their full ministry as apostles after Pentecost. Jesus and Matthew probably taught them to read throughout Jesus' ministry. Peter and John were probably illiterate at first, but we know that later they wrote books of the Bible.

The Illumination of the Holy Spirit

The illumination of the Holy Spirit is the doctrine that refers to the work of the Spirit in helping us as true Christians understand the word of God better and better as we read it throughout our Christian journeys. 1 John 2:27 makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit is our teacher. We saw in the second book of my "basics" series that this does not mean that we don't need godly human teachers. It only means that those teachers can greatly aid us, but that ultimately we are to be taught by the Spirit. The

Spirit uses such teachers, but none of them are infallible as is the Holy Spirit. It makes perfect sense that this would be the role of the Spirit as He is the one who sanctifies us. We have already seen from my previous works, and this work as well, that no true Christian can ever fully embrace heresy. But, we have also seen that genuine Christians can get things very, very wrong when it comes to secondary matters. Some will be far more off than others. All of this plainly implies that some seek after the Spirit in this area of illumination far more than others do. Hence, it is our duty as Christians to seek after Him as much as we possibly can.

All orthodox theologians agree with everything I said in the previous paragraph. Where things get sticky is over how exactly the Spirit helps us to better understand the word of God. Many Christians believe that the Spirit almost gives us sort of a sixth sense. You will often hear Christians say that they just don't have a peace from the Spirit about a certain doctrine. With all due respect to those who take this position or one similar to it, there is almost zero biblical evidence for it. The Holy Spirit is a very clear author. He did not write His word in a confusing fashion. Even when it comes to secondary doctrines where He was not 100% clear, He still gave us enough information that with His help we should be able to come very, very close to what He was driving at. Where the Bible is just not that clear on something at all, that is an issue we should basically say we just don't know this side of heaven.

The Bible is clear that the reason people don't listen to God's clear revelations in His word is due to sin (1 Corinthians 2:14). There is no reason to think therefore that the reason some Christians are so off on secondary matters is due to anything other than sin. Our laziness in studying the word of God and/or our stubbornness about not wanting to believe a certain teaching of the Bible is the reason why we are off on secondary matters. So, when we pray for the Spirit to give us more and more of His illumination, it follows that He will more and more remove our laziness and stubbornness. And this will cause us to give better and better arguments to our brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree with us on certain issues, and we will do so *from the Bible*. The reason fellow Christians often don't have a peace about something is because they don't like a particular doctrine. If they cannot make a good case for their position from the Scriptures themselves, they need to rethink their doctrine.

Guidance and Wisdom

As was said earlier in this work, one can have knowledge without wisdom, but one cannot have wisdom without knowledge. Wisdom is the sound application of knowledge. One does not need to be a scholar to be a wise person, but one must still have some strong and basic knowledge of any topic in order to use wisdom regarding that topic. For example, some people are like walking computers when it comes to basketball stats. They can tell you all sorts of things about the history of the game. However, many of them would not be good coaches as they are not good at taking that knowledge and applying it to actual game situations. They are very knowledgeable about basketball, but they do not have a great deal of wisdom when it comes to the game. And some of the best coaches in history are those that don't know a fraction of what these basketball eggheads know. However, they are excellent recruiters and know how to manage difficult players and so they often have very high winning records. They don't always have a ton of knowledge, but they use what knowledge they do have in very wise ways when it comes to basketball. Yet, if someone from a foreign country that does not have basketball came to our country and tried to be a coach with no knowledge of the game, he or she would epically fail. Even if this person had a knack for wisdom, this would not help him or her one bit without at least a very basic knowledge of the game of basketball.

In the realm of spiritual things, wisdom is the sound application of the doctrines, commands, and principles of Scripture to our daily lives. We grow in this wisdom through experience and by seeking the Holy Spirit for more and more wisdom in our lives. Many Christians ask how much we should make of signs in our lives when trying to make wise decisions. I think we should as a general rule make very, very little of them. I know that most Christians don't want to hear that, but I don't see a lot of biblical evidence to indicate that I am wrong here. I know that many Christians will want to point to the many signs that were given to the people of God as recorded in the Bible, but these were mostly given to prophets or through prophets. We must not forget what I

said earlier about the immense privilege we have today of having all of the Bible. We don't need those signs any longer. We have what we need in the Bible.

A lot of Christians are not satisfied with this answer. They say that the Bible does not tell them whom to marry or what job to pick, etc. So, they say they need signs or many become attracted to churches that reject cessationism. What they are failing to understand is that even in the days when official prophets were on the earth, they did not go around telling each follower of God what God wanted him or her to do regarding such things. And God rarely gave anyone signs regarding such things either. The people of God had to use wisdom just as much as we do today. I understand that this can lead to worries about making bad decisions. But, this is why we must pray all the harder for God to help us look at our circumstances and make the most godly decisions possible.

Chapter 2: Part 2 of Section 4

Other Alleged Positions in the Church

Many good Christians, including even some very godly Confessional Presbyterians, do believe that there are other permanent positions in the church whereby a person must be ordained to this position beyond that of elders and deacons. I disagree with this position and thus wish to explain why in this subsection. We have no indication from the New Testament that any other gifts in the church were to be made official through ordination or appointment. Yes, it is true that sometimes the apostles would impart spiritual gifts to certain Christians through the laying on of hands, but this always seems to be exceptional. Most Christians were clearly given most of their spiritual gifts at the moment of salvation. They may not have become fully aware of them until later, but the presentation in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is that Christians usually receive their gifts at the moment of salvation. And it certainly seems that 1 Timothy 3 is

the definitive chapter on the requirements for the officers of the church. If there are to be other official officers, why are they not mentioned in that section of the Bible?

This in no way means that evangelists; theologians; teachers; apologists; Christian artists; etc.; have the right to do whatever they want. They are all still under the authority of their elders. But, the elders should give all such Christians as much freedom, both inside and outside of the church, as they possibly can. I know many churches, including far too many Confessional Presbyterian ones unfortunately, won't allow anyone at their church to lead any ministry outside of the church without the permission of the elders. I do not see this as biblical. However, if the elders find out that this person is doing or saying anything unbiblical in this ministry, they have the right and obligation to begin the process of church discipline. This, in my estimation, allows for a great deal of freedom while not opening the door to total chaos and heresy.

Complementarianism

Complementarianism is the doctrine that God created men and women very differently with very distinct roles. The egalitarian position largely denies this. However, even orthodox egalitarians have to admit a great deal of what is said by complementarians in order to avoid slipping into complete heresy. They have to acknowledge that God created men and women very differently and that at the very least men are to act in a masculine manner while women are to act in a feminine manner. They also at the very least understand that only women can have children. They also must at the very least agree that before the completion of the Bible God did not punish men and women in the same fashion. Hence, even they are pretty complementarian on many subjects.

The primary difference between the two sides in the church concerns the role of women in the home and the church today. The complementarian side says that women must submit to their husbands until they die or Jesus returns, and that women should not be pastors in the church. I have already explained the reasons why I take the basic complementarian position in the last book of my "basics" series. But, I do want to take the time here to discuss a few more issues in connection with this important doctrine.

The first has to do with deacons. Some complementarians, even some of the most conservative ones like John MacArthur, believe in female deacons. This position is also very common among Confessional Presbyterians who are complementarian. They try to argue that when 1 Timothy 3 refers to the wives of deacons that the original Greek is actually more conveying the idea of deaconesses (female deacons). I do not agree with this interpretation based on Acts 6:1-7. At the institution of deacons, we only see men and therefore that should be the pattern for us as well.

With all of this said, women should be integrated into the life of the church as much as possible, and this should include leadership positions as much as possible as well. I do not believe that women should ever be in charge of general ministries based upon 1 Timothy 2:12. However, any and all ministries for women and/or children can and often should be led by women. Women should be allowed to preach and teach to other women and to small children of both genders. Women can also be teachers; writers; theologians; apologists; evangelists; missionaries; and many other positions outside of a specific church context. We see this very clearly in Acts 18:24-26. Based on that verse, I believe that 1 Timothy 2:12 is only talking about within a church context. This is confirmed by the fact that this verse is shortly followed by 1 Timothy 3, which is all about the officers in the church.

Women members of the church should also be able to fully voice any and all of their concerns at congregational meetings. That seems to be the clear teaching of Matthew 18:15-20. Some try to argue that this is not the case based on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11. However, both of these verses in context seem to be talking about teaching or preaching in a church context. 1 Corinthians 14:35 is admittedly a very difficult verse to understand. Some very godly Christian scholars do not believe it was even in the original manuscript that Paul wrote. Hence, we should not make any doctrines based on that one controversial passage alone.

None of this means that women cannot have leadership positions over men in the secular sphere. There is ample biblical evidence that they can. Deborah was the civil leader of the Israelites for a time during the period of the Judges. And this was a God appointed position. Esther was a queen. While this was not a God appointed position, there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that she was doing anything sinful.

There were certain elements of her position that do not seem to have been godly, such as marrying an unbeliever, but we find nothing in Scripture that actually being queen was unlawful. The Queen of the South visited Solomon and is hailed by Jesus as a godly woman (Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31). There is nothing to indicate that God wanted her to step down as queen after coming to know Him. In Acts, we are told about the queen of Ethiopia and there is nothing to indicate that this position was sinful in God's eyes.

At all times we must never lose sight of the fact that the Bible is unequivocally clear that men and women have been created equal before God. And within the church, both have been equally redeemed by God. Further, even though God deals with men and women differently, and thus punished them differently, we must never forget that men were given more responsibility in Adam (not because they were better, but because God created them first), and they will be judged much more severely at the final judgment. God is therefore not being unfair to women in His dealings in any way, shape, or form.

Before wrapping up this subsection, it will be good for us to briefly discuss the very controversial topic of head coverings for women in the church. Most Conservative Evangelicals reject the need for these coverings and that is certainly my position. However, a very, very small minority of good Christians do believe that they are still required for women today in church based upon 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Hence, we will look at this very difficult portion of the Bible here. The first thing I want to say is that I understand that all of the talk about men being the head of women is very hard to swallow in our day. As said above, all of these verses must be carefully interpreted in light of all that the rest of the Bible has to say about men and women, including the Apostle Paul himself. All Paul is saying is that men are the head of women and women reflect the glory of man because they were created after men and Eve was taken from Adam. That in no way makes women inferior, but it does mean that they have a different place and role than men. The best way to think about this is with the Jews and Gentiles.

Jews and Gentiles are completely equal as human beings. They are both equally made in the image of God. But, Jews are given a higher place than Gentiles because God chose them to be His special ethnic people. Even today, after the time of

Pentecost, when God is mostly saving Gentiles, Jewish Christians are an especially wonderful blessing because they so powerfully reflect God's promises to Abraham. They are the natural branches of Israel (the true church) as Romans 11 tells us. Now, I understand that in many respects it may seem that Jews have not had it so great. This is true, but is largely a punishment for their rejection of Jesus. The fact remains that they have always been given a special place within God's people. However, they are punished more harshly than Gentiles because of this. And that will be true at the final judgment as well. However, very faithful Jewish believers will be rewarded more highly than any of God's people at the final judgment.

The comparisons are not perfect. Gentiles are not punished more in this life as is the case with women. And men are not given a more special place in the church, they are only given more authority and that is not always such a great thing despite the fact that the world worships power. The main point remains though, that just as Jews are put above Gentiles in certain respects despite the two being completely equal, the same is true with men and women. I understand that we may not like the fact that God deals with people differently, but that is His prerogative whether we like it or not.

With all of that made clear, what do we make of Paul's comments about head coverings in this section of his epistle to the Corinthians? Not all Conservative Evangelicals who reject the need for head coverings today (like myself) give the same answer to that question. My position, and the position of many other theologians, is that Paul is primarily talking about hair length in this section. Long hair is feminine and thus women should have long hair. Short hair is masculine and thus men should have short hair. I understand that many true Christians may not want to hear that, but that is my position and I believe that it is what Paul is talking about here. I believe that verses 13-15 make this clear. I believe that Paul is saying that if a new Pagan convert has short hair and she is a woman, she must wear a head covering until her hair grows long. And a new Pagan convert with long hair who is a man should simply cut his hair.

One problem for this interpretation is the reality of the Nazirites in the Old Testament. Male Nazirites were told not to cut their hair and so if God is displeased with long hair on men, it seems very odd that He would command the male Nazirites not to cut their hair. The solution to this seems to be that this was a godly exception to the rule

so that Nazirites could be very clearly distinguished from all other male Israelites. It must be remembered that these vows were rare and most people only took them for a short period of time. As far as those who took them permanently, again, we should see these as exceptions and that their permanent long hair was to separate them from the rest of the male Israelites.

Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are primarily talked about in Scripture in the following verses: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 7; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:11-14; and 1 Peter 4:10-11. Below is a list of the spiritual gifts found in these sections.

- 1.) Prophecy
- 2.) Service
- 3.) Teaching
- 4.) Exhortation
- 5.) Giving
- 6.) Leadership
- 7.) Mercy
- 8.) Word of Wisdom
- 9.) Word of Knowledge
- 10.) Faith
- 11.) Healing
- 12.) Miracles
- 13.) Discernment
- 14.) Tongues
- 15.) Interpretation of Tongues
- 16.) Apostleship
- 17.) Evangelism
- 18.) Pastoring (being an elder)
- 19.) Preaching

20.) Celibacy

Based on what we saw earlier in this work, below is a list of the gifts that have ceased.

- 1.) Prophecy
- 2.) Word of Wisdom
- 3.) Word of Knowledge
- 4.) Healing
- 5.) Miracles
- 6.) Tongues
- 7.) Interpretation of Tongues
- 8.) Apostleship

That leaves 12 remaining gifts and they are found in the list below.

- 1.) Service
- 2.) Teaching
- 3.) Exhortation
- 4.) Giving
- 5.) Leadership
- 6.) Mercy
- 7.) Faith
- 8.) Discernment
- 9.) Evangelism
- 10.) Pastoring
- 11.) Preaching
- 12.) Celibacy

These lists do not seem to be completely exhaustive. For example, in the Old Testament God is said to have filled certain people with His Spirit so that they could do

excellent and creative work on His temple. It would seem very odd for God to give such a gift to people before Pentecost, but not afterwards. And yet, we do not see this gift in the above list. More than likely, all gifts of that nature are subsumed under the gift of service. Hence, the above list may be exhaustive in a broad sense, but many of those gifts could be broken up into very specific manifestations of that gift, especially the gift of service. Many Christians seem to have the gift of prayer and this also could be a gift of service as they fervently pray for the people of God. Having the gift of apologetics would seem to be a specific form of the gift of evangelism. And the gift of teaching is not only referring to the elders. Yes, elders must have that gift, but that gift is found in many others in the body of Christ.

One of the biggest mistakes many pastors in the church make today is the idea that just because every Christian has at least one very specific spiritual gift that is to be used for the benefit of the church, this must mean that all adult Christians should be involved in at least one ministry in the church. There is no biblical justification for this position. Further, there seems to be strong biblical evidence against it. As we saw in the final book of my “basics” series, most Christians are called to get married and have children together. Having a Christian family is extremely hard work. And Jesus was quite clear that we are not to tie up heavy burdens for God’s people. Jesus was fierce with the Jewish religious leaders for this practice. Hence, most Christians are to use whatever spiritual gifts they have to the best of their ability within the context of their Christian family. That is still a massive benefit to the church as most people are saved and first disciples in a Christian family context. Those God calls to be involved in ministries in the church will know this and will act accordingly.

Single Christians and those whose kids have all moved out should be more open to being directly involved in the ministries of the church. However, this is not an absolute obligation. Someone may have the gift of making money and may seek to work as hard as possible in order to give as much to the church. Such a gift would be a specific form of the gift of service. And such a person could be used much more by focusing on his or her ability to make money. Now of course this person is still obligated to attend church and be a member of a church. I am not denying that in any way. But, he or she is not necessarily obligated to be involved in any specific ministry.

Many Christians wonder how they can know what spiritual gift they have. This is something that far too many Christians overly stress about. Most Christians only have one gift and that is fine. It is not a competition. And don't forget that some people have many gifts and are center stage in the church, but are nevertheless very lukewarm in their overall walk with God. Those with only one humble gift who are on fire for God will be far more rewarded at the final judgment than these other Christians. And God will eventually reveal to you your gift. It will become clear that you have a passion for something on the list above and you will begin to see God use that gift. Even if it is only with your children, that is entirely fine and biblical.

Observing Old Testament Rituals as Christians Today

Many Christians today believe that it is ok for us to observe Jewish worship practices as long as we are clear that we are not doing so for salvation and that we do not require this of all Christians. Many will perform Passover dinners. Many Jewish Christians believe that this is a central aspect to their faith as Jewish believers. In my very strong estimation, this is not biblical. And the overwhelming vast majority of theologians for the past 2 thousand years have agreed with me. Colossians 2:16-17 and the entire Book of Hebrews seem to clearly be against this view. Those who advocate the opposite position of me point to the fact that the Jewish Christians in the early church are recorded in Acts as still observing many of the Jewish religious practices well after Pentecost. This was only something God had them do temporarily so as to avoid being overly offensive to the Jews. The above sections of Scripture certainly seem to me to be saying that this was not to continue forever.

