

Revelation: God Has Spoken

How do you get to know somebody? You interact with that person. You watch, listen and talk to him. OK, so how do you get to know God? We don't see God. He isn't walking around on earth so that we can observe His actions. In fact the Scriptures state that no one at present sees God. Yet truths about God can be seen. We do talk to God. We call that prayer. However, can we listen to God? Is He talking? If we're waiting to hear an audible voice, no, He isn't talking like that. However, God does speak.

God speaks to us by means of revelation. God reveals to His creation what He wants creation to know. The idea of revelation is represented by various words. The Hebrew *nagid* meant to be conspicuous, to be in front and plainly visible.¹ The Hebrew *galah*² and the Greek word *apokalupsis* both involved “an uncovering.”³ *Apokalupsis* derives from the verb *apokalupto* which, “signifies to uncover, unveil.”⁴ God reveals something by unveiling it. When it is veiled, it is unseen or unknown. When it is unveiled it is revealed, it is seen not hidden. That's revelation.

Natural Revelation

God reveals truths by a variety of means. God's physical creation provides some limited revelation. Bible students often call this “natural revelation”

¹ See גג William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 226.

² See גלל Holladay, p. 60.

³ αποκαλυψις W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 974.

⁴ *ibid* p. 974.

because it employs nature – the physical universe. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul demonstrated the descent of man into increasing depravity. These verses in Romans refer to events around the time of the flood. William Newell referenced Lamech before the flood and Sodom after the flood.⁵ At that time mankind began to suppress the truth by means of unrighteousness (Romans 1:18), to exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for that of corruptible creatures (Romans 1:23), and to exchange the truth about God for the lie (Romans 1:25). Therefore, in the context of mankind's exaltation and worship of creation that Paul turned to the physical creation as a form of God's revelation. God's creation reveals two invisible aspects of God's nature (Romans 1:20). His power is revealed as the cause of creation. Consider the immensity of the cosmos, the stars and planets. This reveals that God's power is immense. Consider the foolishness and arrogance of men who displace the all-powerful God by that which He created. His creation also reveals His god-hood. The intricacies of biological life and the fact that order exists indicate intelligent design of the creation. The word God-hood⁶ means a divine being, a deity, and not merely raw power. The noun "is a summary term for those other attributes which constitute Divinity."⁷ Creation did not result from raw unguided power, contrary to

⁵ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 27.

⁶ Some Bibles have Godhead. Godhead refers to the Trinity and is not the word Paul used. θεϊότης means deity or divinity. See F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. rev. Fredrick Danker. p. 89.

⁷ William Sanday and Arthur Cayley Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 43

evolutionary theory, but from power directed by thought, with a divine purpose, and power intelligently guided. That god-hood is “everlasting.”⁸ God is eternal (we’ll see this in future studies). Creation is temporal; it is limited to time – there was a time in which creation did not exist. Because creation is not eternal it can only indicate that the power and Divine Being existed longer than creation itself. It can’t reveal that God is eternal, though it reveals His existence. In this way, creation leaves humans without excuse. They may deny God’s existence, they may worship lesser beings, but if they would reckon with physical creation, it would confront them with the fact that someone who is very powerful and intelligent is responsible. Therefore, creation as a form of natural revelation holds men accountable to the one whom they owe worship.

By contrast, David recognized God’s revelation of Himself in creation. He wrote that the heavens declare His glory and righteousness (Psalm 19:1).⁹ David referred to the starry spaces and the sky overhead. Like Paul’s words in Romans 1, it is the visible creation which declares who God is. The Hebrew word “glory” has the idea of “weight”.¹⁰ The creation declares that God is “heavy” or great. This word also may indicate “distinction, respect, mark of honor.”¹¹ Creation is vast,

⁸ αἰδιος is everlasting and distinct from αἰωνιος eternal. Some English Bibles haven’t maintained the distinction between these words. Everlasting indicates how long a thing continues but not whether it had a beginning. Eternal considers that which has no beginning or ending, or that which is not bound by time.

⁹ Here the Hebrew is סָפַר *sapher* to write.

¹⁰ Here “glory” כָּבוֹד Holladay, p. 150.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 151.

immense, and grand. Look up at the stars at night and we are quickly overwhelmed by the vastness of space. This points out that God is bigger and greater than the universe. It marks the Creator with distinction and deserving of honor.

David further stated that the vastness pours out speech day and night (Psalm 19:2). He wrote that the universe speaks without using words (v. 3). Yet the order has gone out, a line unto the ends of the universe (v. 4). Imagine, the grandness of the universe speaking every day and every night and doing so like a silent drama, a flannel graph show, a speech for the eyes. Unlike the men who displaced the Creator with His creation, David was moved by the natural revelation to focus upon God's verbal revelation in God's law (vv. 7-11). David wished to avoid pride or presumption (v. 13).¹² David's wish was not to become like those who presumed they could take God's place or had no need of God. Therefore, David closed this psalm with his hope that what he said with his lips or repeated¹³ in his heart would be favorable to God. He wished that God and not himself or another created being is his LORD, his Rock, his Redeemer. Therefore, as a form of natural revelation creation encourages the one who trusts in God.

The universe is also constant. The sun rises in a consistent manner and God calls out the earth (Psalm 50:1). The stars appear overhead at such regular intervals that man uses them to define time and

¹² The Hebrew **פַּרְוָה** in a plural form is translated "presumptuous sins" in many English Bibles, while this noun simply means to act in heat or to "**treat arrogantly.**" *ibid*, p. 88.

¹³ The verb **הִגִּיד** involves repetition of words.

navigate. That order demonstrates that God is righteous (v. 6).¹⁴ He is orderly and accurate (righteous), and this is reflected in the orderly accurate procession of the heavens over head. Yet man is judged by the heavens and earth, for the heavens and earth obey God's call while man does not and even forgets his God (v. 4). God's steady righteousness encourages those who are lovingly kind (v. 5), who have made a covenant with God, and it serves a sharp warning to those who are wicked and have forgotten their God (vv. 16, 22). The first group does not expect God to remain silent, but to speak to give verbal revelation. Creation as natural revelation demonstrates God's righteous order in contrast to disobedient mankind.

The apostle Paul spoke of natural revelation to a group of people in Lystra and Derbe. Paul had healed a man and the locals thought he and Barnabas were a pair of gods¹⁵ (Acts 14:8-13). When Paul corrected them, he pointed them to the true God who created all things (v. 15). Then he stated that God had let the Gentiles go their own way. This had been true for nearly 2,000 years, from the call of Abraham to the time Paul was speaking. However, during that time God did not leave Himself without a witness (v. 16). He caused the rain to fall so that crops continued to grow. People could eat that food and through this they were experiencing some of God's goodness – His sense of well-being. This was contrasted to many of the false gods of the Gentiles,

¹⁴ Here the Hebrew "revealed" is **גָּלַג** see footnote 2.

¹⁵ It is interesting that they thought Paul was Mercury and Barnabas Zeus. Mercury was the messenger and since Paul did most of the speaking, it was natural to assume he was Mercury.

false gods who had no genuine concern for people, or may even have intentionally caused mischief among mankind.¹⁶ Creation as natural revelation can testify that the Divine One who created all things and is powerful, is also good.

Paul also explained that there is the witness of man's conscience (Romans 2:15). God gave the law to Israel. However, Israel was characterized more for hearing the law and teaching others the law, than for doing it (Romans 2:13, 17-24). Yet some Gentiles did some of the things written in the law, even though they didn't have the law (Romans 2:14). Paul described this as the work of the law written in their hearts, or more popularly, the conscience.

The conscience is where one's knowledge and one's conduct meet. The Greek word conscience literally meant "with knowledge" [συνουιδα]. If one lived in a manner which was consistent with what he knew, then he had a good conscience, the balance scales of his heart were balanced. When one's conduct didn't match one's knowledge, the balance scales were tipped and a guilty or bad conscience resulted. The conscience was/is not infallible. Their conscience could accuse them, resulting in a guilty conscience. They could also use their conscience to excuse their behavior. Even so, the conscience served to demonstrate that some sense of right and wrong was written in the heart of man. Note carefully, Paul did not write that God wrote it in man's heart. God provided mankind with some revelation. When Noah disembarked from the ark, God gave him a couple of rules or guidelines. That basic information

¹⁶ This is according to the myths and writings of those Gentiles.

has been passed down through dad's and mom's to their children, and from governments to their citizens. In this way it bears the imprint of God's revelation in a form of law.

Special Revelation

So, God has used visible creation to reveal some limited truths about Himself: He exists, He has great power, He is righteous and He is good. Yet there is much more about God than these characteristics. In fact, there is more about these characteristics than physical creation is able to reveal. This is why we say that natural revelation is limited, it can reveal only so much. For more detailed truths, as well as revelation of what God wants mankind to do, God used special revelation.

Special revelation involves an active intervention by God in time. Sometimes God appeared to men and spoke audible words. Sometimes He wrote literal words which men could read. He used dreams and visions, angels and prophets, letters and even animals. God has no limits to His available means of revealing truth.

Let's look at some examples of each. God has revealed information to men in dreams. While men slept God spoke to them or showed unusual events to them. He even warned a king not to touch another man's wife (Genesis 20:3, 6). Don't confuse this with normal dreaming. Revelation by means of dreams was distinct. The men knew without a doubt that God wanted them to know something. They didn't always know precisely what that was. God revealed truth through dreams to two unsaved men: an Egyptian Pharaoh and a Babylonian King (Genesis 41; Daniel 4).

In both instances God used a man of God to explain the dream to the ruler, and in so doing revealed His plans. However, the revelation was provided by different means in each situation. Pharaoh told his dream to Joseph and then Joseph explained the dream to Pharaoh. In the second instance, the Babylonian king refused to listen to anyone's interpretation of his dream until that person could recount the dream first. So, God revealed to Daniel the dream and then Daniel explained the dream to the king. In these instances the revelation was two fold. First God caused the men to dream the dreams. Then, God revealed to Joseph and Daniel the meaning of those dreams. This is special revelation. Each involved the special activity of God to make truth known.

God has revealed information to men by means of visions. When someone had a vision, he or she, with his eyes wide open, saw something others could not see (Genesis 15:1; 42:2). This wasn't his imagination but a revelation from God in the form of a visual display. It was as though God downloaded a video presentation directly to one's optical nerves. The individual saw the display while no one else who was present did. Twice we find that a dream was a vision of the night (Job 33:15; Isaiah 29:7). This is helpful, because in the same way that only the one dreaming sees the dream, so only the one having the vision sees a vision. Don't confuse biblical visions with modern Christian leaders trying to give people a vision for a building program, a missions program or some other objective. Those are not special revelation, but man-made ideas, which people errantly call visions. A Biblical vision was always special revelation from God which was sure, not a mere

suggestion or idea for what one might wish to accomplish.

God personally appeared to Moses (Exodus 3:2). He appeared in a bush which burned but was not consumed. From the bush God spoke with Moses (v. 4). The Lord appeared in a cloud and spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 24:15). God appeared in two types of clouds, a stormy type and a normal bright type of cloud (Exodus 20:21; Numbers 11:25; 12:5).¹⁷ The bright cloud would descend to the tent of meeting when God would speak with Moses or others (Exodus 33:9;). The Lord often met with Moses at the tent of meeting and spoke with him (cf. Exodus 40:2; Leviticus 1:1). These appearances are significant as God was making His presence visible to not only Moses but the people. God was assuring through this that no one could justifiably claim that Moses was “hearing voices.” God was appearing and speaking special revelation for Israel.

At times God even showed up looking like a man and talked to people. He sat and ate with Abraham. Abraham even washed His feet¹⁸ (Genesis 18:1-3, 9-10). In the book of Genesis, God appeared to people in a temporary human form many times: Adam, Cain, Enoch, Noah, Jacob. With these He walked and talked. He even wrestled all night with Jacob (Genesis

¹⁷ Normally God appeared in a bright cloud, a normal type of cloud expressed by the Hebrew noun *ana* [ענן] but at other times in a very dark and ominous cloud, probably what we would identify as an extreme storm cloud *araphel* [ערפל].

¹⁸ This doesn't mean that God normally has feet. This was a temporary appearance in a form which men could see and understand.

32:24-28). The Lord appeared in a human form to Joshua outside of Jericho (Joshua 5:13). He identified Himself as the captain of Jehovah's army (v. 14). Like Jehovah's appearance to Moses in Exodus 3, He told Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy" (v. 15). He then preceded to instruct Moses on how He would give Jericho into Joshua's hand (6:2). In each instance God revealed information to these people which they needed to know. That information could not have been deduced from nature but required a special act of God.

Numerous times throughout the Old Testament, God the Son appeared as "the Word of the LORD." In many Old Testament passages we find something similar to "the Word of the Lord came to me, saying..." (Jeremiah 1:11). By these statements is not meant, "a message was received" or "a message arrived." These are personal appearances of the Word of Jehovah. When John introduced his account of Jesus' life, he wrote, "In a quality of beginning, the Word was existing." John had no reason to elaborate upon the Word. Many people have sought through Greek philosophy regarding the *logos* [English "word"] or even Hebrew thought. Yet the Holy Spirit bore John to consider this person who had been appearing throughout the Old Testament. A.C. Gaebelien wrote on John 1:1, "But we do not need to speculate on the use of the expression. The Holy Spirit had before spoken of the second person of the Godhead as the Word. 'By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made' (Psalm 33:6); 'He sent His Word and healed them' (Psalm 107:20); both passages may be

interpreted as meaning the Son of God.”¹⁹ F.F. Bruce appears to see this, though he seems cautious in his suggestion, “But when this latter form of language is used, the way is open to personify ‘the word of the Lord’ and treat it as his agent or messenger. Similarly, alongside the statement that ‘the LORD said to Isaiah . . .’ (Isa. 7:3) we may be told that ‘the word of the LORD came to Isaiah’ (Isa. 38:4). Again, the two statements are synonymous, but in the latter of the two ‘the word of the LORD’ can be pictured as a messenger sent by God the prophet.”²⁰ A couple paragraphs later, Bruce concluded that John dispensed with the personification of the Word. “The personal status which he ascribes to the Word is a matter of real existence; the relation which the Word bears to God is a personal relation: ‘the Word was with God’.²¹ The first occurrence of the Word appearing is in Genesis 15:1. With no further explanation, John Davis simply states, “the Lord appeared to Abraham ‘in a vision [*mah’azeh*]’ (15:1).”²² This expression, “the Word of the LORD came” occurs close to one hundred times. In considering these it seems plain that this is a personal appearance of a God, specifically the Son, and that He spoke to men. Of those occurrences, sixty times the precise Hebrew phrase is “Word of the LORD was unto me to say” (e.g. Genesis

¹⁹ *John*, (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1965) p. 12.

²⁰ *The Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p. 30.

²¹ *ibid*, p. 30.

²² John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975) p. 184. It is unclear if Davis understands “the Word” to be Jehovah Himself, but he handles this as more than just a message arriving.

15:4; 1 Kings 17:2; Jeremiah 1:4; Ezekiel 3:16). In all these passages the words “to say” express purpose.²³ The Second Person of the God-head came to these individuals with the purpose of speaking to them. This is special revelation.

God even used an animal. Balaam was a prophet hired to curse Israel. While he was traveling to carry out his duties, his donkey seemed to disobey Balaam and eventually stopped in the road refusing to move. However, the donkey was able to see an angel from God standing in the road. The angel stood with his sword drawn. Balaam couldn't see the angel. In response Balaam mistreated his donkey thinking, it was simply disobedient. Then God permitted the donkey to talk to Balaam. The donkey told Balaam that an angel stood in their path and that the angel would have killed them if they attempted to proceed. God could use an animal to communicate to a hardheaded man (Numbers 22:22-35 [28-31]).

At times, God sent angels to reveal His will to people. The angel who appeared to Balaam told Baalaam what do (Numbers 22:35). God sent angels to Daniel, Joseph (Jesus' stepfather), Zacharias and others (Matthew 1:20, 24). In fact, the word “angel” is an English pronunciation of the Greek word *angelos*. *Angelos* means “a messenger (from *angelo*, to deliver a message) sent whether by God or by man or by Satan.”²⁴ Sometimes the messenger was human. Most of the time the New Testament word *angelos* and the

²³ The infinitive of אָמַר “to speak” with the preposition לְ to indicate purpose.

²⁴ Vine op cit p. 57.

Old Testament word *malach* are used of the spirit beings we commonly identify as angels.

In the future God will use other forms of revelation. In Ephesians 2:7 we find that in the coming ages (that's the future) God will display the surpassing riches of His grace. Those riches are extended to the Church (that's us) by God's kindness. Kindness is an attitude which calms or makes others comfortable. Think about it. In the future, we will be with God. He is infinite in every way, yet He will extend His grace to us by making us comfortable in His presence. Wow, that's pretty awesome. God will reveal something more about Himself by the manner in which He will treat us. In Ephesians 3:21 we find that God will receive glory by the Church in Christ into all the generations of ages. As the ages continue to go on, God will continue to receive glory and we will be the means. We will be an object lesson regarding God's character. We, will be a form or basis of revelation in the future.

God still speaks. No, I don't mean that He causes people to see visions or dream dreams; He doesn't appear to people and speak with them or speak audibly with anyone. Yet He does speak. He speaks to you and I in the Bible. Today the Bible is God's only means of special revelation. Creation still declares His glory but only the Bible explains that glory.

Let's illustrate the importance of the Bible in this regard. Many Christians recognize that God provides them the food they eat. They thank Him for it when they sit down at a meal. However, many Christians connect the provision of food with God's love. Sounds plausible, depending upon how one understands God's love. However, the Bible connects

the provision of food with God's goodness (recall Acts 14:16). The distinction between goodness and love might be expressed as the difference between the desire for one's contentment and happiness and the desire for what is in another's best interest. If we didn't have special revelation, how would we know why God provides us food. He provides it because He desires our happiness.

Why does God speak to us? So we can know God. We can't know God unless He reveals Himself. If it were not for revelation, we wouldn't know anything about God. We don't have to guess at what God wants us to know. The religions of the world are comprised of men's ideas, their own thoughts about what a god might be like and how this world came to be. We are not left to our own imaginations. We can open our Bibles and read what God wants out to know about Himself, about His creation, about us and about His works, all because God has freely revealed them for us.

Revelation: Scripture & Inspiration

We have seen that God has used many means to reveal truth to mankind: natural revelation, conscience, dreams, visions, and the written word. For the believer today, written revelation is the most important. Natural revelation and even our conscience are insufficient to direct us in righteous living. “All Scripture is God-breathed, and profitable ... for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be adjusted, thoroughly outfitted for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16...17). It is the Word of God which provides us with the necessary information for Christian living and service. After Paul asserted that Scripture is profitable for us, he told Timothy, “speak the Word with authority²⁵” (4:2). Note, that despite the chapter division, this is the next sentence, and flows logically from Paul’s statements regarding Scripture. If it is God-breathed and profitable, Timothy should speak that Word.

1 Corinthians 2 explains how God breathed out His Word, how He maintained its precision and thereby its profitableness. Paul wrote, “eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and it has not risen in man’s heart what sort of things God has prepared for those loving Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Paul was not referring to all truth

²⁵ English Bibles use “preach.” However, our idea of preaching probably misses the idea. The verb κηρρῶσω meant to proclaim, or to announce. Its New Testament emphasis was not on the power of the “preacher” or the preaching but the authority of the message. The idea of a polished sermon and an eloquent speaker have much less to do with this word than unapologetically announcing the truth of God’s Word. If one is a “great preacher” but proclaims his ideas rather than God’s Word, he’s just a fancy speaker not a great preacher.

contained in Scripture. He was writing about those truths which reveal God's design for our lives and glory (v. 8). God's plan for us did not originate in any human mind. No one ever saw His plans. No one ever heard His plans. No one imagined His plans. So, how do we know God's plans for us? How does His plan get from His mind to the mind of man? He revealed them to us by His Spirit (v. 10). This classic passage explains this process.

A man's spirit is his center of rational thinking. Man's spirit has the ability to think about matters outside of one's realm of experience. His soul is the interpretive center of his senses, where he makes sense of his experiences. The only person who knows²⁶ the thoughts and plans of a man is his spirit. I've come to really know my wife. I can make a fairly accurate guess of what she's thinking based on circumstances, but I can never know precisely what she's thinking, unless she tells me and is fully honest. In a similar manner, the only one who knows the things of God is the Spirit who is God (v. 11). The Spirit knows all the things of God, even the deep things (v. 10).

So, since only God's Spirit knows the things of God, it was necessary for God to give His Spirit so we can know those things. While it is true that we have the Spirit, the "we" in the following verses do not include you and I. Paul used an editorial "we," clearly referring to himself in the context²⁷ and "to a select group, the

²⁶ Paul used οἶδα to indicate precise knowledge as opposed to knowledge based upon experience. When an individual knows what is going on in his head, it is not based on experience. He simply knows the collection of facts, enthusiasms, and plans

²⁷ See R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, p. 65.

apostles and the prophets who laid the foundation for the church and who wrote the New Testament books.”²⁸ We (Paul) have not been given the spirit of this world. The spirit of the world is a spirit which depends upon philosophy, scholarship, and debate: the wise, scribe, and debater (1 Corinthians 1:20). These three depend upon the three situations denied in 2:9. They depend upon sight, hearing, and imagination or mental conceptions. Since, the things of God did not originate from by those means, those relying on the spirit of the world could never come to know the things of God. If one relies upon philosophy, scholarship, or debate he will never arrive at these truths.

The Holy Spirit was the source of what Paul taught. He was the means of making known to Paul the things God has prepared for us. “We have received the Spirit who is God“ (2:12). We noted above that the ” we” referred to a limited number of New Testament believers: apostles and prophets. Yet we too experience the work of the Spirit. The Spirit’s work in Paul, the other apostles and prophets was different than His work in us. Paul distinguished himself and the other apostles from the Corinthians in the first part of this passage. Paul and the other apostles knew as fact the things which God had given to them. This was made possible by the work of the Spirit. The Spirit did not make those truths known to us by the same means He used with the apostles. The apostles then spoke those things (v. 13). The words they used to articulate²⁹ such truths were not

²⁸ Robert Gromacki, *The Holy Spirit*, Nashville: Word, p. 99.

²⁹ Articulation is distinguished from general content as the difference between λαλεω and λεγω respectively.

human-taught words but Spirit-taught words. The things of God were compared and then combined³⁰ with the words available. This is what Paul meant in the final phrase, “comparing spiritual *words* with spiritual *things*.”³¹ In the Greek text the first “spiritual” *pneumatikois* [πνευματικοις] refers to “words” [*logois* λόγοις]. Notice the same endings. The second word “spiritual” *pneumatika* [πνευματικα] is a neuter form which refers to “the things” from verse nine, which is simply *ha* [ἅ]. Where were the words? They were in the spirit or mind of the individual apostle. Therefore, the Spirit had a thing from God to communicate. He compared that thing with the words available within the individual’s vocabulary, and in this way He moved these men to speak with careful articulation. David recognized this in his life as he attributed the words on His tongue to the Spirit (2 Samuel 23:2).

This explanation by Paul of how God brings about accurate revelation is precisely to what some object. Though in disagreement, Paul Achtemeier summarized this view of inspiration, “In its simplest form, such a view of inspiration asserts that God so guided the writers of Scripture by his Holy Spirit that they were incapable of writing anything contrary to His will, or even writing anything that in any way could be considered untrue. In sum, the words in Scripture are

³⁰ The idea of “combining” was used by J.B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of Paul*, pp. 180-181, and is the natural result of such a comparison, in fact it is the purpose of the comparison, to find a word which can be combined with a truth.

³¹ See A.A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration*, Grand Rapids: Baker, p. 23.

the words that God, not a human being, has chosen.”³² While a reading of 1 Corinthians 2 might cause us to go to this extreme, it would seem better to see a synergy of God and Paul. God was choosing the right words from Paul’s vocabulary to enable him to speak what God wanted said. Yet at the same time, Paul was saying something he wanted to say. So in 1 Corinthians 3:1 Paul could write, “I could not speak unto you...” Note, “I,” not we. The I does not refer to God, but to Paul. Many times Paul expressed his goal, his desire, his concern. Were those Paul’s alone? No, if Paul desired that believers progress, we can be certain that God also desired that. What the Holy Spirit did with Paul was to assure that Paul used the best words to communicate this desire. In one sense, Paul could have said, “I wanted to say this,” but he also knew that the Holy Spirit was choosing those words to say this.

Some have also pointed out that 1 Corinthians 2 is limited to verbal revelation. Paul does not use words such as “write” but speaking words. However, Paul used speaking words to refer to his communication in this very letter. In 1 Corinthians 6:5, “I say to your shame.” In 7:6, “But this I say” and then verse eight and twelve, “But I **say**” then “But to the rest I **say**.” (See also 7:35; 10:15, 29; 11:22; 15:51). The verb in each case is *legō* which indicates verbal communication, sometimes orally but in these above listed instances written. In 2:6, 7, and 13, Paul used the related verb *laleō*. This verb also involves communication but emphasizes articulation. He also

³² Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, p. 19.

used this word in this letter to refer to what he was writing in 3:1; 9:8; 15:34. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 2:13 may describe how Paul spoke orally or how he spoke with pen and ink.

Beginning in 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul included the Corinthians, as he spoke of men in the third person. The soulish³³ man doesn't welcome the things from the Spirit of God. This man is soulish; he's unsaved and doesn't have the Spirit (Jude 19). He evaluates truth by his soul: his senses and emotions. He can only evaluate what he can sense and make sense of. Look back at verse nine, where these things had nothing to do with observation, hearing or imagination/cogitation. These things which God prepared for us are foolishness to him. He evaluates these things as foolish because, he can't know them. Paul didn't mean that this man is unable to listen to, memorize and recite these facts. Paul used the word *ginōskō* meaning knowledge involving experience. An unsaved man is never able to experientially know these things. He can't live them or practice them because they aren't for him. They were prepared by God for those loving God, and only believers can love God. These things are spiritually evaluated and an unsaved man does not have the equipment to make such an evaluation.

³³ Most English Bibles have followed the tradition of translating ψυχικός *psychikos* by "natural." J. N. Darby clarified that it is a man animated only by his created soul. R.G. Gromacki comments, "He is soulish or physical. ... Within the immaterial part of man, a distinction is made between soul and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). The natural man operates within the soul realm because he is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1)." *Called to Be Saints*, p. 40. The natural man is the soulish man. The unsaved man is by nature soulish, it is his only realm of experience.

Therefore, the things God has prepared for us, were carefully made known to the apostles. They, in turn, communicated them to us, first verbally and then in written form. If we are a believer, then we can potentially know and evaluate these truths (1 Corinthians 2:15). By evaluate, Paul meant that believers are able to see the value in these Scriptures. The unsaved (soulish) man finds no such value in the Scriptures. We can know the things from the mind of the Lord, because we have the mind of Christ (v. 16). Paul omitted “the” before the word mind, because we don’t have “the mind of Christ”, for that would mean we can know everything He does. What Paul meant is that through salvation, we now have the kind of mind that Christ has, and therefore, the potential to know these things revealed to us by God.

The next key passage which illustrates how God has provided written revelation to us is 2 Peter 1:20-21. Peter explained that no prophecy came into existence from its own loosing,³⁴ that is, it didn’t arise of its own, from a necessity, or a prophet’s solution to a problem he observed.³⁵ Likewise, the prophecies didn’t arise because men dreamed them up, or saw something that “inspired” him. Additionally, those prophecies didn’t arise because men desired those specific ideas (2 Peter 1:21). In this way, Peter is stating Paul’s thought of 1 Corinthians 2:9. It was the Holy Spirit who carried

³⁴ R. Laird Harris notes the poor translation “interpretation” used in the AV and other English Bibles because, “The question at issue is the origin of Scripture, not hermeneutics.” *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, p 64.

³⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, Greenville, South Carolina: Bob Jones University Press, p. 82.

men along. As He carried them, they spoke from God. The Spirit carried men along by choosing the words they would use to articulate the ideas God wished to communicate. Both Peter and Paul saw God's Word as the product of the Spirit's work through men.

Regarding those who hold to a lower view of Scripture than traditional evangelicals, it is important to note their opinion of 2 Timothy and 2 Peter. Both books contain key texts on the origin of Scripture. Both books are also rejected as authentic apostolic literature by many non-evangelicals. As a non-fundamentalist James Barr represents this opinion, "But both II Timothy and II Peter can probably be considered somewhat marginal books, and are probably treated so in practice even by fundamentalist circles."³⁶ Therefore, two of the plainest texts on the inspiration of Scripture are marginalized, often with the claim that they represent a later view of inspiration, one which could not have existed during New Testament times. Yet a plain reading of these texts supports the thought that they did indeed have a such a view of inspiration. Perhaps they were not asking the hard questions asked by interpreters since that time, but they held to a view of the origin of Scripture which looks very much like that held by modern Evangelicals.

Did the writers of Scripture know the Spirit was doing this work through them? David was aware that some of his words were put on his tongue by the Spirit of God (2 Samuel 23:2). God assured Jeremiah that He had placed His words in Jeremiah's mouth (Jeremiah 1:7-9; cf Isaiah 59:21). Jesus attributed David's written word in Psalm 110:1 to the Spirit (Matthew 22:43-44).

³⁶ James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978) p. 67.