The Laying on of Hands

The New Testament often describes the practice of the laying on of hands. Because of this, many Christians wonder what this practice was and if it should still be practiced today. Throughout the New Testament we see the apostles use this practice to authoritatively give people the Spirit; or to baptize them; or to anoint them as elders; or

to give them a spiritual gift. There is zero concrete evidence in the New Testament that this practice was ever performed by non-apostles. Therefore, this is not a practice that should be done in the church today. There is nothing wrong with putting our hands on people as we pray for them as a show of affection. However, this is not required and we should not do this as any sort of official act from God.

Sin is Sin

A doctrine in the church today that has become more and more common is the doctrine that all sin is equally evil. A common phrase that is used by those who hold this doctrine is “sin is sin.” They use many passages and themes to support their position, but the primary text is James 2:10. I will address James 2:10 in a moment, but I do not believe this view is correct. And the vast majority of theologians throughout church history would agree with me. God gives much lesser punishments for certain sins all throughout Old Testament law. And Jesus certainly seems to directly contradict this doctrine in Luke 12:47-48 and John 19:11. The text in James seems to simply be saying that all sin is the breaking of God’s law and makes all of us guilty. We are all equally guilty before God in the sense that all of us deserve hell. Even the smallest of sins deserve eternal damnation. That in no way means that shoplifting a Snickers bar should be put on the same level as murder. I’m not making light of shoplifting at all. But, I am saying that the one sin is astronomically worse and more harmful than the other. This seems to be in accord with common sense and the Bible as a whole.

Living in Sin

Throughout my works I have made mention of the fact that the Bible clearly teaches that true Christians cannot live in sin for very long. I personally believe that the Bible teaches that a true Christian can never live in sin. In this subsection, I want to detail what I mean by *living in sin*. This is because all Christians still struggle with sin. And most of us still struggle intensely in one or more areas. Because of this fact, many Christians will mistakenly question their salvation because they know what the Bible

says about living in sin. Hence, I want to clear this up here. Living in sin simply refers to those who have given up on living the Christian life at all. They may read the Bible, pray, and even go to church here and there to make themselves feel better, but they are not walking with God. It does not refer to those who have intense, even habitual, struggles in certain areas. It also does not refer to those who commit even the most heinous of sins in moments of weakness. Allow me to give some examples of what not living in sin looks like vs. some examples of what living in sin does look like. I think this will help clear this issue up for many.

Let's call our first example Henry. Henry is a true Christian, born of the Spirit of God. He loves Jesus far, far above all else. He prays throughout the day; he makes time for longer, more formal prayers two or three times a week; he reads a few Psalms every day; and He reads large chunks of Scripture on Sunday. He attends church almost every Sunday morning with his family. He is an extremely godly husband and father. He has a good job and he is a good provider for his family. But, he does not work too hard and makes ample time for God and his family. And twice a year, he goes on short-term missions trips with his church to foreign countries. He does not go through the motions and is in almost every respect a faithful and on fire for God Christian. He is not lukewarm. However, Henry deeply struggles with gluttony. He often overeats and he often eats as a way of comfort and escape. To make matters worse, he has an incredible metabolism and so he never gains a bit of weight. Hence, most would never know about his struggle. But, his wife and kids know it. They also see his discouragement over this issue and it takes its toll on the family. No matter how hard Henry seeks God in this area, he often only sees minor improvements. And he has phases where he actually goes backwards in this area of his life. And he has days, and sometimes even weeks, where he grossly overeats and hardly even tries in the slightest to stop himself.

Henry is not living in sin. He merely has a horrible struggle in his life that God has for the time being chosen not to help him with very much in order to cause Henry to seek after God all the more. Eventually, God will of course deliver Henry from this struggle, but this deliverance may come very slowly and may not fully come for decades.

Our next example we will call Jane. Jane is also a true Christian, filled with God's Spirit. She loves Jesus far, far above all else. She prays all throughout the day. Due to her busy schedule, she mostly sets aside long periods on Sundays for more formal prayers and lots of Bible reading. She attends church with her family almost every Sunday, but she misses more than Henry because she travels so much for work. However, she has talked this over with her husband and pastor and they both agree that she is not being disobedient to God in this area in any way. She is an extremely godly wife and mother. She teaches her children the word of God and sound doctrine. She regularly helps with many of the ministries at church, and she is the leader of one of the women's ministries. Her relationship with Jesus is even stronger than that of Henry. She is far from lukewarm, having a profoundly deep and intimate relationship with Jesus.

But, Jane has two big struggles. Even though she has one more major struggle than Henry, she does not battle with either of these struggles to the degree that Henry struggles with gluttony. Yet, she does have these two struggles and they often get her very down. The first is with arrogance. Because Jane is such a competent and successful person, she often feels better than other people. She often becomes very impatient with the incompetence of others. She knows how much this is not like Jesus, and yet the struggle persists. The second struggle is with envy. There are not many people that are more competent than Jane, and so the few that are really get under her skin. She constantly compares herself to these people and longs to be more like them. She often beats herself up emotionally for being such a failure compared to these people despite the fact that Jane is no failure by any sane measure. Jane has fought these struggles hard with the help of the Holy Spirit and she has made amazing strides over the years. But, they never seem to completely go away and this can be very discouraging for her sometimes. Jane is not living in sin and she knows that God will one day fully deliver her from these struggles. She longs for that day, but also knows that God is using these struggles to draw her closer to Himself.

Our next example we will call Jack. Jack is a true Christian. He is regenerate. He loves Jesus far above all else. But, Jack is a very typical lukewarm American Christian. He prays informal prayers in his head to his dear Savior Jesus often throughout the week. But, he can't say that he prays every day as he often gets distracted by life. He

does make time for more formal prayers every few months, but this is usually when he is at a very low point. He reads his Bible every so often and he knows the basics of the Bible stories and sound doctrine. He does not embrace any blatant heresies. He goes to church a couple times a month, but he often will go weeks without attending. He often finds himself binge watching the NFL all day on many Sundays.

Jack is not a very godly husband and father. He struggles to work hard and is not a great provider. He loves his wife very much, but he does not press in to give her all that she needs. He loves his kids very much, but he mostly leaves it to his wife and their teachers at church to teach them the Bible and sound doctrine. He plays with his younger children, and he hangs out with his older children, and they do often talk about God, but not nearly enough and rarely with any depth. And Jack has a plethora of deep struggles that have done horrible damage to his Christian family. Jack has a very bad porn addiction, he struggles with drinking, and he often hangs out with very ungodly friends. Jack hates all of these sins and he does not condone them. He does not defend them and recognizes that they are woefully unbiblical. He often repents of them and seeks God's help. Jack does not view pornography in a casual fashion. He hates this sin in his life and it makes him sick. He often avoids it for long stretches. But, it is an addiction in the sense that he always comes back to it. Jack is not a full alcoholic. He rarely gets drunk. But, he does drink beer all of the time, he spends far too much money on it, he often gets carried away, and at times, he does get drunk. At one point, his casual friends convinced him to go to a strip club and in a moment of weakness he relented. This led him to meeting a woman that night after drinking too much whom he slept with at a local motel. This was a one time event, but it has shattered his marriage. His godly wife has chosen to stay with him, but the damage has been unfathomably bad.

As bad as all this sounds, Jack is not technically living in sin. He is merely a very lukewarm believer. Despite all of this, he still loves Jesus above all else. He has never given up on living the Christian life at least to a strong degree. The problem is that Jack can never seem to bring himself to a point where he really seeks after God with fervency. He does repent and seek after God when he really blows it, which is

unfortunately all too often. However, in an overarching sense, Jack does not seek after God with passion so as to revolutionize his walk with Him.

Our next example we will call Kaylee. Kaylee is a true Christian. She is regenerate and loves Jesus far above all else. But, she is also a very typical lukewarm American Christian. However, her lukewarmness does not show up in the very clear ways that Jack's does. From all outward appearances, Kaylee looks a lot like Jane. The difference is that Kaylee often goes through the motions. She is not inwardly passionate like Jane. To be clear, Kaylee is not entirely faking things. She does love Jesus above all else as stated. She knows that these actions are biblical in themselves. But, she often really struggles to enjoy these things as much as she should. Her mind often wanders and she daydreams about doing other things. Not even blatantly ungodly things, but often things like going to the beach and watching her favorite show (which is a clean and non-sinful show). She doesn't have any blatant struggles like all of our examples so far other than the constant and overarching struggle with apathy. She knows that if she really pressed in, the Holy Spirit would strengthen her, and yet she often can't seem to bring herself to fully want this. She knows she is not as happy in the Lord as she could be, and yet for some reason she stays where she is. Kaylee is not living in sin. She is simply lukewarm.

Our next example we will call Davis. Davis is not a true Christian, but he thinks he is. Davis does not truly love Jesus at all, let alone far above all else. Davis sees "Jesus" as his free ticket to heaven. He thinks he loves "Jesus" on some level and even has moments of emotionally feeling like he loves "Jesus," but he doesn't understand that this is all simply him deceiving himself. Davis often prays, but only so that he can ask for things he wants. He reads the Bible every so often to make himself feel better, but that is about it. He also goes to church every so often to make himself not feel so guilty, but that is about it. Davis regularly looks at porn in a casual manner; he routinely gets drunk; he often goes to strip clubs and raging parties with his friends; and swears in almost every sentence. Davis often takes verses of the Bible out of context and is enamored with conspiracy theories. When true Christians challenge his lifestyle, he arrogantly becomes defensive and tells them to back off as we are saved by grace alone and he's just a "carnal Christian." Haven't they ever read 1 Corinthians 3:2-3!

Man, those Pharisees! “Jesus” would be on his side and they don’t even realize it! Davis is living in sin and unless he repents and receives the true Jesus, he will spend eternity in hell.

Our next example, we will call Raquel. Raquel in most respects seems to be a true Christian. She does all of the basic things one would expect from a true Christian. But, she is not regenerate and she does not love Jesus in her heart. She was raised in a godly home and does most things out of guilt. Eventually, Raquel decides to move in with her boyfriend. This is not the same thing as two young genuine Christians struggling with fornication, and even giving in on two or three occasions. She has given up on chastity altogether with this decision. For a long time she still outwardly acts like a true Christian in most respects out of guilt and tells herself and others that “god” understands her decision. However, over time the guilt is too much. And yet she can’t bring herself to leave any version of “Christianity” altogether. So, she begins to seek out a church that will condone her lifestyle. She finds one and more and more begins to embrace damnable heresies. She refuses all godly correction. Raquel is living in sin and if she does not repent, her fate will be the same as the unrepentant Davis.

Biblical examples of those who seemed to be saved but later it became clear they were living in sin are King Saul and Judas. Biblical examples of lukewarm Christians are Solomon and Samson. Solomon only had a phase of terrible lukewarmness, while Samson was lukewarm until the last day of his life when he became a hero of the faith for his actions that day. David was not a lukewarm Christian. He simply had a horrific moment of weakness and then sought to cover it up out of fear. When this did not work, he had another shocking moment of weakness. God punished each of these men for their actions. One might argue that Samson was plainly living in sin with his relationship with Delilah. However, the Bible never ever says that this relationship was sexual. Yes, Samson visited a prostitute, but that does not mean he made a habit of this or that his relationship with Delilah was sexual. Many will say that the narrative implies that it was as they were living together. That is not so. It was clearly romantic and so Samson assuredly often stayed at her residence until he fell asleep, but the Bible never says he actually moved in or that the relationship became sexual at any point.

Confessing Our Sins to One Another

As we saw in the last book of my “basics” series, we are to confess our sins to each other, especially to our fellow Christians. The problem is that many Christians really worry that they are not confessing enough. We need to have balance here. All of us as Christians are still so sinful (Romans 7) that we still sin against each other, especially those closest to us like our family members, so often every day that it would be impossible to confess all of these sins all of the time. Therefore, we should confess all of our sins, as much as we can remember, to God, and only confess the very serious sins to our fellow believers. The only exception is if a believer comes to us and confronts us about a sin. Even if it is something small, if we did in fact sin, we need to apologize and ask for forgiveness. If we feel that the other person is making too much of the sin, it is usually best to still confess. Our confession does not mean that we fully agree with the gravity that he or she seems to be conveying. With all of this said, if we did not commit a sin, we must gently make that clear to the other person. We are not to be liars and so we are not to confess to something we did not do. In most cases though, we probably did sin to some degree and we should confess.

Fasting

The Bible never commands us to fast on a regular basis. But, the Bible often commends fasting and we often see godly people fasting by example. Fasting is a way of coming before God and showing how badly we want something from Him. It is a way of humbling ourselves and saying that we understand that we have no right to anything from Him, but we are seeking Him fervently for something. It is also a way of showing our repentance before God. In general, the Bible is against works of penance. And there is no formal ceremony of penance found in the Bible as is taught by Roman Catholicism. For the most part, our works of repentance should simply be by way of making things right. If we stole someone’s sandwich at work in a moment of weakness, we need to confess this to God, confess this to the person, and then buy him or her a

new sandwich. And probably throw in some chips, a cookie, and a drink for good measure. The Bible does have exceptions here though. For example, in the Old Testament it often commends repenting in sackcloth (often also called burlap) and ashes as a way of showing repentance to God. The New Testament does not commend these acts of penance very much, with the exception of fasting.

With all of that said, we are not to get carried away with fasting. Many Christians really damage their health by getting carried away here. As we have seen, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We must treat them well. We are not to intentionally damage them. And fasting does not always have to be from food altogether. The New Testament is especially against legalism, and we most especially see that in the ministry of Jesus Himself. And since the Bible never commands us to fast at set times, it certainly seems reasonable that we can fast from things other than food at times. However, it also doesn't seem biblical to never fast from food unless you have a serious medical condition that won't allow for that. Hence, at appropriate times as the Spirit leads us we should fast from food or other things that we really enjoy.

John 9:1-3

As I very briefly discussed in the final book of my "basics" series, many people try to use this passage to say that the punishments of unbelievers are not always the result of their sin. They are taking this verse badly out of context. It cannot be used to negate what the rest of the Bible makes so clear. Jesus' point here is only to say that God's ultimate purpose in allowing this man to become blind was not as a punishment for his sin or the sins of his parents. God was going to save this man and thus use his blindness mightily for the glory of God. Now, of course, God uses all things, even the punishments of unbelievers, for His glory. Such punishments magnify God's holiness and justice. But, God is most glorified in the redemption of His people. Hence, the healing and eventual salvation of this man was going to glorify God in a very special way. And that was the ultimate purpose of God allowing this man to be blind. None of this changes the fact that God could have never allowed this man to become blind in the first place if we had not all sinned in the Garden of Eden. Jesus is not at all contradicting

this truth, He is merely saying that this was not the ultimate purpose behind God allowing him to be born blind.

Jesus is also being clear here that the hardships of people should never be used as a justification for us judging them as if we are better than them. We don't know all of the reasons why God allows bad things in the lives of people. Many times He does so because He is using them to strengthen His people. And even when His purpose is nothing beyond demonstrating His justice, this is no reason to become self-righteous. This is because God often withholds His full punishments towards unbelievers in this life. Many times God will not give unbelievers the full measure of their punishment until the final judgment. Hence, an unbeliever may not have a very hard life compared to many other unbelievers, but this is not always because he or she is less sinful.

Confirmation

Confessional Presbyterians for the most part believe in the practice of confirmation. Many other genuine Christians do as well. But, not all Christians agree with this practice, and a minority of Confessional Presbyterians disagree as well. This practice within much of Historic Protestantism must be distinguished from the Roman Catholic view. The Catholic view is that confirmation is a sacrament. There is very, very little biblical evidence for this. Confirmation among many Historic Protestants is only a practice that is connected to the belief that people should not partake of the Lord's Supper unless they understand the full weight of the sacrament. This is especially the case with children who are so prone to irreverence. With adults, pastors usually make a statement to any visitors about how they should only partake if they are a member of a godly church. With their own members, pastors make sure they are mature enough to partake of the Supper. And with the children of members, there is usually a class that is taught by one of the elders or someone approved by the elders where the teacher makes sure that the children are ready for the Supper. And when the children have passed this class, they are confirmed. This simply means that the church is saying that they are ready to partake of the Supper.

This doctrine comes from the fact that children could not fully participate in all of the sacraments of the Old Testament. For instance, they could not offer sacrifices. Sacrifices were to be offered on their behalf through their parents under the authority of the priests, but they could not bring their own sacrifices. They would often participate in these rituals and festivals to some extent though. For instance, they would travel with their parents for the feasts and be present for many of the activities. This is why we do not believe that children need to be entirely absent for the Lord's Supper. It is healthy for them to be in the service when it takes place to learn about it and see their parents worshiping God. There is nothing wrong with them passing the plates to their parents either. However, they are not to partake of the actual bread and wine/juice. This doctrine is also strongly supported for us in the New Testament by what we see in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. The Lord's Supper must only be taken with the utmost reverence. Hence, children can only be allowed to partake when the church has determined that they are capable of such reverence.

Theologians who believe in infant communion (*communion* is another term for the Lord's Supper) object to this by saying that 1 Corinthians 11 is only referring to adult Christians. They say that we are making the same mistake that those who deny infant baptism are making by applying passages that only refer to adult Christians and then using them to deny infant baptism. This does not follow. The infant males were to be circumcised under Old Testament law. Young children were not allowed to fully partake of any other ceremonies. And even they have to admit a key difference as very young infants cannot eat bread. Whereas an infant that is only a few days old can safely be either circumcised or baptized. And a very young child who is baptized can have it explained to him or her how special this is and that he or she needs to take it seriously. Most children can be fairly reverent on one occasion. However, to ask them to be fully reverent on every occasion that the Lord's Supper is taken is not something that most young children are capable of doing.

Remaining Lord's Supper Issues

There are a couple of remaining issues about the Lord's Supper that are debated among Confessional Presbyterians, as well as other Christians. The first is that some believe that wine must be used in the Lord's Supper. They defend this position by pointing out that Jesus used wine when He instituted the Lord's Supper and that is what we see continued throughout the rest of the New Testament. My position and the position of most other Confessional Presbyterians is that the core element about the wine is that it is the fruit of the vine. We do not think that the alcohol has any symbolic value in the sacrament and in order to not stumble former alcoholics, it seems wisest to give grape juice as an option. This is why most Confessional Presbyterian churches will provide both wine and grape juice as options when they celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The second is that theologians have debated whether the bread in the Supper should be leavened or unleavened, or whether it matters either way. Most Confessional Presbyterians, myself included, believe that it does not matter as long as bread is present. Those who defend the use of unleavened bread point to the fact that Jesus used that type of bread when He instituted the sacrament. Those who defend the use of leavened bread point to the fact that this seems to be what Paul is advocating in 1 Corinthians 10:14-18. It seems to me that based on both of these lines of evidence that either type is fine with God.

Lastly, some Christians believe in private celebrations of the Lord's Supper. This does not seem to be biblical to me. I think that celebrating any sacrament without an elder overseeing it is unbiblical as I have made clear earlier in this work. And even if an elder is present, the example that is given to us in 1 Corinthians 11 is that of a church service. Further, the Passover was to be celebrated with the people of God. Yes, each family celebrated somewhat privately, but they did so alongside all of the other families in Israel. These patterns do not suggest that private celebrations of the Supper are permissible. And we have no examples of them in the Bible.

Defending My Tips for Witnessing from Scripture

One of the key essays I wrote for beginners is my essay where I lay out my advice to the bulk of Christians who do not have the gifts of evangelism or apologetics.

However, it was beyond the scope of that essay to detail where I came up with my doctrine from Scripture. Thus, I wish to express that here.

The first key pillar of my advice comes from the fact that the Bible is abundantly clear that we are to testify of our relationship with Jesus (Isaiah 12:4; Matthew 10:32-33; and 1 Peter 3:15). We are not to fear the consequences that may come from this (the Book of Daniel; Matthew 5:11; Matthew 10:28; and the Book of Acts). Part of this proclamation will be to point people towards the apologists of the church and we have seen this earlier in this work. This is not a cop-out as we also saw in that section. All Christians can at the least testify of the Spirit that is within them and we have already seen that all true Christians have the Spirit of God. We have also already talked about how God for the most part does not save intellectuals and how much He is against legalism. Further, we have already seen how not all Christians have every gift.

Therefore, it is not reasonable to expect most Christians to be either evangelists or apologists. Finally, we must be especially careful about not pushing new Christians too fast. The Bible often talks about those who are baby Christians and we must give them adequate time to grow (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-14; and 1 Peter 2:2-3). At the same time, as those verses make clear, we are to push Christians to move beyond this baby phase. They are not to be expected to be scholars, but they are to learn the word of God more and more as they have time and are able to do so. All of this forms the core foundation for my advice to most Christians about witnessing. The rest of my essay is based upon common sense, my own experience, and other doctrines I have already established in one or more of my other works for beginners. As far as tips for witnessing to our children, I will cover that below in my discussion on raising godly children.

Chapter 3: Part 3 of Section 4

Civil Government

There are a number of views on the proper view of civil government after Pentecost among excellent theologians. I cannot cover them in this work. I will briefly present my own view, which is shared by many American Christians, and you will have to decide for yourself. All true Christians throughout all of church history have always believed in the legitimacy of civil governments and that we should obey them as much as we possibly can. This comes from much of the Bible, but especially from Romans 13. And all true Christians are also clear that the nation of Israel after the giving of the full law of Moses was to follow the civil laws that God gave to them in that law. Further, all true Christians have also always been crystal clear that not all of the Mosaic law applies to the church today, nor does it apply in all respects to any nations today. These foundational principles are all not in dispute here.

My view is that because the church is the continuation of Israel, no other nation on earth can claim to be a Christian nation in the fullest sense. We will see soon that I believe we can and must call certain nations Christian nations in a qualified and secondary sense. But, there is only one true and full Christian nation on earth because God has only one people. Therefore, God's one nation on earth today is His church. I understand that the church is unlike most nations on earth today. That is why Peter calls it a holy nation in 1 Peter 2:9. So, it is a nation. We have a king. It is Jesus. We have a government. It is the elders of the church all around the world. We have a law. It is the Bible. And we are made up of a people. This is the institutional church. All of this forms the basis for the belief that church and state (civil governments) should be sharply distinguished. Notice that I did not say that they should be separated. That is a made up notion of liberals in our day. The two should work together as much as possible. However, they are not to be formally united.

If that is true, then it follows that freedom of religion must be granted to people. If people were forced to be Christians, then there would be an absolute unity of church and state. That does not mean that all religions or all religious practices should be allowed. Some religions, like the KKK, advocate violence. All such religions must be forbidden. With that made clear, as much as possible, nations should allow for religious freedom. If religious freedom is true, then it would certainly seem that freedom of speech and freedom of the press must be allowed. This is because any crackdowns on

these things would inevitably hamper people's ability to hold to their particular worldview. And from these basic rights almost all of the other American rights seem to flow as a matter of common sense. Hence, I believe that the American system was one of the greatest advancements in human history. Since its inception, most of the world has largely copied us and because of this the world has become a far more free and prosperous place.

Many Christian theologians object to this by saying that Old Testament Israel did not allow for freedom of religion. This is true, but it does not prove anything. Israel was a tiny nation that was to be an exception to the rule. They were God's people and so of course there could not be full freedom of religion. And this is still true of the church today. People can certainly visit our churches, but if they want to become full members of the one true church, they must give their lives to Jesus Christ. Many Christian theologians also object to the American system based on Psalm 33:12. But, that passage is clearly talking about Israel and not nations in general.

None of this means that people will not try to abuse the American system. Many try to do so today. It is clear from all of the above principles that under the American system, the government should butt out of our lives as much as possible. Unfortunately, millions of Americans today believe that the government should practically run our lives. They believe that it is the job of the government to fix all of our problems and basically take care of us. There is no way to reconcile such a view of government with the above principles of freedom. As our government gets fatter and fatter, our rights as citizens become less and less important. More and more our government is trying to tell people what they can and cannot say, and what they can and cannot believe, and what they can and cannot do. This is extremely dangerous territory for the American church. We are becoming more and more hated in our culture, and as our government begins to more and more downplay religious freedom, the more the government is going to begin coming after us. That is not me trying to scare you or me being overly pessimistic. That is simply the direction our country is going and we should prepare ourselves and our children for this reality.

Many also try to abuse the principle of freedom of belief by stating that those who want to mutilate children in the name of trans rights must be allowed to do so otherwise

we are allegedly trying to impose our Christian beliefs onto others. This is absurd in the extreme. The same is true regarding abortion. Being against killing babies and the mutilation of children are not purely Christian issues. These are common sense issues. I agree that governments telling adults that they cannot be trans is wrong. We certainly must as Christians tell people that this is against God's law and implore them to repent. That is not the same thing as the government forcing people to avoid being trans. However, an adult choosing to make an ungodly decision is not the same thing as allowing a child to make this decision. Children are not old enough to make such serious and permanent decisions regarding their health. And it is also ridiculous in the extreme to make taxpayers in any way pay for someone to become trans. That is actually a very real form of violating our freedom of religion because we are being forced to pay for something we believe to be deeply sinful.

Children are a different issue altogether. Children must be protected. We should protect parental rights as much as we can. We must do all in our power as a society not to infringe on the rights of parents to raise their children how they please. There are limits here though. Children are often abused by horrible parents and we all understand that in such instances the government has an obligation to step in. If an adult wants to watch pornography in private, that is a woefully sinful decision. As the church, we must ever make this clear. However, civil governments have no business regulating such sinful behavior. But, as soon as a parent allows a child to watch pornography, that is child abuse and we need to stop pretending that it is not. The same goes with allowing children to choose to be trans and begin the process of permanently altering their health based upon this choice.

The government should stay out of all issues such as education; marriage; inheritances; retirement; medical care; etc. All of these issues should be private and the government only messes things up when it gets involved. So many of the most contentious debates in our society today would not even be issues at all if the government had never tried to take over these issues in the first place. The primary role of the government is not to take care of people, but to protect their rights so that they can best take care of themselves. As far as those who run into severe life difficulties, let me say that I am in that boat. So, I am speaking as someone with tremendous amounts

of sympathy. With that said, those in that boat should go to family and friends first, and then to the church or other religious institutions as needed. They are much, much better equipped to handle helping us. The government is not. Unfortunately, in our day most people much prefer to go to the government as they feel it can save them a lot of embarrassment. And this leads to them not receiving the permanent help that they need.

Many Christians who believe in far more government intervention for the poor often point to the provisions for the poor within the nation of Israel as commanded by God in the Old Testament. All these verses prove is that the church must be heavily involved in helping the poor as much as possible. Smaller churches should focus on helping their members who are less fortunate, but they should know what larger churches they can point people to that have more resources. And larger churches should set aside a good chunk of their budget for helping the poor. The nation of Israel was a unique nation, set apart as the people of God. That nation is not a template for secular nations. And by *secular*, I am not denying the fact that Christians should try to make their nation as Christian as possible from a cultural perspective. I will get to that topic shortly. By the term I am only referring to all nations outside of Israel where church and state should be sharply distinguished. All such secular nations can never ever provide for people the very personal help that they need in the way that religions can. That is a fact of history. And when these nations try, it always leads to bigger government and more taxes that often get terribly wasted.

Next, I want to discuss generic statements about “god” that are found in our nation. Many true Christians become very excited about these statements and believe that any attempt to get rid of them is the work of Atheists trying to ruin our once godly nation. This is not the case at all. Generic statements about a nebulous “god” are not in any way honoring the one and only true and living God of all things. The fact that Jews; Catholics; the LDS; and Liberal Protestants; all often wholeheartedly embrace these statements more than proves the point. I understand that many Christians who are very conservative politically like myself may become very angry by me saying this. The fact remains that these statements are not biblical. Most of these statements came after the Civil War and were put forth by Liberal Protestants who were trying to make their

generic “Christian” “god” the “god” of our land. In many respects, they succeeded in the first half of the 20th century, when our nation became thoroughly Liberal Protestant. All religious statements should be kept out of the government. If a government does not officially embrace Biblical Christianity, any statements it makes about religion will be generic, superficial, and ultimately blasphemous. Before the Civil War, such statements were very rare in our nation because the church understood all that I’ve said here.

Now I know that many Christians will strongly object to what I’ve just said in the previous paragraph. They will say that we must make it clear in our official documents that our rights come from God. The problem is that any statements must either be very explicit about which “god” or God we are talking about, or they must be left out altogether. Generic statements about “god” lead to false forms of ecumenism and this is unacceptable. And any statements about the one true God would be in violation of the principle of the freedom of religion for nations outside of God’s one true nation, His institutional church. Therefore, we as Christians must in our witnessing and apologetic efforts to the world make it clear that our rights as citizens do indeed come from God. But, that does not mean that non-Christian governments should be making generic statements about this. As long as the government itself recognizes these rights, it does not matter whether or not they have a proper idea of where these rights come from.

Many of the founding fathers recognized these rights, but had terribly poor views on where exactly these rights came from. I know many people love to point to the statement in the Declaration of Independence about how our rights come from our creator. But, it should be noted that this statement came from Thomas Jefferson who was a Deist. Later in that same document, he goes on to refer to nature’s “god.” No Christian should be ok with that statement. We can still love and rejoice over the Declaration, while recognizing its shortcomings.

The final item I would like to touch upon here in this subsection concerns the concept known as *Christian Nationalism*. This has become very controversial in our day. This is because many fear that Christians are going to try to take over our country militarily in order to turn it into an explicitly Christian state. This worry is grossly unjustified. Yes, there are some crazy heretics out there who hold to such views. Many of them were at the Capitol and rushed into the building on Jan 6 of 2021. They are not

true Christians and are in no way representative of true Christians in our nation, including the vast majority of Trump supporters. It is true that some true Christians do believe that our country should be more explicitly Christian on a governmental level. But, they are not advocating for an armed revolt. That is simply their position theologically and they believe that if Christians were ever to start a new nation that it should be more explicitly Christian. And some believe that our nation was in fact established as an explicit Christian government and are only trying to recover that politically. They are wrong and are misguided, but they are not pushing for armed revolt. Most American Conservative Evangelicals hold to views that are far more similar to my own. And the fact that we are trying to push our culture to return to its Christian roots is our prerogative. We have no interest in an armed revolt at this time. This entire issue is wildly exaggerated by the liberal media today.

The United States Established as a Christian Nation

From a cultural perspective, our nation was established as a Christian nation. And this is something we should be very proud of and should seek to rekindle. This rekindling may never happen as it seems that God is mostly working in South America, Africa, and Asia today. But, we can still pray and hope for revival and reform in our nation. In fact, it is our biblical duty to do so. Far too much of the debate between Atheists and Conservative Evangelicals today in our nation concerning this issue centers on the question of whether or not our country was established as a Christian nation from an official governmental perspective. Both sides are convinced that this is the only question that matters. The fact is that both sides are deeply wrong about this issue. As much as I hate to say it, many of my brothers and sisters in Christ are woefully mistaken about this question. It is a historical fact that our nation was not established as an official Christian nation from a governmental perspective. And they often twist evidence very badly in order to try to make their case. This is dishonest and they are making the church look very bad. If this is you, please repent.

The Atheists are also extremely misguided when they think that the only way to consider our early nation Christian is in the sense of officially from a governmental

perspective. Our nation was absolutely established as a Christian nation from a cultural perspective. And that is immensely important. There are many reasons why this is so important and I cannot cover all of them here. But, I will unpack a couple of them. The first is that from our perspective as Bible-believing Christians, we see God's providence in the United States in powerful ways. Our country has been far, far from perfect. Much of our history has been quite ugly, especially with slavery and the treatment of African Americans in general. However, taken on the whole, and considering just how fallen our world is, compared to all other nations in history, our country has been an absolutely wonderful place. We don't see that as an accident, but as a result of just how Protestant (in the orthodox sense) our country was for so long.

The second is that any and all laws in our nation that blatantly violate Biblical Christianity today, and there are a ton of them now, clearly go against the spirit of our nation when it was founded. The idea that a nation that was so culturally Christian would be ok with overtly anti-Christian laws is insane in the extreme. Hence, when Atheists and others try to defend these laws in the name of the so-called separation of church and state, they reflect either their deep dishonesty or their deep ignorance. In either case, deception is going on because if it is the latter, they are still being disingenuous about how much they actually know. This is not ok and the church rightly must pushback hard against all of these arguments.

With all of that laid out, let us now look at what I mean by the fact that our nation was established as a Christian nation from a cultural perspective. I want to look at where I live as a very good example of what I am talking about. I live in the State of Utah. This State was established as an LDS State from a cultural perspective. To say otherwise is historical gibberish. The State was formed predominantly by LDS people who were looking to have a State where they could live freely in accordance with their beliefs. The overwhelming vast majority of the population of the State was LDS until fairly recently, and even today, over 60% of the State still claims to be LDS. Almost all of the original historical monuments in the State's capital city are in some way connected to the religion. The headquarters and the largest and most important temple of the religion are in the State's capital. Most of the State's legislature is LDS. Both of the State's senators are LDS and it would be almost impossible for a non-LDS candidate to

win a senator seat from this State for the foreseeable future. The governor of the State is LDS.

Where I live in St. George, Utah, almost 70% of the population claims to be LDS. One of the oldest LDS temples ever built is at the center of town and can be seen from most of the city. It is a very large and tall building in a city with not a lot of tall buildings. It is beautiful from an architectural standpoint. They are also building another temple across town. There are LDS churches every few blocks. Many of them are built right next to each other so that there can be a bigger grass area for local young sports teams to practice. These churches are packed every Sunday. You can see this because the parking lots are jammed full every Sunday and that is even with many people walking to church. You can see people walking to church all throughout the day as LDS people dress extremely nicely for church and it is clear where they are headed. Everyone who has ever lived in Utah knows exactly what I am talking about here.

When we first moved to Southern Utah, we spent a year at my parents' cabin in Pine Valley, Utah. This city is about 40 minutes north of St. George. It is a very, very small town and so there are no schools there. Hence, my kids took the bus to a nearby town even further north named Enterprise. This is a small town, but not as small as Pine Valley. Hence, it does have two schools. Almost 95% of the town is LDS. Towns along the lines of Enterprise are scattered all throughout the State of Utah. The LDS church is the dominant cultural influence in this State and it is not even close. It has been this way from the State's inception. In fact, the State, especially the capital city of Salt Lake, has become far, far more secular. And yet, the predominant cultural influence is still the LDS Church.