Therefore, the Spirit not only put words on David's tongue but He also caused David to write. The Spirit was producing both the vocal and written revelation. The writer of Hebrews attributes Psalm 95:9-11 to the Holy Spirit speaking (3:7-11). Paul attributed Isaiah's words in Isaiah 6:9-10 to the Spirit in Acts 28:25ff. In general, Peter attributed the writings of the prophets to the Spirit (1 Peter 1:10-11). David, Jesus, Paul, Peter and others attributed the writings of Scripture to the Holy Spirit. He directed the writers to communicate exactly what God wanted written.

This brings us back to the question; were the human authors just mouth pieces, were they just the pens? The Scriptures reveal a dual authorship, one in which the Spirit revealed accurately, word-for-word what He desires and at the same time, every word which flowed from the pen was also that which the human author desired. So, Jude sat down to write a treatise on salvation, but felt the necessity of encouraging the saints to really live the Christian life.³⁷ Is that what the Spirit wanted written? Yes. It was also what Jude felt compelled to write. Paul really desired Timothy to come before winter (2 Timothy 4:21). Yet those words were also those of the Spirit. When Daniel prayed the prayer recorded in Daniel nine, his desire, concern and words were truly his, but also those of the Spirit. When David cried out to God in Psalm 51, he

³⁷ The expression "contend earnestly for the faith" was not an urge to engage in a verbal defense of biblical truth against liberals or unbelievers. It was the forewarning in 2 Peter, dealing with men who were twisting the grace of God into a license for immorality. Facing such teachers, these people needed to really live the Christian life.

expressed exactly what he was thinking and desiring, and yet every word was chosen carefully by the Spirit.

The biblical evidence is that the writers of Scripture knew they were writing as the Spirit moved them, but they were often writing regarding that which concerned or burdened them, that over which they had joy or anticipation. They saw no conflict. Some writers were moved to write of matters they did not fully understand. Daniel even wrote his question to God in Daniel 12 but was told that it wasn't for him to know at that time. Peter explained that many prophets wished to know about the matters they were prophesying, indicating that they understood some of what they wrote, but were unable to fully understand it.

Dual authorship is also demonstrated by writing styles. Every author has a vocabulary which he tends to employ. Sometimes he will call on a rarely used word, while some words will be used regularly. When one writer is compared with another, it will be noticed that certain words are omitted by one and used frequently by the other. This is part of style. Also part of style is syntax or the relationship of words in sentences. English syntax depends upon word order. Greek syntax is based more upon form. Greek writers could use different forms. When John is compared to the other gospel writers, he normally places the subject of his verb after the verb, i.e. "replied Jesus" which is read in English, "Jesus replied." He does this over twice as often as the other writers. This is part of his style, and the Holy Spirit's work didn't blur or erase it because the writing of Scripture was synergistic: the Spirit's work and man's work.

We now turn to the most well-known passage on

Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” First we need to understand what Paul meant by “Scripture.” The American Standard Version of 1901 rendered these words, “Every scripture inspired of God.” This troubled many, as though the translation left room for doubt as to the inspiration of some Scripture. However, Paul just reminded Timothy that he knew the sacred writings since he was a child (v. 15). On this statement Paul reminded Timothy of the profitableness of all Scripture. “Scripture” meant writing and Paul clarified that the profitable writings are the inspired ones, and this described the Old Testament writing Timothy had known from childhood.

“Inspired by God” is one Greek adjective, *theopneustos* [θεόπνευστος]. This word occurs only here in the New Testament. It does not occur in literature prior to the New Testament, apparently used by Paul in this passage for the first time. The Spirit may have moved Paul to coin this word, to express the character of Scripture. The word literally meant “God breathed.” When a person speaks, he breathes out, therefore, when God spoke the Words of Scripture, He breathed out, and those Scriptures then have the quality of having been breathed by God. The Spirit spoke these words as He carried men along. The English “inspiration” often gives people the impression that God was inspiring people in a manner similar to the inspiration a painter or poet may take from seeing a flower or sunset. This is not the idea Paul intended. He meant nothing more than to say that the Scriptures which are profitable are those spoken by God. That is a

profound statement. It indicates that the Word of God is communication from God to us. Scripture is God's breathed out or spoken word to us.

The relationship of the adjective *theopneustos* to the noun "Scripture" has been debated. The common Evangelical handling interprets it as a predicate adjective, "is God-breathed." No verb exists, and therefore translators supply the understood copula—"is," followed by this adjective. Some interpreters have translated this phrase "all God-breathed Scripture," taking *theopneustos* as a simple adjective. Other theologians and translators have objected to this latter translation, claiming it leaves the statement vague; what are these God-breathed Scriptures? Yet even the familiar translation "is God-breathed" does not define to what specific Scriptures Paul referred. The context does that, "that from childhood, you have known the Holy Scriptures [or Writings]" (2 Timothy 3:15). Paul was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, but we know this by context, not by the statement that they are God-breathed. Further the statement "God-breathed" is intended to encourage Timothy to consider the value of Scripture due to its origin from God. Regardless of which translation we choose,³⁸ in this context, both refer to Old Testament Scriptures and assert a relationship from God.³⁹ The translation "all Scripture is God-breathed" also fits the syntax because Paul used two adjectives connected with the conjunction *kai*

³⁸ G.C. Berkouwer stated this same conclusion. See *Holy Scripture*, trans. Jack B. Rogers, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), p. 141.

³⁹ For further discussion of these issues, see George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) pp. 446-447.

[and]; “all Scripture *is* God-breathed and profitable.” If we follow the alternative translation, we should have “all God-breathed and profitable Scriptures.”⁴⁰ To treat only “profitable” as a predicate adjective leaves us with an awkward use of *kai*, perhaps “indeed,” but this is unlikely. It is preferable to see both as predicate adjectives intended to encourage Timothy as to the value of the Scriptures with which he was familiar from youth.

The other issue surrounding this word regards the nature of the assertion. Does the adjective indicate a passive act of the Scriptures being breathed out, thus describing how God brought them into existence, or is it active indicating that the Scriptures are God’s breathing?⁴¹ The former would emphasize what the Spirit of God did, by breathing the Scriptures into existence as He worked through the human writers. The latter idea communicates the freshness of Scripture, that it is a living text, as though upon reading it, one could claim that God is speaking. As appealing as the latter interpretation may be, it does not appear to be Paul’s point. He is not telling Timothy that he could have a fresh encounter with God’s speaking by reading Scripture. Paul was not referring to some present experience with Scripture, though this cannot be denied. Certainly other texts support the contention that the Scriptures are alive and continue to speak to the reader (cf. Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23). In this text, Paul was emphasizing Scripture’s value because it

⁴⁰ Compare helpful comments by J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (London: A&C Black Limited, 1986) p. 203.

⁴¹ G.C. Berkouwer, *op cit.* p. 140.

originated from God.

The word inspiration doesn't apply directly to the human writers. God didn't inspire the men, but the Scriptures. God used faulty men, yet produced a faultless written revelation. The men were not God-breathed. The writings which the Spirit produced through their pens were God-breathed. Failing to understand the object of inspiration has led some to argue for some form of infallibility on the part of the writers. A friend once refused to believe that a writer of Scripture could have erred in his personal conduct and still write inerrant Scripture. Yet Moses wrote Scripture, David wrote Scripture, and Peter wrote Scripture, and each of these men did unrighteous acts at some time during their lives. It is for this very reason that the Spirit superintended and carried along these normal, albeit, saved men.

Was this superintendence by the Spirit always necessary? Some Scriptures were dictated. The Word or the pre-incarnate Son came and spoke to Jeremiah who in turn dictated to Baruch who then wrote the words (Jeremiah 36:4, 27-28). The Lord Jesus dictated seven letters to John in chapters two and three of Revelation. Daniel wrote the visions and dreams which he saw, and John the vision of the things which he saw. All they had to do was record it! It is the "they" which is the problem. What if Jeremiah and Baruch couldn't remember all the words correctly? What if Baruch didn't hear Jeremiah, or John missed a word spoken by Jesus Christ? Even in these instances of dictation, the Spirit was overseeing every word so that God's Word would be accurate. What if a writer accidentally writes one wrong letter (e.g. "pin" instead of "pen"), it can

alter the meaning. When writing, I often think one word and yet my fingers type another. We are prone to error. Three friends standing side-by-side might each see an event differently, might interpret what they observe incorrectly. Therefore, even when men were recording dreams and visions, or records of historical events they may have witnessed, it was necessary that the Spirit direct each word from their pen.

The importance of this can be illustrated by reference to a statement Jesus made that not a jot or tittle would pass from the Law (Matthew 5:18). The Hebrew letter yod or jot looks like this, י. It was the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet and looked something like our apostrophe. It is the first letter in the name Jehovah, written in Hebrew יהוה (read from right to left). If the yōd is dropped from Jehovah, it would be the word “become”. Dropping that small letter would change God’s name. The tittle is not even a letter but part of a letter, a short extension of a line past an intersecting line. The tittle distinguishes a ד[daleth] from a ר[resh], and a ב[bēth] from a כ[kaph]. The word “praise” is *todah* [תודה], but if one drops the tittle on the daleth (third letter from the right), it becomes *torah* [תורה] the word for law or instruction. If one drops the tittle from the word son [*bar* בר] it becomes battering ram [*car* כר]. These are just a few examples of how small changes could affect significant changes in the meaning of the text.

Some evangelical interpreters reject this view of inspiration, favoring greater human freedom. Paul Achtemeier asserts such a position. He wrote, “Rather than being inspired only at the final stage of transmission, when they were written down in the

biblical books we now have, those traditions, shaped by the community which existed for God's purposes and by his providence, shared in divine inspiration from their inception. Inspiration is therefore to be located as much in the community of faith, out of whose experience traditions were formulated and reformulated, as in the process of giving final shape to the biblical books."⁴² Thus it was not Jeremiah speaking to the king and people of Judah from God, but the community's shaping of Jeremiah's words, and the reformulation into a prophecy. It was not Paul speaking to the Corinthians, but the Corinthian's handling of his words to them, and the interaction and shaping of the words into the form we know. I choose these examples, for in both cases, the audience did not respond positively. In Paul's case the Corinthian believers were carnal and incapable of "meat" and Jeremiah's audience was even hostile. However, Achtemeier doesn't rest this shaping of Scripture on the initial writer or audience. He sees the whole tradition of the community being directed to a given situation, and potentially many individuals or respondents rewriting a text, even recasting the text in light of new situations leaving us not with Paul as the human author, but others such as an inspired author, a compiler, and editors. Achtemeier would reject that a letter as we have it (albeit a copy or translation) could be attributed to an identified author, because the community's tradition and many individuals have handled and altered what was written. He wrote, "It is really not important that the apostle Paul may not have written 1 Timothy, since that book,

⁴² *Inspiration and Authority*, op cit. p. 102.

like many others in Scripture, may have behind it a series of respondents, one of whom at an earlier stage may have been Paul, whose own traditions have since been modified in new situations by further respondents.”⁴³ Yet, if such a situation is true, they have falsified the author by claiming it was from Paul. Could we trust their other claims? Such a view places the emphasis on the community and its traditions, and largely benches God.

This community driven view makes it easier for such interpreters to account for the many discrepancies they find in Scripture. In his criticism of the Conservative view of inspiration (akin to the view I hold), he cites many perceived internal discrepancies, as well as those challenged by science, history, and human reason.⁴⁴ He perhaps has chosen to ignore the many supposed discrepancies with history or science which in time were demonstrated to be inaccurate, new historical facts agreeing with Scripture’s claims. It is easier to attribute discrepancies to defects in the community’s traditions or interpretations of events. However, it results in a distrust in Scripture as an accurate communication from God to man. If man’s fingerprints have distorted the image in the mirror of God’s Word, how can one see clearly what God wanted us to know? It is interesting that in Achtemeier’s proposal of his view of inspiration, little reference is made to God, only that the community does, “seek to follow the guidance of the same Spirit in their

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 117.

⁴⁴ *ibid*. pp. 43-63.

reinterpretations of their traditions.”⁴⁵

However, a Biblical view of inspiration takes into account a larger more dominant role of the Spirit. When Jesus quoted from Exodus 3:6, He did not attribute it to Moses but, “have you not read what was said to you by God” (Matthew 22:31). Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would remind them of all things which Jesus had said (John 14:26). Many New Testament students spend a great deal of time discussing the sources the gospel writers used for their accounts. We know that Luke was not present during Jesus’ earthly ministry and therefore, carefully researched the events in order to write his account (Luke 1:1-4). It is popularly believed that Mark’s account was taken down from the oral teaching of Peter. However, Matthew and John were present, saw, and heard most of the events of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Did they consult sources? No. The Spirit supernaturally reminded them of the words. Additionally, the Spirit then carried these writers along to record accurately not all they remembered, but what the Spirit wished to say.

So the Spirit oversaw the writing of Scripture, to be certain that every word was accurate. We call this verbal inspiration. It was necessary to breathe the words to accurately communicate the thought. The breathing out of the thought expressed by the words is called plenary, or full inspiration. “Jesus and the apostles regarded Scripture as authoritative because they believed that God had directed the biblical writer-what he wrote was what God said. That they regarded even minute details as binding indicates that they felt that

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 116.

inspiration by God extended even to the smallest particulars.”⁴⁶ The Spirit accurately communicated the thought by accurately choosing the words.

Let’s look at three examples where the minute details are crucial to the thought. In Galatians 3:16, Paul quoted and interpreted Genesis 22:17. His interpretation hinges on the number of the word “seed”. Paul wrote, “...He does not say, and to the seeds, as *speaking* about many, but about one, and to your seed, who is Christ.” Paul knew that the word “seed” can be a singular plural (word written in a singular form but referring to many).⁴⁷ However, Paul interpreted the seed to be singular because the pronoun “his” suffixed to “enemies” is singular.⁴⁸ The significance of this stands out even more when we see that the pronoun is one letter in Hebrew, the ך [waw] at the end of איביו (read from right to left *oyevaw*) while “their” would have been ךם [kem]. Paul then interpreted the seed to be “Christ.”

Our next example refers back to the same passage in Genesis. In Luke 1, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer, made several prophecies regarding the birth of his son, and the coming Lord. In the prophecies Zechariah referred to Genesis 22. He stated that God swore by an oath. Only in Genesis 22:16 did God swear an oath to Abraham. In the same context God promised

⁴⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, p. 209.

⁴⁷ We even use the word that way: we buy seed for our garden or field. We only say “seeds” when we might be referring to a variety of different plants.

⁴⁸ The NASB puts “their” in the text, which is interpretation, and footnote “his.” The ESV has “his.”

that the seed would possess the gates of his enemies. Zechariah prophesied of salvation from the hand of their enemies. Zechariah did not switch from his enemies to their enemies, for their enemies, that is Israel's enemies, would be dealt with by Christ taking control of His enemies. Israel does not fight and defeat their enemies; Christ fights and defeats them.⁴⁹ The Holy Spirit first moved Zechariah to prophesy and then bore Luke along to correctly record his words. God made various promises to Abraham. Zechariah's words are connected to a specific promise from God. Had Luke not recorded the words accurately, we would miss the specific promise of how He would save them from the hands of their enemies.

Finally we note that the writer of Hebrews quoted Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8:8-12. The writer didn't quote Jeremiah to say that this covenant had been enacted. He never said it was fulfilled. He wrote that since God had promised a "new" covenant, that meant the law covenant was old and would disappear (Hebrews 8:13). Paul's argument hinges on the word new. Further, twice Paul⁵⁰ refers to a new covenant. Greek has no indefinite article. When the article is omitted, the emphasis is on the quality not specific identity. So in 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul stated, "Who also had made us sufficient servants of *a* new kind of covenant..." and in Hebrews 9:15, "And because of this, He is mediator of *a* new kind of covenant." In neither reference did Paul use the definite article, for he

⁴⁹ Even when texts present Him accompanied by an army from heaven, He does all the fighting, not they.

⁵⁰ Yes, I understand Paul to have authored Hebrews.

was not referring to **the** new covenant of Jeremiah 31, but a covenant of a new quality. It may bear similarity by being new but is not identical with the former.

Syntax or the relationship of words in phrases and sentences was also governed by the Holy Spirit. Scripture will bear this out, but most people know that even if we use the correct words, those words must be placed in the proper order and so related to each other, otherwise those words may say nothing or even the wrong thing. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 three times (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). He quoted the phrase, “The righteous one will live by faith.” Leon Morris demonstrates a view which treats this as referring to justification or initial salvation.⁵¹ He takes Paul’s preceding phrase in Romans 1:17, “from faith to faith” to mean “faith through and through.”⁵² It seems better that Paul meant from faith initially placed in Christ into a life of faith. This makes sense in his quotation from Habakkuk, where God promised a coming judgment at the hands of the cruel Babylonians. While judging the unrighteous, the righteous ones would go on living by faith. They could believe God’s promise that He would save them alive even through that judgment. The Spirit communicated this idea by use of the Imperfect verb “shall live,” the Imperfect communicating continuing or future activity.⁵³ Paul

⁵¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, pp. 70-72.

⁵² *ibid*, p. 70.

⁵³ “All imperfects represent *incomplete states*. They are either *repeated* (frequentative), or *developing* (progressive), or *contingent* (subjunctive).” J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, Nashville: Broadman Press, p. 33. emphasis his

reflects this in each of his quotations by the use of the Future tense, as each quotation refers not to initial justification but the life of faith lived by God's righteous ones. All three quotations reflect this respect for the grammar and syntax of the Habakkuk text.

This passage also illustrates another aspect of syntax's importance. How should we take the words "the righteous shall live by faith"? Morris summarizes the opinion of many with the translation, "He that is just by faith shall live."⁵⁴ This applies a verbal sense to the adjective "righteous." It arranges the syntax into a phrase "the just by faith" and treats it as part of relative clause related to the supplied words (not part of the text) "He that is." It then combines these phrases into a clause with a new sense. However, since Paul quoted Habakkuk, we can trust that the Spirit made certain that his translation reflected the Habakkuk's Hebrew. The Hebrew text is simple comprised of three words: righteous one, his faith, shall live (it takes at least two English words to translate each Hebrew word). Hebrew word order plays a key role in Hebrew syntax. The word order of this verse places the subject - "the righteous one" first, while the subject more frequently follows the verb. However, the word "by **his** faith" involves the suffixed pronoun "his." It indicates that this righteous one has faith, not that he is exercising faith for the first time. So, the normal manner of translating and understanding Paul's quotations of Habakkuk reflect that syntax, though Paul dropped the pronoun. The Spirit knew what He meant when He bore Habakkuk in writing the prophecy and assured the Paul

⁵⁴ Morris, *Romans*, p. 71.

reflected that well in his quotations.⁵⁵

Because the Word was produced through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and since He carefully chose each and every word, producing the exact syntax, the Word is exactly what God wished to say. The result was a revelation which was inerrant and infallible. F.F. Bruce stated, “This historical ‘once-for-all-ness’ of Christianity, which distinguishes it from those religious and philosophical systems which are not specially related to any particular time, makes the reliability of the writings which purport to record this revelation a question of first-rate importance.”⁵⁶

We conclude that due to this process, God has given us His Word. We have an objective revelation from God, in written form, the Bible. It is without error in everything it addresses. It isn’t a science or history book, but where it touches on these matters it is accurate, though it may not use the language of science but the language of appearance. It is dependable as a revelation of God’s activities through all time. It is for us, a small sample of the mind of our great God.

⁵⁵ This passage involves some questions about the use of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament). However, F.F. Bruce pointed out that the elders (Jewish) translated Moses’ first five books into Greek, “It was Christian writers who extended their work to the rest of the Old Testament.” *The Canon of Scripture*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, p. 44. On page 45 Bruce wrote, “With few fragmentary exceptions, the Septuagint manuscripts now in existence were produced by Christians.” While Bruce does not assert this, I wonder if it is possible that these Christian translators used Paul’s quotations as an aid for the appropriate passages.

⁵⁶ *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, p. 8.

Revelation: What is Truth?

What is truth? Pilate asked Jesus that question and many continue to ask (John 18:38). We live in an era which some call postmodern. The modern era, questioned the revelation in God's Word, even denied that God's Word exists. It pitted science and philosophy against supposed divine revelation. It claimed to have discovered absolute truth outside the Bible and that the Bible was not accurate; miracles were only metaphors, the resurrection a fable and salvation was about improving ourselves and the world. Yet science watched as many of its own "absolutes" were overturned. Give researchers long enough and last decade's conclusions may be proved false or less than accurate. Today's miracle drug for arthritis promises greater mobility leading to easier exercise and improved heart health. Yet given time it may be tomorrow's killer.

Disappointment has caused modernism to give way to the current postmodern era, where people treat any truth statement with caution. Everything is tentative, yet everything goes. Even history can be rewritten. Every event past or present is interpreted not in light of "facts" but in light of our experience. Another's experience might result in different conclusions, and that's OK, no one is wrong but neither is anyone especially right. Perception, experience even feelings have taken prominence over facts.

For the Word of God this means that "thus says the Lord" receives an unbelieving, "Yeah, sure, whatever" response. Some christian leaders have felt it is therefore necessary to alter our presentation of the

message and sometimes even the message itself. Their response is that the postmodern mind can't be reached with absolute propositions. Perhaps people won't come to exactly the same conclusions but we are all involved in a conversation which is hopefully moving us closer to what God desires.

How does all this fit the Biblical model of revelation? What is truth? The Biblical idea can be illustrated from the background of the Hebrew word for truth. *Ameth* and *amen*⁵⁷ are part of the Hebrew word family translated in English by various words for truth. These words derive from a Hebrew root meaning that which is firm, solid or stable. In some passages it even describes the pillars of a building (2 Kings 18:16). These words represent that which is dependable. The supports of a building are dependable. A sensible person doesn't support a building with a few small sticks or pieces of straw but with solid wood, stone or metal.

We expect buildings to be built on a solid foundation with sound sturdy materials. In life we also expect many facts to be dependable. Let's say that I write you a check for 500 dollars. You cash it at the bank and the teller hands you three dollars. You point out that this is wrong. The teller responds that this bank has chosen to interpret 500 to mean three; they've found it works better for them. You could be justifiably upset maybe even angry. Yet, if there are not dependable facts upon which we can think and function our world would be in an uproar.

⁵⁷ The Hebrew words respectively are *אמת* and *אמן*. For the latter, William Holladay gives as definitions, supported, have stability, remain, reliable, p. 20.

This is also true of Biblical truth. If the information revealed in God's Word is debatable, if it is subject to our impressions or feelings, if it is subject to what is socially or politically acceptable at the time, then it will not provide a sound foundation for our lives. Don't worry, the Scriptures reveal that they are indeed sound and provide us the sturdy truth we need.

Truth and Scripture's Antiquity

One reason some believe the Bible is not sufficient is its age. The earliest books of our Bibles were written about 4,000 years ago and the most recent about 1,900 years ago. Can a book written that long ago address believers today? Yes. Peter and the writer of Hebrews described God's Word as living (Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23). Hebrews 4:12 states that the word can still help the believer distinguish between the soul (his senses and emotions) and spirit (his rationale center with which he relates to God). The Word isn't dead; it still works in making distinctions. Peter wrote that the Word of God which is living is the avenue of our spiritual birth. It was through the Word that we heard the good news of Jesus Christ, and through this that we believed and were born anew. The Bible is not a dusty outdated book. It is the living word of the living God.

So, we begin by asking three questions. Are the books in my Bible the right books? After thousands of years, how do I know we even have a dependable copy or copies of each of those books? Since I don't read the languages in which the books were written, can I hope to know what they wrote? To answer these questions, we will discuss three issues that demonstrate the reliability of the Word: canonicity, or what books belong in the Bible; transmission, how the Bible went

from the original writers to us; and translation, how the Bible came to be written in a language other than those in which it was originally penned.⁵⁸

Canonicity

Canonicity is used to describe Scripture which is considered authoritative. The Greek word canon described a reed, and then the reed or any other item used as a standard to measure something else.⁵⁹ A straight reed could be broken at three feet like our modern yardstick, and other marks added for smaller divisions of length. When we talk about the canon of Scripture, we are describing it as a standard, a type of measuring stick. If one desires truth, it is necessary to determine whether the standard is accurate. In the case of Scripture, canonicity involves the question of what books should be in the Bible and which should not, or what books make up the measuring stick.

The Bible of the Roman Catholic Church includes seven books not in our Bibles. Non-Roman Catholics have generally referred to these as the Apocrypha, a title meaning hidden, which describes these books as not part of the accepted canon. Many other books have been written which were never included in our Bible? The fictional work *The DaVinci Code* has recently popularized the idea that some or many of these other writings should have been included, and perhaps some New Testament books should have been omitted. How

⁵⁸ Volumes could and have been written on each of these topics. We will deal with each briefly. For those interested in further study, I would recommend R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969.

⁵⁹ The word is illustrated in the following passages 2 Corinthians 10:13, 15, 16; Galatians 6:16.

can we be certain that our Bible is the right Bible? This is the question of canonicity.

The basis of canonicity is inspiration. If the Spirit carried along men to write truth, it belongs to the canon. Other writers can recognize this, but no individual or council can canonize a writing which was not produced by the joint work of the Spirit and man. Such writings are God-breathed and part of the canon.

Some have thought that our canon, especially the New Testament canon was assembled by church councils, with their own theological and/or political agendas.⁶⁰ This is not true. The most they could do is recognize what belongs to the canon, but they could not determine the canon. The canon of Scripture can be viewed as consisting of an Old Testament canon and a New Testament canon. Each was recognized separately and then together. Though Jewish and Church councils considered the list of books included, those councils did not determine the canon. Those councils could only recognize the character inherent in those writings. We will consider each of these canons separately to answer the question regarding the whole canon.

The Old Testament Canon

We begin by citing Old Testament writers who refer to other Old Testament writers. Let's first look at the example of Daniel. In Daniel nine, Daniel tells the reader that he understood by books the number of years revealed by the Word of the Lord to Jeremiah (Daniel 9:1). Daniel attributed Jeremiah's revelation of seventy

⁶⁰ Harris, p. 155.

years to the Word of the Lord⁶¹ (Jeremiah 25:11-12). In Daniel 9:3-19, Daniel takes all the steps delineated by Solomon in 1 Kings 8:46-53. These steps were for addressing God when Israel had sinned and were taken captive, as was Daniel. Therefore, Daniel considered Solomon's words authoritative to address his, Israel's, and Jerusalem's predicament. Daniel also referred to the Law of Moses, as promising a curse and calamity in response to their transgression of the Law (9:11-14). For him, Moses' law was authoritative. Daniel considered each of these: Jeremiah, Solomon, and Moses to be revelation that was authoritative.

Moses is authoritatively quoted by the author of Judges (Judges 3:4), David (Psalms 103:7-9), and Ezekiel (14:14, 20). Hosea refers to Adam's act of transgression (6:7) and Isaiah to the flood of Noah (54:9). Both prophets considered Moses' words to be accurate and the events genuine. Moses himself wrote, that he recorded the Law God gave to Him (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). Therefore, the writers of the Old Testament books viewed the writings of other Old Testament writers as authoritative, to be genuine revelation from God, and viewed their own writings as authoritative and revelation from God.

Old Testament writers also recognized the legitimacy of other writers, by quoting or referring to other Old Testament writers. Ezra quoted Jeremiah, Haggai, and Zechariah, and Moses (Ezra 1:1; 5:1; 7:6). Isaiah quoted Micah (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4).

⁶¹ Word of the Lord [דבר יהוה] is a reference to the pre-incarnate Son, personally appearing and speaking. See [Special Revelation](#).

Zechariah quoted Moses and prior prophets. (Zechariah 7:12). Malachi quoted Moses (2:5-8; 4:4).

The Jewish teachers taught that the Old Testament books were written by a line of prophets.⁶² R. Laird Harris traced out this line of prophets accounting for the Old Testament writings. For example, Moses was identified as a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15). Joshua finished Deuteronomy after Moses' death, carrying on the mantle of the prophet (1 Kings 16:34). Samuel wrote Judges, Ruth and some of 1 Samuel. He is acknowledged as a seer ⁶³ (1 Samuel 9:19; 1 Chronicles 9:22). First and Second Samuel were concluded by Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer (1 Chronicles 29:29). The Kings also were recorded by prophets and seers. Nathan, Ahijah, and Shemaiah were prophets (2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15) and Iddo a seer (13:22). Thus we have acceptance among Old Testament writers forming the foundation of the Old Testament canon.

The Old Testament canon was in existence at the time the New Testament events happened. The Jews of Jesus day recognized an authoritative collection of writings, which we know as the Old Testament. Only a few Old Testament books were questioned. Esther was

⁶² Harris devoted nearly 20 pages to developing and proving from Scripture the idea that the Old Testament writers were called prophets, or God's authoritative spokesman. Harris agrees with the popular idea that a prophet was a forth-teller "preacher" more than a foreteller. I agree that prophets preached, but always in connection with a promise for the future: of judgment, of blessing, of Divine intervention. Even Moses' Law was tied closely with God's future plans for Israel, and His promised blessings and curses. The remainder of the Old Testament records numerous examples of both.

⁶³ The root for seer is הָרָא a form of the Hebrew word "to see."

questioned by a few Jewish authorities for its lack of a divine name, that is, it never mentions God, though it demonstrates His sovereign care for Israel.