None of this changes the fact that because Utah is a State in the United States of America, there can be no full union between the State and the LDS Church. Freedom of religion is fully granted to all the citizens of Utah and it has always been this way. Utah does not have a government that officially recognizes the LDS Church as the religion of the land. If it ever tried to do so, it would get in a lot of trouble with the federal government and rightfully so. This fact though, in no way takes away from the basic undeniable fact that Utah is LDS from a cultural perspective. This does not mean that Utah is an LDS paradise. There is no LDS utopia here and no one is claiming this.

There is much about the State that does not reflect the values of LDS culture. There are many people here who are not LDS. There are many people here, like myself, that are very against the LDS Church. Parts of Salt Lake have become very secular and this greatly saddens the LDS people. Many groups exist here that are considered heretical by the LDS Church, especially all of the polygamist groups. And many who claim to be LDS are not very devout. Again though, none of this messiness in any way changes the fact that the dominant cultural influence by far in this State is still the LDS Church.

And the same was true regarding Biblical Christianity and our country when it was first established. I can easily fully detail that for anyone who is interested. If anyone would like me to provide that case, please email me and I will gladly do so. My email can be found at my website. For now, it is important to say that this is absolutely the case and we can and should defend our Christian founding without being dishonest about the fact that our nation was not established as a formal Christian government.

Equality

Countless people in our nation, due to the influence of the far-left, have an outlandishly distorted view of equality. The new buzzword among many of these folks is the term *equity*. By this term they mean that people should be in the same basic circumstances as much as possible. They do not mean that people should be identical. They practically worship diversity. But, they mean that as far as economic conditions and abilities are concerned, people should be nearly identical. This is not what actual equality means and so we need to discuss this very important topic here. God created people equal in the image of God. But, He created men and women very differently. From the very beginning men were to be masculine and women were to be feminine. This did not mean that men could never do feminine things or that women could never do masculine things. Some men are more sensitive than others and that is fine as long as they are masculine overall. And some women are more into sports than other women, as just one example. That is also fine as long as these women are feminine overall. The fall has certainly made all of this more difficult, for some much more than others, but this basic truth was in no way obliterated by the fall.

And many things would have looked differently before the fall as well. Men are generally the soldiers and this is how it should be. I'm not against women in the military at all unlike many other conservative Christians. I'm not even against them being in combat if they can properly handle it. Many conservative Christians disagree with me there, and that's ok. I'm merely recognizing that far more men are going to sign up to be soldiers, especially combat soldiers, and no amount of social conditioning will ever change that. Being a soldier is a masculine trait. That doesn't mean that female soldiers are somehow sinning. It only means that this is an area of their life where they are engaging in something that happens to be more masculine. As long as they are feminine in their lives overall, there is no sin here. And before the fall there was no need for soldiers. But, men still would have been more aggressive before the fall. Had Adam and Eve not sinned and humankind had fulfilled the covenant of works, and Adam and Eve had gone on to populate the earth, men still would have been more prone to wrestling and competitive sports. Obviously, no one could have gotten hurt from these activities as is the case today, but that would have clearly been the case. And God has used this aggression in the fallen world among males to raise up soldiers who can fight against those who are trying to oppress other nations and people.

On top of these basic differences of masculinity and femininity, men were given more responsibility. This is not because they were better or more capable in any way. This was merely God's choice and we are not to question that choice no matter how much we may not like it. Now I believe that this responsibility was only that Adam would be held more responsible for his sin. Many complementarians though, believe that Adam was the head of Eve even before the fall. I do not believe that to be the case based on Genesis 3:16.

Further, had Adam and Eve not fallen and gone on to populate the earth, God would not have made all people exactly the same. Some would have been better athletes, some would have been better artists, etc. There would have been no jealousy as everyone would have fully used their gifts to benefit each other. This is proved by the fact that Adam would have clearly been stronger than Eve as a male. Eve would have been the more nurturing parent as a female. Therefore, there is zero reason to believe

that this same basic pattern would not have been present had we not fallen across humanity.

Equality only means that we are all equal in an overarching sense. As an analogy of what I am driving at here, take the example of two football players. One is a flashy quarterback and the other is a very humble lineman. The two are equally valuable to the team. The quarterback is extremely talented, but this particular lineman is so good that he allows both the quarterback and the running back to gain large amounts of yards on a regular basis. He also helps keep the quarterback protected so that he can have more time to make his throws. The two look very different; they play very differently; they have very distinct skill sets; and they act very differently as well. Yet, on the whole they are equally valuable to the team. Now, in our very fallen world, the quarterback is going to get a lot more credit for his play. This is unfortunate, but it is the way that it is. This in no way changes the basic equality as players that exists between them.

The same basic idea is true with humanity, both before the fall, and after the fall. The big difference after the fall is that we tend to exalt certain skills and traits far above others. We elevate physical attractiveness, success with money, and athletic ability far above other gifts and talents that God has given to other people. In our fallen state it is very hard for us to see Michael Jordan as being equal to someone who has been paralyzed from birth. But, as much as I loved Michael Jordan, I have come to find out that he was not always a very cool person. The paralyzed person may be a far, far more naturally friendly person. The world may not care about this gift very much, but it means a great deal to God. All people are equal before God in this basic sense and we should all treat people accordingly as much as possible.

None of this means though, that God has to treat all people the same. God has the right to do things that we do not have as humans. God certainly will never treat anyone unfairly, meaning that He will never fail to reward what He has promised or punish beyond what anyone deserves. And God commands us as humans, especially secular governments, to treat people as equally as possible. But, God is not obligated to deal with men and women in an identical fashion. He is not obligated to deal with all people groups in an identical fashion. He certainly has gone about dealing with Jews and Gentiles in a very different manner. He is not obligated to treat all individuals the

same either. Some are given far more earthly blessings than others. And we are not to try to override God here. Yes, we are to do all in our power to eliminate as much poverty and injustice as we can. But, some people are going to be more wealthy than others. Some people are going to be more healthy than others. Some people are going to have kids that are naturally better behaved than others. This is the way of the world and governments can never fix all of this. When they try to do so, socialism results and socialism makes everyone miserable.

I've honestly heard people on the left say that anyone can do what Lebron James does if he or she just put his or her mind to it. Um, yeah I'm gonna go with a big fat no on that one. A woman who is under 5 feet tall will never ever be able to do what Lebron James does. It would not matter how hard she practiced and determined within herself to do what he does, it would never ever happen. And this truth does not thereby make her less than Lebron. It only makes them different and unequal when it comes to natural basketball ability. I'm not at all negating the importance of practice and effort either. If James hadn't worked as hard as he did over the years, he would never have been as great as he was. However, the natural ability was there for him to use it if he chose to do so. The natural ability is not there for the woman just described. With all of this made clear, it still remains that the two are completely equal in an overall sense.

Finally, it is very important to understand that this principle also applies to the doctrine of election. God is not obligated to choose to save everyone. I know how much people, including many true Christians, utterly despise this doctrine. But, that does not alter its truth. God is quite clear that He is under no obligation to be equally gracious to all people (Matthew 20:1-16). This is never to be a justification for Christians showing favoritism to fellow Christians in a court of law. A godly judge must judge a true Christian in the same way that he or she would judge an unbeliever. With that made abundantly clear, God can show grace and mercy as He sees fit (Romans 9). Many Christians object to all of this by pointing to the many verses in Scripture that make it plain that God does not show favoritism. All these verses are saying is that God never shows grace and mercy to people based upon any of their inherent characteristics. God will never favor tall people because they are tall. He will never favor more humorous

people because they are more humorous. But, God can and does freely give out His grace and mercy as He sees fit.

Gun Control

All orthodox Christians have always believed that people have the right to defend themselves (Exodus 22:2-3; Luke 22:36; and Revelation 21:8). Pacifism is heresy. To many, pacifism at first glance sounds very Christlike. In actuality though, it is nothing but cowardice and the Bible condemns cowardice in the strongest of terms (Revelation 21:8). It is saying that only non-Christians should be soldiers, police officers, and those who defend their families and neighbors. The idea that such a notion is more in keeping with the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount is absurd in the extreme. We are of course as Christians to turn the other cheek and thus avoid violence as much as we possibly can. With that said, all Christians are duty-bound to protect themselves and those around them. And all able Christian men are duty-bound to offer themselves as soldiers if their nation or a godly rebellion needs them.

Many Christians have said that there is no such thing as a godly rebellion based on Romans 13. They are not pacifists. They believe in the military, police forces, and self-defense. And they believe that Christians are fully encouraged to have these professions and to engage in self-defense as necessary. However, they reject any notion of a godly rebellion. This position does not seem to be in keeping with the image of God that is repeated throughout Scripture. According to Romans 13, we should obey the government as much as we possibly can. Even ungodly governments must be obeyed when they command things that do not directly contradict Scripture. However, none of this means that we should allow any government to overtly oppress us and our fellow citizens. We are not to be doormats. Now, as was said in the final book of my "basics" series, a godly rebellion can only be undertaken when it is clear that it can be won. Hence, when Christians are a persecuted minority, they must accept all persecution, even martyrdom, in the most passive and loving ways possible. And this has often taken place throughout church history. However, when Christians can band together with other good citizens to fight back against a tyrannical government, they

must do so. To fail to do so is cowardice. That is not a violation of Romans 13. That chapter is talking about us as individual citizens. None of us ever have the right to engage in vigilante justice. A godly rebellion is something different altogether.

With all of this in mind, it follows that the citizenry should be allowed to have weapons. The best way to keep any government from becoming too tyrannical is an armed citizenry. Therefore, gun control for the most part is unbiblical. This does not mean that no common sense gun laws are needed. Criminals, the mentally unstable, and youth should be kept from weapons. Youth should only be allowed to use weapons when they are being assisted by law-abiding parents or guardians. I understand what a sensitive issue this is in our day when gun violence has become out of control in our nation. But, the solution is not to take guns away from law-abiding citizens. Better security, red-flag laws, and far more (not less) police enforcement are the answers. These are all solutions the left rejects. It is wrong for Christians to support their agenda. I understand that some police officers and some police forces are very corrupt. The solution to that is to weed them out and clean house. The solution is never to get rid of or downsize the police. The more our society becomes a criminal society, the more police we need. The notion that the opposite is the case is absolute craziness. It is not biblical.

I understand that there are societies where the citizenry is not armed and they have a very peaceful culture. I understand the temptation to see them as the correct template. The problem is that the people of these societies cannot adequately defend themselves when attacked and they have no way of fighting against a tyrannical government if that is the direction their government goes down the line. I understand that in many of these societies, attacks are rare and there are no signs of the government moving in a tyrannical direction. But, attacks do happen and a government can turn tyrannical very quickly. We have seen this throughout history time and time again. Here in the United States, we must work harder to change our violent and degraded culture. The answer is not to take away all guns.

The primary way this is done is through fathers in the home. I understand how much the left hates to hear that, but every single study that has ever been done shows this to be the case. This is not to take away from the vital role that mothers play in the

emotional development of their children. I am convinced that one of the key reasons mental health problems have become off the charts in our country is due to bad mothers. Please don't misunderstand me. I fully understand that many people have mental health issues who have had wonderful mothers. Sometimes these things are simply genetic and it is the fault of no one. With that said, the shocking uptick in mental health issues in our nation cannot be attributed to genetics alone. With all of that made clear, it is the duty of fathers to discipline their children and turn them into good citizens. I understand that sometimes certain children are just incorrigible and will severely rebel even when they have had a great father. But, this is rare. And I am not talking about normal teenage rebellion here. I am talking about severe adult rebellion.

Believe me when I say that I am not trying to be judgmental towards single parents. I am a single parent. I understand that often this is not the fault of the single parent. But, single parents must realize how unhealthy this is for children. Single parenthood should not be celebrated in this country the way that it is. It should be mourned. And single parents must realize this and go the extra mile to take measures to mitigate the harm to their children. One of the best ways this can be done is through grandparents. Male grandparents can often take the role of a missing father in many respects, and femal grandparents can often take the role of a missing mother in many respects. Far too many single parents in our country refuse to ask or seek after this help and wish to do things themselves. This problem is ravaging our country and it needs to stop. This problem has become absolutely out of control in the black community. And if you even point this out, the left brands you a racist. This is Satanic. I understand that the reasons for this problem in many respects go back to racist policies in our nation. I am not in any way blaming the black community for this epidemic. But, the solution at this point is not to ignore the problem, or worse, to glorify it. We must do all in our power to weed out racist policies and call upon black Christians to boldly proclaim the truth to their community.

And none of what I said is intended to let the white community off the hook either. Fatherlessness and violence are both also out of control within our community right now. Most mass shooters are young white males. Fatherlessness and extremely violent video games have both heavily contributed to this problem. I am not a legalist. I have

allowed my kids to play certain medieval or military video games that have some violence. However, every father must monitor this to make sure the usage is in moderation and that the child is mentally healthy overall. American culture is so violent primarily because of the breakdown of the family. Most of the peaceful cultures I alluded to earlier have extremely strong families, such as Japan. I'm not saying Japan is a utopia. That culture puts far too much pressure on its people and this has led to a huge rise in suicide. I'm merely saying that the reason crime is so low in that nation is because of how highly families are praised in that culture. Our culture needs to get its act together and the idea that if we just take away all the guns this will magically take place is naive in the extreme. People will find ways to be violent through homemade bombs and other means. History has borne this out.

God Cursing Certain People Groups

One of the most difficult realities we have to deal with as Bible-believing Christians is the fact that the Bible clearly details for us the fact that before Pentecost God did sometimes curse certain people groups for their behavior. What is even more disheartening is the fact that, as I pointed out in my book on church history, many true Christians used this teaching to defend prejudice in the church and in the broader society. As I made clear in that work, none of these true Christians hated these people groups that they believed God had cursed on some level. They loved them as best they knew how in their cultural climate. They accepted those of them that were saved as their brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet, they still believed in certain practices and policies, both in the church and in the broader culture, that today we rightfully see as repugnant. With all that said, I am in no way denying that many professing "Christians" in those contexts did abuse this prejudice in hateful ways. Plenty did. But, they were not true Christians. With all of this laid out, we must look at these cursings in the Old Testament and try our best to understand them today.

The first thing that we must say is that God did not create any groups inherently inferior to any others. And God never allowed any groups to become inherently inferior to any others even after the fall. All of this is plain from the teaching that all humans are

created in the image of God. However, God did allow certain people groups to degenerate in their behavior more than others. This may sound like God did in fact allow some groups to become less than others after the fall. This is not so. God did not allow any people groups to become less intelligent or less skilled overall than any others after the fall. And every people group has had positive phases morally and very negative phases morally. These phases never last forever. In all of these ways, God has kept all people groups equal overall. The difference is that God before Pentecost did decide to punish certain groups more than others when they were in a negative phase morally. And God had and still has every right to do this. God will make everything right and fair at the final judgment, but this does not mean that He has to treat all people in the same exact manner in this life. He most certainly does not and the Bible is quite clear that He often chooses not to do so. And before Pentecost, God did at times choose to curse entire people groups as groups. We may not like this today, but the word of God has spoken.

With that made clear, there is zero evidence that God has or will ever again curse any people group as a group across the board after Pentecost. The only thing that remotely comes close to this is Paul's words found in Titus 1:10-14. But, it is clear that the Cretans were cursed before Pentecost and this is only carry over into the time when Paul was writing this letter. The New Testament as a whole is abundantly clear that the gospel is to go out to all people groups equally. There is not a hint that Christians should be more wary towards any particular group. This plainly implies that God will not curse any more groups after Pentecost. This is why the church has pushed for governmental and cultural equality so hard, despite its mishaps in this area at times. And the world has more and more gotten on board with this.

All that I said in the previous paragraph may seem to be contradicted by the fact that God has indeed punished the Jews as a group for their rejection of their Messiah. There is a difference between God punishing certain groups behind the scenes and Him openly cursing any group. God still does the former, but not the latter. When God openly curses a group of people, the people of God must outwardly treat them differently. They are not allowed to hate that group or be prejudiced in their hearts towards this group, but God gives them certain instructions on how to proceed in their relations with this

group. With the Canaanites, for example, the people of God were instructed to annihilate them. They were also given permission to take them as slaves until that annihilation was complete. And the Moabites, as another example, were not allowed to join the Israelites for a number of generations. The Jews were never cursed in this manner. As Christians, we are to love them and preach the gospel to them. We are to rejoice beyond measure when any of them are saved. And we are to wait in great expectation for the time when God will bring most of the living Jews unto salvation during the end times (Romans 11).

Thus, there is zero place for antisemitism in the church today. All of the conspiracy theories about them are ridiculous and gross in the extreme. Any form of Holocaust denial is a denial of the historic facts and is wildly unbiblical. The nation of Israel should be supported and protected by all Christians. Its existence does not mean a lot of what Semi-Dispensationalists say it means, but nonetheless we are to support that nation that has been such a blessing to ethnic Jews.

With all of that made clear, I understand that some may still call my firm belief that the Jews were punished by God for many centuries up until very recently for their rejection of Jesus, antisemitism. I don't say that with any joy in my heart, but I must submit to the Bible. And the Jews explicitly said that they wanted the death of Jesus to be on them and upon their descendants (Matthew 27:25). History has more than shown that God gave to them what they asked for. But, that in no way means we are to condone the horrors that were done to them. I know that fact may be confusing to many. Many may wonder why we would not condone it if what I have said about it being a punishment to them is true. The fact of the matter is that God often uses the evil actions of people to punish others. This is found all over His word. Isaiah 10 would be a prime example of this. God used the wicked and godless Assyrians to punish the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They did what they did to the Israelites out of malice. Their actions were sinful. But, God providentially used their malice to punish His people. Therefore, we must condemn in the strongest terms the antisemitism that has existed for so long, especially as it was found in the church for far too long. Yet, we must still recognize that much of it was punishment for what the Jews said and did to Jesus.