The Jews considered their canon to have closed when the succession of prophets ended with Malachi about 435 BC. Josephus, a first century Jew, wrote, “From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.”⁶⁴ It is believed that some of the apocryphal writings made up this complete history. Yet they did not accept those writings, for they weren’t written by prophets. Even in Maccabees, an apocryphal writing, the Jews responded to the defilement of their altar, “So they tore down the altar and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them.” (1 Maccabees 4:45-46). Though not divinely recorded history, this demonstrates that the Jews knew they had no prophet at that time. Therefore, the Jews never considered those apocryphal writings to be part of the canon.

When Jesus walked the earth, He quoted Old Testament Scriptures as authoritative. He not only quoted it numerous times but said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17, 18; cf. Luke 24:44). He saw the writings of Moses and the prophets as

⁶⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* vol. 1 p. 41.

authoritative and many of their prophecies were fulfilled by His life. The literal nature of these fulfillments demonstrate that God meant what He said, and testify to the legitimate inclusion of these books in the Jewish canon.

Jesus upheld the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. He questioned the Jewish religious leaders, “Did you never read in the Scriptures” (Matthew 21:42). He claimed that problems regarding the Scriptures did not involve the Scriptures themselves but the understanding of its interpreters (Matthew 22:29). He knew that His actions and the events of His earthly life were fulfilling or completing statements of the Scriptures (Mark 14:49; John 17:12). He asserted that the Scriptures spoke about Him (John 5:39). Finally, regarding the Scriptures He stated that they cannot be broke (John 10:35). In this context, the verb “broken” probably has the idea of destroyed, or annulled.⁶⁵ In this case, Jesus meant broken in the sense that it is annulled or no longer effective or authoritative.⁶⁶ The Son, the Word of God Himself, verbally acknowledge the authority and continuing validity of the Old Testament Canon.

At the time of the New Testament, the Jews studied and respected the Old Testament as God’s Word, even if they did not understand it properly and missed that it pointed to Christ. They knew some of what the Scriptures said about the Christ (John 7:42). The unsaved Jews of Berea examined or evaluated the Scriptures daily to see if Paul was accurate (Acts

⁶⁵ For this use of the verb *λυω* compare Matthew 5:19.

⁶⁶ cf. J. Carl Laney, *John*, Chicago: Moody, p. 197.

17:11). As a result, many of them believed. They recognized the Old Testament canon of Scriptures.

New Testament writers viewed the Old Testament as authoritative and accurate. If you recall, the word canon meant measure or standard. While the New Testament writers never used that word to describe Scripture, they wrote of Old Testament Scripture as a standard. When Paul rehearsed the the gospel for initial salvation, he wrote that the death and resurrection were “according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). “According to” translates the Greek preposition *κατα* [*kata*] which can mean, “5. of the norm, of similarity, homogeneity - a. to introduce the norm that governs something”⁶⁷ Luke 2:24 illustrate this usage: when Jesus was presented at the temple as a baby boy, his parents brought an offering **according to the standard** which was spoken in the law (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:13). James quoted Leviticus 19:18 as the standard for the royal law (James 2:8). Paul quotes from the Old Testament numerous times, and considers what it says to be authoritative, “For what does the Scripture say?” (Romans 4:3; 11:2; Galatians 4:30). Paul, Peter, and Jude both quote and refer to these writings as though they are accurate authoritative accounts.

The New Testament Canon

We now consider the development of the New Testament canon. The New Testament canon can be divided into five primary groupings: the synoptic gospel writers, Lucan history, the Pauline letters, John’s writings, and the catholic letters. The documents can also be divided between those writers who were

⁶⁷ Gingrich, p. 101

eyewitnesses and those who researched their writing or recorded the information of others. Matthew and John are examples of the first. Portions of Acts also were eyewitness accounts. We recognize these parts of Acts by Luke's use of "we." He included himself when he was a participant in the events he recorded. Luke tells us that his account of Jesus was researched, and it is generally accepted that Mark recorded the oral history related by Peter who was a first hand witness to much of what the gospels record. Modern liberal scholarship precludes any supernatural source of these documents. Most rejected the named authors of these books, making them second, third, or fourth generation accounts. This was not the tradition from earliest times. Early Christian writers recognized these accounts as written early and written by apostles or by close associates of the apostles. This fact is all the more interesting when we note that not one of the four gospels specifies the human author.⁶⁸ Yet, despite this, the early church was nearly unanimous, even as early as the end of the first century, that is within 40-50 years of the very first gospel written and within 10 years of John's gospel.

However, Christ pre-authenticated the apostles' writings. In the Upper Room He assured them that the Spirit would remind them of all things which He had said (John 14:26). He also promised them "all authority..." (Matthew 28:18ff). That authority was then extended through their writings. This accounts for Matthew and John's writings who were eye witnesses to

⁶⁸ The titles "According to ..." were added and do not appear in the earliest copies of the gospels.

most of the events they recorded. When I say, “most of the events” note that Matthew wasn’t present for the events of chapters 1-3 and part of chapter 4, but witnessed much of the last 24 chapters in his account. Matthew wasn’t present at the birth of Jesus, or when the angel appeared to Joseph. Mark has historically been treated as Peter’s record, recorded by Mark (as writer not secretary).⁶⁹ This leaves only Luke who tells us he researched his work from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-3). Paul quoted Luke 10:7 in 1 Timothy 5:18 and called the book of Luke Scripture.⁷⁰ In the same letter, he referred to the gospel accounts writing, “healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:3).⁷¹ Paul could have read copies of all three synoptic writers by the time he wrote 1 Timothy.⁷² He was well acquainted with the earthly life of Jesus, though it was not the focus of his God-given ministry (2 Corinthians 5:16;

⁶⁹ See Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943, p. 144.

⁷⁰ Paul’s quotes precisely *αξιος γαρ ο εργατης τοθ μισθου αυτου* from Luke. Mathew 10:10 replaces *μισθου* with *τροφης* “food” for “wage”.

⁷¹ *του κυριου ημων ιησου χριστου* the lord of us, Jesus Christ could be a qualitative Genitive (Gen of description) meaning “words about our Lord Jesus Christ.” It seems more natural to understand this as words belonging to Jesus or from Jesus.

⁷² Matthew is probably the first account written, then James, then 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, and perhaps Luke. Mark was the last of these three. Modern scholarship rejects this, following liberal studies which take a documentary and evolutionary approach to the gospels. According to them, Mark being the shortest and most simple is the primordial slime from which Matthew and Luke evolved. These make Matthew dependent on Mark. Yet, Matthew was an eyewitness and needed no “sources.”

11:4).⁷³ It is possible that as early as 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul referred to Matthew or Mark's account when he wrote, "according to the Scriptures."

Aside from the gospels, the authority Christ gave to His disciples found expression in the writings of John and Peter. Paul did not speak specifically of their writings. 1 Peter was written toward the close of Paul's life, within five years and 2 Peter was written shortly after Paul's death. John wrote approximately 20 years after Paul's death. Therefore, Paul was unable to mention either of these writers. Paul recognized these two along with James as pillars of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). Some make much of Paul discounting these men as adding anything to he and Barnabas, yet Paul didn't state this out of disrespect, but to demonstrate that His apostleship and message were from Christ and not established by these apostles. He recognized them as apostles (cf 1 Corinthians 9:5; 12:28; 15:9). Their writings round out Paul's new doctrine. James explains the tension of wanting the best of the world and wanting God's will. Peter explained how God's grace is compatible with suffering and in his second letter, along with Jude, how grace is not a license for immoral living. John explained that there is only one way to have fellowship with God and the world's options are not it. Without these letters, we would have incomplete information regarding God's will for Christians.

⁷³ Paul warned of others who announce another Jesus which he did not announce. Another is *ἄλλος* similar but not the same. The easiest explanation in light of Paul's overall writings is that they announced the earthly life of Jesus, and Paul did not. He focused on the resurrected Jesus.

Paul's writings were classified among Scripture. Peter wrote, "just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16). Paul wrote Timothy, "...commit to faithful men." implying that a content of truth existed and was to be passed on to others. He considered that content to be the message he taught, the message he was about finished writing (2 Timothy 2:2).

Transmission

Transmission describes the process of the text passing from the original writers to modern readers. This involves two areas: copying of texts and modern textual criticism. Copying involved individuals making copies from the original writing, for example a singer or priest copying one of David's Psalms to share with others. Textual criticism is the "science" of examining manuscripts (handwritten documents) in an attempt to discern what manuscript/s best represent the original writing. This is done by comparing changes, handwriting styles, and other works by the same stated human author (e.g. comparing 1 Timothy with 2 Timothy both written by Paul). Textual criticism also examines versions of the original texts. A version is a translation of text from one language to another, such as the Hebrew Old Testament being translated into Greek. A study of copying and textual criticism go hand in hand, as an understanding of the first can help us better practice the second. Both are necessary for us, because we have none of the actual documents penned by the human authors, which we call autographs. We have

only copies of what they wrote. The study of transmission helps answer the question: do we have dependable copies of the original writings, so that we can say that we have God's Word?

Copying of the original writings began early. We are not certain how quickly Old Testament writings began to be copied. We do have one recorded incident in which only one copy of the law was known to be in existence. It was located in the neglected temple during the days of King Josiah (1 Kings 22:8). God had instructed Israel that their king was to make a copy of the Law in the presence of the Levites (Deuteronomy 17:18). It was a sad time when the law had been lost.⁷⁴ God expected the law to be copied, that's transmission.

Transmission of the Old Testament Texts

The Jews not only copied the text of the Old Testament, but explained some of their techniques in assuring accurate copies. In the age of photographic reproductions, it is easy to forget how a slip of the eye or ear could miss a letter, a whole word, or perhaps a whole line of text. The Jews were aware of these problems and counted lines, numbers of words and

⁷⁴ In the last two centuries, many have set forth a faulty theory known as the documentary hypothesis. This theory classified the writings with the letters JEDP. Each letter represented what they considered to be a set of religious writers, with various religious agendas. For example, they claim that Genesis was written over several centuries by different writers. These theorists believe they are able to judge what verses or sections were written by what type of people. These theorists explained the finding of the law as not the Law of Moses but Deuteronomy written much later. However the various writers of Scripture provide no real support for this type of theory. Gleason Archer provides a good survey and rebuttal of this theory *A Survey of New Testament Introduction*, Chicago: Moody, 1974.

were known to burn whole scrolls when inaccurate copying was discovered, so as not to transmit error. Copying was sometimes done in rooms where several men would copy the same text at the same time, and then check the work for accuracy. Thus God's Word was carefully copied and passed onto to following generation.

For us, the transmission of the Old Testament text was considered a problem, because until the 1940's the oldest copies of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament dated from about AD 900. That's 1,300 years after the last Old Testament book was written. However, in 1947 copies of most of the Old Testament were discovered in the region of the Dead Sea (in Israel). The oldest of these date just prior to 200 BC, one of the oldest and best preserved being a copy of Isaiah. When these were compared with existing copies, very few discrepancies were found. R. Laird Harris compared the Masoretic text of Isaiah one with the Isaiah scroll from Qumran. The Masoretic text was the standardized Hebrew text. Scholars thought the Masoretic text had been drastically altered to the form found in our copies dating about AD 900. Qumran was the community which produced many of the Dead Sea Scrolls, among which most of the Old Testament was found. Harris found 20 differences between these two copies of Isaiah one. He concluded that only one difference was significant. The following chart compares the textual differences as listed in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.⁷⁵ The number on the left is the verse in which the difference exists. Following the

⁷⁵ Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart, 1984.

Hebrew text is an English translation.

Masoretic	Qumran
15 texts ends with “blood”	+ אצבעותיכם בעאון upon your fingers perversity.
18 צשנים scarlet (as plural)	כשני scarlet (shortened)
20 חרב sword	בחרב - by sword
31 החסון the strong ones	החסנכם your strong ones
וופעלו his work	וופעלכם your work

Note how minor the differences are in this one chapter. The differences involve plural forms versus singular forms, or the omission of preposition or pronoun. The sense of the passage is not dramatically altered by any of these, though all likely were changed with purpose. For example: the Masoretic (Rabbis responsible for the Masoretic text) may have made “scarlet” in verse 18 a plural so that it agreed with the word “sins.” Our English would read “If your **sins** are like **scarlets**...” This does not significantly alter the sense of the statement. The meaning of the text is that their hands were scarlet with the blood of innocents for they were not pursuing justice (v. 17). Whether scarlet is singular or plural doesn’t press us to think differently about the meaning.

Contrary to popular critical opinion, the Qumran

documents confirmed that the Jewish Scribes had been very meticulous in their copying techniques. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars were highly suspicious of the Masoretic text thinking that it was too standardized and could not have reliably represented the original documents. Though not faultless, the Masoretic text disagreed little with the new found material. “Nothing in the new discoveries from the Qumran caves endangers the essential reliability and authority of our standard Hebrew Bible text...”⁷⁶ For us, this means we can have confidence in our existing Hebrew texts. We have a sound foundation for study and translation, and most importantly, for knowing God’s revelation.

Transmission of the New Testament Texts

The New Testament situation is different, and this is important since New Testament canonicity does not have the significant later support and citation by New Testament figures and writers such as Christ, Paul, and Peter. The earliest known copy of a New Testament text is a two sided fragment of the gospel of John from chapters 18 and 19. It is very small with just a few words on either side. It is dated at about *AD* 105 to 120, some scholars claiming that it may even date to between *AD* 95 and 100. This fragment was copied within 5 to 15 years of John’s original work. This was significant for the Gospel of John, as John’s theology is considered the most developed and many have asserted

⁷⁶ Archer, *A Survey of New Testament Introduction*, 41. On page 65 in his chapter on Lower Criticism of the Old Testament (i.e. study of differences between manuscripts, he writes, “In conclusion we should accord to the Masoretes the highest praise for their meticulous care in preserving so sedulously the consonantal text of the Sopherim which had been entrusted to them.”

that it could not possibly have been written in the first century and certainly not by John.⁷⁷ Other early copies date from mid to late second century, placing them within about 100 to 150 years of the original writings. However there are more discrepancies within the New Testament copies. At present, over 5,000 manuscript copies and fragments of the Greek New Testament exist, demonstrating how prolific its distribution.⁷⁸ The New Testament believers saw their writings as valuable, providing them essential revelation from God regarding

⁷⁷ These individuals assert that it was a later work of a community with a developed theology, a theology which first century Christians and their leaders could not possibly have understood. This shows a bias regarding the development of theology. John has a “high Christology” a term meaning Jesus was more than a man and a teacher but divine even God. For liberal scholars that point of view was unacceptable. They were certain first Century Christians could not have understood Jesus to be God. Therefore, they concluded that John had to be written later. Isn’t God’s sense of irony amazing.

⁷⁸ J. Ed Komoszewski, M James Sawyer, Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, p. 77.

His provisions and expectations for them.⁷⁹ The New Testament Christians did not develop formal scribes until about 200 AD. “In the early period copies were made privately: there were no scriptoria (professional copying centers) before A.D. 200 at the earliest.”⁸⁰ As a result most of the differences among New Testament manuscripts involve differences of spelling. The Greeks (like our English prior to the mid 1800’s) did not have firmly established spellings of many words, with words and names having alternate spellings. Therefore, though a greater number of discrepancies exist among Greek New Testament copies, most of those discrepancies are spelling differences, omission of definite articles, and shortening of titles, such as, “our Lord Jesus Christ” to “our Lord Christ” in Romans 16:18 (AV vrs NASB). Many of these would be classified as unintentional changes.

Unintentional Changes

⁷⁹ In the 1970’s a Catholic priest proposed that some of Dead Sea fragments were fragments of seven New Testament books: Mark, Acts, Romans, 1 Timothy, and James, and 2 Peter. Father Jose O’Callaghan first recognized a section from Mark. The existence of New Testament Manuscripts among the Scrolls had not been previously considered, did not fit popular theories, and many New Testament Scholars still reject the idea. However, this is a possible situation and would demonstrate how quickly many of these writings were copied and distributed, and seems to fit New Testament evidence. David Estrada and William White Jr., *The First New Testament*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1978. 93-124. Though some question why New Testament letters would be among Qumran materials, the Qumran community collected many and diverse writing available at their time. Knowledge of this new “sect of Jews” (this is how many viewed Christianity) spread throughout the region and its literature (letters) were of interest.

⁸⁰ Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans Errol F. Rhodes, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, 55.

Bruce M. Metzger (1914-2007) was a New Testament scholar and textual critic at Princeton for over forty years. He notes four areas of unintentional changes in the copying of the New Testament texts⁸¹ “Errors arising from faulty eyesight.” This resulted in confusion of letters, for example the sigma for the epsilon (Σ E), which in the uncial⁸² script were distinguished only by the short horizontal line in the middle; and the theta Θ for omicron O again distinguished only by a short horizontal line. “Errors arising from faulty hearing.”⁸³ Some copyists wrote listening to dictation not visually looking at another manuscript. Therefore, if two words sounded the same or two letters sounded similar, the copyist may have written the wrong letter or word. “Errors of the mind”⁸⁴ such as when a copyist having read a few words, mixed up a synonym in his mind, or rearranged the sequence of the words, or transposed letters within a word (e.g. ἔλαβον “take” into ἔβαλον “throw”). Finally, “Errors of judgment”⁸⁵ in which a scribe accidentally changed or added a word/s due to a theological misconception.

Intentional Changes

Metzger then lists seven potential reasons for intentional changes in the text.⁸⁶ The first involved intentional changes in spelling and grammar, when the

⁸¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, 186.

⁸² All the letters were written as capitals and at the same height.

⁸³ *ibid* 190.

⁸⁴ *ibid* 192.

⁸⁵ *ibid* 193.

⁸⁶ *ibid* 195-205.

scribe attempted to correct spelling as he understood it or smooth out grammar, again as he understood it. Second, some attempted to harmonize the text they were copying with other known texts. One copying a document which quotes from the Old Testament may have attempted to make the quote agree perfectly, or to make two gospel accounts agree. This error failed to realized that subtle changes were not intended to create conflict but due to different intentions of the writers who picked out different details. Sometimes two seemingly similar events are only similar but actually two distinct events, perhaps even close together in time. Sometimes a scribe added words to clarify meaning. Metzger cited the situation in Matthew 9:13 “For I did not come to call righteous ones but sinners.” Luke added the words “to repentance” (εἰς μετάνοιαν) and so many scribes felt Matthew’s quotation was not sufficient and added these words to Matthew’s record. Metzger’s fourth situation involved attempts to clear up historical or geographical difficulties. Sometimes later copyists might have two differing copies before him and attempted to blend two different readings. The last verses of Romans are found in at least four different locations in the last three chapters of the letter. Some texts include the verses in two locations, perhaps to be safe or because the copyist was not sure as to their original location. The sixth involves changes made for doctrinal reasons. Romans 8:1 reads, “There is therefore, no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus.” Yet a large number of manuscripts, have moved the words from verse 4 “who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” to the end of verse 1. This reflects a theological bias regarding judgment:

who is judged and why. The theology of Colossians 2:2 is tremendous but difficult and has resulted in a large number of variations in once verse, the hardest reading being “God even the Father and the Christ.” Finally, Metzger noted the additions of small details. Almost all our manuscripts tell us that Paul taught in the Ephesian lecture hall of Tyrannus for three years. One manuscript added “from the fifth hour to the tenth.” This may reflect a tradition but it is a detail not well supported.⁸⁷

Because of these unintentional and intentional changes, scholars such as Bruce Metzger spent their life attempting to sift through the thousands of New Testament manuscripts and the relatively small number of changes to ascertain the original wording penned by each individual New Testament writer. Such students developed tests for weighing the evidence for and against differing readings. For example, if one single manuscript tends to differ frequently from most other manuscripts it is suspect of not reflecting the original. For instance, though the detail about the hours of the day during which Paul taught in Ephesus is interesting and may reflect tradition, it is not likely Luke wrote those words in Acts. Sometimes knowledge of the theological tendencies of one region versus those of another are helpful. If a part of the Church tended to view Christ as less than God, it may not surprise us that manuscripts coming from that region tend to omit certain titles and descriptions of Christ. If a portion of the early Church had already developed a high view of

⁸⁷ See *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, 2:405.

“sacraments”⁸⁸ it is not surprising that we find additions regarding “sacraments” in manuscripts originating from those regions.

Textual scholars of the Greek New Testament have attempted to place the existing manuscripts in four families: Alexandrian (those agreeing with the dominant texts found in the region of Alexandria Egypt, Western (those connected with Rome in the West), Byzantine (those associated with the Church in Byzantium - modern day Istanbul), and Caesarean, those associated with Caesarea on the Mediterranean Coast of Israel. Some question whether this last family existed as a copied text representing the way of thinking in the early centuries of the Church.

New Testament students generally fall into one of three groups depending upon which family of text they prefer. Modern Scholars favor the Alexandrian family of texts. These texts have been collated to form the Nestle/Alland texts (currently in its 27th edition), and the United Bible Society text (currently in its 4th edition). These texts are favored because they include some of the oldest New Testament manuscripts in existence. Simplistically, these scholars believe older is better. They also believe the Byzantine texts to be suspect because of their great uniformity. They question how a text could have been copied so consistently and uniformly. However, this can be turned around; how can they favor a family of texts with greater and more frequently discrepancies. The Alexandrian manuscripts,

⁸⁸ I put this in quotes because I do not believe in sacraments as taught by much of the Church. I hold to water baptism for adult believers and communion, but I hold both of these to be acts of testimony, not to acts which confer grace on the participant.

though few, have a greater number of difference among themselves. Despite this fact, they are in agreement with other text groups in the majority of places and demonstrate agreement on what God revealed.

The second group shows favor to the Byzantine texts, sometimes identified as the Majority text. The Majority text identification emphasizes the large number of manuscripts. They believe the existence of such a large number of manuscripts, so much in agreement with each other, demonstrates the Church's recognition of their accuracy. These texts originated from the region of modern day Istanbul, Turkey where the Greek language and the study of the Greek New Testament remained in use for nearly one thousand years after many other areas had switched to Latin. It was for this reason that so many similar copies of the New Testament in Greek exist. These texts do have unique readings which can be shown to date back to the 2nd Century. These texts show some emphasis on traditions of formal church which developed in the Eastern Church..

The third group is loyal, sometimes fiercely, to the Textus Receptus, a text having a closer affinity to the Byzantine texts than the Alexandrian but not identical. The Textus Receptus did not exist as discovered text. A Catholic Monk by the name of Desiderius Erasmus compared two Greek copies of the New Testament, and formed a new manuscript by collation. He repeated this process comparing his first product with two other manuscripts, and then repeated this with two additional and finally a seventh. Therefore, the TR in various editions was a new collated text from seven other texts. He lacked Greek

texts for some portions of his work and back translated from the Latin vulgate resulting in a large number of readings unique only to Erasmus' text.⁸⁹

Some who favor the TR have set forth the idea that God has protected His text only in the TR. We do not disagree that God has protected the text of Scripture. God's greatest work was in designing the text in such a manner that even when people intentionally have altered certain words, God's Word remains. Even with poorly translated Bibles or those which reflect a skewed theology, all fundamental doctrines can still be studied and taught. However, regarding this TR position, one would have to prove that God superintended the men who copied these manuscripts to assure their accuracy in the same manner the Spirit carried along the original writers. Since no one text existed which was the TR prior to Erasmus's work, one would also have to prove that God (presumably the Holy Spirit) worked in Erasmus, causing him to know what words from the seven manuscripts should be included and which should be omitted.

The results of extensive research are two reliable text families from which our modern Bibles have been translated. In comparing various differences between texts, I've encountered very few differences which would prevent a Bible student from understanding what God desires us to know. Accuracy makes arriving at God's meaning easier, but even with some of the existing differences we can still know God's will. Most doctrines do not rest on one text.

With these differences, can we trust our Bibles? If

⁸⁹ Metzger, 98-103.

all the differences in our New Testament texts were collated, we would have about 10,000 places involving different readings. Of these, “only about one-sixtieth rise above the level of trivialities.”⁹⁰ One way to illustrate this (maybe not the best) is take, at random, a page from the *Novum Testamentum Graece*⁹¹ and list the variants. This will seem a bit tedious for some English readers, but the purpose is to demonstrate the situation, to show how little variation really exists, and how inconsequential many variants are. Page 385 of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* covers Acts 20:32-21:5. Following is a list of textual variations. The English translation is from the NASB followed by the Greek word. The change is my translation of the variant listed in the apparatus (footnoted). The last column is the number of Greek manuscripts which support the variant listed in the apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum*. A + following the number indicates the Byzantine text type, consisting of many nearly identical manuscripts.

In thirteen verses there are fourteen variations. None are significant. None alter any doctrine. Of those fourteen variations five occur in only one manuscript, in contrast to thousands of others in agreement. Of the remaining nine variants four only occur in 2-3 manuscripts. Notice that the variant in 21:5 switches the word order of two words, two involve variant spellings, three involve a minor

⁹⁰ Normal L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, 180. Trivialities may be alternate spellings, change of word order, which in Greek does not alter the meaning, or omission of a definite article.

⁹¹ 27th Edition, ed. Barbara and Kurt Aland. 1993.

Verse	word	change	#
32	God θεω	Lord κυριω	2
32	<u>all</u> those who	<u>of the all</u> ...	1
32	(nothing)	to him <i>is</i> the glory into the ages amen	1
33	no one	no one (variant spelling)	4
35	all (object)	in all	1
35	happy (masculine)	happy (neuter)	1
21:1	And when it came about that we had parted from them and had	And embarking we set sail. Now we departing ...	1
21:1	Patra.	Patra and Myra	2
21:1	(same) πατερα	variant spelling πατερα	3
21:3	had come in sight (active)	had come to be seen (passive)	5 +
21:3	landed at Tyre	arrived at Tyre	3 +
21:5	ἡμᾶς ἐξαρτίσαι	ἐξαρτίσαι ἡμᾶς	3
21:6	we went on board ανεβημεν	we went in board ενεβημεν	7
21:6	(same)	we went upon board επεβημεν	+

change in gender or case, four involve alteration of the root verb by tense or prefixed preposition as in the 21:6 whether it is on board, in board, or upon board. The point is that most of these variants have little effect on the sense of the passage. This is the case

throughout the New Testament. Certainly some variants have more significance but most are like the above. It has been estimated that of the variants “only 1-2% substantially affect the meaning of the text.”⁹² This is an amazing fact; God’s Word, completed 2,000 years ago, has come to us in thousands of Old Testament and New Testament manuscripts with such overwhelming agreement that we can know what God has said.

Translation

Most believers don’t read Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. They study a Bible translation. Opinions differ greatly on what comprises a good translation. Some readers want the general thought communicated. Others want the words and syntax of the original language represented in translation with little regard for the structure of their own language. Regardless of what side, it is important to know that it often takes more than one word to translate. Nuances of another language can seldom be communicated by one word for one word. Hebrew and Greek speaking peoples were able to say in one word what often takes three or more English words to communicate. A Hebrew verb may occur in a causative stem. In Genesis 28:3 we find, “the Lord make you to be fruitful and multiply.” The forms of the Hebrew verbs translated fruitful and multiply indicate that God (in this context) caused both. What takes us seven words, a Jew said with two.

Sometimes a translator has no choice but to

⁹² W. Edward Glenny, The Preservation of Scripture in *The Bible Version Debate*, Plymouth, MN: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997, 96.

interpret. Words often have a range of meanings. For example, the Greek *logos* means simply “a word,” yet it can also mean a report, a speech, even a matter or thing. To translate it “word” in every situation would be wooden and would lead the reader astray. For instance, in Romans 14:12 it is translated in most Bibles, “every man shall give an **account** of himself.” “Account” isn’t bad, though many believers have been led to think they’ll be giving a blow by blow account of their lives. Perhaps the quite literal “a word” isn’t a bad translation in this case. Maybe all that we’ll say is the word “grace” or “that’s all.” However, that’s teaching and interpretation. This illustrates that at times a translator must interpret the context to narrow which definition is best. The NASB has provided extensive footnotes offering the reader alternate renderings of words, where the translators’ choice might be questioned. This is a good idea; matters of interpretation ought to be left in footnotes for the reader to consult and not be made part of the text. However, many do not like the idea of footnotes. Some believe that an adequate translation can be manufactured that does not require footnotes to provide the true sense. I disagree. If a translator believes Paul meant “marriage” by the word “touch” as in 1 Corinthians 7:1, he should clarify this in a footnote.

A thought for thought translation can leave one at the mercy of the translator, yet even in “word for word” translations, it is necessary to communicate the thoughts, because the words are not always clear. All reliable translations strike some balance between strict literalness and thought for thought. Even very literal translations such as the A.V. and NASB must take liberties at times. We’ll illustrate this with three popular

English translations: the Authorized Version (King James), the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version.

I was raised using the Authorized Version, and still appreciate its literalness. However, the AV doesn't always reflect the God-intended meaning. In Philippians 1:27 Paul encouraged the Philippians to stand in one spirit, and compete as a team in one soul. The AV translates soul "mind" as does the NASB. The NIV has "one man." Paul was concerned for the Philippians' rationale and their feelings, respectively. The AV's translators made a similar error in Philippians 2:20 calling Timothy "like-minded" when Paul meant like souled, that is, Timothy felt the same way about them that Paul did. Here the NASB translates it "kindred spirit" and the NIV barely translates it with "like." This may reflect the translators' belief in dichotomy (that man is material and immaterial) rather than in trichotomy (that man is material with two distinct immaterial parts, soul and spirit) and therefore they were unclear regarding these two words used together. Because I see that the Bible teaches trichotomy, I see the importance of distinguishing these terms in these passages. Soul and spirit occur in passages where their meaning does not emphasize this distinction. In Matthew 2:20 soul refers to Jesus' physical life and "life" is an acceptable translation. In Acts 2:41 soul is a metonymy for "person" (cf Acts 27:10, 22, 37).

I regularly use the New American Standard Bible, but the translation of the word *paraptoma* as "transgression" in Romans 5 is unacceptable. They accurately translate this word "trespass" in Ephesians

2:1 and that is the idea intended in Romans 5. Paul was considering Adam's offense or trespass along with his transgression. In 5:14 they translate *parabasis* "offense" though it is properly the word for transgression. Part of the problem is that neither of these Greek words are used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) to translate either the word *mael* which meant a trespass or *pasha* which meant a transgression. Neither are they used for a New Testament quotation of one of these words. It is therefore necessary for the translator to determine the appropriate word meaning based upon contextual statements such as Romans 4:15 which states that one needs a law in order to transgress (Romans 4:15). However, one can offend or trespass without law, by simply acting outside of the character God would desire or expect. Adam fell because he offended God, he chose that which was contrary to God's expressed will. His choice preceded his transgression. His transgression was eating. His offense was choosing. This translation messes up some of Paul's theology in Romans 5.

Finally, the popular New International Version tends to be more interpretive. Too frequently (in my opinion), the reader is given the translators' interpretation, not a translation. While teaching the Bible I've had many questions from others regarding why their NIV reads such and such. In 1 Corinthians 7:1, the NIV reads "it is good for a man not to marry" where the Greek text would literally be translated, "it is good for a man not to touch a woman." Did Paul mean touch or marry? The word *hapto* meant "touch." "Marry" is pure interpretation. The NIV's translation doesn't let the English reader have the option of

deciding for himself based upon the context.

These three examples are intended to demonstrate that it takes words to communicate ideas accurately. Change the words, and the idea changes. Was Timothy like-minded or like souled? What God meant hinges, in part, on the accurate choice of words. A translation ought to leave the interpretation to the Bible student and the individual work of the Holy Spirit, and not the translator. Even good translations have weakness. Each of the above translations have strengths, places where the translators' work is good. The above situations were chosen mostly to point out that even good translations have areas which are poorly or inaccurately translated, reflecting a difference in the translator's theology, understanding the context, or understanding the author's intent. As much as we would like a flawless translation, it is not likely we will see one.

Since no translation will be perfect, can we have confidence in our Bibles? This is similar to the situation of transmission. We could restate the question, "Is my Bible the Word of God?" Even with errors of translation, God has so written his Word that though one passage is poorly or inaccurately translated, elsewhere the word or idea is probably translated accurately. Let's illustrate this with the above passages. The Authorized Version's translators did not maintain a clear distinction between spirit and soul in Philippians 1:27. However, they maintained a distinction in Hebrews 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; and several other passages. In the context following Philippians 1:27, in the first verses of chapter two, the A.V. distinguishes between consolation in Christ, and comfort of love, between fellowship pertaining to the Spirit, and

“bowels of mercies.” Therefore, the context distinguishes between feelings and rational thought, between emotional soothing and unity in truth. Though it is harder to get at Paul’s meaning, in the overall context we can still see his general idea.

When we began our study of revelation and God’s Word, we concluded that inspiration applies only to the original documents penned by the human authors. It does not apply to copies or translations. This does not undermine authority, for all that the word “inspire” means is that when the document was being penned, God was breathing out that document. What we have now are copies and translations of what God breathed out. However, if a copy or translation alters what God breathed out, is that God’s Word? No, because it isn’t what God said. We can say that where a translation does not reflect what God said, it is not God’s Word, but where it accurately reflects what God said, then we do have God’s word. So, in one verse we may have God’s Word and in the next verse we may not. Yet should not undermine our confidence in God’s Word, because He has so governed the original writing that we can read God’s Word in just about any translation.

Some Helps for Bible Study

The last four studies have examined revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, canonicity, transmission, and translation, all matters relating to our Bible. The last study concluded with comments encouraging confidence in our Bibles, despite imperfect translations. This can leave many English readers (or readers of any language other than Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) frustrated. It should not. Our English Bibles still communicate God's truth, and in most places, they do a pretty good job. Yet this is not enough for some. Such people may never be satisfied. They wish for a 100% perfect presentation of truth, and feel that God must be less than God if He can't guarantee this. I, on the other hand, see God's power in protecting truth, so that even after man's faulty handling of God's perfect product, His truth still comes through.⁹³

In the remainder of this study, we'll consider some helps for Bible study, for making good use of God's Word. A variety of tools (books and software) provide believers access to some of the depth of the Greek and Hebrew texts. In the 19th Century a Methodist minister James H. Strong (1822-1894) identified and numbered 8674 Hebrew roots and 5523

⁹³ Some years ago, a friend's mother attended a tent meeting sponsored by an errant church. She told her son that she had been saved at the meeting. My friend, knowing that this church required water baptism for salvation, pointed this out to his mother. She replied that they had told her that too, but she knew they were wrong. She knew that believing in Jesus Christ was all that was necessary. Though these people mixed error with truth, the truth came through. Though they messed up the requirement for salvation, the Spirit used the truth presented to bring this woman to saving faith. Though not an excuse for sloppy or errant theology, it is testimony to the power of God's truth.

Greek roots. With this numbering system, he then tagged the English words of the A.V. in a concordance published in 1890. This provided English readers access to the original word behind the English word. If one refers to the back of the concordance, where the Greek and Hebrew words are listed, one will find all the other English translations in the AV for that word. This allows one to compile all the occurrences of an original word. This can be most helpful. Sometimes a key passage, one which dramatically aids understanding a truth would not be consulted because a key word is translated differently. For example, in Romans 4 the A.V. translates the word λογίζομαι [*logidzomai*] by three different English words: count 2x, reckon/ed 3x, impute 6x. By consulting Strong's concordance, the reader is able to see all eleven occurrences of the Greek word. As an aside, in our computer dependent culture, we should appreciate Strong's manual labors.

Half a century earlier, British Bible student George V. Wigram undertook a similar project. "Several years before this, Wigram's interest had been engaged in the preparation of Concordances which should aid especially Bible students with no, or but little, knowledge of the original languages. The plan of these was determined on after conference with Mr. De Burgh, who found the workers, whilst there can be no doubt Wigram himself provided the money, although he humbly speaks of this only as "passing through my hands." The first to appear, in 1839, was the Englishman's Greek and English Concordance to the New Testament, and it was followed in 1843 by the Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance to the

Old Testament.”⁹⁴

Both tools or concordances provide English readers access to Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek roots. Strong’s concordance did so working from the English text. It takes more work to collate all the information using Strong. The *Englishman’s* volumes lists in English all occurrences under their original roots, requiring the English student to find the original root. These latter two volumes have indices of the various English words. My experience is that the latter volumes are easier and faster to use.

Computer software has made this work even easier. A basic programs such as *The Online Bible*, *eSword*, *the Blue Letter Bible*, or *the Unbound Bible* allow the user to click on an English word in an English translation and immediately have displayed Strong’s brief definitions and potentially lexical work from larger works such as Joseph Henry Thayer’s *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*⁹⁵ or *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. If the user clicks another key, all the occurrences of that original root are displayed. Another click or menu choice allows the user to see the conjugation of all verbs. What once required many minutes, can be done in seconds. Higher end software such as *Logos* or *Accordance* for the PC and Apple computers are capable of more complex searches and provide greater detail.

It has been seen how important word meanings

⁹⁴ www.stempublishing.com/authors/Biographies/wigram.html

⁹⁵ It’s full title was *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti*

are. Today, English readers have available many tools which will provide definitions of all or most Biblical Hebrew and Greek words. In the last century, W.E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* opened a wealth of solid definitions to English readers. Listed by English words, the reader needs access to what specific Greek word occurs in the verse in question. For example, under Disease, He finds four nouns and two verbs. For each entry, Vine gives an English pronunciation followed by the Greek word. If one were looking at 1 Timothy 6:4, he would need to find that the word is *NOSEMA* and then would be able to read the appropriate entry.

Recently, Vine's has been bound with a similar, though less exhaustive, set of studies on Old Testament words, edited by Merrill F. Unger and William White Jr.⁹⁶ William Mounce has edited *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*.⁹⁷ Though helpful, I have not found this volume to do as well in recognizing distinctions between words. Also available is *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* edited by Stephen D. Renn⁹⁸ which is supposed to be an update of Vine's. All three of these recent volumes provide definitions for both Hebrew and Greek words.

An interlinear bible is very helpful. An interlinear provides a Hebrew or Greek text in a line, with a literal English translation below each word. Some interlinears add a third line which may be more idiomatic or rearranges the words for the sake of English syntax.

⁹⁶ Printed by Nelson Publishers of Nashville, TN.

⁹⁷ Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.

⁹⁸ Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005.

Following is Ephesians 4:1 in an interlinear format.

Παρακαλῶ	οὖν	ὑμᾶς	ἐγὼ	ὁ	δέσμιος
I encourage,	therefore,	you,	I	the	prisoner
ἐν	κυρίῳ	ἀξίως	περιπατῆσαι		
in (the) Lord,	worthily	to walk			
τῆς	κλήσεως	ἧς	ἐκλήθητε,		
of the	calling	from which	you were called		

Of the many interlinears available today, Alfred Marshall's good 1958 work is available in various editions. Two others are also recommended, *The NKJV Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* by Zane Hodge and Arthur Farstad⁹⁹ uses the Majority Greek text. This helpful volume cites the major variations between the Majority text and both the Textus Receptus and the United Bible Societies' 3rd edition. I recommend *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*¹⁰⁰ by Robert K. Brown and Philip Comfort. The NRSV text in the margin is not recommended but the interlinear translation is, using more up to date English than Marshall. This interlinear lists some textual variants (not many).

Let's look at one passage and employ these tools. The AV text of Philippians 4:19 reads, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Consulting *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, we find "will fill" instead of "supply." These are potentially different ideas. When we consult our expository dictionaries or

⁹⁹ Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994.

¹⁰⁰ Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990.

lexicon, we find that indeed, “to fill, or fill full” is the normal meaning. Consulting a concordance we see that our verse is the only place this word is translated “supply.” We then use the concordance to look at the other places this word occurs. We see a variety of uses, yet all have some idea of filling. We also find that this word is used in Ephesians four times, and each refers to the body of Christ or the filling of a need which is present in the local assembly. In the context of Philippians, in light of the struggle for unity, might not Paul’s comments be about God filling up that need? Studying the context, we see that the need is met by God’s riches in Christ, not by material riches in the world. The Philippians had a spiritual need. That need could only be addressed in Christ, where Paul has been urging them to focus throughout the letter.

With all the study helps available, the student must always pay attention to context. Sometimes the meanings of a word, which could be translated in various ways, is narrowed or absolutely clear due to context. We can study all the nuances of language: lexicography (defining words), grammar (how a word is used as a noun or verb, etc.), syntax (the relation between words), yet an equally important facet is context. Keep in mind, what the author has been talking about. Has the author changed topics or is he reiterating? To whom was the author writing? Has the author used the same word elsewhere? Frequently the meaning of a word in one context is clarified by the same author’s use in another. This is especially true if we find the word in the same book. Though be warned, a word’s potential range of meanings can be expressed even within the same work. An easy example is Paul’s

use of πνεῦμα for both the Holy Spirit and the human spirit within the letter to the Ephesians. Then consult other writings by the same author. The word “fill” is used four times in Philippians, yet in the first three the Philippians are doing the filling, not God. When we consulted Ephesians, we found God, specifically the Holy Spirit filling. Personally, I would guess that eighty percent of my questions are answered in the context, perhaps not fully, but sufficient to make sense of the meaning. The other twenty percent require information from other parts of Scripture. Even when I understand a passage in its context, normally I can learn more as I broaden my search of the Scriptures. As I do so, I collect information, compare contexts, and attempt to collate the information into an understandable format, one which I can rehearse for my own understanding or to share with others.

God has specially revealed Himself, His work in history, and His will for us in His Word the Bible. The revelation is inerrant. That revelation is trustworthy. It has been transmitted to us with very few significant alterations. It has even been translated into many languages, making that revelation available to believers in many places. We even have tools that help us mine some of the great truths of that Word. Every part of this is a challenge to get into our Bibles so we can continue to know God and know Him better.

**“Illumination, Animation and Interpretation
The Scriptures and you.**

So God gave us a book. We've seen how God communicated some of His thoughts and plans to us through His written revelation. However, Christianity is diverse. Some people baptize by immersion, some sprinkle, and others pour. Some baptize only adults upon their confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ while others baptize infants. Some churches are governed by a hierarchy in a separate location. Some are governed by a board of elders within their own assembly, and still others govern themselves by the choices or votes of their members. Some churches believe that Christ will return and set up a kingdom which will begin with a literal thousand years during which He jointly reigns with His people. Others believe in no such kingdom. Some churches teach that we believers are to live by law while others do not. Some churches teach that the church is a continuation of Israel while others teach it is distinct. This list could go on and fill pages. The above listed differences point out that though we use the same Bible, we all do not understand it the same.

Some people celebrate this diversity. This, however, is foolish. If our previous considerations regarding the giving of God's revelation to man should teach us anything, it is that God has something to say and has said some of it in Scripture. He did not give us a book and then free reign to give it any interpretation we choose. God's revelation means something. He intended us to understand something specific. Celebrating our diversity or at least minimizing the importance of distinct conclusions expresses a failure to

appreciate what God meant. If the meaning of the text is whatever I take it to mean, then how can that express what God desired? Either God has planned a literal future thousand year reign or He has not. The two cannot both be true. Either God intends for the believer to live by the Mosaic Law or He doesn't. Both cannot be required of him. The fact is, God meant something specific. He did not give some loose information which can be legitimately strained into a diverse set of guidelines.

Why is there a difference of understanding? Is it purely a matter of interpretation? If a person develops the right set of interpretive principles will he arrive at a guaranteed accurate understanding of Scripture all the time? Does tradition play a role in how we interpret Scripture? The answer to these questions rests in our understanding of how God provided this revelation. We saw that it was a joint operation of God and men. God's will always prevailed and yet man played a cooperative role. God expressed precisely what He wished to say and yet almost every text bears the unique marks of the human author. Therefore, it is accurate to conclude that our understanding of Scripture involves both Divine and human components. The Holy Spirit as author of Scripture plays a major role. The human reader also must have some interpretive framework through which he reads God's Word.

The Need for Divine Help

Human beings come to the Word of God with baggage and interference. Unsaved men have a blind to things in the Word of God. God sent Isaiah to speak to His people, "And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on

seeing, but do not perceive.’ ‘Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed’” (Isaiah 6:9-10). Jesus told parables to hide truth from some people (Matthew 13:10-13). Yet even the disciples needed some of the parables explained to them. So even Jesus did not intend all of His teaching to be understood by everyone. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 not only tells us of the profitability of God’s Word but also that it is for the man¹⁰¹ of God. The Bible as a whole is not for everyone. Some of the Scriptures are profitable for training in righteousness. This righteousness is restricted to believers or the man of God. Paul knew God’s Word does not instruct unbelievers in how to live better or how to live moral lives. Their need is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel of Christ addresses them; the moral teachings of Scripture do not. Lewis Chafer identified four particular forms of blindness: Israel’s, Gentile, Satanic, Carnal.¹⁰² So, in both the Old Testament and New Testament times, men have been unable to understand with appreciation God’s revelation without some divine assistance.

The Unsaved, Natural-Soulish Man

The unsaved man may grasp as a set of facts or propositions the teachings of the Word of God, but he does not appreciate them. Paul described the unsaved man as the “soulish” man (1 Corinthians 2:14). English

¹⁰¹ *Anthropos* correctly translated “man” was not always a gender specific words, and here, as in many places refers to mankind: men and women.

¹⁰² L.S. Chafer, op cit, Vol. 1, pp. 105-108.

translations often use the adjective “natural” though the Greek *psuche* points to the soul. A soulish person operates by his senses: what he can experience directly with his senses. This type of person does not welcome the things from God, which things God has prepared for those loving Him (1 Corinthians 2:14, 9). The soulish man does not welcome such things because he deems them foolish for himself. He is unable to know such things. This word “know” is the Greek *ginosko* not *oida*. He is capable of the latter, as that is simply knowledge by learning, perhaps book learning or hearing from others. He is incapable of the former because that is experiential knowledge. He is unable to experience the things God has planned for those who love Him. If he were a believer, he could relate to such truths not only in his head but in his experience. However, since the unsaved man is operating by his senses, he doesn’t appreciate such truth. He can’t touch them, taste them, smell them, see them, or hear them. For instance, today God counts every believer to be sitting in Christ (Ephesians 2:6). God says blessing about us (Ephesians 1:3). However, I can’t see myself in Christ with my eyes, and I can’t hear with my ears the blessings of God. I can read in His Word that He does this. Paul explained that such truths are “spiritually discerned” or “evaluated” (1 Corinthians 2:14). My spirit rises above my senses and thinks about those things I cannot touch, taste, smell, and so on. Since the soulish man does not operate by his spirit, his evaluation of God’s truths will always be - FOOLISH! This is his blind evaluation of God’s Word.

Because soulish people do not appreciate the value of God’s revealed things, he will most likely

respond in one of three ways: reject the Bible and walk away, reject the Bible and mock it while finding fault wherever he can, or attempt to make the Bible understandable to himself. It is the last response that affects understanding. He will attempt to make the “foolish” things sensible. Since he cannot appreciate an entirely new way of life to come in the future, and since life on this planet is all he can sense and appreciate, he may reinterpret passages regarding the coming kingdom in a non-literal fashion. He may present that kingdom as already existing in some spiritual sense and therefore alter the meaning of the many promises attached to that kingdom. Since he cannot appreciate the fact that Jesus fully bore his sins while He hung upon the cross, he may interpret the cross as martyrdom and Jesus giving us an example of dying for a cause. Since he does not witness physical bodily resurrections, he interprets such statements to be vivid statements about how Jesus’ example lives on in us.

You see, if a person cannot accept the Bible for what it says, he may change what it means to fit what he can understand. Just from the perspective of the New Testament, it has been around for nearly two thousand years. In that time, immeasurable confusion has been brought to Scripture for this very reason.

These soulish people are soulish by choice. Paul instructed the Ephesians not to walk like the rest of the Gentiles (Ephesians 4:17). He went on to explain why the unsaved Gentiles live in the manner they do. Their minds are vain (v. 17). The Greek *mataios*¹⁰³ translated vain or empty, emphasizes an emptiness of outcome or

¹⁰³ ματαιότης W.E. Vine, op cit. p. 1204.

conclusion. As we saw above, an individual might read the Word of God and see what it says, or hear it explained plainly, but since he is soulish and cannot appreciate it, the conclusion of his mind is always empty regarding God's truths. Second, he is darkened in his thinking (v. 18). The word for thinking is built on the word "know" with the added preposition *dia* meaning through.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the word is that which is moving through the mind and describes part of the thinking process. Paul stated that when such individuals are thinking about these truths, the light is off. They are attempting to think about these things in a dark space. They lack illumination. Jesus described the religious leaders of His day as blind individuals leading other blind people, a true absurdity (Matthew 15:14; 23:16, 24). Third, he is cut off from God's life (v. 18). This is part of the reason the light is off. God's life is light and it shed light for men (John 1:4; Ephesians 5:9, 14-17). These individuals have never believed in Christ and therefore do not have God's life. They do not have God's life because of the ignorance that is in them (Ephesians 4:18). They don't know who God truly is and they do not know who Jesus Christ truly is. As sad as this fact sounds, they don't care because the ignorance is in them due to the hardness of their heart (v. 18). They don't want to believe in Jesus Christ. They sense no need of forgiveness, righteousness with God and eternal life. They feel quite fine in their own efforts. They may feel God can help them, but they sense no need for anything more than aid. Finally they

¹⁰⁴ The word mind is νοῦς and thinking is διανοια.

are past feeling¹⁰⁵ (v. 19). If at any time in the past they might have been uncomfortable rejecting God, Jesus Christ and God's Word, they don't care any longer.

Paul further attributed the blindness of the unsaved to Satan. He wrote, "But if indeed our good news stands hidden, it is stands hidden among the ones who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving¹⁰⁶ that the illumination of the good news regarding the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Simply, Satan keeps the unsaved from seeing who Christ truly is. The unsaved will always have some deficiency in their understanding about Jesus Christ, claiming: he's just a man, he's fiction, he's not fully God, he's all God not man, he's another god, he's a created or propagated being, etc., he only rose spiritually. This deficiency in their understanding of Jesus Christ causes them to turn to some other means of salvation than faith in Christ alone. Why believe in Him, if he is not sufficient to be your savior? They draw that conclusion due to this blindness.

Israel's Present Blindness

This blindness or hardness is even more pronounced among the unbelieving Jewish people. Because they rejected Jesus Christ, they are not only without the Spirit and unable to evaluate or appreciate the value of God's truths for us, but they are blinded to

¹⁰⁵ The Greek ἀπαλγεω "to cease to feel pain for" ... "to become callous, reckless." G.Abbott-Smith, op cit. p. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Literally this is "unfaithful" indicating that the unbelieving are not dependable towards any of God's revelation.

the Scriptures which were originally theirs, the Old Testament. Paul wrote, “Their mental conclusions are hardened, for until this present day the same veil remains over the reading of the old covenant, not being unveiled (removed), because it is rendered idle in Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:14). In simple terms, unsaved Jewish interpreters can’t see the real point of their own Scriptures. Like unsaved Gentiles they misrepresent what is plainly stated on the pages of Scripture so that it fits their mind. Because they reject Jesus Christ as Messiah, the incredibly accurate account of His sufferings in Isaiah 53, are reinterpreted to apply to the suffering of God’s servant nation Israel. Jewish commentator Israel W. Slotki illustrates this in his commentary on Isaiah, “The Babylonians, or their representative, having known **the servant, i.e. exiled Israel idealized**, in his humiliation and martyrdom, and now seeing his exaltation and new dignity, describe their impressions and feelings.”¹⁰⁷ He equates the servant with Israel not Jehovah’s Holy One. While Jews have discovered interesting facts about their Scriptures, they have not turned to the God of the Scriptures and believed in Jesus Christ.

Believer’s Blindness due to Carnality

Even believers have problems when approaching God’s Word and it due to more than an influence from unsaved men. In 1 Corinthians two, in addition to unbelievers or soulish people, Paul also explained why some of the Corinthian believers were struggling with God’s truth; they were operating in their flesh and acting like babies. Their approach to one

¹⁰⁷ Israel W. Slotki, *Isaiah*, (London: The Soncino Press Ltd. 1970) p. 261

another involved infighting and battles over loyalties to human teachers (1 Corinthians 3:3-5). Paul pointed to this as evidence that they were carnal or fleshly. Fleshly meant that they were operating or living their lives by their own fallen, twisted human efforts. They were not spiritual men but carnal, even like babbling children¹⁰⁸ (v. 1). Paul explained to them that he had to give them milk not solid food (v. 2). Therefore, carnality (fleshliness) and immaturity hinders one's ability to ingest deeper truth and keeps such people in a state similar to spiritual toddler-hood.

Paul repeated the problem of how immaturity affects one's ability to understand or appreciate God's truths when he wrote the Hebrews. In Hebrews five, Paul was explaining the priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 5:5). Paul compared Christ's priesthood to that of Melchizedek (v. 6). Paul had more he could have said about Melchizedek (vv. 10-11). However, he could not present additional truths, because the Hebrews had become dull of hearing (v. 11). They had enough time to become teachers (v. 12). To become a teacher requires sufficient time to take in truth and understand it so one may teach it to another. Yet the Hebrew believers needed to go back to Christian kindergarten (v. 12). They needed someone to teach them the basics. G. Abbott-Smith gives two definitions for the Greek *stoicheia* [basics] which shed light on this matter. He explained, "2. *an elementary sound or letter of the*

¹⁰⁸ *νηπιος* is always used negatively in the New Testament and describes one who is incapable of articulating and is therefore a babbler. This could even be a school-age child who would not be trusted to conduct family business due to his inability to articulate what is important in business.

alphabet...3. *the elements or rudiments* of knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ We might say that they needed to learn their ABC’s again. They needed to return to some basic Christian truths. Similar to the immature Corinthians, the Hebrew Christians needed milk not solid food (v. 12). They were immature and unable to partake of solid food because they had not exercised their faculties of perception to distinguish between good and bad (v. 14). This last statement needs to be understood in the context of the Hebrews and the Law of Moses. The Law prescribed every aspect of life, so Jews needed little discernment. Therefore, they remained in a sort of spiritual immaturity,¹¹⁰ but now, the previous commandment has been set aside due to its inability to mature anyone (Hebrews 7:18). This necessitated that the Hebrews exercise discernment regarding what is good or bad (5:14). The problem is that bad [*kakos*] is not specifically immoral or sinister but rather can denote, “what is useless, incapable, bad.”¹¹¹ Continuing to observe the Law with all its rituals was evil. It was useless and incapable for what they needed. It held them in infancy and did not permit them to grow. Therefore, immaturity and the refusal to mature keeps one from advancing in New Testament truths.

¹⁰⁹ Abbott-Smith, op cit, p. 418.

¹¹⁰ (cf. Hebrews 7:19 where “perfect” means maturity, see also 6:1 “let us be carried on to maturity”)

¹¹¹ Vine, op cit, p. 390. See Luke 16:25 in which *kakos* describes what Lazarus experienced, i.e. that which was useless or bad, not immoral or unrighteous. Also Matthew 24:48 with a *kakos* slave who mistreats others due to his thinking his master is long time in coming; he probably doesn’t expect his master to return.

God Illumines

In the early days of the Law, a man was found gathering wood on the sabbath (Numbers 15:32). The people knew this was a violation of the Law and so they brought him before others and held him until they could know what to do with him. Moses wrote, “because it had not been made clear what should be done to him” (Numbers 15:34). God spoke with Moses and explained what they were to do with the man (Numbers 15:35). When the Babylonian exiles returned they lacked a clear understanding of God’s will for them. Therefore, the people gathered and Ezra stood and read the Law to them (Nehemiah 8:1-8). While Ezra read, the Levites explained or caused the people to understand the law (v. 7).¹¹² Verse eight adds that they made the text distinct to give the sense so the people could understand the law. Even the Law needed explaining at points.

When Jesus asked His disciples who they said that He was, Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15-16). Jesus then explained that human beings [flesh and blood] had not explained this to Peter. God the Father had revealed this to him. Peter didn’t arrive at his conclusion by human deduction or considerations. He had heard Jesus tell who He was and had seen Jesus’ works. We might consider this sufficient, yet as we’ve seen above, the blindness of men’s minds and hearts necessitated that the Father reveal Christ’s identity to individuals. In a similar vein, Jesus stated that no one came to Him unless the Father was drawing that person (John 6:44).

¹¹² “Explain” is a Hiphil stem of the verb בִּין [*bin*] meaning to “understand.” This stem is causative.

This was true during His earthly ministry. A similar work is done now by the Holy Spirit. In both cases, God initiates an understanding of the revelation given.

In the present, God speaks and the light shines into dark hearts. We saw that the unsaved have a deficiency in their understanding of Jesus Christ's identity (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). If the unsaved do not see who Jesus is, how does anyone come to salvation? How is the blinding work of the god of the age (Satan) stopped? Paul looked back at his experience and that of the Corinthians and described it as God shining light into their hearts so they could see with knowledge the person of Jesus Christ (v. 6). God illumined. Paul employed the metaphors light and darkness to explain the presence or absence of understanding. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus involved literal light as Jesus met him, and illustrates well the spiritual light God shed in the hearts of men at the point of salvation (Acts 9:5). The encounter caused Paul to see Jesus' true identity.

Among Christians, the spiritual man can evaluate the things God has prepared for those loving Him (1 Corinthians 2:15). The verb "evaluates" [*anakrino*] means one judges over. It entails the recognition of value or lack of value. In that context the soulish man can't experientially know those truths so he deems them to be foolish. The fleshly believer can't digest these truths, being limited to basic truths. Only the spiritual believer sees the value of these things God has prepared for us.

Some dislike this division of believers into spiritual and carnal, though Paul certainly had no

problem doing so.¹¹³ In the context of 1 Corinthians 2, distinguishes between believers who attempt God's work by their own efforts follow specific men versus believers who do God's work in dependence upon the Spirit and recognize that God uses many different men. Since the Spirit is the one who chose the words to express the things God determined to reveal, the believer who is depending upon the Spirit is suited to appreciate those truths.

Any given assembly will have believers at different levels of maturity (1 John 2:12-14). The recipients of 1 John fell into four levels: little born ones, young children, young men, and fathers.¹¹⁴ John addressed the second group, the young children (those capable of training), because they appear to have been shaken by the departure of individuals from their assembly (1 John 2:19). These individuals left because they were not really part of the group; they were unbelievers who did not believe Jesus was absolutely God (v. 22). John identified them as antichrists. However, this was basic Christian truth and the young believers already knew this (v. 21). John's discussion

¹¹³ It might be helpful to consider carnality and spirituality not as lifelong qualities but as states which believers move in to and out of, sometimes through the course of a whole day. However, in Corinth, some believers had been loyally following specific men and bickering among themselves long enough that Paul assumed they would still be in that state when they received his letter.