Today, it seems that God is wrapping up His punishment though. The Jews are an extremely blessed people today for the most part. They have been given a nation and most are very successful around the world. Millions have come to Jesus, far more than at any other point in church history. All of this is a huge sign that we are moving very close to the return of our Lord. For this we must rejoice with all of our hearts.

None of what I have said in this subsection gives to anyone any grounds for asserting that God must have judged a certain group in history behind the scenes because a certain group was struggling. I am not in any way trying to pick on the Jews, but they are a very unique case based upon Scripture. We do not know all of the reasons why God has allowed certain groups to struggle at various points throughout history since the completion of the Bible. Some of those groups may have had many true Christians within them and God was using their struggle to further sanctify His particular children. And even those that did not have any Christians within them at the time, He could have caused them to struggle in order to bring about certain conditions that He wanted to be in place for when He did start to save people within that particular group.

Hence, when a natural disaster takes place today and certain Christian leaders come out and say that it must be a direct punishment from God, they are speaking presumptuously. They do not know this. Now, as I've said, all of the evil that takes place in this world is in some sense connected to our punishment for original sin. Even when God uses evil to sanctify us as His children, this evil only exists in the first place because of our sin as we have discussed. That doesn't mean though, that the primary reason God is allowing certain evil is because of a direct punishment.

That may seem to contradict what I said earlier about how all bad things that happen to unbelievers are a punishment in some sense. It does not. God's purposes are often multifaceted. God could allow a particular group as a whole to struggle for reasons other than punishment. But, as a secondary purpose, He would be allowing this as a punishment to all of the individual unbelievers that are part of this struggle. In these instances though, He is punishing them as individuals and He is not necessarily punishing the whole group as a group. And remember, not all the punishments towards unbelievers are due to some specific sin in this life. Sometimes that is the case, but it is

not always the case. Sometimes God is merely punishing unbelievers for original sin. And as I've said many times, God will make everything right at the final judgment.

God Punishing People for the Sins of Others

When God punished certain people groups, this is understandable insofar as the people of these groups were indeed being very sinful. We may not like this reality, but if we are honest, it does make sense. However, what is more difficult to grasp is the fact that it is highly doubtful that all of those in these people groups were equally sinful. It can seem that God was punishing people for the sins of others. What makes this all the more difficult, is the Bible is clear that God does in fact punish people for the sins of others sometimes in a manner of speaking. At first glance that makes very little sense. However, this is not as big of a problem as it seems at first. God does punish people for the sins of others, but only indirectly. Ultimately, they are being punished for their own sins, but God chooses to punish them for these sins at the same time He is punishing someone else. God knows that the punishment of another person can often be very painful for someone. Hence, God may punish the children of one person because of his sins. This is a punishment to this individual because he loves his own children so much. But, God does this to both punish this person and to punish the children for their own sins. God may have been willing to hold off on certain punishments until the final judgment for these children, but chooses to punish them in this life due to the sins of their father. God is not being unjust towards the children at all though.

While God no longer punishes people groups in this fashion any longer, God does still punish the children of certain people for their sins. This has led many heretics to say that governments have the right to punish certain people for the sins of their ancestors. This is not so. Only God has the right to do this as He is all-knowing and all-powerful. He knows the exact right amount of punishment that everyone deserves. Governments do not. Governments can only punish people for very specific and provable crimes. When the government tries to act like God it will always become tyrannical. Therefore, all of this nonsense in our day about how white Americans should be punished for the sins of their ancestors is heresy. The Bible is clear that as humans

we never ever have the right to punish people for the sins of others (Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:20; none of the sections in the Gospels or the epistles on church discipline ever give us the slightest hint that someone can be punished for the sins of another).

Slavery in the Bible

There is ample biblical evidence that God sees slavery as evil (Genesis 9:24-27; God freed the Israelites from slavery; Leviticus 25:44-46; the institution of the Lord's Supper was clearly intended to be a continuation of Passover, which was the celebration of the Israelites' freedom from slavery; 1 Corinthians 7:21; 1 Timothy 1:8-11 [especially verse 10]; and Philemon). As far as why God commanded slavery in the Old Testament in certain instances, it is quite plain that He did so as a punishment for sin. Many of the verses on slavery in the Old Testament make this clear. And of the ones that do not, it is implied by the other verses. In the New Testament, God never ever commands anyone to take slaves. God only commands those who already have slaves to treat their slaves well. Does this mean that slaveholders are off the hook? No, of course not. All these verses merely imply that God recognizes that freeing all slaves right away is not always a good idea. The slaveholder must do his or her due diligence in helping his or her slaves find a good life after he or she has freed them. In the meantime, he or she must treat the slaves with dignity.

A key question here is: does this mean that slavery as punishment for sin is permissible in our day because God allowed it for His people before Pentecost? No. The reason this is the case is because we have no evidence that God ever allows this after Pentecost. And because the Bible clearly recognizes slavery as evil overall, we must conclude that the Old Testament situation was unique in the history of God's people. God has the right to give certain punishments as He pleases that we do not have the right to give out. Therefore, without extremely strong evidence that we have this command today, we must conclude that we do not have it. With all of this said, because the Bible does not condemn all slaveholders at all times, we cannot condemn every Christian throughout church history that owned a slave. I understand how

politically incorrect it is in our day to say this, but it is the truth. Those who did not treat their slaves well were heretics. I am not defending them. Those who did treat them well were still very wrong and sinful for having them in the first place, but they were not fully heretical either.

The last thing for us to discuss here is the fact that God did use the wicked reality of slavery for one very good purpose. God used this system as a picture of our relationship with Him. We are God's slaves and the Bible makes this clear over and over again throughout its pages. Many try to say that this is not the case when we become saved based on John 15:15. This very important verse cannot be used to negate what the Bible teaches all over its pages. For instance, in almost every greeting in the epistles, Christians are called the slaves of God. All Jesus is saying is that He no longer treats us as slaves, but as His friends. He is not saying that we no longer are God's slaves.

This imagery is so important because it is intended to cause us to never lose sight of our place before God. Yes, God has adopted us as His children. Yes, God has made us His friends. Yes, God brings us into His kingdom. God is our Father, our King, and our best friend. We are to have the deepest intimacy with Him. And yet we are still His slaves and we best not forget it. We are still to be reverent towards God in the extreme and never forget that God is free to do many things that we are not. And God does not owe us all of the answers. Yes, He gives us so many answers and we should be so grateful. But, He doesn't give us all the answers. And we are still to obey Him even when we don't understand because He is our Master. He knows what is best because He is absolutely perfect. You and I are not to question Him. This does not mean we cannot ask God questions. It doesn't mean that you cannot ask Christian leaders questions. You absolutely can and should. But, when the Bible does not fully answer something, as is so often the case, that is too bad. You are the slave. You and I need to shut up and submit when that happens. I understand how much our culture rages against such language. Again, too bad. They are not God.

Chapter 4: Part 4 of Section 4

Christians and Culture

As we saw in the final book of my “basics” series, all Christians must seek to foster good culture to some degree. Any notion of being a hermit “Christian,” or a hermit “Christian” family, or a hermit “Christian” community is not biblical. On top of all that was said there, I want to add here the important biblical doctrine of dominion. The Bible is clear that as part of our being the image of God as humans, God gave us dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26-31). The Bible is quite clear that the image of God remained in humans after the fall (Genesis 9:1-7; Matthew 19:1-6; and James 3:7-9). Therefore, it is clear that while the image of God in us has been marred and defaced very badly because of our fall, it is still very much present. In fact, we don’t just have the image of God, we are the image of God as human beings. Read the passages above carefully and this will become quite clear. Hence, we still have dominion over the earth. In fact, Paul tells us that our dominion technically extends to all of creation (Romans 8:18-25). When we fell, the whole creation fell with us. And when we as Christians will be fully redeemed at the return of Jesus, all of creation will be redeemed with us.

This means that all that we are currently doing in outer space is fully justified. While it is clear from the Genesis passage that our dominion is to be primarily focused here on earth, we are well within our rights to explore and utilize the creation beyond our planet as necessary. This also means that we need to take care of our planet. This does not mean that we need to become radical environmentalists or believe all that liberal scientists say about global warming, but it does mean that we should take care of our earth as best we can. When we see images of endless garbage floating in the ocean, this must make all true Christians immensely sad. The idea that saying this makes one a “tree-hugger” is grossly unbiblical. And part of this dominion is the need to foster good culture. Where bad culture exists, the creation suffers. This is common sense and history more than reflects this truth.

And while we should not force Christian culture upon people, we as Christians know that Christian culture is always going to be the best culture. I know how arrogant

the world may see such a statement, but to say otherwise is to say that God's ways are not best. Be very careful about making such blasphemous statements simply because you do not want to be judged as intolerant by the world. Many Christians will agree with me there, but say that the only way we should do this as Christians is by preaching the gospel. This is not so. We should be pushing Christian books; Christian movies; Christian documentaries; Christian music; Christian schools; Christian charities; Christian adoption agencies; etc. Again, we are not to force these things upon people, but we should do all in our power with the help of the Holy Spirit to passionately and creatively find ways to best nudge people towards these things. As we do this, we will see more true conversions, but we will also see even many unbelievers start to see the world in a more Christian manner even if they do not accept Jesus personally. And the more that is the case, the more healthy any given culture will be.

With all of that laid out, I now want to address some controversial issues within the church in connection with this important doctrine. The first is the belief of many Christians that all Christians should push high culture as much as possible. High culture refers to a very sophisticated culture. It pushes things like classical music; museums; fancy clothes; etc. I strongly disagree with this position and I believe it to be even somewhat dangerous on some level. I think that it comes very close to blatantly violating the principles laid down by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1. Any type of culture is fine biblically in my strong estimation. With that said, I do not think those of us like myself who are not too into high culture should judge our brothers and sisters in Christ who are. If they are using these tastes for God's glory, we should leave them alone on this issue.

What God is clearly against is retreating from the world. Yes, we must be very careful to be separate from the world in many respects. We should keep secular content that we take in as Christians to a minimum. And we should mostly hangout with fellow believers. But, that does not mean that we should retreat altogether like the Amish. That is wrong. We need to engage our culture and seek to change it in a positive direction through voting and the means I discussed above. If you like country music; fairs; midwestern food; simple clothes; and simple forms of art; I see nothing unbiblical about this. And there is nothing unbiblical about digesting non-Christian forms of these things

in moderation as long as they are not blatantly blasphemous and do not cause you to stumble. However, we should also seek to push Christian culture as well.

The second controversial item concerns our freedom in Christ as Christians. I hate to say this, I really do, but a lot of Christians can be very legalistic when it comes to many issues that many people tend to associate with culture at least to some degree. I cannot give all of the examples of this here, but I will point out a few of the major ones. Some of the biggest ones concern alcohol; smoking; raising godly children; Christian education; vaccines; Christian calendars; dancing; sports; entertainment; fashion; tattoos; piercings; burial vs. cremation; gambling; and politics. I have already discussed alcohol and smoking (although I will address vaping more below) enough. Hence, we will briefly look at some of the other issues.

Let us begin with raising godly children. Many otherwise very godly Christians insist on many strict rules for raising godly children. Many have very regimented schedules for their children. Many of them insist that all Christian parents must engage in corporal punishment. Many of them insist that homeschooling is the only way to educate Christian children. None of this is biblical. And I say that as someone who homeschooled my kids for many years and believes in the great benefits of that system. But, the Bible nowhere demands homeschooling. And while I used corporal punishment on my kids, there is no evidence for this type of punishment in the New Testament. The Bible simply does not give a great deal of concrete information on parenting. It simply tells us to raise them to be Christians; to discipline them; to educate them; and to pray for them like crazy! And it specifically tells fathers not to provoke them (Ephesians 6:4). This is in keeping with the overall spirit of the Bible, especially the New Testament, and most especially the ministry of Jesus, that we are to avoid legalism. Christian parents therefore should be as relaxed as possible, they should extend immense amounts of grace, but they should sternly discipline all major infractions. And if corporal punishment is not used, Christian parents must find very effective means of discipline for the most serious offenses.

As far as education goes, Christian parents simply need to educate them in general, and educate them in sound doctrine in particular. And there is no one mold for how this is to be done. Homeschooling; Christian schools; private schools; or certain

public schools; are all fine as long as the parents are deeply involved in the process. I fully agree that some public schools are so violent and/or are so anti-God that no Christian has any business sending his or her children to such schools. However, this is not true of all public schools in our nation right now. My kids attended very conservative and solid public schools here in Southern Utah for the latter part of their education. Sending our kids to such schools can greatly help them socially and to be able to better interact with unbelievers in the future. I fully agree though, that kids should not be sent to public school unless the parents have laid an extremely solid Christian foundation for them first. Christian parents should have taught them all of the basic Bible stories and the basics of the gospel before they are 5. And they should be teaching them sound doctrine all throughout their growing up. And this is not to be given up to Sunday School teachers and youth pastors. They are all a great supplement. But, it is your job as Christian parents to teach them sound doctrine.

If you and your spouse do not have the gift of teaching, you can use godly books, but you should be testing your children and discussing things with them regularly to make sure they are learning. If you have a lot of children and feel overwhelmed, the older children can help greatly with this. And just because you send your children to a great Christian school does not mean that your responsibility here has been alleviated. Again, such schools can be an amazing supplement, but it is still your responsibility to teach them and to monitor their spiritual growth. Also, please do not be tempted to become judgmental of other Christian parents, especially if your children are young. You have no idea of some of the challenges that await you as your children get older. I have been in the church for almost 25 years and I have seen Christian parents with amazing and godly marriages who did everything biblically, and they still had at least one rebellious child. God has not promised to save all of our children and we need to be ok with this. And He has also not promised to save all of our children from young ages. And we need to be ok with that as well. Because of this though, sometimes our kids rebel. Sometimes they walk away from God. Sometimes God truly brings them to Himself after they have walked away, and sometimes He does not.

As far as witnessing to our children goes, don't overcomplicate things. Lead by example and teach them the word of God. Give your children as much freedom as you

possibly can without violating any of the commands of God. Make it clear to them that they must personally receive Jesus. They will not get into heaven based on your faith. But, also make it very clear that you will love them no matter what. It is sinful when Christian parents make their kids feel like they will be rejected if they reject the faith. Only the Holy Spirit can save. You cannot force anyone to believe, including your own children. If they have questions, answer them as best as you can. For all questions you cannot answer, give them the resources that can answer them. If they challenge you over the fact that you cannot answer all of their questions, tell them that you know the truth because of the internal testimony of the Spirit. If they say that is just a cop-out, tell them that if you are wrong, the evidence should show this. And challenge them to actually examine the evidence with an open mind.

Next, let's discuss vaccines. I understand that a lot of Christians are very passionate about this issue and believe that our increasingly ungodly culture is trying to shove vaccines down their throats, but we should take a sober look at the full picture. As a historian, I can tell you that vaccines have done more to help people live past infancy than anything else in all of history. And it is not even close. That is not my opinion. That is an undisputed fact. I'm not saying that this means that you must vaccinate your children. I'm merely saying that we should recognize facts as Christians. We should be all about the truth as Christians and this fact is an important truth that should not be minimized. If you feel that vaccines are currently dangerous, that is totally fine. There is evidence that the Covid vaccines had some serious side effects. But, we should all be pushing for these side effects to be taken away in the hopes of fixing the problem. To be against all vaccines across the board is to say that it would be better if millions upon millions of people died before they were 2 years old as was the norm for centuries until very, very recently in history. I'm sorry, but that is not a biblical position to take.

As far as Covid itself goes, I understand that a great deal of the world basically lost its mind. I understand how frustrating this was to watch as Christians. It became abundantly apparent early on in the pandemic that the virus most affected those over 65 and those with serious health conditions. All such people should have been helped by society to quarantine and protect themselves as much as possible. And the rest of

society should have functioned as normal. The craziness that went on with the masks, the lockdowns, the ruining of businesses, was all evil. However, this does not mean that we as Christians should have been completely against the vaccines. They were very helpful to the vulnerable. I understand that there were risks, but the science was clear that the dangers for such people far outweighed the risks. With that said, forcing people to get vaccines, especially those that were not vulnerable, was tyrannical in the extreme. The fact that many portions of our nation became almost like police states was terrifying. The fact that so many went along with this was even more frightening.

Next, let's go over Christian calendars. The Bible nowhere commands or condemns following a Christian calendar. Hence, there is freedom in Christ here. Those who like to follow them, must not push them on to the rest of us. And those who are not into them like myself, should not condemn those who find them helpful. With all that said, those who follow them should be careful to still follow the regulative principle. If you want to celebrate Lent for example, that is fine. However, no practices should enter a worship service that are merely medieval traditions, which cannot be found in the Bible. I also understand that those that are against them tend to be very wary of many of the practices that take place on the holidays found in these calendars. They are even wary of the holidays that most like myself still celebrate (like Christmas and Easter) despite not following Christian calendars in general. This is because many of the practices, such as Easter eggs, do have Pagan roots. This concern is biblical. We should be very, very careful to avoid Pagan practices. This is why I am so against yoga, despite how popular it has become within the church. With that said, most of these practices are so removed from any forms of Paganism that I think they are fairly innocent at this point. This is not true of yoga, which still forms a crucial part of the worship of many Hindus today.