¹¹⁴ Again, it is often argued that John intended no such classification of believers. However, the natural reading of the text supports distinctions based on some level of maturity. In the letter, each group is distinguished by its progress in knowing God and His truth. Three of the groups, *teknia*, *paidia*, *neaniskoi*, are also addressed as to their need at that level of maturity.

led him to a key verse on the Spirit's role of illuminating this God-given revelation, "And the Anointing which you received from Him remains at ease in you and you have no need that anyone teach you, but as the same anointing teaches you generally¹¹⁵ concerning all things and is true and is no a lie, and as He taught you, be at ease in Him" (1 John 2:27). God has given human teachers and therefore, John did not mean that human teachers are unnecessary (cf. Romans 12:7; 2 Timothy 2:2). John meant that no believer is so dependent upon human teachers that he is unable to recognize such an error without a teacher to point it out. "Having stated his own conviction concerning their heresies, he simply declared that no man really had to tell them the truth, for the Holy Spirit would confirm it to them."¹¹⁶ The Spirit teaches generally these things. The Spirit may not elucidate precisely all the problems in an antichrist's theology, but He sufficiently teaches so even the young believer knows it doesn't smell right.

Illumination sheds light upon or opens eyes to know or understand a truth. Paul prayed that God might give the Ephesian saints real experiential knowledge (Ephesians 1:17). That knowledge depends upon the Ephesians' eyes having been illumined to three things (Ephesians 1:18). They were illumined to the hope of Gods' calling for them, that is, what He had called them to be and the hope which that calling would produce. They were illumined to know the riches of His glory consisting of His inheritance among the saints, that is

¹¹⁵ The Greek preposition *peri* used with the genitive case speaks of generality not specificity.

¹¹⁶ C.C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965) p. 105.

the saints are His inheritance and that truth constitutes real riches (Ephesians 1:18). They were illumined know how great God's power is, power which operates in believers (Ephesians 1:19). All of these had been explained by Paul, but Paul knew these believers needed more than exposure to truth. They needed light shed upon their hearts to see and appreciate those truths. The Perfect participle "enlightened" indicates an established fact prior to¹¹⁷ the verb "give" in verse seventeen. The idea is then that God might give them experience in the realm of their knowledge because He had enlightened them to these important truths.

In the Upper Room, the night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit would guide and teach them when He came (John 16:13). He would reveal many new things for the disciples, things which were so different from the life they had known under Law that prior to the Spirit's coming, they were not able to bear them (John 16:12). Paul attributed the mystery of the Christ to the Spirit in Ephesians 3:4. That mystery revealed that Jewish believers and Gentile believers are now absolutely equal in Christ (v. 6). That would have been an unbearable truth. So while the Lord revealed those mysteries directly to Paul, the Spirit revealed that mystery to the apostles who like Paul taught the truth to others. In the Upper Room, Jesus explained that the Spirit would not come to primarily speak about Himself, but about Christ (John 16:14). We should note that this specific teaching and guiding

¹¹⁷ "Antecedent action relative to the main verb is ordinarily expressed by the aorist or perfect." Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Toronto, Ontario: The Macmillan Company, 1955) p. 230.

ministry of the Spirit was for the disciples who would then speak and eventually record those truths. Jesus had previously promised the eleven that the Spirit would both teach them and cause them to remember the things He has said (John 14:26). We benefit by believing on their Word and learning from the Scriptures they wrote.

We need to consider the limitation of what the Spirit does when He illumines or teaches. Some have used this truth to indicate we do not need to submit to human teachers. We pointed out that this would be contrary to and render untrue the New Testament statements that God gave teachers and teachers are to give attention to teaching. Second, some have used this truth to support the discovery of fanciful doctrines which could not be derived from a normal reading and comparison of the text. The Spirit does not illumine or teach by causing believers to discover hidden messages between the lines of the text. He gives light to the plainly revealed truth.

Yet principles of interpretation are not sufficient for the simple fact that though one may arrive at the correct meaning of a text, if it does not make sense to the interpreter or he does not appreciate the truth, perhaps due to carnality, he will likely reject it and manipulate the text for his purposes. This could happen at any point in the interpretive process. One might have a problem with one clause or phrase in a larger context, and that one problem could spin his interpretation in a different direction. In the early centuries of the Church, believers largely held to the truth of a literal one thousand year start to Christ's kingdom - a millennium. The world was hostile to the believers and so believers did not feel at home here on earth. The Church

experienced an intense opposition from Satan, as he was not bound. Therefore, the promise of a different future made sense. However, when the Church gained a respect and acceptance in the world, many found it unnecessary and undesirable to wait for a better future. They believed Satan was bound and the kingdom of God was advancing. Within a short time the belief in the literal millennium was largely abandoned. Most famous for this was Augustine who altered the plain meaning, because the plain meaning no longer fit the circumstances in which the Church lived. He interpreted the thousand years of Revelation 20 (stated six times) to be idealized, and that the kingdom already was in place. This was contrary to the plain message. The Spirit illumines to the accuracy and value of the message plainly seen in the words of the text.

The Word Can Be Interpreted Correctly

This leads us to the next point; how to interpret the Bible. Since this is not a study of Bible interpretation, our considerations will be brief. We ought to interpret the Bible in a normal fashion. That means that we read and interpret it as we would any other piece of nonfictional literature. That means, we expect words to take their normal meanings. We recognize figures of speech when they occur. We recognize the language of poetry (a legitimate genre) is figurative compared to a narrative. We read history as history and do not neglect the interpretation of the history to find some deeper spiritual meaning. The Scriptures were given to the man of God, not to specialist or an elite educated Christian. Therefore, Charles Ryrie stated about this form of interpretation, "The principle might also be called *normal*

interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated *plain* interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech. Symbols, figures of speech, and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation.”¹¹⁸ Therefore, our approach is the same approach anyone can take towards a work of nonfiction.

When we open a box labeled “some assembly required” we expect the box to contain a set of instructions on how to assemble the item. We read the instructions in a normal sense, paying attention to the correct size of screws to use or labeled part so when we finish, we have assembled the object as it was designed to be. When we read the instructions God gave Moses for constructing the tabernacle (tent), we interpret the instructions normally. We don’t endow the the materials with special meanings. We interpret the materials to describe the exact materials God intended for use in the tabernacle’s construction. The dimensions and designs are taken normally, as we would understand a set of written instructions. God didn’t intend a deeper meaning. God simply gave Moses instructions to build a specifically designed tent in which He would be present to Israel and at which Israel could assemble before Him. This is normal interpretation.

When we read instructions to husbands and wives, we understand them to be real instructions about married life. The Old Testament contains the Song of

¹¹⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995) pp. 80-81.

Songs, a love poem between Solomon and one of his wives. In places it contains graphic descriptions of the physical love between a husband and wife. Yet as the Church was affected by philosophies which viewed the physical body and its accompanying pleasures as less than the best and at times inappropriate, the Church struggled with the place of this text within the canon of Scripture. A common approach was to allegorize the book, making it a portrait of Christ's love for the Church. As appealing as that may have been, it still leaves one perplexed by Solomon's appreciation for and description of his wife's breasts as well as other parts of her body. It still seems best to take the poem to be descriptive of a real physical relationship within marriage. It was an appropriate and necessary book in the canon. With the many warnings regarding sins and indulgences surrounding the issue of sex, it was good of God to include a book which encouraged a healthy physical, sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Such an interpretation is the natural interpretation of the book. The allegorical interpretation arose because interpreters could not accept the normal meaning, as it was offensive to a philosophical view they had adopted. This is similar to what Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. One's inability to accept the plain message of the text, presses the interpreter to seek a different interpretation, one which God and the human author did not intend, and therefore, an interpretation which is inaccurate.

It has become popular to teach that we must recognize various genres in order to properly interpret Scripture. Indeed, poetry is a genre which is uniquely figurative. However, such proponents of genre

appropriate interpretation use it to undermine the plainness of the gospels as historic accounts and the plain interpretation of prophetic texts such as Revelation. They call the latter *apocalyptic*, claiming it, like poetry, is often highly figurative and not to be pressed too literally. In his overview of the topic Genre Override in Revelation, Robert L. Thomas writes, “*The preterist, tradition-historical, continuous-historical, and idealist approaches to the book have at times spiritualized the book in accord with the assumption that its apocalyptic style makes it different from other books.*”¹¹⁹ However, when examining Old Testament *apocalyptic* literature (to use their designation), we find that it was often fulfilled with such literalness that we are stymied as why anyone would doubt we should do the same with those sections yet to be fulfilled. Toward the end of the chapter, Thomas summarized one past theologian’s logic for taking one thousand years in Revelation 20 to be non-literal, “Abraham Kuyper acknowledges that the language of Revelation 20:1-10 found anywhere else would require literal interpretation, but he thinks that its surroundings in this book require the terminology to be understood nonliterally.”¹²⁰ The only reason for interpreting this number (listed six times in Revelation 20) is because Kuyper determined the remainder of the book to be generally non-literal. However, we have no immediate

¹¹⁹ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) p. 323. A preterist understands many of Jesus’ prophecies and many of those in Revelation to have been fulfilled in the past.

¹²⁰ Thomas, *op cit*, p. 337. Thomas referred to Kuyper’s work *The Revelation of St. John*.

cues that one thousand years should mean anything other than one thousand years. If we look back at the scene around God's throne in Revelation four and five we do not take it as symbolic. We can take it to be a very real view of individuals and activities at that time. Only a strong anti-semitic prejudice would keep the interpreter from understanding the 12,000 sealed from each of Israel's 12 tribes to be non-literal. However, when we come to Revelation 12:1 John sees a sign in heaven. The sign is figurative. A sign always pointed to something else. The figurative sense can be understood to refer to literal events. No imagination or history book at the side of the text is necessary to understand most of the sign. On Revelation 9, Robert Cooper interpreted the smoke rising from the pit as the beginning of the dark ages "in which idolatry and spiritual fornication and misrule prevailed, when the sun of righteousness was obscured for a while, and the air, the seat of Satan, was filled with the smoke of false doctrine."¹²¹ He interpreted the locusts coming up out of the pit as the Saracens pressing Islam upon the regions which had become anti-christian.¹²² Charles Ellicot interpreted this same section to refer to the smoke of false teaching and persecution which pervaded the Church like an army of locusts.¹²³ Yet no such interpretations are necessary. We can understand the locust-like creatures to be real supernatural creatures perhaps set for that specific time.

¹²¹ Robert Bransby Cooper, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, (London: J.G. &F. Rivington, 1833) p. 77

¹²² *ibid*, p. 78. Saracen was an old word for an Arab or Islamic person.

¹²³ Charles John Ellicot, *The Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957) p. 123.

And if their description leaves us aghast, we only need to review the description of the very real cherubs described in Ezekiel chapters one and ten. The rest of Revelation often explains the various figures. For instance, in 13:1 the beast comes up out of the sea. This sea is explained as many waters in 17:1 which in turn are interpreted to be peoples, crowds, nations and tongues in 17:15. We might assume the beast in 13:1 is a man, as well as the second beast in 13:11, and this is born out in 19:19, 20 and 20:10. We might struggle to identify every image in the book, but as we compare the Scriptures, we find the Scriptures explain themselves. Even prophetic Scriptures such as Revelation should be interpreted normally. No special rules apply.

The Word is Alive

The apostle Paul specifically stated that Scripture is living and powerful (Hebrews 4:12). Scripture is not a dead archaic text, but a living and active text which can still speak to the modern reader. Paul explained that Scripture still works like a two edged sword, being a critic of the individual believer's enthusiasms and intentions. When the individual reads Scripture and specific statements confront his own desires, plans, and activities, the believer experiences Scripture's living quality. Scripture reveals what the believer should appreciate, and what appropriate goals and means the believer should have. The Scriptures remain relevant. It still gets into the individual's heart and challenges him with what he lacks, where he has sinned, or even his misconceptions which can lead to errant conduct (this was the problem of the Hebrews).

Peter appealed to his readers that the Word is not only alive but does not corrupt or decay (1 Peter

1:23). They were regenerated from this Word. It acted as the seed, containing the good news they needed to hear and believe. That benefit of the Word did not end when they believed and were regenerated. The utterance (*rhema*) of *the* Lord continues (comfortably effective) into the age (1 Peter 1:25). Since his readers had tasted the Lord's kindness through this Word, he charged them to crave that word like a babe craves milk (2:2-3). By that Word, they can then grow into their salvation, as opposed to being stunted. It remains true, that the truth of God's Word is a necessary element for growth, and this because God's Word is alive.

Many have written books on conduct, manners, science, mathematics, law, etc. These books, as they accurately communicate facts have authority for those in need of the information. Yet those books are not alive. The authors of many of those books have died, some long ago. In this way, God's Word is different from all other books. God, the author of the Bible, is not dead. He is alive (Hebrews 3:12). The Spirit, the specific person of the God-head who is the author of Scripture, uses the Word in His ministry to individuals. The Spirit turns on the light to understand the significance of God's revelation. The Spirit provides the believer the ability to evaluate God's revelation as to its value. The Spirit uses God's revelation to guide or lead believers. The living Spirit operates in the individual and through the Word, so that the Word is alive. It is not a dead book. It is a living Word for the living author stands behind it.

The Word is Authoritative

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, individuals challenged the

traditional recognition of the Scriptures' authority. Teachers subjected the authority of Scripture to the authority of science, secular history, philosophy, psychology and human scholasticism. Therefore, such teachers claimed the creation account was a spiritual account of God's endowing material and man in particular with significance, but it certainly wasn't an accurate account of origins. In their minds, secular history trumped biblical accounts, certain that some individuals never existed nor did certain events take place. They viewed Scriptures' teaching about the world and human mind to be naive and shelved such truths as archaic, patriarchal, and ineffectual compared to modern developments in human understanding of how things work and how man works. Therefore, the Bible was good only for spiritual concerns or perhaps some encouragements to better ourselves.¹²⁴

The controversy roused many to answer these charges and demonstrate the accuracy of the Bible in all these and many other areas. Thus arose the Fundamentalists and their controversy with modernists (old designation for biblical liberals). The conclusions of the Fundamentalists are expressed to this day in numerous Church doctrinal statements and creeds. "We believe the Bible to be the center of true Christian unity and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and opinions shall be tried."¹²⁵ It is not in the scope of this study to demonstrate how the Bible's

¹²⁴ For a fuller discussion of these issues see The Attack on the Bible in George W. Dollar, *The History of Fundamentalism in America*, (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973) pp. 1ff

¹²⁵ Paul R. Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church* (Des Plaines, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1968) p. 168.

authority stands against the modernists' charges. Numerous texts have been authored to demonstrate the accuracy of Scripture and the reader may refer to these for some answers on specific challenges. I point out just two: Josh McDowell and Don Stewart's *Answers to Tough Questions* and Dave Hunt's *In Defense of the Faith*.¹²⁶

Authority and Interpretation

Scripture's authority lies in the proper application based on the proper interpretation. When God gave Israel the law, that law was authoritative for those people with no further interpretation. However, within the law, certain parts were not authoritative for Israel until they entered the land. God would choose a specific location at which to place His name. At that location Israel was to come and no place else. Because the Law was given specifically to the nation Israel it was authoritative for them. However, unless an Israeli sinned, the instructions for offering a sin offering were not applicable to him. The instructions on how the priests were to slay and burn offerings were applicable for the priests but not for the non-priest. Because they were applicable, they were authoritative. Authority lies in the intent of the text.

The above examples of Israelis and priests demonstrate that authority lies in the intent and the intended audience of the text. All Scripture is authoritative for God-revealed truth. Scriptures containing promises for the believer are authoritative for his faith. Scriptures which address the individual's

¹²⁶ See also *Big Book of Bible Difficulties, The: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* by Thomas Howe and Norman L. Geisler

conduct are authoritative for his righteous conduct. Scriptures explaining how a believer may correct sin or error is authoritative for his correction. This is Paul's point in 2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is God breathed. All Scripture is profitable. However, all Scripture is not profitable in the same way or area. Paul named four areas in which Scripture can be authoritative. The first, doctrine comprises truth which the believer accepts as valid by its revelation from God. It needs no other proof. God said it; that settles it. We read of creation. We don't practice creation. We don't create. Creation does not offer us correction. It is God-revealed truth for which we have no verifiable proof, we simply accept it as valid, because God said it.¹²⁷ Creation is doctrine. Second, if I take something that does not belong to me, and then upon reading Ephesians four I come across Paul's statement, "The one stealing, stop stealing," that text isn't expressing a truth. It is expressing a reproof, a challenge to my sinful behavior. For one who is stealing, that text is authoritative by application. If one is not stealing, for what is this text authoritative? This illustrates that authority depends on both proper interpretation and application. 1 John 1:9 addressed believers who denied any existence or problem of the sin nature (v. 8). Rather than denying that one has a sin nature and that the individual sins, John instructed his

¹²⁷ I realize that some apologetic oriented creationists (and I am a creationist) believe that creation can be proved. However, we can't see it. We can't see evidence of God speaking something into existence and it immediately coming into existence. Therefore, I assert that we accept it because God's Word says that is the way all things exist. Proof may be offered that contradicts an evolutionary model, but that is a different issue, and still cannot prove instantaneous fiat creation.

readers to confess or agree regarding their sins. When a believer has sinned and/or has denied the presence or problem of his sin nature, this text is authoritative for him. The first step in correcting his behavior or attitude is to confess to God what he has done. Finally, Jesus gave His disciples a new command to love one another with the same kind of love He had for them (John 13:34). That command is not just truth. That command is not a reproof for unrighteous behavior. That command does not correct unrighteous behavior. That command is an instruction in righteous behavior or activity. Therefore, if one is a believer in Jesus Christ, that command is authoritative for his conduct. All Scripture is God breathed. All Scripture is profitable, but it is not all profitable in the same manner. We have provided illustrations of each of the four areas of profitability. Each area, therefore, is authoritative in keeping with the proper interpretation and application of each text.

We should point out how we might undermine Scriptures' authority by misinterpreting and misapplying it. We've already pointed out that authority rests on proper interpretation and application. The Sermon on the Mount is often taught as an ethic for the present Christian life. Some Bible students, perhaps many, have rejected the interpretation that this sermon explained life in the coming kingdom and the required lifestyle of those who would enter that kingdom. They did not appreciate the distinction between believers in this present time and Jesus' Jewish audience. Therefore, they interpret the sermon in keeping with an application they can make to believers today. However, when we arrive at certain of the teachings, we find ourselves

confronted by difficult statements, “Whoever might say, ‘Fool,’ is liable to the Gehenna of fire” (Matthew 5:22). A.T. Robertson explained the meaning of Hell fire (A.V.) and then added, “The language is metaphorical, but is meant to convey the dreadful reality of the punishment of sin.”¹²⁸ Another commentator gave his opinion, “In these words of Jesus against anger and contempt there is an aspect of exaggeration. They are the strong utterance of one in whom all forms of inhumanity roused feelings of passionate abhorrence.”¹²⁹ When one follows this type of interpretation, he follows the path of allegory from which the eventual denial of a real Gehenna (Hell) rises. The denial of key doctrines often arose in subsequent generations trained to interpret and apply the text in a less than literal fashion. This lesson challenges the Bible student to consider, that just because an interpretation may challenge his sensibilities, it should not be cast aside. His sensibilities, not the interpretation may need revision. The careful interpretation and application of the text rests upon the Biblical teaching of the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. It upholds the God-given authority of His Word, rather than undermining it.

Why would interpreters claim that Jesus was exaggerating, or that Jesus used Gehenna fire as a metaphor? We can’t speak for all who handle the Sermon on the mount in this fashion, but the above held that it expressed God’s righteous desires for believers

¹²⁸ A.T. Robertson, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, (N.Y.: MacMillan, 1911) p. 99.

¹²⁹ A.B. Bruce in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol I, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p. 107.

today. At the same time, at least some of these interpreters affirm (and accurately so) that the believer cannot lose his or her salvation. If this is true, then a believer is not in danger of Gehenna fire, for he has passed out of death into life and is promised to never come into judgment (1 John 3:16; John 5:24). Therefore, either the passage is not about the conduct of believers, or Jesus meant something different than Gehenna fire. Rolin Chafer in writing on the role of logic in Biblical interpretation mentioned “The Law of Excluded Middle, or Exclusion.”¹³⁰ It is the rule that if two things are contradictory, “one must be true and the other false. If one is affirmed, the other is thereby denied.” It cannot be true that the believer is not under condemnation and will not come into judgment and at the same time be potentially in danger of Gehenna fire. Holding Scripture in tension, pitting contradictory texts against each other, undermines the authority of God’s Word. Recognizing that two such texts refer to different times, people, or matters upholds Biblical authority.

This leads to a matter of the relationship between Biblical authority, interpretation, and at least some of the Bible’s contradictions pointed out by its critics. Some contradictions only exist because interpreters attempt to make two distinct passages speak to the same matter or the same individual. As in the above example, to make the believer free of judgment and in danger of judgment is a contradiction. It is an unnecessary contradiction. A proper interpretation does not require the interpreter to minimize the significance

¹³⁰ Rollin Thomas Chafer, *The Science of Biblical Hermeneutics*, (Dallas: Bibliotheca Sacra, 1939) p. 44.

of Jesus' words, or classify them as "exaggeration." It requires us to discern for whom the words were intended. If they are intended for the believer today, we have a contradiction. If Jesus intended them for a different group, such as the largely unsaved, unbelieving Jews to whom He was speaking, the contradiction is eliminated. Yet this is broader than answering the Bible's critics (which rarely succeeds), it affects our understanding of the Bible's authority

The Scripture is authoritative in two ways, immediately and mediately. Immediate authority existed when a text of Scripture was addressed directly to an individual or group. God sent many prophets to His people Israel. The prophets gave divine revelation regarding God's coming judgment as a warning for Israel to return to Jehovah. Often the prophets repeated the call "return to Me" or similar statements (e.g. Isaiah 44:22; Jeremiah 4:1; Joel 2:12; Zechariah 1:3). Each time, the call had immediate authority. Israel had wandered after foreign gods, and God was calling them back. These statements were authoritative because God was addressing a specific need of His people. Along with the call to return, God often warned of judgment. So in Joel, God and His army are vividly portrayed as an army of locust devouring everything in their path. By warning Israel of His coming judgment God was encouraging the people to return, "Who knows whether He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him," (Joel 2:14). This too was immediately authoritative. If Israel did not return, they would indeed face God's judgment. Contrast this to the account of David dancing before the ark when he had it brought into the city of David (2 Samuel 6:12-19). David did

nothing wrong, and so he was in no danger of judgment. He was enjoying the presence of God in the city and near his palace. No call to “return to Me” was needed, for David was not wandering after other gods. Therefore, a text which was authoritative in one situation was not authoritative in another.

When Paul wrote the Ephesians, he instructed husbands to love their wives as Christ had loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25). That text was immediately authoritative for some of the men in the Ephesian church. It was not authoritative for single men,¹³¹ but was authoritative for the married men. Likewise, the instruction for the wives to submit to their husbands (presumably, allowing their husbands to love them) was immediately authoritative for the married women but not for the unmarried women.¹³² The unmarried men had no wives to love, and the unmarried women had no husband to whom they could submit. These are obvious examples of immediate authority and the limit of immediate authority.

However, no one to whom any text of Scripture was directly written lives today. They all died. Therefore, Scripture has only mediate authority today. Mediate authority means that any given text must be mediated to the modern reader. This involves even more limitations. For any text to have authority today, the audience must meet certain criteria. Israel was a nation established by God with a divinely given law

¹³¹ The Greek *andros* –ανδρος means male, and is only translated “husband” by the demands of context.

¹³² In Greek, the word *gunai* –γυνή simply means woman. “Wife” is an interpretive translation in the context. No distinction exists apart from context.

system. In the same way that our modern secular laws include penalties for violating those laws, God included penalties for Israel's disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Some of those penalties included enslavement to other nations, destruction in warfare at the hand of other nations, and defeat by other nations. God threatened these specific penalties in Joel 2, and a reading of the prophets will render many more similar threats. God did not just invent a threat in the moment. He was keeping the judgment He had promised Israel when He gave them the Law. By contrast, we find no such ideas communicated to those who comprise the Church. The Church is not a nation. It does not have a law system of blessings and penalties as God had given Israel. Therefore, we believers in the Church do not meet the criteria. Therefore, the promise of judgment spoken by Israel's prophets has no authority over us.

In a similar manner, Paul warned the Corinthians that an improper attitude at the Lordian Table could result in judgment (1 Corinthians 11:27-30). Since believers today celebrate communion (or the Lordian Table), this warning is authoritative for us. People in the Old Testament did not have Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. They did not partake of the Lordian Table. Such a Scripture would not have fit their situation and they could not have understood the significance. Paul's warning had no authority for them. This is almost an absurd statement to make because Paul wasn't around at that time. He wrote many centuries after most of the Old Testament was completed. However, we have no problem with going backwards in search of applications. In so doing, we undermine the authority those texts had for the people

addressed. Violating context undermines Scripture's authority.

David was excited that the ark was being brought into his city, for he could spend his days at the house of the Lord (cf. Psalm 23:6).¹³³ When his son Solomon dedicated the temple he communicated God's promises regarding that temple. God would attend to prayers made at or toward the temple (2 Chronicles 7:15). For Israel access to God at the temple was important, they knew the location at which they could seek God's face (cf. 2 Chronicles 7:14). God warned them in the same context that they could lose this privilege if they disobeyed and served other gods (vv. 19-20). That text is not authoritative for us. Though we might find a parallel in David's joy of coming before God, we have no earthly location at which we are to pray or at which we might find God. We are privileged to approach God anytime, regardless of where we might be. We have access through Christ to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). We approach God in the heavenly temple, where Christ sits. We also have a bold access because we approach a throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). The very nature of grace implies that if we could do something to lose that access, then it wouldn't truly be grace. So, unlike Israelis who could lose their access to God through sin, God has promised us access to Him based on who Christ is for us, and upon His grace. Christ and God's grace assure us that we cannot lose

¹³³ The *beth* preposition affixed to the Hebrew word "house" in Psalm 23:6 can be translated "in" but it can also be translated "at". David would not spend his days in the tabernacle, but most likely outside, where he may have read some or many of the psalms he wrote, or listened as priests read them for him.

that access. In this way, our situation differs from that of Israel and the temple. We are not the original recipients of the letter to the Ephesians or the Hebrews but we are part of the same body of Christ of which they were. We too are “in Christ” and through Him, we share in that same access. Therefore, the instructions written in Ephesians and Hebrews have mediate authority for us, since we are the same type of people in the same situation.

Making all Scripture or most of Scripture authoritative over an individual without determining if it addresses someone like him, violates this principle and undermines Scripture’s authority. As we noted above, in doing so, many have made Scripture self-contradicting. Scripture does not contradict itself. It appears to do so when an interpreter attempts to apply distinct texts about distinct individuals or groups to the same people. Are we to be those who do good to all as we have opportunity, even to the point that it heaps coals of fire on theirs heads, or are we to hate those who hate God (Galatians 6:10; Romans 12:19-21; Psalm 139:21)? Paul wrote the first set of texts to believers in the Church, while the Psalm passage described an Old Testament saint. Sometimes distinct texts are addressed to the same people but about distinct situations. Believers are frequently challenged to be together and to have a proper attitude toward one another (e.g. Philippians 2:1-3; Romans 12:3-5), yet if a brother refuses to work and mooches from his local church, believers are told not to mingle with him (2 Thessalonians 3:14). While both sets of texts are addressed to believers in the Church, they address different situations. Such texts contradict each other if

one attempts to apply them at the same time. They cannot both apply to the same individual at the same time. Are we to observe the restricted diet God prescribed for Israel, or are we to refuse nothing (1 Timothy 4:3-4)? While these examples may be obvious, many more less obvious situations occur by which we undermine Scripture's authority by neglecting the context of its statements and charges.

Application

As humans we are self-centered. Many of the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21 involve some aspect of selfishness. Thinking that every verse, or at least every passage of Scripture has something to say to me, something I can employ in my life is partly selfish. We've seen above, that attempting to make all Scripture apply to all believers creates contradictions and undermines its authority. Determining the proper application of a text is as important as determining its meaning. The principle of proper application is very simple, the application should fit the interpretation. If you determine for whom the text was intended, you have found for whom it is applicable. If you found an action which the text urges to be done, you have found the application. The interpretation determines the application.

Application has limits, and not every text has an application for you. That is near anathema with some Bible students, but it remains true. To reiterate the matter of Israel's diet and my diet, how am I to find an application in Israel's diet for myself. The interpretation of the dietary restrictions for Israel is straight forward. God gave them restrictions. Upon reading those texts, I take each restriction literally and I've properly

interpreted them. There was nothing complicated or “spiritual” about understanding what one (as an Israeli) could or could not eat. However, that diet was prescribed by God for Israel. He does not require me to abide by that diet. My only restriction is that if something I eat negatively affects another, I should forego that food while that person is present. So in 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul deals at length with the effects of a believer’s actions upon others. If what I eat might get in the way of being able to speak the gospel to another, I should refrain. If what I eat causes an immature believer to mimic my actions, even though he doesn’t think he should (for religious reasons—remember, he’s immature), then I should forego. That’s a simple principle, but it is nothing close to the restrictions God gave Israel. God’s rules for Israel **apply** to Israel, and God’s guidelines for New Testament believers **apply** to New Testament believers.

Though the problem of a plain interpretation not aligning with one’s theological or philosophical views probably leads the way in misinterpreting or allegorizing Scripture, attempting to find an application for one’s self in every passage is a close second. Let’s return to our earlier illustration from the Sermon on the mount regarding the danger of Gehenna fire. Jesus stated that a man who has looked at a woman with the intent to lust has already committed adultery in his heart. The application was for those Jews who were listening to Jesus, most of whom were unbelievers. However, it takes very little finessing of the text to apply it as a warning to believing men today, to tell them to keep their eyes off of other women. Yet, one does have to finesse the text. One has to do something

with the penalty. Unless the Bible student thinks that a believer could lose his or her salvation (contrary to some very clear statements), it doesn't seem possible to square this statement. The option is to apply it and ignore the penalty, which is dishonest, or reinterpret the penalty, which is dishonest. Either way, making the text applicable to someone different than God intended alters the interpretation.

The point of this has not been chiefly to enter into a discussion of interpretation and application. Rather, that the Bible is authoritative. However, we ruin the clarity of that authority, by misinterpreting and misapplying. If one attempts to apply the blessings of physical prosperity which God promised to Israel, one is setting up believers for disappointment. How can those promises be squared with Paul's charges to be content, and the very fact that he himself experienced lack and was content in that situation? The two only conflict when we attempt to apply them to the same people. Recognizing distinctions when we interpret and when we apply are necessary.

It seems helpful at this point to note that the New Testament writers, while quoting extensively from the Old Testament, recognized the distinction between what was for Old Testament people and what is for us New Testament people. The apostle Paul especially saw this and distinguished the types of teaching. In several passages, Paul used two distinct words for teaching: *didache* [διδαχη] and *didaskalia* [διδασκαλια]. The former emphasized teaching intended to be practiced. The latter consisted of teaching which is not practiced. Titus 1:9 demonstrates a distinction by using both words. The bishop [a pastor] is to hold firmly to the

teaching that governs his conduct [*didache*]. By so doing, he keeps the teaching which does not govern his conduct [*didaskalia*] healthy and it is useable to counter those who stand in opposition. As an example, Titus had to contend with people teaching law for Christian living (Titus 1:10-11, 14; 3:9). The best counter to that is people living by grace (Titus 2:1-13). At the same time, teaching what the law required as fact and not for application, helps others see what a law-life looked like, and does much to reprove errant law-teachers. Mixing these two realms of teaching corrupts both; it is no longer law but neither is it grace. Mixing them results in some hybrid requirements.

Didache is seen in what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He expected His audience to do what He taught them. Therefore, the crowd considered His teaching *didache* (Matthew 27:28). The teaching of the Pharisees' was *didache* because they expected their followers to do what they taught (Matthew 16:12). The philosophers in Athens considered Paul's teaching to be practical, hence they called it *didache* (Acts 17:19). In contrast, Jesus applied *didaskalia* to Isaiah's statement regarding Israel, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. In emptiness they worship Me, teaching the **teachings**, commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9). Jesus added the noun teaching to this statement. He described what they taught as having no authority for the practice of others as such teachings were the commandments of men. In Paul's writings *didaskalia* appears always to be used of the Old Testament Scriptures, and it is important to see that though we do not practice *didaskalia*, Paul taught that it has value. It encourages us with the

examples of Old Testament saints (Romans 15:4). Though the emphases are different between these two types of teaching, both are vital.

The New Testament writers did not see a conflict in the Scriptures, because they both interpreted and applied Scripture appropriately. If the modern interpreter would uphold the Bible's authority, he or she must do the same. Misappropriation of Scripture texts for the purpose of application (misapplication) undermines the Bible's authority. Misapplication demands a reinterpretation of the Old Testament passages and in so doing alters what the text plainly means. John Feinberg affirmed the traditional dispensational view that the New Testament does not or should not alter the meaning of Old Testament passages. He writes, "Dispensationalists often begin with the OT, but wherever they begin they demand that the OT be taken on its own terms rather than reinterpreted in the light of the NT."¹³⁴ Feinberg then quoted from George Ladd, "Here is the basic watershed between a dispensational and a nondispensational theology. Dispensationalism forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and then fits the New Testament into it. A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ John S. Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988) p. 75.

¹³⁵ Feinberg, *ibid*, p. 75 quoting from *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977) p. 27.

The New Testament use of the Old

Can we open our Bibles and deduce from the Scriptures a rule or formula for handling the Old Testament Scriptures? The New Testament includes nearly over three hundred quotations from the Old Testament.¹³⁶ Some believe that the New Testament's use of the Old Testament cannot be reproduced as it involved the special ministry of the Spirit. I would cautiously agree with this position. Others believe that we can discover and duplicate the New Testament writers' approach to the Old Testament, and in so doing we can learn to apply the Old Testament for ourselves outside the "applications" which the New Testament has. Some within this latter view almost ignore the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture attempting to account for its message from a human perspective: what was the writer thinking, or what was his motivation? Jonathan Lunde in an introduction to this topic noted, "But when we examine the NT authors' use of the OT closely, rather than sharing the wonder that filled Jesus' companions on the road to Emmaus, it is sometimes difficult to avoid the impression that the NT application of OT texts is arbitrary and forced."¹³⁷ A wide variety of approaches stand between these two positions.

As a personal aside, having taught many studies in the Old Testament, I have wrestled with how to handle those texts. For example, I spent two years

¹³⁶ This is according the index in the United Bible Society's third edition of *The Greek New Testament*, pp. 891-900 . They also provide a much longer index of allusion and verbal parallels.

¹³⁷ *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Stanley N Gundry, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 9.

teaching the twelve minor prophets. While I found some parallels to certain contemporary situations, I was most impressed by the plain differences between us and Israel, between the New Testament writers and Israel's prophets. I found great comfort knowing that God proved Himself faithful to Israel and His promises to them even when they were in overt rebellion. I know that I too disobey God and He proves Himself faithful to His promises to me. However, I also see that He made promises to Israel that He has not made to me, and the opposite is also true. The most striking difference is that the Minor Prophets were written to a nation established by God but comprised of both saved and unsaved individuals. As a nation, God had given them national promises and held them not only individually responsible but also responsible as a nation. The Church is not a nation. It is comprised only of saved individuals. God holds individuals responsible and seldom holds the whole Church responsible for failure. He may hold an individual local assembly responsible for addressing the actions of individuals in that assembly, but not for the actions of believers in other assemblies. The commentaries I consulted tended to interpret the prophets in their context, and I appreciated this. However, as I have listened to many messages on the prophets or portions of the prophets, I find that teachers often neglect the meaning and focus upon a man-made application. As a result, today God's people do not know what the issues were that the prophets addressed. They go away thinking the prophets were addressing them, and that the issues are the same. God's people don't really hear God's Word, but an interpretation of God's Word, an interpretation

intended to fit our modern situation and so it misses what God meant.

The Holy Spirit introduced New Testament quotations and references in various ways. He had Matthew introduce a quotation from Isaiah 7 with the phrase, “that the thing uttered by *the* Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled” (Matthew 1:22). Peter explained the coming of the Spirit by a reference to Joel stating, “But this is that (Spirit?) having been spoken of through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). As Peter continued speaking he quoted from Psalm 16, stating simply, “For David say about Him” (Acts 2:25; also vv. 34-35). When Paul introduced his subject in Romans, he quoted Habakkuk 2:4, prefacing it, “as it stands written” (1:17). When warning the Corinthians about immorality, Paul referenced Genesis 2:24 with one verb, “it says” (1 Corinthians 6:16). When describing Israel before Sinai, Paul gives not special introduction at all, he simply inserts two quotations into his narrative, for the quotations simply fill out the account (Hebrews 12:20, 21). James quotes from Leviticus indicating the quotation only by the words “according to the Scriptures” and then a couple verses later he indicates a quotation from Exodus and Deuteronomy, “for the one saying . . . he also said” (James 2:8, 11). Peter quotes at length from Psalm 34 but gives no indication in the context that it is a quote (1 Peter 3:10-12). These several examples serve to demonstrate the variety of ways in which the Spirit introduced or didn’t introduce quotations or references to Old Testament Scriptures. Understanding how Scriptures uses Scripture reinforces its authority. We’ll consider these various types of quotations in order.

Fulfillment

Numerous Old Testament passages are said to be fulfilled by an event recorded in the New Testament. The Greek word “fulfill” means to fill a thing full (there’s a big surprise). We’ve brought a tremendous amount of meaning to the verb which may complicate the matter. In very simple terms, the text written in the Old Testament lacked something; it was deficient, and the recent event has filled up that lack. It has done so by completing that which was spoken. If God said that A will happen, then until A happens, that matter, from a human perspective is lacking. For example, in King Ahaz’s day, Isaiah prophesied about a young unmarried woman [*almah*] being pregnant and bringing forth a son (Isaiah 7:14). Some have attempted a double fulfillment, claiming that two separate events fulfill this prophecy: the birth of Isaiah’s son by Isaiah’s wife, and the distant birth of Jesus. However, Robert Thomas clarifies, “The Hebrew word translated ‘virgin’ refers to an unmarried woman (Gen. 24:43; Prov. 30:19; Song 1:3; 6:8), indicating that the birth of Isaiah’s own son in Isaiah 8:3 could not have fulfilled this prophecy.”¹³⁸ In the Jewish culture of Isaiah’s day, it was presumed that an unmarried woman was a virgin, which was not true of Isaiah’s wife, because she was married. Further more, when Matthew wrote, the Spirit led him to use the noun *parthenos* to translate the Hebrew noun *almah*. *Parthenos* means “virgin” and not merely an unmarried woman. The Holy Spirit caused Matthew to understand that this passage from Isaiah, was not about the events of Isaiah’s day, but about the conception and

¹³⁸ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, op cit, p. 243.

birth of Jesus. I'm convinced that Matthew could not have deduced this from a study of Isaiah. Matthew's conclusion that Jesus' birth fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy required the Spirit's work in and through him.

Some quotations are not clear as to which original writer is quoted. When Judas betrayed Jesus, the council gave him thirty pieces of silver. In Matthew's explanation regarding the thirty pieces of silver, he prefaced it, "Then the thing uttered by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled saying," (Matthew 27:9). The problem is the quotation is closer to words in Zechariah 11:12-13 than to the statements regarding the potter in Jeremiah 19. Several solutions have been presented. Authors Paul Taylor and Bodie Hodge with the ministry Answers in Genesis list seven proposed solutions.

1. Said by Jeremiah but later written by Zechariah
2. Zechariah's second name is Jeremiah, like "Simon Peter" for Peter
3. Copyist mistake, but the Syriac and Persian versions have no prophet listed and all the Greek versions do
4. This is quoting from an apocryphal work of Jeremiah, like Jude quoting from Enoch
5. The last four chapters of Zechariah were actually written by Jeremiah
6. Due to a different order of books in the Jewish canon, Jeremiah could be given proper credit for any of the minor prophets

7. This passage refers to both sections of Jeremiah and Zechariah, and only Jeremiah is mentioned¹³⁹

Suggesting that the first five are unlikely, and that the last two have merit, they propose an eighth solution, that Matthew quotes from an unrecorded statement of Jeremiah. Though Jude records a prophetic statement by Enoch that is not from Scripture, and Paul on at least two occasions quotes secular poets, it seems better to see Matthew's quotation as referring to written Scripture. Number seven in their list is probably best. The Spirit was not bearing Matthew to refer to only one statement, but multiple statements one from Jeremiah and another from Zechariah. So Craig Keener writes, "Jewish scholars could cite some texts while simultaneously alluding to others. Matthew here quotes Zechariah 11:12–3, but by attributing it to Jeremiah he also alludes to a similar text that he wishes his more skillful readers to catch (Jer 32:6–0; cf. 19:1–, 10–1). (The quotation is almost verbatim, and it is unlikely that Matthew would have known the text so well yet attributed it accidentally to the wrong author, unless he is using a list of standard messianic proof texts instead of citing directly from Zechariah, or he is purposely 'lending' texts, as I suggest here.)"¹⁴⁰ James spoke similarly referring to the prophets (Acts 15:15). Though

¹³⁹ <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2009/04/27/contradictions-mixed-prophets>. Their eighth proposal was also adopted by Louis Gaussen, a 19th Century Swiss Bible student. *Theopneustia*, p. 216.

¹⁴⁰ Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993) p. 125. See also, Louis Barbieri Jr. in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983) p. 86.

James quoted chiefly from Amos 9, the Spirit and James both have in mind other prophets who agree regarding a place for Gentiles in God's future plans. Therefore, Matthew's quotation includes elements from Jeremiah chapters 19 and 32 and Zechariah 11. Though of these statements, it is likely that one would only have deduced a reference to the Messiah from the Zechariah passage. In fact, one might have read even the Zechariah passage and never considered that something hadn't yet happened and so needed fulfillment. Again, it is the Holy Spirit Who puts this together for the reader.

Yet a number of Old Testament texts anticipated a fulfillment, as they spoke of a future event. These texts differ from the above passages which were fulfilled by events in the life of Jesus, though they did not appear to need fulfilling. Six times, New Testament writers quoted from Isaiah 53. John wrote that Israel's unbelief despite Jesus' many signs fulfilled Isaiah 53:1: "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Israel did not believe Jesus' message, and they had seen God's arm revealed in Jesus' many signs. While the Spirit caused John to see fulfillment in Israel's unbelief, Paul only referenced Isaiah 53:1 to demonstrate the unchanging nature of Israel's unbelief (Romans 10:16). Romans 10 sets in the middle of Paul's discussion about God's present relationship to Israel. They were still in unbelief. Matthew tied Jesus' activity of casting out demons and healing the people to fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4, "Surely our griefs He Himself lifted up, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves considered Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted." (Matthew 8:17). This is the same point John made in quoting Isaiah 53:1; Jesus

was doing good things to alleviate the suffering of the people, and yet they did not respond to Him in faith, but even considered Him struck by God, implying that they considered Him to be in opposition to God. A few years later, the Spirit told Philip to approach a chariot in which a government official from Ethiopia was riding (Acts 8:26-29). The official was reading from Isaiah 53:32-33. He read about the judgment, death and attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 8:32-33). He was unable to discern if the prophet was writing about himself or another individual (v. 34). Philip then spoke good news about Jesus starting with the Isaiah text. Though fulfillment language isn't used in this passage, Philip understood the passage to describe Jesus, not Isaiah; it was fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Peter supposedly quotes Isaiah 53:9 in his brief statement, "Who sin *he did not do, neither was found guile in His mouth.*" The first words "Who sin" are not part of the text of Isaiah. Isaiah wrote, "He did no violence."

Isaiah 53 as an example of the writers of Scripture

Some Bible interpreters approach Scripture with the thought that the writers always knew what and why they were writing. This is logical to a point. It is normal that a writer of Scripture had a point and was working towards it. We saw under the topic of inspiration that the Holy Spirit works together with the writer, for this reason David does not sound like Moses or Paul. Each writer has his unique style. His imprint is left upon the text. Though Hebrews is not signed, it has Paul's

fingerprints all over it.¹⁴¹ Therefore, to a degree the writing of Scripture was synergistic.¹⁴² The Spirit incorporated the intention and desires of the human authors. It is legitimate to ask, what was the human author's intent?

Peter tells us that this was not always true. Sometimes, the writers of Scripture did not know what they were writing (1 Peter 1:10-11). They could not make sense of the time or the events. Peter also adds that while they were trying to make sense of it, the Holy Spirit explained that it wasn't for them to know. We have one clear example of this in Daniel 12, where Daniel asks God about the timing, and God (the Spirit) indicated that it wasn't for him. In this same vein, we can ask, did David have a circumstance which framed Psalm 22, or was the Holy Spirit so moving him, that he wrote about something which could only be fulfilled in the experience of Jesus Christ? I favor that latter view.

Isaiah 53 provides a helpful example of this type in his prophecy about the suffering servant. Earlier in Isaiah, God had revealed that His servant was Israel (49:3), but He also distinguished His servant from Israel (49:6). This second servant would raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore Israel. How can one be both the nation and restore the nation? Does it restore itself. No, God indicated a second servant. The former servant Israel was blind and deaf (42:19), and a servant who

¹⁴¹ I recognize that many good Bible students do not believe Paul wrote Hebrews. I however find the evidence of Paul overwhelming.

¹⁴² Some oppose synergism opting for monergism even in non-soteriological matters. However, Paul described himself and Apollos as God's co-workers (1 Corinthians 3:9; cf 1 Thessalonians 3:2).

needed to believe in the LORD (43:10). Israel was a servant in need of another to raise it. This means that He sees two servants.

Peter wrote that the prophets struggled with the suffering and glory, the two seemingly incompatible. Isaiah 53 was likely one of these texts. The one suffering is despised and rejected by men (v. 3), bore our griefs, and the people of Israel account Him to be struck and made low by God (v. 4). This one is pierced for Israel's transgressions, and crushed for their perverse activities (vv. 5, 8). He takes the discipline they deserved and by doing so brought them peace (v. 5). Jehovah laid all our perversity upon Him (v. 6). He dies (cut off from the land of the living; v. 8). He died as an innocent one (v. 9). He is crushed by the Lord (v. 10). Yet He will see his offspring and prolong his days (v. 10). He will be satisfied (v. 11). He takes a portion of the spoils (v. 12). By knowing Him, the righteous are counted righteous (v. 11). This passage includes statements of suffering and glory. Did Isaiah know what this was about, or about whom he wrote? Did he have a goal in revealing this? What was his intention? As New Testament believers we read back what we now know; Christ suffers and dies as a substitute and then is raised in glory. Did or could Isaiah have understood this which he was writing? Peter's explanation demonstrates that they did not always understand the point of their writing.

Conclusion

God the Spirit is the author of Scripture. The Spirit worked in a cooperative fashion with the human writers, so that each writing bears the imprint of the individual human, but communicates precisely what the

Spirit desired. The Spirit accomplished this through the intents and desires of human authors. The Spirit accomplished this by bearing these men along and comparing the spiritual ideas He wished to communicate with the spiritual words available to communicate that idea. The Spirit also guided these men in their perspective on history and their contemporary experiences. He directed them in the use of other Scriptures by quotations and statements of fulfillment. Though we may not understand how some acts are fulfillment of other passages, when all the evidence is collected, we can see God's purpose. This is also true regarding apparent discrepancies. It is easy to point to errors, and yet many supposed discrepancies and/or errors have been ably answered, and for some new light has been shed upon the problems through the discovery of archeological or other historical evidence. Such evidences do not prove the Scriptures, but remind us but remind us that they are true, and any supposed fault is often within our limited understanding. God's Word stands. God has communicated with us, and continues to do so, through His Word. Our responsibility is to study His Word so we can know what He has said. As we objectively learn that Word, we can then put into practice those portions which are appropriate to our lives. In so doing His genuine objective truth becomes a reality in our lives. We are privileged to get to know our God first through that revelation and through our experience of that revelation as those truths are worked out in our lives.

GOD

Scripturally, revelation is the act of God making Himself, His plans, and His will known to others. It has been seen that God has used many means of accomplishing this, first and foremost is Scripture itself. While God has revealed many areas of truth, His self-revelation stands supreme. We learn in a general degree about God's power, intelligence and immensity by observing creation. We learn about His love, righteousness, truth, goodness and holiness through His written revelation. Not of all of Scripture is specifically about God, for He has also told us about created spirit beings and about ourselves. Yet the written revelation communicates volumes about God, revealing and repeating in some manner His character, His works, His plans on nearly every page.

Theology Proper is the study of God. Theology in the larger sense is the study of the things of God, such as salvation, creation, Israel, and the Church. Theology takes many forms, depending on the objective of the student/teacher. Theology can sit at opposite poles; that theology which is firmly grounded in the Biblical revelation is one pole and the opposite is speculative. The later is more common than we realize. Whenever an individual says, "I believe ..." followed by some statement about God or God's plan, he or she is making a theological statement. However, many statements are ill-informed, biblically illiterate, and therefore, speculative. Often we must examine a great deal of Scripture to understand what God meant by a statement about Himself. It is my goal to examine what God has revealed about Himself in the Bible, to allow Scripture to speak as opposed to speculation regarding God.

One approach to theology is called Biblical Theology. The expression “Biblical theology” does not examine what the whole revelation says on a topic, but what a human author wrote: e.g Paul or Moses, or a section of Scripture: e.g. poetry (Job-Song of Solomon). This can be helpful, but God expected us to move beyond this to collate information from His whole written revelation. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament never limited themselves to the study of one Old Testament writer. When addressing a specific topic, they might reference what multiple Old Testament writers had to say on that topic. For example, in Romans chapters nine, ten and eleven Paul discussed the current state of Israel. He quoted from at least ten passages of the Old Testament in chapter nine, nine passages in chapter ten, and five passages in chapter eleven. If we wish to understand who God is, it is not sufficient to understand only what Moses understood about God’s character or plans. We need the rest of the writers of Scripture. If we are studying contrasts (e.g. David’s understanding of God versus Paul’s) then we might focus on the two writers. However, our goal is discover and understand what God has revealed about Himself in His Word.

Systematic theology is another approach to theology. It accumulates all information bearing on a theological topic from any source, including science, philosophy, history and of course the Bible. This can be a problem if one of these sources conflicts with the plain statements of Scripture. For instance, Augustus H. Strong in his *Systematic Theology*, did not see a conflict between the revelation of Scripture and the general view of evolution in natural sciences. In fact, he

potentially held natural science to be arbiter of meaning regarding the Hebrew word for “create” - *bara*. He wrote, “If science should render it certain that all the present species of living creatures were derived by natural descent from a few original germs, and that these germs were themselves an evolution of inorganic forces and material, we should not therefore regard the Mosaic account as proved untrue. We should only be required to revise our interpretation of the word *bara* in Gen. 1:21, 27, and to give it there the meaning of mediate creation, or creation by law.”¹⁴³ Frequently (and thankfully) men who hold a high view of Scripture write systematic theologies which focus primarily on Scripture, some of which give little heed to science or philosophy.

A biblically based theology collects and organizes this information, but limits its source to the Bible. In a biblically based theology, the extra biblical sources may contribute in greatly a restricted manner. We don't ignore them entirely, but do not allow them to force our interpretation of the Scriptures. For example, when considering the formation of Scripture we made references to extra biblical situations: Rabbinical councils, history, church councils, yet our primary focus was the Word of God. It remains the measure of truth.

Normally, when we speak of theology, we mean a logical collation of some or all the Biblical revelation on that topic. We organize the information for the purpose of developing a larger view on a specific topic, say, God's goodness, or God's love. The various passages which contribute to our understanding of these

¹⁴³ A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907, p. 392.

themes can be organized to help us think through what God has said on each subject. So anthropology collects Scriptures, studies them in their contexts, and attempts to organize what God has revealed about man. Soteriology does the same with revelation regarding salvation. Bibliology attempts to understand revelation itself, culminating in the Bible.

Our present study will attempt to examine what God has revealed about Himself. This is theology proper. However, before we study His revelation as a whole, let's do a little Biblical theology. Let's briefly walk through our Bibles, drawing the conclusions the revelation allows. While we do this, we will attempt to stick to the context and not bring the texts of other Scripture writers to bear on our conclusions.

When we open to Genesis one, we meet a God who creates the universe. He not only creates the universe but does so by simply speaking. He completes each event of creation in a day. We also find that this God speaks to Himself as an "us". We don't yet know why. God created man in His (i.e. God's) image and according to His likeness, therefore, something about man resembles something about God. God evaluated everything He created as "good." This is an overview of Genesis one. Each of these is a theological observation or statement. Now think what you could know if you only had Genesis one. It would be very limited. It is hard for us not to read more into these statement than we can safely conclude, especially because most of us have a lot of other information; we're familiar with many other Scriptures, and we've been taught a lot of theology whether good or bad.

OK, let's go on to Genesis two. We find that this

(chapter one) has been an account of everything God created. God ceased creating after He created man on the sixth day. “Ceased” is the idea of the word translated “rested” in 2:2. We might conclude that man was the pinnacle of God’s creation, as he was the final thing created. The narrative of chapter two appears to back up and describe the condition of the earth: no cultivated shrub, no tilled plant, no rain, and no man to cultivate. This is within week one. The account of man’s creation is expanded; we discover that God formed man from the dust of the ground, and God personally breathed life into man’s nostrils so that he lived. This expands what we know of God’s creation of man as recorded in chapter one. God planted a garden in a place called Eden and placed the man in the garden. 2:5 tells us that no planted vegetation existed, at this point, but only what God planted. God took the man He created and placed him in the garden, to cultivate [serve, v. 5] it and guard it (v. 15). We would assume that his work of cultivating is similar to what we might do in a garden or field. God provided the man all the trees of the garden but one for food. That one restricted tree involved the knowledge of good (that which makes for happiness and a sense of well-being) and evil (that which brings or is disastrous or calamitous). Note, these conclusions regarding good and evil are not based on more revelation, but based on the meaning of the words. To assume that good means morality and evil means sin is broader than the Biblical text reveals. God brought all the animals He had created to the man. God wanted to see how the man would call the animals. None of the animals were a suitable match for the man. God evaluated this and said it was not good. He

determined that the man should not be alone. So from some of the man's substance, God formed a woman. The man knew she was his counterpart, for unlike the animals, she was from man. Regarding God, we can draw one clear conclusion from Genesis two: He is concerned with that which is good, not just for Himself but even for the man.

In chapter three the man and woman disobeyed God's instructions regarding the one forbidden tree. The woman was approached by a serpent, which Moses identified as "beast of the field." In some form, God approached the man and woman, so that they could hear His approach. He confronted them regarding their obedience. He then proceeded to curse the serpent, apparently changing its very physical nature. He cursed the woman, changing something about the way in which she gives birth and how she relates to her man. He then cursed the physical earth and the man with hard work in order to eat. God speaks to Himself as "us" and states that man has become like God by knowing the good and evil. So God drove man from that garden and prevented him from returning. He stationed a covering one [cherub] at the entrance to the garden and a burning sword that moved in all directions. From this account we know that God enforced consequences for disobedience. We don't know for certain why He did this. We also find that God is capable of altering the physical order of the things He previously created: the serpent, the woman, the earth. We can also conclude that whatever it meant for the man to cultivate [serve] the garden in chapter two, it was distinct from the labor to which God consigned man after he ate from the tree. Can you imagine work that wasn't work? We also find

that in man's disobedience God clothed them with skins to cover the nakedness which had caused them shame. He didn't require them to do so, He did it.

In chapter four, two brothers bring offering before God. God looks with favor on Abel's offering but not upon Cain's. Was this difference due to their attitudes, the kind of offerings, the quality of the offering? God approached Cain and confronted him with his fallen attitude. He pointed out that a sin *offering* was crouching [like an animal] at his door. Cain responded by killing his brother. God again approached Cain. However, this time, we find no evidence that God was offering him some form of forgiveness. In fact we find that God cursed him, making it impossible for him to farm (his previous occupation). Cain bemoaned his circumstance (he showed his priorities, he speaks of being driven from the ground before being driven from God). God responded and marked Cain (we don't know how) to protect him from the avenging hand of another. At this point Cain left. The words "and Cain went out from the presence of the Lord" are important because it frames the following context in which men laid the foundations of "civilization." We might conclude that God had no direct role in developments of civilization. It was the design of men outside of God's presence.

Let's take some faster paces through the remainder of Genesis. In chapters six through eight, God views man's increasing violence (5:11). God was sorry that he created man. What does it mean to be sorry? At this point we won't likely understand it differently than a man being sorry over a project which falls apart. God determined to destroy all air-breathing creatures upon the earth. However, He is fair or

righteous in sparing Noah and his family because, Noah was righteous and blameless in his family tree. However, he gave Noah responsibility for building the vessel of his deliverance. In that floating box [ark] God rescued Noah, his family of seven and some of every species of air-breathing animal. He was powerful enough to flood the entire earth, dry the earth, and bring the people and animals off the ark. When they disembark, He tells them to spread out and multiply.

Sometime later, God responded to man's latest rebellion. Mankind had remained together and were building a tower to make a connection with heaven. God spoke to Himself as "us" again and went down to earth to enforce His previous instructions to scatter. He altered language and so men divided according to their new languages. Once men were divided, God broke up the surface of the land with water. So God has power and knowledge to alter language and physical divide the earth's surface.

In the opening chapters, we meet a God who is powerful; He creates. He is very intelligent; He knows how to create, and to do so with complexity and diversity. He maintains a sense of right and wrong; He responded to men's disobedience on four occasions. He enforces some form of punishment on men for their disobedience. We also might deduce (He hasn't told us) He is also fair or righteous because He looked with favor at Abel's sacrifice, and rescued Noah from His impending judgment.

Have you ever thought what God looks like without all the other theology we know? I'm sure if you read through those chapters you might draw some other conclusions regarding God. You might even find fault

with some of my conclusions. This was simply an attempt to examine some revelation without bringing everything else I know from God's Word to the table. It's hard to do. And is that what we are to do? At times. Sometimes, in order to best understand a text, we have to eliminate from our analysis other information that the writer probably did not know. It's so common for people to read our understanding back into other's minds. Some would assert that Adam and Eve saw the cross in God's provision of the skins to cover their nakedness! Did they? We have no idea. Nothing in the text suggests they even had a hint at it. What about the **protoevangelion** of Genesis 3:15, didn't Adam and Eve know that God would provide them a Savior? This word, meaning "first gospel", is often applied to Genesis 3:15 indicating that God was revealing a future salvation. Some go so far as to claim that Adam and Eve understood that future salvation. Eve's words at the birth of Cain were simply that she had gotten a man from God (4:1). You and I have the full written Scriptures. We know more than they did

You and I can thank God that we have the whole written revelation. If you are like me, it was hard (and maybe I failed at points) to read those first eleven chapters of Genesis without the aid of additional revelation. We have David, Christ and Paul's comments on God's creation of Adam, and of Adam's disobedience. We have Christ and John's revelation regarding Abel and Cain. We have Christ, Peter and Jude's revelation regarding the days leading up to the flood. We have Paul's words explaining the post-flood days and man's increasingly unrighteous character. We have a wealth of revelation in our Bibles. At times, we

will need to isolate one writer's ideas from the rest of Scripture so we can deduce what he meant in that specific context. However, most of the time we can draw upon the entire revelation as it bears on our subject of study.