It is fitting to briefly address Halloween here. This is not technically a Christian holiday, but many Christians do wonder about whether it is ok to celebrate it or not because of how Pagan much of the holiday is. My best advice is to celebrate it at churches that do harvest festivals instead. These avoid the Paganism of the holiday while still allowing kids to dress up in clean ways and to have fun. I believe that this is the best way to avoid both legalism and the Paganism of Halloween.

I now want to talk about dancing. Many Christians believe that all forms of dancing are sinful. Some believe that dancing is only sinful if it is not used as an act of worship. Some churches, especially in Africa, see dancing as worship as one of the most important parts of their worship services. I see nothing sinful about dancing as non-worship as long as it is not immodest or inappropriate. And as long as the music is not severely ungodly. With that said, I see zero evidence in the New Testament for dancing as a form of worship after Pentecost. I understand that dancing was used as a form of worship before Pentecost, but that was rare and there were a lot of worship activities that took place before Pentecost at the command of God that are no longer appropriate for us today. I hate to be a downer for those who see this as a key part of their worship, but I have to be faithful to Scripture first and foremost. I think that such churches should foster the importance of dancing in their culture by dancing to clean music outside of the worship service. There is no reason that this cannot be done in a church building as a ministry of the church. But, it should not be called worship and it should not be done in a worship service.

Let's next dive into sports. Some Christians are very against sports. They point out all of the worldliness that is often associated with sports and there is a lot of truth there. However, there does not seem to be anything inherently sinful about sports. We should do all we can to avoid the worldliness that often gets attached to sports without condemning sports altogether. The Bible neither condemns or commands sports and so there is freedom here. Christians should not be pressured into loving sports simply because they may be such an important part of a given community. And it should be said that while there is far from enough evidence to demand that Christians play or support sports, the Bible says more about them than many people think and these instances all seem to be talking about them in a positive manner. The Bible even refers to a somewhat violent sport, namely boxing, and it seems to do so in a positive light. These references are found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7; and Hebrews 12:1.

Let us next talk about entertainment and fashion. Many Christians are against almost all forms of secular entertainment and making any fashion statements whatsoever. This seems very legalistic to me. I agree that a great deal of secular entertainment and fashion is so evil that we must avoid it altogether. However, it seems

to me that engaging with some of it can greatly help us in our witnessing endeavors. I fully agree that this should always be done in moderation. If you are barely reading the Bible; praying; going to church; listening and watching godly material; and you are taking in secular material in large doses, your walk with God is going to suffer horribly and you are being disobedient to the commands of Scripture to be separate from the world. Also, if we are seeking to only draw attention to ourselves, we are sinning. But, while I'm personally not into fashion at all, I do not think that we should condemn those who like to use clothes to express their personality. Such people are often outgoing people that unbelievers often like and they can use this to witness to these unbelievers. As long as they are not being immodest or too showy, I see nothing unbiblical here.

Many good Christians wonder about hair coloring. Again, as long as this does not become over the top, I don't have a problem with it. You may ask, "How do we define 'over the top?'" Let's say that someone colors his or her hair purple. That seems to be pushing it. But, let's say that it is only done for fun and this person lives in a part of the world where this will not be seen as that big of a deal. And let's say that this person does not have a lot else going on that really causes him or her to overly stick out. I see no issue here. However, if someone has a mohawk; dyes his or her hair purple; is covered with tattoos and piercings; and is dressed in all black; I'm sorry, that is over the top and is not biblical. Such a person clearly just wants the world to notice him or her.

Next, let's tackle tattoos and piercings. The only verse that can be used against tattoos is Leviticus 19:28. I'm sorry, but that is not enough evidence to condemn the use of tattoos among Christians today. And this is coming from someone with zero tattoos and who is not a giant fan of them personally. I'm not biased here. Using the above passage is also seen to be very questionable because the passage just before it tells the Israelite men not to trim their beards. Almost no Christian believes that is a principle that still applies to us today. God often gave the Israelites many commands under the Mosaic law so as to strongly distinguish them from their Pagan neighbors. And many of these commands are nowhere reiterated in the New Testament. As far as piercings go, women are often recorded as wearing nose rings and this is seen as a sign of beauty in the Bible. Hence, I see no evidence for condemning tattoos and/or piercings. With all of

that said, we are not to cover ourselves with either of them. Everyone knows that when people do this the primary goal is to bring attention to themselves and that is sinful.

Let's now tackle burial vs. cremation. The Bible gives no commands here, yet burial is always presented as the custom throughout Scripture. Further, the Bible is quite clear that God is going to raise our bodies at the end of time and thus it would seem unseemly in the extreme for us to incinerate what God has told us He is going to resurrect. With that made clear, God is omnipotent and can reconstitute our bodies even after they are long gone. So, if cremation is the only viable option like in a plague or something along those lines, Christians do not need to feel bad about this or worry that a certain body won't be resurrected. Hence, Christians should see burial as preferable, but cremation in extreme situations is not sinful.

Next, let's look at gambling. Obviously, reckless gambling is sinful. We are to be good stewards and to waste money like this is sheer wickedness. However, gambling small sums of money for fun is not sinful. I used to gamble candy with my former students over big sports games. It was a lot of fun. My father is the most frugal man on the planet, but sometimes when I was a kid we would travel to certain hotels where gambling was allowed and he would put a quarter in one of the machines as a joke. It was like a tradition and for some reason we thought it was hilarious (my brothers and I) because we knew how much my dad hates to waste money. I know some Christians who like to gamble small amounts of money over card games with good friends. As long as it is small amounts; just for fun; in no way hurts the family; and is not wasteful; then there is no sin. But, many Christians should be extremely careful here. Gambling is addictive for some people and so tremendous caution should be used.

Next, let's grapple with politics. I've already said a fair amount about this subject in my previous works for beginners, but here I want to reiterate that it is almost always wrong to make being a part of any political party a litmus test for Christian faithfulness. I'm not saying that this can never be the case. Sometimes one party so stands up for godly principles in contrast to another party, that all good Christians should be a part of this party. I think one could have made the case for the Republican Party in the 80's, 90's, and early 2000's. That is no longer the case. The idea that the Republican Party is *the* Christian party today is absolute hogwash. The party today is largely the party of

Trump and no longer stands for marriage. I think it is deeply mistaken that the government ever involved itself with marriage in the first place, but it is woefully sinful for the government to ever formally endorse something the Bible explicitly calls evil, as with gay marriage. Trump fully supports much of the LGBT+ agenda, and 12 Republican senators just voted to fully enshrine gay marriage in our land. Don't tell me that I always have to vote Republican. I live in the State of Utah and I will most certainly not be voting for Mitt Romney, who was one of those 12.

With all that said, those who seek to defend the Democratic Party today within the church should very much reassess things. The Democratic Party has become anti-God in almost every way. American Christians should no longer vote along party lines in our country today. It is high time that the political divisions in the church stop. Christians should not vote Democrat, and they should only vote for individual Republicans and Independents if they are going to stand up for what is right. As a general rule, we should be against abstaining from voting. I understand that sometimes there are candidates or measures on ballots that we may know very little about and in those cases it is wise not to vote on them. But, for the big measures and the big offices, we should only abstain when both candidates seem to be truly unbiblical choices and sometimes that does happen. And this has become more and more necessary in our day unfortunately.

Another major problem with so much of the politics in the American church today is that it leads to a false ecumenism. Ecumenism is when Christians from different denominations get together to work together for the gospel. Godly ecumenism is a beautiful thing. However, far, far too many Christians in our day will join hands with Catholics; the LDS; Seventh-day Adventists; and others; not just politically, but spiritually as well, in the name of fighting for "godly" political causes. Often, true Christians who are misguided and vote for the other party are condemned for this. All of this is unbiblical. Godly brothers and sisters in Christ who don't vote wisely should be gently corrected as best we can, while those who may hold to good political views but are part of heretical groups should not be embraced as brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ comes before politics. Period. I am fine with working with those from other worldviews on political issues, but we must always still be clear with them that we do not

accept them as Christians. Many true Christians refuse to do this because they will be seen as negative and judgmental.

The final topic I wish to unpack in this subsection is the doctrine known as *dominionism*. This is important because those who advocate for it often try to do so on the basis of the biblical doctrine of dominion. However, they are taking the truth of our dominion way too far. Many take it to heretical lengths. Many Postmillennialists believe in what is known as theonomy. Theonomy is the belief in a specific type of theocracy. A theocracy is a government that officially adopts a specific religion. Many Christians believe in the concept of Christian theocracy, but not all of them believe in theonomy. Theonomy not only believes in theocracy, it also states that all Old Testament law must be obeyed, including by governments, unless a law has been specifically abrogated in the New Testament. I reject all forms of theocracy, and thus reject theonomy as well. However, I do not condemn my brothers and sisters in Christ who hold to these views, as they are not heretical.

The reason all of this ties in with the doctrine of dominionism, is because many advocates of either theocracy or theonomy believe that it is the church's duty to try to bring the whole world under Christian governments in order to fulfill the dominion command. This seems like a major stretch to me, but this belief is not heretical. However, it is a form of dominionism. The heretical version of dominionism is found in the New Apostolic Reformation movement. I have an essay on this movement on my website. It can be found within the section on the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. And that can be found within the section on the religions of the world. This movement not only believes in the doctrine of dominionism, but it states that only this movement with its official apostles can bring this dominion to pass. It also specifically focuses on its particular doctrine of the "7 Mountains." This doctrine states that there are 7 overarching spheres of society that Christians need to infiltrate in order to bring about this dominion. These spheres are figuratively called *mountains*. These 7 mountains, according to them, are: family; religion; education; media; entertainment; business; and government. Another key aspect to their particular doctrine of dominionism is what they call the fivefold ministry. They get this from Ephesians 4:11, and say that these five gifts are the most important in the church and that they must all be functioning in order for

the church to fulfill the dominion command. These five gifts or roles or positions are: apostles; prophets; evangelists; pastors; and teachers.

We have already seen why it is heretical to say that there are official apostles in the church today. Hence, this movement must be shunned by all true Christians. As far as their 7 Mountains doctrine goes, there is nothing in the Bible that states or implies that only these 7 are the areas of influence in any given culture. I can think of many more. As one would example, the arts are an extremely important part of culture. They may argue that the arts are merely a part of the entertainment category, but most societies have seen the arts as being distinct and above entertainment. And I would wholeheartedly agree with that assessment. A beautiful painting or statue is not entertainment the way a sporting event is. It is art and should be recognized as such.

Avoiding Worldliness

The Bible very clearly states that we are to hate and avoid worldliness at all costs as true Christians (James 4:4 and 1 John 2:15). A lot of Christians wonder though, how should we best avoid worldliness. Jesus was clear that He did not intend for us to be taken out of the world (John 17:15). And the Bible is clear that while we are to maintain a very healthy separateness from the world, we are to interact with the world (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Jesus often hung out with the worst sinners and even went to parties at their houses. It is quite clear therefore, that we must maintain a balance here. Legalism is not the answer. But, neither is looseness. First and foremost, we must avoid all sin. Obviously, we are still going to sin plenty as Christians (Romans 7). However, we must avoid seeking out sin or making light of sin. Further, we cannot join any organizations that are blatantly sinful. We also should avoid environments that are blatantly sinful for the most part as well. There are exceptions here though. For example, there is a ministry of former strippers in Las Vegas who go to the clubs and witness to these women. They should not spend too much time in these environments, but their ministry is godly. Men on the other hand, should never go to these clubs. Even Jesus rarely went to the parties spoken of above, and so we should be cautious about making too much of these instances.

A lot of this issue has to do with amounts. Something, like a very secular surf competition, may not be sinful for Christians to attend. While they will undoubtedly hear and see some inappropriate things, if the goal is to see some great athletics out in the beauty of nature and to interact with unbelievers, then this is a godly activity. However, if someone attends these all the time, that is probably not a good idea. The language and lifestyle of many at these contests will start to rub off on the Christian no matter how hard he may try to not let this happen. Hence, the answer is not always that something is totally ok or is completely not ok. Many things are ok in great moderation, but become sinful and worldly when we partake of them too often.

It is important to not become legalistic in this area and set up commandments that are nowhere to be found in Scripture. This was the grave error of the Pharisees and Jesus was not kind to them about this error. As one example, I remember talking to a Calvary Chapel pastor, who was an unbelievably godly man who had my utmost respect. Overall, he was not a legalistic Christian. But, I remember him telling me about a photo that was taken of another pastor with this other pastor on a motorcycle holding a beer. He was incensed by this photo. He could not believe how “worldly” it was. I gently tried to pushback and I asked him what exactly was so worldly about it. He didn’t have a great answer. To him it was just obvious. But, what is sinful about motorcycles? What is sinful about beer? Neither are condemned in Scripture. Now if he wanted to argue that this pastor was showing off, ok, he could have made that case. But, maybe this pastor was trying to reach out to those who may never feel comfortable coming to church. If this pastor’s motives, as I suspect they were, were to be all things to all people, then he was not sinning. As much as I loved, and still love, this Calvary Chapel pastor, it was truly sad that he had strayed from the wonderful spirit of the founder of his movement, Chuck Smith. I know that Smith hated alcohol and so maybe Smith would have agreed with him. But, that would have been so contradictory to the spirit of Smith that went out of his way to reach the hippies of Southern California that were being ignored and judged by so much of the church.

To be clear, anyone who hears all that I’ve said in these last couple of subsections and says to himself, “Oh this is awesome! I can love Jesus and drink beer; smoke cigars; play poker for money; ride motorcycles; go to parties; get tattoos and

piercings; and hang out with unbelievers instead of my fellow stuffy Christians(!),” is utterly missing the point of what I am saying. Most of our lives should be devoted to serving the Lord. Period. I spend most of my time writing theology and witnessing to people online and in person. That is my calling. You need to find yours. All I am saying is that we can engage in the above activities in moderation and as long as they do not cause us or others to sin. And most of our social interactions must be with other believers for the most part. We must be very, very cautious about how much time we spend with unbelievers. Even in work situations, where often we cannot help having to interact with unbelievers a great deal, we should do all in our power to keep things to a minimum. Often, I won't respond to certain things online because it is so toxic and I know that it is bad for my soul to spend too much time interacting with unbelievers.

Marijuana and Vaping

I understand how badly many younger Christians in our nation may have wished that I included these topics in my section where I was detailing a number of more debatable points in regard to cultural issues. But, I am convinced that this would have been incorrect. I'm not accusing Christians who regularly smoke marijuana or vape of being heretics, but I do think they are mistaken. Many may say that I'm soft on alcohol, cigars, and pipes, but then I'm hypocritically way too hard on marijuana, vaping, and cigarettes. Let me be clear: getting drunk is a sin. Regularly smoking pipes and/or cigars is a sin in my strong estimation. The difference for me is that the Bible plainly does not condemn moderate drinking. I understand how many Christians want to argue otherwise, but their arguments are a massive stretch. And I know hardly anyone who only vapes, or smokes cigarettes, or smokes marijuana on the rarest of occasions. While I know lots and lots of people who smoke pipes or cigars on only the rarest of occasions. I'm not at all denying the fact that many do smoke pipes and/or cigars in an addicted fashion. Many absolutely do. I'm simply saying that many do not and the health risks for smoking pipes and/or cigars very rarely are minimal. That is the difference.

And with marijuana, there is the added element of getting high. I understand that many, many young Christians today argue that they can smoke marijuana regularly and

never get high. If that is truly the case, fine. I'm not going to condemn that. I'm just very skeptical. Now, I understand that I'm getting old and I may just have a legalistic blind spot here. This is again why I'm not willing to call my position absolute orthodoxy. But, when I was growing up, I only ever saw people smoke marijuana in order to get high. And it is impossible to be sober-minded as the Bible commands when one is high. That is a fact. Hence, if you are getting high, you are sinning. And if you are casually and regularly getting high, you are living in sin and are not saved. I'm sorry to be so blunt, but that is absolutely the case. As much as I personally hate cigarettes, they do not get people high and that is a key difference. I still believe that smoking cigarettes is a sin because of the horrible health effects, but I'm not going to be as absolute about it as I am with people getting high. I feel the same way about vaping. If you only rarely vape, I don't see a problem with it. But, I just don't see that as being a very common practice. If you regularly vape, I do personally believe you are sinning, but again, I'm not going to be as dogmatic as I am about getting high. With all of that said, if you truly only smoke or use marijuana every so often and do not get high, I don't see any sin in that. If you use marijuana in a very controlled way through the advice of a legitimate doctor for medicinal purposes, I also see no sin in that either.

Finally, in case anyone wants to accuse me of bias, it is important for me to say that I don't drink or smoke anything in any fashion. I am not in any way trying to impose that on anyone else, but I'm just personally not into any of it. Hence, I'm not trying to let alcohol, or pipes, or cigars off the hook because of personal preference.

Divorce and Remarriage

In the final book of my "basics" series, I laid out the basic biblical doctrine concerning divorce. However, there were some key issues that I could not fully address in that work as I was trying to keep it as short and as manageable as possible. Hence, we will look at one of these issues here. One of the most difficult issues concerns remarriage after divorce. Because of some of Jesus' language in some of the key texts on divorce, some Christians have concluded that remarriage is always sinful for the Christian. Based on 1 Corinthians 7:15, myself and many other theologians believe that

the non-guilty party is free to marry after divorce. The guilty party is another matter though. In most cases, the guilty party has shown himself or herself not to be a true Christian and will in the end do whatever he or she wants. The church cannot control this. If the guilty party has not repented and still wants to be part of the church, he or she must be excommunicated if all other means to bring about repentance have failed. The really difficult cases are those where adultery was committed in a moment of weakness, the innocent party decides to go through with a lawful and biblical divorce, but the guilty party has repented. Should such a person be allowed to remarry? I believe that it is unwise for him or her to do so. If he or she can remain single, I think he or she should do so. This is especially the case when kids are involved. This makes things less complicated for them. However, if this person feels very strongly that he or she does not have the gift of celibacy and that God does not seem to be giving it to him or her, then I think he or she can get remarried if full repentance has taken place.

Many object to this by saying that this seems to contradict the teaching of Jesus. But, it seems to me that He is talking about those who are unrepentant in that situation. Any notion of discarding one's spouse for another person because one has fallen in love with someone else or any other such nonsense, is certainly condemned in the strongest terms by our Lord.

Christians and the Single Life

One of the most difficult challenges that is faced by many Christians is being single while very obviously not having the gift of celibacy. And it isn't just about not being able to have sex. It is also the lack of intimacy and companionship. There is also the stigma that is often attached to this, especially for younger Christians who have never been married before. Many Christians do not try very hard to remedy this situation based upon 1 Corinthians 7:25-28. They are badly taking this verse out of context in my estimation. Paul in context is talking about those who do not feel compelled to get married. All such people, even if they do not necessarily clearly have the gift of celibacy, should not stress on this and allow God to lead them.

However, those who long to be married and are very positive that they do not have the gift of celibacy, should fervently seek a spouse. The rest of 1 Corinthians 7 makes this quite clear. The failure to do this often leads to a great deal of sinning and this is a massive problem in the American church today. The last thing I want to do is make my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ feel even more guilty than they already do, but they should be praying and fasting and taking whatever steps they can to try to find a godly spouse. Now, this in no way means that they should rush into a marriage. That is equally a massive problem in the American church today. It is one of the reasons why divorce is getting so out of control in the American church today as many people are marrying people that are not genuinely saved and they ignore all the red flags. Make sure that a future spouse is by all appearances extremely godly. With all of this said, there is no shame whatsoever in being single if that is what God is currently calling you to do. The church needs to stop putting so much pressure on such people to marry and to find ways to better incorporate them into the life of the church. The failure to do this is a violation of 1 Corinthians 7:25-28.

Sex Acts Within Marriage

Many Christians wonder what is permissible as far as sex acts within marriage. They understand that the Bible does not allow for sex outside of marriage, and they also understand just how seriously God takes sexual immorality. Therefore, many become very nervous about doing certain things even with marriage. Based on Song of Solomon, it certainly seems that Christians should lean towards being more open than closed in this area as long as both spouses are completely comfortable with any given act. I do think Christians should avoid anal sex and other acts specifically targeted at the anus. The emphasis on cleanness in the Bible would seem to warrant that to me. I also think Christians should be careful about making videos. As long as the video is only for the viewing pleasure of the couple, I don't see anything unbiblical about them. But, Christians should be very careful about how they watch them because if things are put on a computer or phone, they could get into the wrong hands. Christians should also be careful about pictures. Those also don't seem sinful to me if they are only for the couple,

but people can find pictures and again if they are uploaded to the wrong place, they have the potential to become public. Phone sex or Zoom sex would also be another tricky one. I think for the most part this is ok, but again, Christians should remember that not all of our phone or Zoom conversations are as private as many people think. But, I know that this can be very helpful to couples who are apart from each other and so I am very hesitant to say that they should avoid it altogether.

Christians often wonder about masturbation. It seems to me that private masturbation is not permissible biblically. However, I don't think there is anything wrong with it if it is done while in some way connected to a spouse, like with phone sex. Or sometimes one spouse may masturbate while the other spouse performs other acts upon him or her. This seems to me to be biblically permissible. Or some Christians may watch each other masturbate or one may watch as the other spouse does. Again, as long as there is this connection, I don't see anything biblically that would condemn any such actions. Christians should feel fairly open and free to explore what works best for them. And the church should not be closed off about the subject of sex, but it also should not over promise when it comes to sex. God has never promised all Christian couples the best sex in the world. Some extremely faithful Christian couples struggle a great deal with sex for a number of reasons.

Finally, Christians often wonder about sex while the wife is on her period. This is a very tough one and there is a lot of debate about this one among Christians. The Old Testament very clearly forbade this act for the Israelites. However, there is no New Testament evidence against it. On the other hand, like with anal sex, it would seem that God's emphasis on cleanliness throughout the Bible would lead us to believe that this act should be avoided. But, we also have to take into account how much God hates legalism and so my tendency is almost always to lean towards freedom where the Bible is not very clear. My best advice here is to try to avoid sex during the height of this time as much as possible without getting too stressed about it. For example, if the wife believes that she is basically done with her period and you have sex and some bleeding takes place, I would simply clean up well and move on without feeling any guilt.

Interracial Marriage

Many Christians throughout church history have been against interracial marriage and some still are today. They base this on the fact that the Bible clearly distinguishes between people groups. As we have seen, God even cursed certain people groups before Pentecost. And God especially distinguishes between ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles. God often became very upset over interracial marriage in the Old Testament. Many have also tried to say that they believe that Acts 17:26 supports their position. Because of this evidence, we cannot call this position heretical. However, much of the church today disagrees with the opposition to interracial marriage and I think that is the correct position, and we should continue to try to convince the other side of their mistake.

It is true that people groups exist and have always existed. They always will to some extent. That fact though, does not demand that we be against interracial marriage. Often two people groups heavily marry with each other and create new people groups. This is precisely what happened with the Hispanic or Latino world. That people group is mostly made up of those who are descended to one degree or another from both Europeans (especially the Spanish and Portuguese) and American Indians. And yes, God certainly does strongly distinguish between ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles. But, God will providentially keep this distinction intact. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that God needs our help here. It seems there is nothing sinful about an ethnic Jew and an ethnic Gentile marrying. These instances in God's providence will be somewhat rare, and God will always make sure that there is a sizable group of people that are predominantly ethnically Jewish. The Acts 17 text is quite a stretch. And God often became angry over interracial marriage in the Old Testament because the Jews were often marrying Pagans. God is very against believers marrying unbelievers and we see that reflected in the Old Testament. It is of course true that the Israelites could not have married any of the cursed groups, but these were exceptions.

My position, and the position of many in the church today, is supported by the fact that there is not a hint of condemnation for the practice of interracial marriage in the New Testament. It is further supported by the fact that Boaz married Ruth, who was a Moabite. Not only is this very significant because of the fact that she was not Jewish,

but also because the Moabites were at one time a cursed people group. Yet, their marriage is nowhere condemned in Scripture and they both ended up being the ancestors of both David and the Lord Jesus.

Weddings

A lot of Christians wonder if a wedding is necessary for a Christian marriage. It is not in the sense that even without one, a true marriage can take place. However, in my strong estimation one is necessary in order to be obedient to God. I don't mean that in the sense of saying this is an essential doctrine of the faith, but I do mean it in the sense that it is my position that the Bible consistently gives us the pattern of having weddings. I made that clear in the last book of my "basics" series. All that is required for a true marriage is solemn covenant vows between the two parties (the bride and groom can pick the exact words), and at least one witness to these vows. With that made clear, a wedding should take place to fully celebrate the momentous occasion.

I understand that cost is a huge concern for many couples. I am in no way saying that an expensive wedding should take place. Even just having a big bbq with close friends and family suffices for those who do not have a lot of money. And a wedding does not have to be officiated by a pastor. It does not have to be done in church. There doesn't have to be rings. These are all traditions. I do think that it is a good thing to have weddings in churches officiated by pastors as a way of really making a statement to God that the parties are committed to a biblical marriage, but this is not absolutely necessary. I also believe that rings are a very good idea as a way of making it clear to others that one is married. Again though, they are not an absolute requirement biblically speaking.

And for those with limited means, there is nothing wrong with avoiding those things. There actually doesn't even need to be an official at all. The parties can simply give their vows to each other in front of the wedding guests and then proceed to the feast. A very, very modest wedding is still a wonderfully beautiful thing to be celebrated. Going to a courthouse alone is not following the biblical model. I'm genuinely not trying to make anyone feel bad, that is merely what the Bible presents to us.

Childbirth

A lot of Christians wonder if it is ok to take steps to lessen the pain of childbirth in the light of Genesis 3. The answer is that it is absolutely ok to do so. No matter how many advancements we make, childbirth will always remain a scary and dangerous reality for both women and the babies. Some element of the curse will remain until Jesus returns. Many women today have to have C-section surgeries. While these surgeries are an amazing medical development that has saved the lives of millions, it is still a very invasive surgery that requires a lot of recovery. Every bad thing that happens to us in this life is part of the curse of the fall. And yet, obviously humans are to do all that they can to make things easier for those around us. To fail to do this is to fail to love our neighbor. Hence, the idea that childbirth should be any different doesn't add up. Even when women take high doses of medicine for the pain and have a very smooth birth (and there is nothing sinful about that), these medicines are not without risks. Therefore, there is no such thing as a birth that is entirely stress free in fulfillment of the punishment God laid down. And where God shows a great deal of mercy to people, especially His own people, in this area, we should rejoice.

Chapter 5: Part 5 of Section 4 and Conclusion

End Times Doctrines

In this chapter, I want to go over a number of very important doctrines that are connected to the overall subject of the end times that I was not able to cover in the second book of my "basics" series.

The Intermediate State

The doctrine of the intermediate state refers to where people go after they die before the return of Jesus. Many heretics throughout the years have taught that the souls of all people basically go to sleep, either in the body or somewhere else, until the resurrection of our bodies. And the medieval Western church taught the doctrine of purgatory. It also taught there was a special place for the Old Testament saints before Jesus let them loose after His crucifixion. It also taught that babies who died without baptism went to a special place as well. Further, most Dispensationalists and Semi-Dispensationalists, have a very complicated doctrine of the intermediate state. They believe in a number of different places for humans (including some believers, such as the Old Testament saints) and angels. These places include Hades; Abraham's Bosom; and the Abyss. Therefore, it is necessary to do our best to clear up all this confusion as best we can here. What I am going to detail below was the belief of the vast majority of true Protestants until the rise of Dispensationalism.

All orthodox Christians have believed that the souls of Christians eventually make their way to heaven after they die before the return of Jesus. So that is the best place to start. There has always been some unity on the doctrine of the intermediate state in the church because of this truth. This truth is abundantly taught in Luke 22:39-43; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; and 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. From these passages, it is clear that *heaven* and *paradise* are the same place. Don't let the language of our eternal heavenly bodies confuse you. If you are not careful, such language could sound like God will not resurrect our actual current physical bodies because we would already have our eternal bodies. But, we know from the rest of the Bible that this is not the case. The resurrection of our bodies is in fact so clearly taught in the Bible that it has always been seen as an essential doctrine of the faith by the true church for 2 thousand years. All Paul is talking about here is that God will give us temporal heavenly bodies while we wait for the resurrection of our bodies. These bodies will be eternal in the sense that they will reflect in some heavenly fashion what our physical bodies will look like after we have been fully glorified.

Also, don't become confused by Paul's language about the three levels of heaven. This has nothing to do with the false teaching of three levels of heaven as taught by the false prophet Joseph Smith and the current LDS Church. Throughout the

Bible, the term *heaven* or *heavens* is used in three different senses. The first refers to our sky or atmosphere. The second refers to the universe. And the final and third sense refers to heaven, where God primarily manifests Himself. Paul is plainly referring to the third sense of heaven and calls it *paradise*.

Let's now dissect the doctrine of purgatory. We cannot call this doctrine fully heretical as it does make some sense that a time of cleansing would be needed after we die since we still have a remnant of our sinful nature. However, the doctrine comes very close to heresy because there is almost no biblical evidence for it and it seems to strongly contradict the passages above. The passages above do not seem to be saying that our souls will go to heaven eventually, they certainly seem to be saying that they go there upon our deaths.

Let's now discuss all of these other alleged places where people and angels supposedly go. It is true that the Bible does use many other names for the intermediate state. However, it is a huge stretch to say that all of these names refer to different places. We have already seen that God gives different names to heaven; therefore, it hardly seems a stretch that He would give even further names to heaven and varying names for hell. Jesus said explicitly that hell was created for Satan and his demons (Matthew 25:41). Therefore, it does not make sense to say that they go anywhere other than hell. And since in the very same context Jesus says that hell will also be the place for unbelievers, it is clear that this is the place God has designated to punish all unbelievers, whether humans or angels. It makes little sense to say that there are any other places for unbelievers. And we have already seen that the Old Testament saints were saved just as we are, so it makes no sense to say that believers go anywhere other than heaven upon death.

Many Christians object to this by saying that the Old Testament saints would have needed a place to go before the crucifixion. They say that this must be the case because they could not have been saved before that time. We have already seen in this work why that is not the case. And I would add to that three key points. First, both Enoch and Elijah seemed to go to heaven when God took them up. Second, neither Moses nor Elijah seemed to be in any holding place waiting for Jesus to free them after the cross as they were able to join Jesus at His transfiguration. And third, as I pointed

out in the first book of my “basics” series, Jesus made it clear that the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been resurrected (Luke 20:27-38). That would certainly seem to indicate that they were in heaven with God and not in some holding place.

Many Christians also object that infants without baptism cannot go to heaven because they cannot be saved because they have neither faith or baptism. And they say that these babies can't be sent to hell because that would be cruel. None of this follows and we will discuss the cases of infants and the severely mentally disabled later in this chapter. In light of all of this, it seems clear to me that upon death, the souls of believers go straight to heaven where they await the return of Jesus. And the souls of unbelievers go straight to hell, where they also await the return of Jesus. They are also probably given temporal physical bodies in hell that can be punished by God. And it seems that Satan and the demons will not be sent to hell until the final judgment.

Finally, the last very important and controversial subject we need to explore in connection with the intermediate state is where did the soul of Jesus go after His crucifixion and before His body was raised from the dead? Many Christians take many passages out of context in order to try to prove that Jesus went to hell or some other place during this time. This view was very popular in the ancient church and even found its way into the Apostles' Creed. Many Christians give all sorts of reasons why this was necessary. I cannot examine all of the passages that are used to defend this view in this work. Many are very difficult to interpret. We must remember that we are to go by the clear passages first and only then seek to do our best to interpret the more difficult passages. And Jesus was quite clear in two very plain passages that His soul went to heaven to be with His Father upon His death (Luke 23:43 and Luke 23:46). Further, as we have seen, our souls go straight to heaven upon death, so it would seem that Jesus' did as well. Lastly, the most common reason given by those that believe the soul of Jesus did not go straight to heaven is that He had to free Old Testament saints. But, we have seen that their souls went to heaven upon death like ours and so this would not have been necessary. Some have argued that Jesus first went to heaven and then left for hell or another place. You can believe that if you want, it is not heresy. But, it seems like a massive stretch to me.

No One Knows the Day

Countless heretics and false prophets throughout church history have tried to predict the day of Jesus' return and all of them have failed miserably. Trying to predict this day is absolute heresy (Matthew 24:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; and 2 Peter 3:10). Now many of our Semi-Dispensational brothers and sisters in Christ do say that the full second coming of Christ will be predictable once the rapture has taken place. However, they are very careful to say that no one can predict the day of the rapture. Many good Christians become very confused by Matthew 24:36. They understand that Jesus is saying that He doesn't know this in His human nature, but they don't understand why Jesus says the Father alone knows this day. Wouldn't Jesus in His divine nature and the Holy Spirit also know this day? Yes, of course they do as God. But, the Father is the primary representative of God within the Trinity. That is His role. The Son represents us, God's people. Therefore, Jesus is merely saying that God alone knows this day.

Many Semi-Dispensationalists strongly object to seeing the tribulation as being before the rapture. They say that if this is the case, then people will be able to predict the exact date of both the rapture and the full second coming as we see both as being one event. They say that the moment the tribulation begins people could simply add exactly 7 years and would know the date of Jesus' return. This does not follow. The references to 7 years are not found in any of the extremely clear passages on the end times. Hence, that number may be figurative. Further, God may cut the time short and this seems to be implied by Jesus Himself in Matthew 24:22. They often still object by saying that people would not be going about their normal lives in the midst of the terrible tribulation, and yet that is what Jesus says people will be doing at the time of His rapture (Matthew 24:37-39). This also does not follow. Don't ever underestimate the capacity for unbelievers to ignore the evidence God provides. The antichrist will do all in his power to make people feel better and unbelievers will be given many privileges by him as he seeks to destroy God's people. As horrible as things will be during the tribulation, people will still have weddings and holidays. Jesus' return will still catch them completely off guard.

Who All Will be Saved?