Our approach to the doctrine of God will be two-fold. We will attempt to find and organize the information God has revealed about Himself in written form (i.e. the Bible). With this material organized, we will examine Scriptures that illustrate these truths. Theology is often propositional; we set forth a truth, a fact and then list Scriptures which prove it to be true. Like much teaching, propositions are best understood by illustrations. Those illustrations should be Scriptural. If we claim that God is "good" and define goodness, we should expect that God in His Word has revealed what that goodness looks like. We've already seen an example of this. When God created, what He created was good. Often goodness is viewed as a moral quality, though this does not reflect Biblical revelation (it confuses goodness with righteousness). When He placed Adam in the garden, He provided him with every tree but one for food. Those trees were good; they would satisfy (not produce morality). We can all relate to that. We get hungry, and something that satiates that hunger makes us happy and content, so we conclude that it is good. God's goodness is partially illustrated by His provision of basic food for Adam, not just dry rice cakes and grass, but good fruit. This is a small illustration of God's goodness.

Think of the other things we find about God as we read. He spoke with Abraham. How? We don't know. Yet in Genesis seventeen He came to Abraham as a

man. He even sat down and ate a meal of veal with Abraham. Is this the manner in which He always appeared? He appeared to Jacob as a man and wrestled with Him all night, until He blessed Jacob. However, when He appeared to Moses in Exodus three, He didn't appear as a man then, but in a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. He later appeared to Israel in a cloud by day and a cloud (or pillar) of fire by night. Because of Moses' response to Israel's disobedience, He met with Moses on the mountain. He did not let Moses look on His "face" (whatever His "face" is) for no man can look on God and live (Exodus 34:3). So He showed Moses only His back side.

The self-revelation of God, and the illustrations of that character, provide us a framework within which to consider other revelation. God's revealed character affects many other areas of theology. Since God is creator and affects that creation, our understanding of God will affect how we understand the creation and God's purpose for and interaction with it.

GOD in a Biblically Based Theology

This is a study of Theology proper. It is not a study of the Father particularly. Often the study of Theology proper is referred primarily or particularly to the Father. This leaves the impression that He is God¹⁴⁴, but the Son and Spirit are not or are less than God. God is a personal being, in fact God is three persons: Father, Son, Spirit. It is sometimes stated that God is a person.

¹⁴⁴ For example, "Because God is a person (indeed, he is pictured as our Father), the relationship we have with him has a dimension of warmth and understanding." Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, 270.

John Feinberg argues that person is used with different senses.¹⁴⁵ Many state that God is a person in an attempt to avoid the liberal or unbelieving view that God is impersonal, does not respond to, or has no connection with His creation especially people. They wish to avoid the view of deism. “Deists believe that God created the world and then left it subject to natural law. For deists, God is beyond the world and not active in it in a supernatural way.”¹⁴⁶ God is active in His creation, and God is personal, however it seems best to reserve the word “person” for the discussion of the persons of the Trinity, otherwise we risk having four persons: the divine nature itself, then the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As we approach the following studies on the nature of God, we are not looking at a person but a singular nature which is shared in its entirety by three persons. We will be using the title God of the whole nature and, therefore of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Necessary Terms

Before we begin our study of God, we need to define some words with which we will make some helpful, logical distinctions. Some of these words are extra-biblical, but accurately describe the biblical revelation. Just about anyone who has spent some time studying or talking about God has probably used the word attribute. Attribute is an extra-biblical term which is “a quality or feature regarded as a characteristic or

¹⁴⁵ John D. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001, p. 228.

¹⁴⁶ J. Carl Laney, *God*, Nashville: Word, 1999, p. 19.

inherent part of someone or something.”¹⁴⁷ My friend and theology instructor H.LaVern Schafer defined it, “Attributes, are those distinguishing characteristics of the divine essence which constitute the basis of various actions in reference to God Himself or to others.”¹⁴⁸ A.H. Strong defined attributes, “They are qualities objectively distinguishable from the divine essence and from each other.”¹⁴⁹ Both Schafer and Strong note that attributes are not the divine essence but “inhere” in the divine essence.¹⁵⁰ I’ve found Schafer’s restricted use of the word attribute¹⁵¹ to clarify God’s self-revelation. It distinguishes between what God is in being: spirit, infinite, from what He is as the bases of His activities: love, goodness, truth, etc. This study will use this definition, considering the eternal qualities which are distinct from each other and distinct from the divine essence. It will look at what God has revealed are His eternal attributes yet also consider those qualities we observe when God’s exercises His attributes within creation, for example love giving rise to grace.

Many Bible students divide the attributes into categories. Some categorize the attributes under the headings **absolute** and **relative**.¹⁵² Attributes in the former list are eternally true of God, and do not require

¹⁴⁷ Oxford American Dictionary, 2005.

¹⁴⁸ H.LaVern Schafer, *Maturing in Christ*, Xulon Press, 2010, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Strong, op cit, p. 244.

¹⁵⁰ Schafer, op cit. p. 6; Strong, op cit, p. 245.

¹⁵¹ This is simply my choice for the purpose of maintaining some distinctions regarding God’s character. It allows me to distinguish terms used of the essence, those used of God’s activities, and those used of the whole nature,

¹⁵² See Strong, op cit. p. 248.

anything outside of God to operate. Attributes in the second list exist due to something outside of God, that is, creation. This does not mean that God develops, but that His absolute attributes are expressed in special ways with respect to creation. For example, God is eternally immense, i.e. huge. In time, after God created, that immensity is expressed toward creation as omnipresence (He is present to all creation). Omnipresence requires something other than God for God to be present to it. Therefore, when nothing but God existed, God was immense but not omnipresent. Similarly, compared to a finite creation, God is infinite. Immensity is absolute; omnipresence is relative. Strong suggests that even God's omnipotence (all-powerfulness) and His omniscience (all-knowingness) are relative. Yet neither of these required creation. God was all-powerful apart from creation, and God knew all, apart from creation. For example, the Father, Son and Spirit had full and intimate knowledge of one another long before God created anything, and each person could exercise power toward one another as they interacted. However, God could not be present everywhere until He created a "where."¹⁵³ Other theologians classify attributes by those which describe the nature or essence of God: eternity, self-existent, all-powerful, and those which describe God's moral activity: righteousness, love, truth. A third group classify attributes as **communicable** and **incommunicable**. The latter term describes attributes true only of God, such as infinity, while the former can

¹⁵³ "Where" implies creation and place. Prior to creation, God alone existed, there was nothing else.

be communicated to the nature of man, such as love. While each of these attempts may be helpful in some respects, this study will reserve the designation “attribute” for those qualities which are eternally true of God as the basis of His activity and are not recognized only by relation to creation.

We will also consider God’s essence. Essence is also an extra-biblical word. Essence is that of which a person or thing consists. Man’s essence is tri-partite: spirit, soul, body. Essence is where the attributes exist (inhere). God’s essence is distinct from His attributes as it is the “substance” in which God’s attributes inhere. I say “substance” because God’s essence is immaterial, yet it is nonetheless real. Having looked at God’s revelation concerning His essence and attributes, we will then look at God’s nature. The divine nature [θεϊαζ] is mentioned twice in the New Testament. It encompasses the union of God’s essence and attributes. Nature involves everything that we know is part of being God. Our study will begin with a consideration of the divine essence, then God’s attributes, and finally the nature. This threefold division is an attempt to logically represent the Biblical data so that we might better understand the vast self-revelation of God in His Word.

God’s Existence

As a starting point, we’ll consider just a few Scriptures which support the existence of God. It is common in many theologies to set forth a series of arguments for God’s existence. These arguments are often of a philosophical nature. They reflect the attempts of human reasoning to explain how God exists, and why “rational” people believe in God. This is not within the scope of our study. The Bible assumes

God's existence. Genesis 1:1 opens with "in the beginning God..." God did not give an explanation for His existence, or why someone should accept that He does exist. Rather, He begins by demonstrating that He is the cause of this creation of which we are a part. Also, John 1:1 tells us that "in a beginning was the Word, and the Word was facing God, and the Word was God." In verse two God reveals that He is responsible for everything that has ever come into being. This creation, God's creation, pours out speech day and night (Psalm 19:1-2). It speaks to even those who cannot read, that God exists, for it speaks by its existence. The creation tells us there is a God (Romans 1:20). Twice David wrote that "the fool has said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1). The one denying God does no good. Good does not refer to morality but happiness, contentment, and a sense of well-being. Those people who deny God's existence do nothing which produces a sense of well-being for either themselves or anyone else. In both passages the denial of God's existence allowed people to engage in unrighteousness and to mistreat others (Psalm 14:4). Biblical revelation and the existence of God go hand-in-hand. If God exists, then the Bible can be trustworthy. If He does not then the Bible is only the product of men, and we should have no more confidence in it than in any other historical document. In fact, it may be in error regarding its religious statements.

God's Essence

Jesus Christ told the Samaritan woman that God is spirit (John 4:24). This is God's essence. Spirit essence is immaterial, yet real. Jesus contrasted spirit to flesh and bone (Luke 24:39). In the first case, the

woman was upholding the Samaritan position that God was to be worshipped in their site at Mount Gerazim, not in Jerusalem as the Jews did. Jesus indicated that the very nature of worship was about to change. That the coming worship would be more in keeping with God's nature. It would not be confined to a physical location on earth (a mountain or temple) nor confined to a physical posture (the word worship¹⁵⁴ meant to bow down). The new worship would be in man's spirit, not his body. It would also be genuine (truth), not a ritual which one could do even if he didn't mean it. God is not physical. He does not have a body. As a result God was never confined to a specific location on earth (we'll deal with this later) and no physical posture or act produces an act of worship which matches His nature. From the second text, we don't learn what spirit is but what it isn't. The disciples saw Jesus and thought He was a phantasm, a ghost. He told them to touch Him. They could feel His hands and feet. Therefore, the ability to touch and feel a physical body is contrasted to a spirit. A spirit cannot be touched; it cannot be sensed by touch.

God's essence is spirit. We do not mean in this case the Holy Spirit/Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a specific person of the Godhead. By spirit essence we mean the one essence or immaterial substance which is possessed and shared by the Father, Son and Spirit (we'll consider this idea in more detail when look at the Trinity).

Spirit involves the faculty of thought or knowing.

¹⁵⁴ Both the Hebrew שָׁחָה [shachah] and the Greek προσκυνέω [proskuneō] mean to bow down before as an act of worship or act of recognizing the greater worth of the one before whom one is bowing.

The spirit of a man knows and the Spirit of God knows (1 Corinthians 2:11). Yet in some way spirit is distinct from mind [νοῦς] (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). It seems that the human mind has both an intuitive and a sensory aspect. The soul comprises the sensory side of the human mind and the spirit the non-sensory side. Since God does not have a physical body, He does not have a sensory apparatus (nervous system) as humans. Man's current body is soulish,¹⁵⁵ that is, it is oriented and characterized by the soul (1 Corinthians 15:44). As humans, we depend not only upon rational thought, but also upon sight, smell, hearing, tasting and touch. Consider how we do science. We enact an experiment, we observe with sight, hearing, smell, touch or taste. We use our senses to collect information for analysis. We might misinterpret the evidence, or our observation of the evidence might be tainted by a fault in our sensory system: bad hearing, poor eye sight, poor sense of smell or taste, numbness in our touch. Man's soul interprets those senses and transmits that information to one's heart, where one chooses how to respond to the stimulus (cf. Revelation 18:14). The future body will be oriented to the spirit. Therefore, we can conclude that the human spirit having the capacity for thought operates outside the sensory realm of experience. Because God is spirit, God does not observe through a sensory system, therefore He does not deal with the impairment or limitations of that sensory system.

We saw that a spirit is not material, therefore God is real but immaterial. He has the capacity for thought, but does not operate based upon senses as we are

¹⁵⁵ English Bibles translate this "natural."

accustomed. As we move on we will see how these three qualities are necessary for God to be limitless. Let's look at one illustration of the benefit of being spirit and operating beyond the bounds of a sensory system such as we have. When God sent Samuel to anoint the new king, Samuel was confident that Jesse's oldest son Eliab was God's anointed (1 Samuel 16:5-6). However, Jehovah corrected Samuel and told him not to look at him based upon outward criterion. Jehovah explained that He had rejected Eliab, because He (Jehovah) does not see as men see. Men see the outer appearance but Jehovah looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Literally the phrase is "man looks at the eyes." We must use our senses to observe others, but those senses limit what we can gather. If God operated on a sensory system as men do, He would have to look at men's outer appearance, at their expressions and outer demeanor. God would use physical eyes which transmit the signals through a sensory system. However, God does not have physical eyes limited to the stimulus of light. God's ability is correctly attributed to His omniscience and truth which qualities inhere in God's spirit essence. Romans 2:8 provides another example of God's limitless ability versus our limited ability. Paul contrasts two types of people: those who by patience do good as they seek God's glory, honor and incorruptibility, and those who act from selfish ambition. God reveals that none do the former, but all do the latter (cf. Romans 3:9-11). But you and I may be tempted to question this because we see people do "good" things for others all the time. We observe acts of kindness. What we cannot see are others' motives. God reveals that the motives are selfish ambition. I cannot

see inside another's heart. That's God's prerogative, His ability. Because God is spirit and infinite spirit, God can know apart from senses, and this allows Him to make infallible evaluations, of which we are incapable.

In a similar manner we often speak of God being infinite, and as that infiniteness relates to creation, He is omnipresent. That presence is possible because God is spirit. A physical body has numerous limitations which would prevent God being present everywhere. Two material substances cannot occupy the same space at the same time. By God's essence being immaterial, God can occupy all space, including that occupied by other beings and objects. God's spirit essence is essential to the doctrine of the Trinity. A physical form would make it impossible for three persons to simultaneously and entirely share one essence. Some unorthodox religions deny the spirit essence of God, and claim God has a physical body. Their theology becomes quickly and obviously flawed in numerous ways. God's spirit essence is the basis of properly understanding God.

Is God only spirit? Man is tri-partite: spirit, soul, body. How do we know that God does not also have a body and a soul? We find references to God having a hand, eyes, and arm (Psalm 34:15; 118:15-16; Isaiah 51:9). Are these metaphors? If not, what are we to say about God having wings or being a rock, shield, horn, or fortress? How large is this body of God's, if heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool (Isaiah 66:1)? It seems best to understand physical descriptions to be metaphors, sometimes called anthropomorphisms [i.e. human forms], "and that we use it [anthropomorphism] because we have no other language to depict a

nonmaterial thing acting in our world.”¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the physical descriptions of God do not indicate that He has a physical nature, but are metaphors for His immaterial nature.

Some might point to the Son becoming flesh, and claim that God also has a human nature (John 1:14). That however was not the addition of a human nature to deity, that is, the Son did not add some human essence to His divine essence. That would result in something less than fully divine and more than fully human. When the Son became flesh, this did not affect the Father or Spirit. They did not become flesh. We conclude that the Son added humanity to His person, not to the divine nature. Since early in the Church’s history, teachers have referred to this as the hypostatic union, or the union of two natures to one person.

Invisibility is an attribute of spirit substance. Three times God is called invisible (Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17). The last reference lists invisible among other characteristics of God, and it seems best to understand that invisibility relates to the limitations of human sight. God’s created spirit beings have no such limitation and would have the ability to “see” or know God’s spirit essence. Romans 1:20 describes God’s everlasting power and existence as God, and then states that both are invisible.¹⁵⁷ Man can only “see” God’s power and existence by what God has

¹⁵⁶ Feinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

¹⁵⁷ The word “everlasting” is not *αιωνιος* but *αιδιος* being everlasting (See notes under revelation). In this same passage it is not the Godhead, that is the Trinity, that is revealed by physical creation, but the Godhood, which is the existence or being of God. So the NASB and ESV translate *θειοτης* “divine nature” and the ASV “divinity.”

created. We see the invisible by the visible because God's nature is spirit and that spirit is invisible.

We have numerous examples in Scripture of the invisible God becoming visible. He appeared to and ate with Abraham, wrestled with Jacob, and walked with others, all in a human form. He appeared in fire and cloud to others (Moses and Israel). He met with Moses on the mountain. Therefore, we can conclude that while God is invisible by nature, because spirit substance is invisible, God can make Himself visible. He can also appear in a variety of forms. While He has taken human form in many of these appearances (do not confuse these with Christ's incarnation), that is not the shape of His invisible substance. His invisible substance has shape. Jesus said that no one has seen His form (NASB, ESV, ASV, shape AV, John 5:37). God's invisible shape is not that of a six foot tall man, because God's spirit essence is infinite, it isn't six feet tall, not is it human.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, while there is form to God's substance, that form remains unseen. God is invisible, though He can make Himself visible.

Self-existent

God is self-existent. God's spirit essence has no derived origin. God was not fathered, has no father, was not created, or formed. Theologians call this characteristic (attribute) aseity from the Latin *a se*, "from itself."¹⁵⁹ This also means that no one maintains God. Absolute eternity requires one to be self-

¹⁵⁸ I say this only because some groups who identify themselves as "Christian" assert the error that God exists in a physical form of a man.

¹⁵⁹ Feinberg, op cit. 239.

existent. God cannot truly be eternal and have derived from another, and Scripture attributes eternity to God (Hebrews 9:14; Isaiah 43:13).

If God is not self-existent, then someone is responsible for creating, forming, or procreating God. When John introduces us to the Word, he tells us, “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). “Came into being” and “come into being” is a better translation of *egeneto* [ἐγένετο] than “made” as it occurs in some English Bibles. The verb *ginomai* [γίνομαι] as used here means to “become” “to gain a state of existence.”¹⁶⁰ This is a stronger statement than “made.” It indicates that the Word who is God (v. 1) is the origin of all things that have come into existence. Anything which has come into existence did so through Him. Therefore, if He was caused, formed, or simply, if there was a point at which He came into existence, then He was His own cause. He could not have been brought into existence. This statement specifically regards the Word. He is identified as God. We shall later see that God is one, and therefore, can conclude that what is true of Him in this regard is true of the other one called God in verse one, as well as anyone else who is truly God.

God has life

When Jesus explained that the Father and Son can and will raise the dead, He referred this prerogative to God possessing life. “As the Father has life in Himself,

¹⁶⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, Eds, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989: Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 3.6.

even so He gave the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:26). The life is God’s; He has it in Himself. Jesus used the reflexive pronoun to specify the Father and Son’s possession of the life. Under the study of the Trinity, we will consider what Jesus meant by “have life in Himself.” The possession of life is understood to be a description of self-existence. God can give life because He is the source of life, as the self-existent one.

God appeared to Moses and sent him to Israel and Pharaoh (Exodus 3:4-10). When Moses asked God for His name, “What *is* His name” (Exodus 3:13), God said, “I AM what I AM, thus you will say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me” (Exodus 3:14). The verb “I AM” [אֲנִי־אֵלֹהִים] is a Qal Imperfect, and can be translated “I continue to be, what I continue to be.” It indicated that God is; that God continues to be what He is. Therefore, God revealed to Moses His name Yehowah [יְהוָה].¹⁶¹ When God taunted Judah’s foolish idolatry, He repeated the idea that He alone is God at least nine times (Isaiah 43-48). In the last half of of Isaiah 43:10 He said, “Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be

¹⁶¹ “The most significant feature of the name **YHWH** is its distinctiveness as the uniquely revealed name of Israel’s covenant God. Exod. 3:14ff. record the occasion on which God declared himself to Moses, identifying himself as the great ‘I AM’ who raised up Moses for the purpose of delivering his people from Egyptian slavery. The designation ‘I am who I am’ bears a relationship to the archaic form of the verb ‘to be, become, happen.’ And therefore this name of God, the ‘Lord,’ signifies God’s ever-present, all-pervading power and majesty as the God who rescued his chosen people from captivity and entered into solemn covenant relationship with them at Sinai during their period of wilderness wandering from Egypt to Canaan.” Stephen D. Renn, ed. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005, p. 440.

not be any after Me.” If God owed existence to another, then another God would have had to exist prior to Him, in order that. In fact, He could not be the only God. God is the eternally existent one. God is the the self-existent one.

God is One

God is also one. As the new generation of Israelis prepared to enter the land, Moses said, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). In a world dominated by belief in many gods, and departing from Egypt a land of many gods, Israel needed to know that their God was not one among many, but one God. This characteristic of God’s essence can be called unity. It means that only one divine [God] essence exists. Since there is but one God, it is also true that there is but one divine nature, one divine essence. Jesus stated the He had a hand and the Father had a hand (John 10:28-29). He then stated that He and the Father are one (v. 30). He had just spoken of each having a hand from which no one could snatch His sheep. The hand is a metaphor for God’s power. The power that is the Son’s is the Father’s. Because there is one essence, The power is the same. There is not two similar or identical powers but one, for there is but one essence. God’s essence is one.

God is simple

God’s essence is also simple. It wasn’t that many years ago that simple was a derogatory term meaning, mentally deficient or that which is for those whose mental faculties were not sufficient for something deeper. However, by “simple” we mean that God’s essence remains spirit. God does not evolve. God does not add to the essence. The essence does not change.

God is not more today than He was 500 billion years ago, or any time in the past for that matter. God's essence is spirit and eternally remains spirit.

Process theology teaches that God changes, grows, and becomes. The god of process theology is not a stable god but a god who evolves, a god who fits their model of life and the universe, ever evolving, ever changing. In contrast, James assured his readers, that while their circumstances had changed, God had not, for there is no change or shifting shadow with God. God is the source of good gifts (James 1:17). While James' readers may have questioned what was a good gift - they had lost many of their possessions when they were scattered - for they had placed their sights on acquiring what they had lost. However, what God was giving them was indeed good, and it would always be good because God does not change. In the days of Malachi, many in Judah had ceased doing the Law regarding the tithe, regarding the ministry of priests, and regarding marriage relationships. To these who were robbing God though they claimed to keep the Law, God said, "I the LORD, do not change," (Malachi 3:6). If He changed, He would have already destroyed Judah once for all. God had sworn to judge and punish them, but not to remove them from the earth. Since God does not change His purpose does not change. Both these statements have more to do with God's purpose and promises than His essence. However, if God's essence could evolve, it would be logical that His purpose could also evolve and Judah may not fit into that new purpose. Finally, as Paul praised God for His work in his own life, Paul wrote that God is not corruptible (1 Timothy 1:17, some Bibles have

“immortal”). His nature cannot be altered by anything which would cause it to be corrupt, or negatively changed. Paul reminded Timothy that God had saved him despite his being a violent sinner (vv. 13-16). It was God’s grace that worked in Paul to change a man who had so violently treated the Church. God is not corruptible, His grace is not twisted either to legalism or unrestrained living. Nothing can cause corruption or decay in God’s nature so that He becomes something He has not always been. God does not change.

God is uncreated, single, unchanging spirit. That spirit is immense! God is huge. Solomon grappled with God’s immensity at the dedication of the temple. He knew that building could not contain God, for no single heaven nor all the heavens together could contain Him (1 Kings 8:27). The Scriptures refer to three heavens: earth’s atmosphere, outer space, the location of God’s throne. All three cannot contain God, so certainly one of those cannot contain Him, therefore, it is impossible for the temple to contain Him. God fills all creation, so that there is no place man can go, that God is not present (Jeremiah 23:23-24; Psalm 139:7). All these verses speak of God’s immensity as it relates to creation. For this we often use the term **omnipresent**, meaning that God is present everywhere in creation. God is present everywhere, because God is immense, in fact compared to the finite, God is infinite. That immensity is an assurance to us, that God is not a God “afar off.” God is always present. Paul wrote that there is “one God and Father, over all things, through all things, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:6). “Over all” indicates that God is transcendent, He does not become confused with creation. His presence does not cause a

rock, tree or anything else to become divine. “Through all things” means that God exists in the same space that all creation exists, whether humans, rocks, or spirit beings. The last phrase “in you all” refers to the believer. He is in us! Some Greek texts omitted the pronoun “you,” yet that was Paul’s point, while God is transcendent and present everywhere, He is only in (indwelling) believers. Our immense, omnipresent God, maintains a special relationship to us.

God is spirit. That is His substance, His essence. That spirit essence is uncreated, un-generated, in fact it is eternal. That essence is one, and there is only one. That essence remains spirit, it does not change. Finally, that essence is immense. In this infinite, unchanging essence God’s attributes inhere. It is the basis for what God has to reveal of Himself.

Attributes? Character? Nature?

We now turn our consideration to God’s attributes, those qualities which are eternally true of God and are the bases of His actions. Because God is eternal, and His attributes inhere in His spirit substance, His attributes are also eternal. Omnipresence is not an absolute attribute of God, for it describes the relationship of God’s immensity to the physical creation. Before creation, to what was God present? Nothing. If we claim God is eternally omnipresent, then something besides God must have existed for God to be present to it. Yet this is not true for God is the only eternal One. Likewise, Grace is not an eternal attribute. Grace is God expresses His love and goodness to fallen creation. In eternity past, the Father did not have to treat the Spirit and Son with grace, or visa versa. Eternal

attributes required nothing other than God for their existence. God needed nothing else to use these attributes. Each person of the Godhead eternally exercised these attributes in relationship to one another.

The idea of eternal attributes makes it difficult for us to understand God. Much of what God reveals about Himself, He does by His interaction with creation. We see His attributes as God relates to His creation. Therefore, we must be cautious in what we say about God regarding His absolute character, His eternal nature. We must be cautious of attributing to Him an eternal quality what is true based on His relation to His creation. We will see His relationships to creation, but we will also attempt to consider what His attributes or characteristics look like as the eternal Persons of the God-head interact.

Attributes describe how God acts. They are the bases of God's actions. Therefore, immensity and self-existence describe God's spirit essence but do not describe how God acts. Love is an attitude which expresses itself through actions. Love is an attribute. It is an eternal quality. The Father, Son, and Spirit could exercise love toward one another in eternity past. They needed nothing else. Therefore love is an absolute attribute. We can state that God's attributes are goodness, holiness, love, righteousness, truth, unlimited knowledge, and unlimited power.¹⁶² Each is eternal, none depend upon another, that is, no attribute is the basis of another attribute. Theologians sometimes make love or holiness the basis of all other attributes. If one attribute is an expression of another, it is not fully an

¹⁶² These are listed alphabetically to avoid showing favoritism to any one attribute.

eternal attribute.

Before we consider the attributes, let's survey how others have classified the attributes. Many classify the characteristics of the essence as attributes and use two general headings as we used essence and now attributes.

L.S. Chafer: *Systematic Theology*

personality

omniscience

sensibility: holiness, justice,
love, goodness, truth,

will: freedom, omnipotence

constitutional attributes.¹⁶³

simplicity, unity, infinity,

eternity, immutability,

omnipresence or immensity,

sovereignty

Millard Erickson: *Christian Theology*

The Greatness of God

spirituality

personality

life

infinity

constancy

The Goodness of God.¹⁶⁴

holiness, righteousness

justice, genuineness

veracity, faithfulness

benevolence, grace

mercy, persistence

J. Carl Laney: *God*

The Greatness of God

spirit, living,

eternal, all-knowing,

all-powerful,

everywhere-present,

constant, independent,

inscrutable

The Goodness of God.¹⁶⁵

good, holy,

righteous, love

faithful, true

gracious, wise, merciful

Charles C. Ryrie: *Basic Theology*

¹⁶³ L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology V. 1*, p. 191, 212-223. Chafer previously established these three as real personality. pp. 180-186.

¹⁶⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 263-300.

¹⁶⁵ J. Carl Laney, *God*, p. 71.

The Perfections of God¹⁶⁶

eternity, freedom, holiness, immutability, infinity, love, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, righteousness, simplicity, sovereignty, truth, unity.

Wayne Grudem: *Systematic Theology*

Incommunicable

(those unique to God)

independence

unchangeableness

eternity

omnipresence

unity.,

Communicable

(those mankind shares).¹⁶⁷

spirituality, invisibility

knowledge, wisdom

truthfulness, goodness

love, mercy, holiness

peace, righteousness

jealousy, wrath, will

freedom, omnipotence,

perfection, blessedness

beauty, glory.

The above theologians would all be categorized within the Reformed side of Christianity, though some less so than others. This list provides a brief overview to note that aside from Ryrie, most attempt to distinguish generally God's characteristics. Chafer, Erickson, Laney and Grudem group these attributes into those which in some manner are unique to God and those which shares shared or exercises towards His creation. Notice that many of those attributes classified as constitutional by Chafer, greatness by Laney and Erickson, and incommunicable by Grudem, we distinguished as characteristics of God's essence, choosing to reserve the designation "attribute" for those

¹⁶⁶ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 35ff.