Christians often rightly wonder what will become of those who die in infancy, or those who are severely mentally disabled, or those who have never heard the gospel. Let's start with the last category first. Some Christians believe that most of these will still be saved and basically fall under the category of the previous two groups. In fact, many Christians believe that most people will never truly hear the gospel in the sense of having it thoroughly explained to them. Hence, they believe that almost all people will be saved. This is not the heresy of universalism, but it does come dangerously close to it. Based upon Psalm 19:1-6; Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:22-30; Acts 17:24-28; and Romans 1:18-23; myself and most theologians throughout church history believe that all adults with normal functioning mental abilities who do not receive Jesus will perish in hell for eternity. There is nothing unfair here as the passages above make it clear that all people know that God exists, that they are sinners, and that they must seek Him out for forgiveness. They do not understand how exactly this forgiveness will work, but they do understand that they need it. And if they sought it, God would explain it to them. The problem is that no one will seek it on his or her own (John 3:20 and Romans 3:10-11).

This principle ties in with the doctrine of conscience. The Bible often talks about our conscience and we all instinctively know that we have one if we are an adult with normal functioning mental abilities. This does not mean that all people know all that is right and wrong. We can only have a full ethic from the Bible. And even then, all of us as Christians will still get some things wrong on secondary non-essential points. What this does mean is what we said above about the knowledge of all normal adults, and it means that all people know the very basics of right and wrong. The very basics include that we should not hurt other people without an extremely good reason. People also know deep down that they could never know on their own all that they need to know about God, themselves, and the world around them. And this includes ethics. They all know that the knowledge they have from common sense, their conscience, and the world around us (what is often called general revelation) is not sufficient. But, because people refuse to seek after God, they begin to come up with substitute truths or worldviews as Romans 1 talks about above. This is usually some combination of how

they were raised, what is popular in their given culture, and their own personal preferences.

As far as those who die in infancy or have severe mental disabilities, most Christians today, myself included, believe that God will supernaturally save them. The primary evidence for this comes from the way that Jesus is consistently portrayed as talking about and dealing with children throughout the Gospels. And this basic principle would therefore seem to also apply to those who have severe mental disabilities. We also know from the Bible that God sometimes does indeed save infants (Psalm 22:10 and Luke 1:14-15). It seems that when God regenerates these people, He credits them as having saving faith because they would indeed place their faith in Jesus if they were able because they have now been regenerated. And based upon that credited faith, it seems that God justifies them accordingly. With that said, we must be careful not to be too dogmatic here. All people are under the guilt of original sin. Therefore, the examples of David and John the Baptist could be exceptions. And those that believe this are not to be condemned as harsh. They have biblical grounds for their position. It must be said that God would of course never send anyone to hell as a baby or in the state of being severely mentally disabled. If God does send such people to hell, He would supernaturally make them into able adults.

My position may seem to contradict all that I've said about remnant theology in my other works. It would seem that if God saves those who die in infancy, then the vast majority of the human population throughout history will be saved as most people did not make it past infancy until very, very recently in human history. This is not so because everything I said only applies to adults. God clearly only saves a remnant of the adult population. And all of my numbers and projections are going off of that. Because I cannot be dogmatic about my position, I simply have to say that I don't know for sure what happens to babies who die in infancy and the severely mentally disabled. But, I am very hopeful and believe that God saves them.

Before moving forward, I must address what precisely I mean by *adults* in this discussion. I do not mean it in the sense of those who are fully developed mentally and physically. And I do not mean it in the sense of a legal adult. I only mean it in the sense of those who have reached the age where they are now accountable for actual sin.

They have reached the age where they fully understand the basics of general revelation. The Bible does not give to us a precise age for when this takes place. In all likelihood it probably takes place at different times for different people. Most would say though, that by at least 13 almost all people have reached this age. This does not mean that we should wait until our kids are 13 to preach the gospel to them. Again, many may reach this age when very, very young. Hence, we must preach the gospel to them as soon as they are able to understand it. And if a very young child seems to be genuinely saved, we should not question that.

Next, we need to further explore those who are severely mentally disabled. For the most part, it is fairly obvious who falls into this category. However, it is extremely important that we understand that this is not always the case. In rare instances, some people have a mental health issue that is so severe that they can often come off as fairly normal to us, but they actually do not fully grasp reality. Such people are not responsible for actual sin. And therefore such people could be regenerated and still very much act like an unbeliever. This is very, very rare. But, it does happen. This is why we can never be 100% dogmatic about whether someone is saved or not. We can certainly tell people based upon their beliefs and their behavior that we don't accept them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is even obligated to not extend church membership to such people. However, we can never say with dogmatic certainty that we know someone is saved or not. Only God knows the heart. The Bible is very, very clear about this.

Another key question that often comes up in connection with this group is what do we make of people that were not born with severe mental disabilities, but became that way later in life? Are they automatically saved? We really can't know. I'm inclined to say no. I'm not at all trying to be harsh, but it seems to me based on all that we have seen from Scripture that if a person was an adult with normal mental abilities and never received Jesus, this person will go to hell. I think such people are in a different category than those born with severe mental disabilities. But again, this is a hard question and we should not be too dogmatic about our opinions on it.

Glorification

Glorification is the theological term theologians give to the biblical truth that the bodies and souls of all true believers will be made perfect. Not absolutely perfect in the sense in which God is perfect (all of His attributes), but free from all sin; pain; discomfort; discontentment; and suffering. We have seen from our discussion on the intermediate state that our souls will be perfected at death or when Jesus returns. And we saw in the second book of my “basics” series that our bodies will be perfected when Jesus returns. What I want to discuss here is what exactly our bodies will be like when they will be glorified. We know from what we saw in the second book of my “basics” series that it will be our physical bodies that are glorified. They will be raised to new life. At the same time though, 1 Corinthians 15 is very clear that they will be transformed. This transformation will not be absolute though. Our bodies will still be physical bodies with many of our old physical properties. We know this because the Bible is clear that we will eat and drink on the new earth (Matthew 8:11; Matthew 26:29; and Revelation 19:9).

Therefore, it seems that we will look like a perfected version of ourselves. People will be able to recognize us, but probably only after they are told who we are. It will probably be like when you see a picture of someone you know from when he was much younger, and you never knew this person when he was this young. You would not at first know the picture was of him, but once he tells you it is, you immediately see the resemblance. Don't let some of the language in 1 Corinthians 15 throw you off. When Paul talks about our bodies being raised as spiritual bodies and says that our physical bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God, he is not saying that they will be transformed into some non-physical substance or something. What he says in the rest of that chapter, and what we have seen from the rest of Scripture, makes this very plain. He is merely saying that our bodies in their current state cannot go into the new earth. They will be perfected and spiritual in the sense that they will perfectly desire above all else to worship God in spirit and truth for all eternity.

All of these truths greatly help to explain some of what at first seems to be some odd phenomena when Jesus was raised from the dead. It is important to understand that Jesus was not raised the way that Lazarus and many others were raised from the

dead. Jesus was not merely made alive again and healed. He was glorified. This is why He is said to be the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20). He is the first one of us to receive His glorified body. This is why the disciples could not recognize Him at first. Some object to this by saying that if this was the case, then Jesus would not have any scars. This does not follow. God clearly allowed some of His scars to remain to ever remind us of His sacrifice. We will see those very scars for all eternity.

Finally, we need to address a number of doctrines that have become very popular within much of the church today that are terribly unbiblical. These teachings are all technically heresies, but I don't believe that most who are teaching them are heretics. No official body or organization has adopted these doctrines, and they are usually taught by pastors that are part of the Independent Bible branch that have little to no oversight over their churches. I believe that most of these pastors are simply misguided and would accept correction if it was properly brought to them. Unfortunately, this is often not brought and because of social media, these doctrines have spread very quickly among many Christians.

The first is the idea that all of our non-sinful flaws as humans are not really flaws because that is how God created us. Many heretics do actually use this illogical line of reasoning to defend the LGBT+ community. But, here I am talking about true pastors who do not use this line of reasoning in that fashion. Usually, it is used to say that things like being overweight, acne, etc., are not actually flaws but are merely the way God created us. This badly confuses creation with God's providence. Yes, God directly creates our souls and He directly created the material that eventually became our bodies. God did indeed create us. But, we are deeply flawed beings and in God's providence He brings us about with our punishment in place. And while God directly creates our souls perfect, God immediately removes the Spirit from them (not in every respect as the Spirit still sustains their existence) and they then become fallen and sinful. God does all of this at the moment of conception.

Therefore, our flaws are in fact flaws and should not be called otherwise. And they will be removed from us when we are fully glorified. We should not take away from that wonderful truth. I understand that this can make many people feel really badly about themselves as some do have many physical and emotional flaws. We must

remember though, that ultimately we are all equal overall. I understand that our sinful world tends to focus on certain things more than it should, but the solution to this is not to call flaws good things. That is actually to slander God.

And I can speak to this with some degree of authority. I was a good looking guy and was pretty popular when I was young. It was not as great as the world makes it out to be, trust me. Without Jesus, I often felt just as empty and confused as anyone else. And today, I have numerous very serious health complications. These have caused me to become very overweight and because I don't sleep very well, I perpetually have very bad bags under my eyes. I am no longer a very attractive person. But, in Jesus this does not matter all that much. I am so much happier and full of joy today as I love and serve my Savior than when I was young and good looking. The solution to our flaws is to focus on Jesus, and not to say that they don't actually exist.

The next bad doctrine says that all Christians are children of God, but not all Christians are heirs of God. The advocates of this position say that being an heir is reserved for a special class of Christians and that we need to seek to become a part of this class. This is nonsense. All Christians will be fully glorified and will inherit the new earth as the children of God. Yes, lukewarm Christians will receive very few rewards, but they are still the heirs of God. There is no such thing as classes within the church. Even lukewarm Christians are still fully Christians. They merely need to seek after God more personally, not in order to enter into an elite class of Christians, but so that they can be fully filled with the joy of the Lord.

The next bad doctrine states that we have the DNA of God and that this will somehow be fully realized on the new earth. This is a bizarre doctrine to be very frank. The idea is that because we are the children of God, we somehow take on the nature of God. This in no way follows. We are the adopted children of God. We are not, and never will be, the natural children of God. Yes, we do become more and more like God in moral holiness, but this in no way means that we ever share the actual being or nature of God in any way. 2 Peter 1:4 is often used to support this doctrine or similar doctrines. You should be very aware of the fact that heretics have been using this very verse to come up with all sorts of twisted and bizarre doctrines for centuries. We should never take one isolated verse and use it to reinterpret the rest of the Bible. That is what

heretics do and they distort the word of God to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16). The passage above is not to be taken literally. It is only saying in very striking language that God makes us more and more like Himself in moral holiness.

The Final Judgment

The final judgment is discussed in the following passages: Matthew 19:28; Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; 2 Corinthians 5:10; and Revelation 20:10-15. Many Semi-Dispensationalists have asserted that there will be a number of judgments and that Christians will be judged separately from unbelievers. They also believe in multiple resurrections for humans. The above passages do not seem to teach this. It seems that all humans and angels (both good and fallen) will be judged at the final judgment on the day when Jesus returns. He will oversee this judgment, but we will actually participate in it. We ourselves will be judged, but some of us will judge unbelievers at the guidance of Jesus. And some of us will also judge the angels. And the apostles will judge the Jews.

These passages make it clear that all people will be judged for their actions here on earth. This is why I have said so many times in this work and elsewhere that God will make everything right at the final judgment. This is why we cannot say that every time we see someone suffering it must be because of some specific sin in this life. We all know horrible unbelievers that have very easy lives. And we all know wonderful unbelievers that have terribly difficult lives. Thus, it is plain that God does not bring about all of His punishments towards unbelievers in this life. He allows some to suffer more than others, but He will make all things fair and just at the final judgment. All of this means that unbelievers will not all be punished the same in hell. Some, like Hitler, will be punished far, far more than others. And while all believers will spend all eternity with God, some will be rewarded far more than others. And lukewarm Christians will receive almost no rewards and will be severely chastised by Jesus at the final judgment. Not all Christians will hear Jesus say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant (Matthew 25:21-23)." At the end of the final judgment, the evil angels and all unbelievers will be

sent to hell for all eternity. After the final judgment, God will burn the surface of the earth and recreate it as the new earth.

The final item we need to discuss in connection with the doctrine of the final judgment is that it may seem like it doesn't make sense for us as Christians to even go through this when God is no longer our Judge, but is our Father. What is extremely important to understand is that there will be a sense in which God will be judging us as Judge one final time at the final judgment. This will be in the sense that God will formally declare to all of the world who are His truly saved and justified children and who are not. This does not mean that we are being justified a second time or anything like that. This isn't even like how our adoption will be completed at this time. We are only justified once, the moment we are saved. But, this will be when God tells the world who the justified really are and who were the pretenders. And God will, as Judge of the world, mightily proclaim that all of the justified have indeed already been declared righteous by Him based upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. The rest of our "judgment" will only be us receiving our rewards from our Father through the Son Jesus Christ. It makes perfect sense that God would want to do all of this all at once at the final judgment.

The Beatific Vision

One of the most beautiful promises Jesus gave to us is that all those that are truly saved (those that are pure in heart through the power of the Spirit) will see God. Theologians call this the beatific vision. This does not mean that we will see the actual being of God as that is impossible. It only means that we will see Jesus, who is God in His person, and we will see the Father as He manifests Himself in His glorious light. Those of us believers who die before the return of Jesus will see these wonderful blessings in heaven, but we will only see them in their fullness on the new earth. Some theologians, especially during the Middle Ages in the Western Church, tended to get very carried away with the doctrine of the beatific vision. Today, Roman Catholicism practically teaches that Catholics will be absorbed in some manner into the being of God. This is not biblical.

A number of questions often arise in connection with this doctrine and the doctrine of the new earth in general. Let us look at each of them here. The first concerns the idea that we will just be staring at God all the time. That is not what the beatific vision means. We will be enjoying the fullness of the new earth. God created us to be on the earth and to enjoy its blessings. Genesis 1-2 makes this very clear. The new earth is God restoring this to us. But, we will absolutely be worshiping God and directly communing with Him often. And that will be beyond amazing. I don't have words for how wonderful that will be. The second is closely connected with the first question. Many wonder if the Father and the Son will be perpetually on their throne. I don't think that they will. As Christians, we long to embrace and converse with Jesus. So, I don't think He will be on His throne perpetually. And all the discussion on the throne of God found throughout the Bible may be figurative. It may simply be a way of saying that God will be directly reigning over us as King forever.

The third concerns the Holy Spirit. Many wonder what His role will be. The role of the Holy Spirit is to be the most mysterious member of the Trinity. Therefore, the Bible does not give to us a lot of information regarding what all He will be doing on the new earth. It seems that He will in all likelihood manifest Himself to us physically from time to time, but we cannot be sure of this. Either way, He will be within us and that will be more than enough. The fourth concerns the reality of time. Many theologians have said that they believe time will almost disappear in some sense. I don't think that will be the case. Even when I often refer to the end of time, I am doing so figuratively to describe the end of this age. Only God is timeless, and we saw in the second book of my "basics" series how there will be day and night forever. The references to there being no night at the end of Revelation seem to only be talking about the New Jerusalem. Jerusalem is God's city and that is not going to change on the new earth. God will primarily rule from this glorious city, which will be where the current Jerusalem is now. This does not mean that all of the descriptions about this city in Revelation are to be taken literally. But, it does mean that there will be a New Jerusalem. And God's glorious light will keep the city lit at all times.

The next question concerns the place of the new heaven. When God creates the new earth, He will also recreate the universe unto perfection along with the new heaven.

It would seem that heaven would not need to be recreated. But, we know from the Bible that Satan and the demons did have access to heaven after our fall. While their activity there is clearly very limited, the mere fact that they are allowed in shows that heaven is not currently perfect. That will change after God does His work of re-creation. Now whether or not the descriptions of heaven coming down to join with the new earth are literal or not is not easy to tell. However, regardless of that fact, it is clear that us and the angels will have access to both. But, we will spend most of our time on the earth as God created the earth for us, and the angels will spend most of their time in heaven as God created it for them. Yet, there will clearly be a lot of overlap and we will of course often worship God together.

The next question concerns the place of the angels. We have already discussed the gist of their place above, but many Christians wonder what their place is in relation to the church. Are they part of the church as after all they are part of the family of God right? They are indeed the children of God along with us. And God loves them as much as He loves us. However, they are not part of the church. The church is made up of all of the saved that are united to Jesus. That of course does not apply to them. When we speak of the church as the family of God, we only mean that it is the human family of God. The angels are our brothers and sisters in a manner of speaking, but they are not our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are more like step-siblings to us. We will love them just as much as we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, but our relationship with them will be distinct from our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The final question concerns the animals. It seems deeply unfair that they would not join us on the new earth. This is why I believe that they will in fact be there. There would be no reason for God to create new animals when He has already created so many. Animals do not have souls, so they do not go to heaven. But, I believe that God will resurrect their bodies unto perfection when He creates the new earth. It may seem that the earth will not be able to fit all of them as so many animals have existed from the time when God first created the earth. It may be that many of them will inhabit other planets. But, I do believe that huge numbers of them will live with us on the new earth. Therefore, I see no reason why our beloved pets will not be with us for all eternity on the new earth. I very much look forward to being reunited with my old dog Luca.

Conclusion

I know that this work was long. But my sincere hope is that it has greatly helped you to grow in your walk with God as you come to understand His word better and better. I recommend coming back to this work as often as you need to in order to help you better remember the many topics covered and to help you better understand some of the more difficult points. Don't feel like you need to have everything down at once. You will forget things and that is perfectly ok. Come back to the necessary sections as needed. May God continue to richly bless you on your journey with Him!