¹⁶⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 156-221.

qualities which are the bases of God's actions. Further note that some listed qualities are not eternal because they are exercised only in relationship to creation. So, Erickson has justice (which is often a variant translation of righteousness) which sometimes indicates the act of judging rightly on behalf of another. In eternity, God exercised no judgment, as not member of the Trinity needed to be judged either for or against. He, Laney and Grudem also include mercy, which we will see is an expression of God's love and goodness towards those who are suffering in some capacity. To make mercy and attribute rather than an expression of an attribute in time, implies that God suffered in eternity. The same could be said for Laney's inclusion of graciousness, which would imply that members of the Trinity did not deserve love from an other member. Inscrutable on an eternal level would mean that one member of the Trinity was incapable of understanding another member. Laney states that inscrutable means some mystery about God remains.¹⁶⁸ Grudem lists jealousy among God's attributes. In eternity, was one person of the Godhead jealous of another person? It is not likely that these theologians would state that the members were merciful toward each other or jealous, or had to be gracious. This list helps demonstrate that how we define God's attributes affects what we include in those eternal qualities of God, which we designate attributes.

Goodness

God treated Moses to a display of all His goodness. A rich man approached Jesus and addressed

¹⁶⁸ Laney, *op cit.* p. 82.

Him as good teacher. What did God mean by “all My goodness?” What did the rich man mean by “good?” Goodness is often confused with love, holiness, and righteousness. Many Bible students treat goodness as though it were morality. Morality falls under the attribute of righteousness and partially under holiness. God’s goodness is a different matter.

Good and goodness represent three primary Biblical word families, the Hebrew *tov* [טוֹב] and the Greek *agathos* [ἀγαθός] and *kalos* [καλός]. *Tov* is used seven times in Genesis one. Good was God’s evaluation of His creation. He wasn’t making a moral evaluation. He was evaluating the creation’s fitness, how pleasant it was. The trees God caused to grow in the garden were good for food (Genesis 2:9). Abraham’s servant considered Rebecca to be beautiful (Genesis 24:16). Jacob’s wife Leah stated that her ability to bear her husband six sons was a good thing (Genesis 30:20). Egypt’s seven years of plenty before the seven years of famine were good years (Genesis 41:35). Each of these demonstrate that the noun טוב has the primary idea of good, pleasing, suitable, beautiful, or friendly.¹⁶⁹ This illustrates an aspect of God’s goodness; God is everything He should be. God is an ideal personage,¹⁷⁰ not because He conforms to some external standard of an ideal. He is the standard. Because He is the ideal, because He is everything He should be. God is good in the sense that He has a sense of well-being.

¹⁶⁹ William Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew And Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 122.

¹⁷⁰ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. Vernon D. Doerksen, p. 85.

To this first definition for goodness, most lexicographers add the idea of rectitude or rightness.¹⁷¹ This meaning is suggested for the tree of the knowledge of **good** and evil (Genesis 2:9, 18; 3:5). However, this tree was not about knowing righteousness versus unrighteousness. It was about knowing what would cause Adam and Eve to be happy, content, or pleased versus that which brings disaster, disagreeableness, adversity.¹⁷² When they ate the fruit they realized that by doing so they brought upon themselves disaster. They were stripped of God's image, forced to leave the garden, made subject to death, and had to labor while sweating in order to eat. That was all disaster. In contrast they knew that God had always given them what was good. So any plea such as "depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14) was less about departing from unrighteous activities, though that too is true, and more about considering how one's activities produce either calamity or well-being. God's goodness is about His sense of well-being, His contentment.

The Psalmists wrote that God is good (Psalm 25:8; 34:8). In both verses goodness involved God's provisions. Sometimes it is God's work of rescuing His own from those who do unrighteousness. In Psalm 73:1 God is acknowledged as good, while the Psalmist sees himself as not having a pure heart. Much like men

¹⁷¹ Alexander Harkvay, *Student's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, p. 216.

¹⁷² The Hebrew עָוֹן does involve the ideas of morally failure or depravity, yet even in these instances, the emphasis remains on the disagreeableness or disaster which is part of this conduct. see Holladay p. 341.

today, he observed that the wicked believe they are innocent and question God's goodness because of the things they have suffered (vv. 10-14). "Why does God let bad things happen to good people?" The Psalmist took refuge in God's provisions and nearness. By nearness the Psalmist meant God's provision for him to draw or come near¹⁷³ to God (i.e. at the temple). The idea was contrasted to those who remove¹⁷⁴ themselves from God, that is, they did not approach the temple but abandoned God. The provision to approach God provided the Psalmist a sense of well-being (v. 28).

While God spoke with Moses on Sinai, the people begged Aaron to make them a god. Aaron agreed and formed a gold calf. The people brought offerings, ate before their god and engaged in immorality (Exodus 32:1-6). The Lord told Moses that He would destroy them and start the nation over with Moses (vv. 9-10). Moses pleaded with God not to destroy the people and the Lord agreed (Exodus 32:11-14). When the Lord directed Moses to resume Israel's journey, Moses requested that God reveal Himself to Moses, even to show him His glory (Exodus 33:12-18). God agreed to cause all His goodness to pass over Moses (v. 19). When He passed over, He proclaimed His character to Moses: merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and truth (Exodus 34:6). God agreed to continue with Israel (vv. 9-10). As a result of this meeting Moses' face shone (v. 29). What was it that

¹⁷³ קָרַבָּה "nearness, approach". Mounce, p. 1036.

¹⁷⁴ רָחַק occurs one times meaning, "one who is far away" and derives from the verb רָחַק meaning "to be far off, to avoid, stand aloof." Mounce, p. 1041.

Moses saw, when God caused all His goodness to pass over him? Goodness is an attitude which produces a sense of well-being or does works that cause the same in others. God's proclamation of His character, visibly showing some of Himself to Moses, and continuing on with Israel all caused Moses to have a sense of well-being. This action also demonstrated to Moses God's true sense of well-being. It changed Moses from being the frustrated leader of an obstinate people, to a leader who knew what God wanted. As a result Moses firmly stayed the course God set before them (Numbers 12:3). Moses' shining face was a demonstration of how God's goodness affected him.

When the young man asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what might I do to inherit eternal life" (Mark 10:17) most readers are interested in what Jesus told him. Yet Jesus' first words are important to the understanding God's goodness, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone" (v. 18). Jesus wanted to know if the man recognized Jesus as more than a teacher; if he recognized Jesus to be God. David told Israel that God found none who do good, not even one (Psalm 53:3). There is none good among mankind, and God alone is good. Eliphaz the Temnite concluded that man is born to trouble, and while some of his conclusions are wrong, Job agreed (Job 5:7; 14:1). In simple terms, man brings a great deal of trouble upon himself. Man seems to be seeking illusive happiness and contentment, yet only brings upon himself more disaster. Solomon knew that if one managed to acquire a fortune through hard work, it is passed on to one who hasn't worked hard for it and lacks wisdom, meaning that it is wasted, or misused. This contrast to man is

helpful, for it establishes God as good in contrast to man. Man apart from God never truly finds goodness and happiness; he is never content or at ease. God is good. Ultimately God is the perfect being and as a result is content, having a sense of well-being, and happy.

God is the happy God (1 Timothy 1:11). In this passage the English “blessed” translates the Greek μακάριος meaning “happy.”¹⁷⁵ The good news for Christian growth is based on God being happy. Law teaching focuses upon God’s righteousness. God’s goodness and righteousness are compatible, but an emphasis upon God’s righteous judgment was not Paul’s focus. He desired Timothy and the Ephesians to live in light of God’s happiness, not in fear of punishment. Jesus Christ is described as the happy and only absolute ruler [Sovereign, Potentate] (1 Timothy 6:15). Historically, dictators have not been happy, but lived in paranoia, focused upon keeping control. Jesus is not like them. He is the happy God, and when He takes His throne, He will be the happy absolute ruler. Therefore, even when God demonstrates His wrath, His fury, when He enters into judgment against His creation, God remains good. He does not demonstrate fury out of frustration or lack of well-being. Think of how many people have acted out of their frustration with circumstances. God does not, for God is good.

¹⁷⁵ Mounce, p. 69. This entry adds “fortunate” which would not make sense if applied to God. It also adds a second meaning of one being especially favored. p. 70. Even in the case of the favored one, the emphasis is mainly upon the resulting happiness.

When the Son hung upon the cross, it pleased¹⁷⁶ the Father to bruise Him (Isaiah 53:10). This was not true because the Father is a brutal, mentally ill individual. Rather the Son suffered according to God's plan, not by accident. In His suffering He did the will of God. He accomplished the Trinity's plan, therefore the Father expressed an aspect of His goodness.

God also exercises loyal love or faithful kindness. The Hebrew expressed this through the חֶסֶד [*chesed*] word family, and the New Testament $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\tau\acute{o}\tau\eta\varsigma$ [*chrestotēs*]. When God was about to rescue righteous Lot, he acknowledged that God was making great His faithful kindness [*chesed*] toward him (Genesis 19:19). Following God's deliverance of Israel through the Red Sea, Israel sang to the Lord (Exodus 15:1). They attributed God's leading them to His loyal kindness (v. 13). After David's sin with Bathsheba, he asked God to show him favor¹⁷⁷ according to His loyal kindness (Psalm 51:1). He didn't ask God to be fair, or give him what he deserved. He asked for kindness. The New Testament word is illustrated by Jesus' comparison of old and new wine; the old is **better** [kind] (Luke 5:39). The idea was that it was smoother or easier to drink, more pleasant to the palate. While the Spirit convinces a man of his sin guilt, his need of righteousness, and resulting judgment (John 16:8-11), God's kindness brings a man to repentance (Romans 2:4). The guilty

¹⁷⁶ This is a Qal Perfect of חָפֵז [*chafetz*]. The base idea being delight or to taking pleasure. Mounce, p. 165.

¹⁷⁷ Qal Perfect of חָנַן "to be gracious" yet the Old Testament idea of grace is often closer to favor than the New Testament concept of grace.

sinner changes his mind about the Person and work of Jesus Christ, when he sees God's kindness, that God has done everything necessary to allow man into His presence. We were saved when the kindness of God appeared (Titus 3:4-5). Peter urged believers to crave the pure logical milk [i.e. the word] so that they could grow by means of it (1 Peter 2:2). Peter made His appeal on their past experience with God's kindness. Since they had tasted God's kindness, they should crave to know even more of it. This they could do, by growing. Our God will display His kindness to us into the ages (Ephesians 2:6-7). He will make us comfortable in His presence in the coming ages. God is kind, because God is good. We might conclude that God is eternally kind. Yet the contexts of kindness involve contrasts to intimidation, coarseness, or inhospitableness. These qualities are not present in the Trinity and therefore, no reason exists for kindness. As an example, the Son has no need to make the Father at ease in His presence. Additionally they are one essence and therefore are never in conflict. They are simply good to one another.

God is merciful. Mercy is God's compassion, His tenderness, His pity. He is merciful because we are sinners, and as such we suffer. Isaiah wrote that destruction is the way of man (Isaiah 59:7). Paul called this misery (Romans 3:16). When God directs His goodness to address this misery, it is mercy. Since the Trinity does not suffer as God, They do not exercise or need mercy among Themselves. Mercy is only directed to creatures. God had no need of mercy in eternity, but only in time toward sinful creation. The Hebrew *rechem* [רֶחֶם] is also the word for womb, involving the idea of

softness. Because men suffer due to sin, God deals tenderly or softly with them to relieve that suffering. God first addressed our lack of salvation. “Not according to our works of righteousness, but according to His mercy, He saved us...” (Titus 3:5). Any provision to relieve suffering apart from the new birth would be like a little band-aid on a mortal gaping wound. When David sinned, He also asked God to blot out his transgression according to his mercy (Psalm 51:1). He knew deserved to be punished and to suffer. He knew that He had sinned against God (v. 4). If God dealt with him according to what he deserved, God would be fully righteous. He knew this. So David did not appeal to God’s righteousness but to God’s mercy and lovingkindness. By blotting out His transgression (David broke two commands) God would be removing some or all of the consequences of his sin. This was mercy. God is merciful, because God is good.

God is good. God is the only being who is fully content and happy. The Father, Son and Spirit are eternally good, eternally pleased with themselves and each other, eternally happy and always content. God is the happy God.

Holy

When Moses led Israel to the edge of the Red Sea, the Egyptians pursued them. Pinned between the sea and the Egyptians, the Israelis were without hope, but God delivered them. He dried the sea and held the Egyptians at bay by means of a pillar of cloud. Israel walked through on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to follow, God caused the waters to collapse upon them and drowned them. On the far shore, Moses

and Israel sang a song to Jehovah, rehearsing His work. In this song they said, “Who is like you among the gods, O’ Lord, who is like you, majestic in holiness...” (Exodus 15:11).

Majestic in holiness? “*God’s holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.*”¹⁷⁸ This is a common way of defining holy and holiness, so a writer of a past generation states similarly and more narrowly, “The root meaning seems to be “separation from, and hostility to, all evil and defilement.”¹⁷⁹ However, in discussing holiness in the book of Leviticus, J. Carl Laney points out a better understanding, “The word *qōdeš* does not mean primarily moral rectitude, though ethical or moral holiness does stem from the idea of being separate (11:44; 19:2). What is “holy” is marked off, separated, and withdrawn from ordinary use.”¹⁸⁰ How does this definition fit the usage of Moses and Israel on the shore of the Red Sea? They had seen God distinguish Himself from the gods of Egypt. He was not like them, in fact He was separate or distinct from them. They were common. God is not!

When Israel entered the land, Joshua called the elders together and rehearsed God’s work among them from the call of Abraham to their possession of the land (Josh 24:1-13). He then asked them to choose whether they would serve Jehovah or the gods they had worshipped in Egypt or the gods of the Amorites (vv 14-15). When the elders pledged to serve Jehovah,

¹⁷⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 201.

¹⁷⁹ J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 65.

¹⁸⁰ J. Carl Laney, *God*, 64.

Joshua countered that they would be unable to serve Him, because Jehovah is a holy God (v. 19). They didn't realize just how distinct Jehovah is, how unlike all the other gods. They, therefore, didn't know to what they were committing themselves. God was unlike any god they had ever known (cf Psalm 77:13).

The Old Testament contains many passages which demonstrate that holiness emphasized distinctness or being set apart from what is common, rather than only being set apart from evil. So God set apart the seventh day, not to make it a non-evil day, but a day that is not common as the other six (Genesis 2:3). Certain men and women were designated "holy ones" with respect to the temples and high places of false gods. This designation referred to people who were religious prostitutes [NASB],¹⁸¹ that is they engaged in sex for religious purposes, and were supposed to be set apart from common activity (Genesis 38:21). Moses set boundaries around Sinai because the mountain was set apart from typical mountains while God was meeting with Moses upon it (Exodus 19:23). Israel could not mix their seeds in the field so as to produce a hybrid. If they did, the seed would be set apart and not useable for food or animal feed (Deuteronomy 22:9). In this last passage the ESV translates the verb *qadash* [to set apart] "forfeited."¹⁸² God even called nations to be set apart for war, that is, to separate from the common matters of life and so to be prepared for war (Jeremiah 51:27-28). These several examples demonstrate that the Old

¹⁸¹ The AV has "harlot", the ESV - "cult prostitute", NIV - "shrine prostitute".

¹⁸² The AV, NASB, and NIV have "defiled."

Testament word for “holy” is less about separation from sin and more about set apart from that which is common for something designated in the context.

God’s intentions for holiness are well illustrated from several passages in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus delineated the daily and religious behavior of the Israelis. In Leviticus 10 God gave statutes restricting alcoholic drink for the priests. By this God made a distinction between holy and common, between unclean and clean (v. 10). In chapter 11 God detailed the distinctions between clean and unclean food. He concluded the dietary rules, “and you will make yourselves holy, and you will be holy; for I *am* holy: (v. 44). God gave laws for Israel’s holiness, because He had separated them from the other peoples (20:26; cf 19:1-37; 20:6-7; 21:5-6). If Israel would have lived by the statutes God gave them, they would have been distinct from the nations. Fifteen hundred years later, God told Peter that the unclean were no longer to be considered unclean (Acts 10:15). Did the animals change in those many years? No, they were not unclean of themselves (cf Titus 1:15). God made the distinctions for the purpose of making Israel different. As they lived under the Law, they found out how hard it is to be different. It was a small taste of God’s distinctness.

In contrast to the difficulty to achieve personal or national holiness, it is not hard for God to be different. He just is. He wasn’t like the gods of Egypt. Those gods were either man-made or fallen angels who had been created by God (cf Isaiah 44:9-20; 1 Corinthians 10:19-20). They weren’t gods in the truest sense. There is only one true God (Jeremiah 10:10; 1 John 5:20). God has shown Himself to be holy, because unlike false

gods, He is able to come to one's aid when one calls upon Him (Isaiah 57:13-15). In this same way, the psalmist saw God as holy because God has done wonders and great works; He has even rescued His people (Psalm 77:11-15). Mary recognized God to be holy because of the distinct exercise of His power which she was experiencing (Luke 1:49). Israel had to learn that God is holy, because no other god is like Him. He even splendidly clothes Himself in holiness (Exodus 15:11). As we wear clothing, so God (who is spirit and has no body) wears holiness. When we meet another person, we likely notice their clothing, and from their dress draw certain conclusions: wrinkled-he's lazy, dirty-she's been working hard, neat, clean and stylish-she has an important job or he's concerned what others think about him. Similarly, God's clothing Himself with holiness points out to those who meet Him, that He is wholly distinct, He's unlikely anyone we've every met. God shows Himself to be holy by the exercise of His righteousness, by showing no favoritism (Isaiah 5:12-16). Therefore, God is holy in one sense by being separate or distinct from those which are false gods.

God created a innumerable company of spirit beings. Among them are the angels. Angels are spirits in essence. God too is spirit, yet God is distinct from those spirits. The Holy Spirit emphasizes this distinction. Those spirit beings are created beings, but the Holy Spirit is creator (Psalm 104:30). The Spirit emphasizes that God is uniquely set apart, even from those which share some similarity of essence to Him.

When we consider God's holiness as an eternal attribute, we have to adjust our definition. In eternity

only God existed. No sin existed. Nothing unrighteous existed. No false gods existed. So what did holiness mean in that context? From what was God separated? Holiness meant that no conflict existed within God. No conflict existed between Father, Son, and Spirit, and no conflict within anyone of those three persons. By contrast, Paul wrote of his conflict in Romans 7. He knew that the law was holy and the commandment was holy (Romans 7:12). The law was spiritual, it appealed to Paul's spirit not his flesh and this was a conflict, because Paul was fleshly (carnal) (7:14). As a result, when Paul wanted to do good (produced by the Spirit), he did evil (Romans 7:19). Paul had been born anew with a nature that had good desires. Paul also had a fallen nature, which desired activities contrary to the good desires. God has never had a conflict like this within the divine nature.

In eternity, the Father always knows Himself to be the Father and never confuses Himself with the Son or the Spirit. This can also be said true of the other persons. So the Son spoke to the Father, not to Himself (John 17:1). He said, "I come to You" (John 17:13) and called Him "Holy Father" (v. 11). He was not coming to Himself. The Son and the Father sent the Spirit, they did not send themselves (John 14:26; 15:26). The Spirit glorifies the Son, and speaks what He hears (16:13-14). The Spirit isn't listening to Himself. Holiness affects the trinity by each person maintaining His united yet distinct identity in respect to the other two persons. Because God is holy, each person is distinct within the oneness that is God. The Trinity is one other way in which God is holy or distinct from anything else in the

universe.¹⁸³ So Isaiah and John both witnessed the words of the burning ones¹⁸⁴ around God's throne, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of armies, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3), "Holy, Holy, Holy, *is* the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (Revelation 4:8). "The threefold repetition of "holy" expresses the infinite holiness of God. Although the number three may be an adumbration of the Trinity (cf. v. 8), it is also used to signify completeness."¹⁸⁵ This was not a "may be" hint at the Trinity, but a reflection of the beings' understanding of God. So F. C. Jennings wrote more pointedly, "In this threefold ascription we may again see 'God manifested;' and as we remember the still clearer revelation of Matt. 28:19, we hear in this antiphonal cry **not a mere repetition for emphasis**, but the recognition of a trinity of Divine Persons, each of whom is hymned as holy;"¹⁸⁶ Modern interpreters sometimes struggle with the clarity of the Trinity in the Old Testament, but Isaiah did not (we'll look at this

¹⁸³ I've had anti-trinitarian individuals appeal to this distinctness as a reason why the Trinity makes no sense: God can't be understood if He is like nothing else. Such individuals claim the doctrine of the Trinity is confusion and God is not a God of confusion, quoting from 1 Corinthians 14, where "confusion" does not mean "mentally confusing" but disorderly and insubordinate. In fact, holiness upholds the truth that God acts in an orderly manner.

¹⁸⁴ The Hebrew is *seraphim* from *seraph* "to burn." Their identity is like that of cherubs, which are also said to glow as though they are burning metal. These seraphs may be cherubs seen as burning.

¹⁸⁵ Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) p. 86.

¹⁸⁶ F. C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1978) p. 63.

under the doctrine of the Trinity), and neither did/does the spirit beings gathered around God's throne. Each Person of the Trinity is holy and those beings recognized it. Isaiah and John record different words from these beings to express God's holiness. John may have witnessed four beings distinct from those Isaiah witnessed. If so, then eight beings are around God's throne, and four give one emphasis to God's holiness: the whole earth is full of His glory, and the other four give another emphasis to God's holiness: His constant eternity. No other being is capable of filling the whole world with His glory, His reputation. No other being is eternal and constant. God is distinct, and the reality of the Trinity emphasizes one aspect of this.

When the Son became man, Scripture reveals only one occasion when the desire of His human nature was in conflict with the desire of the divine nature. This was when He asked the Father that the cup might pass from Him. He aligned His human will with the Father's and did the will of God. The Son was never in conflict in the realm of His divine nature, only in the desire of His human nature. God: Father, Son and Spirit, has no such conflicts.

Sometimes, we are faced with two choices, both of which are good. We struggle with how we can desire two good things but are unable to do both. We might find our desire to do good (bring about another's happiness or sense of well being) in conflict with our desire to be righteous. God has never faced this conflict. God's holiness, "implies that all other divine moral excellences (goodness, justice, mercy, truth, grace) are unified and made mutually harmonious in

infinite degree in God.”¹⁸⁷ I’ve heard people state that God set aside His holiness and/or righteousness so that He could love us. No! God never has to set aside one attribute because of another. That would indicate a conflict within God’s nature, such as His love versus His righteousness. This is never true. God may not always emphasize all aspects of His character, but all aspects remain true, for God is holy.

God’s holiness is more commonly known as the trait by which God is set apart from all that is unlike Him. God is not set apart because of a rule He obeys. He is set apart due to His very nature. When God is in contact with anyone or anything unlike God, God maintains that distinction, and emphasizes His set apartness.

When the Father caused the Son to become sin as our substitute, He separated Himself from the Son’s humanity (2 Corinthians 5:21). As a result the Son was abandoned as a man due to God being holy (Psalm 22:3). When David sinned against God, he feared that God would take His Holy Spirit from him, as He had done to Saul (Psalm 51:11). Psalm 97 pictures God’s holiness as surrounding Him with thick clouds and consuming His enemies with fire; the creation trembles before Him (vv. 2-5). Therefore, the Psalmist instructed others to be ashamed if they served idols, and were to hate evil (vv. 7, 11). They were to give thanks to His holy name (character) (v. 12). Israel forgot God and pursued false gods (Isaiah 2:8). They did not keep law or justice (Isaiah 5:7). So, God brought righteous judgment upon them. He did not judge based on earthly

¹⁸⁷ Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 1:99.

status such as position or wealth. By doing so, He presented Himself holy in righteousness (Isaiah 5:15). God disciplines us in the present so that we might share His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). God desires us to be set apart and disciplines us in love, so that we learn to be distinct from that which does not reflect His character and work. He does this because His is holy.

God is holy. He is unique, distinct from anyone or anything else. Eternally God has no inner conflicts, either individual members of the Trinity within themselves, or the members among themselves. In time, God is then separate from that which is not in harmony with what He is. He urges us to be holy, to be set apart ones, as He is set apart. He urged Israel and encourages us to this end. He is the holy God. There is none like Him.

Love

Everyone knows what love is. It's warm fuzzies. It's good feelings. It's romance. It's cuddles with children, with a pet, with your sweetheart. It's love, dummy. Yet God's love is frequently misunderstood, for the very reason that we think we know what love is. We often measure or define God's love by the standards of this world, by the way in which everyone around us uses the word love. Yet the writer of Hebrews stated, "For the one whom the Lord loves, He disciplines" (Hebrews 12:6). Discipline doesn't sound like warm fuzzies or cuddles. Or think about "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). How do these statements fit a Biblical definition of God's love?

John wrote that God is love (1 John 4:8).¹⁸⁸ Therefore, love is a divine attribute, a defining characteristic. For some it is an attribute which balances God's righteousness, making God accessible.¹⁸⁹ Of God's attributes, today, love is likely the most popular and well-known among people. Though well-known it is not well-understood.

Our English Bibles translate several words by the word "love." In the New American Standard Bible, the word love occurs 556 times, translating about 25 different Hebrew and Greek words. 11 of these words are probably translated well by the word love and represent only four different word families: *ahēbv* - אָהַב, *chesed* - חֶסֶד, *agapaō* - ἀγαπάω, and *phileō* - φιλέω. The first Hebrew word is simply "love," and the second God's loving-kindness or loyal love. The last two words are Greek, the first meaning to love and the second to show warm love or fondness. These words with similar but distinct ideas, give us a picture of God's love.

Love has a breadth of meaning, which must be recognized by context. Isaac loved Esau because he had tasted the wild game which Esau brought home for him (Genesis 25:28). Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than his other ten sons because Joseph was born to him when he was an old man (Genesis 37:3). Amnon one of David's sons loved his half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1). Amnon's actions (vv. 2-18) demonstrated that his

¹⁸⁸ The Greek makes God the subject and love the predicate noun. This is not a reversible statement in Greek. One can not state that love is God.

¹⁸⁹ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 349.

love was an infatuation not a desire for Tamar's well-being. These three illustrate a love which is drawn out by an endearing quality in the object loved: Esau's delicious game, the timing of Joseph's birth, Tamar's beauty. God's love is described in terms that distinguish it from human love.

God's love has its origin in God Himself. God's love is not like that of a man who loves a woman because of her beauty, kindness, wit, intelligence, or any other quality she might express. God's love begins with God, for God is love (1 John 4:8). God loved Israel because He chose to love her, not because she was lovable. We read in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, "Jehovah did bind His love on you or choose you because you were greater in number than all the people, for you were smaller than all peoples, but Jehovah loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your fathers. Jehovah brought you out by a might hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." First, God's love for Israel started with God not Israel. Second, God's love resulted in an act: He brought Israel out of Egypt and remembered His oath to their fathers. God's love originates with God and God's love acts.

God's love not only takes the initiative and acts, but when it acts, it does what is best for the object loved. H.L. Schafer wrote that love, "is the desire for and delight in the well-being of the object loved, even to the point of self-sacrifice if necessary."¹⁹⁰ John Feinberg adds, "This kind of love is love that loves even the unlovely and unloveable. It is a self-

¹⁹⁰ H.L. Schafer, *The Doctrine of God*, (Gaston, OR: nd) 16.

sacrificing, self-giving love.”¹⁹¹ The apostle John explained that God loved first (1 John 4:7-8). God loved by sending His Son (v. 10). God’s love for us was not because of our noble or righteous character (we had none). Paul wrote that among men, one might die for a righteous or good man (Romans 5:7). God, however, loved us when we were yet sinners (v. 8). As sinners we were ungodly and enemies of God (vv. 6, 10). “Ungodly” describes one who does not honor God, or even dishonors God, who lives in rebellion to Him.¹⁹² The word “enemy” involves an element of hostile hatred.¹⁹³ So God demonstrated His love for us by Christ dying in our place while we dishonored Him, were sinners, and were hostile toward Him. God acted in love, but not because of any deserving quality in us.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is probably the most popular collection of statements regarding love. Paul wrote this to correct some of misconceptions about love and service. These corrections help us understand what God’s love might look like. Love is longsuffering, a word meaning that one does not quickly or easily lose his temper (13:4). Scripture reveals that God does have anger and fury. Because God is love, He is not easily incited to anger or fury. God is not reactionary. Love is kind (13:4). Kindness is the ability to make others comfortable or at ease in one’s presence. This is an

¹⁹¹ Feinberg, 349.

¹⁹² *asebēs* [ασεβης] “destitute of reverential awe toward God, contemning God, impious.” Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

¹⁹³ *Exthros* [εχθρος] “2. actively, hostile, hating and opposing another:” Thayer.

amazing thought considering how powerful and awesome He is (awesome means to instill fear). Love is not zealous (13:4). This word has both positive and negative aspects. The main idea is a drive to succeed, to push one's self. Positively, one competes against himself; holding the bar high for himself. Negatively one competes against others, desiring superiority over others, without regard for how his or her actions impact others. God in love is concerned for others. He doesn't ruthlessly run over others who are in His way (I'm writing metaphorically). The next two qualities express God's restraint. God is the only God and creator of all things, yet He does not needlessly puff Himself up or brag incessantly. God does not act in a manner which is inappropriate to His character and work. The NRSV expresses this as "rude" (v. 5). God does not seek His own things. Love is not easily incited or negatively provoked (v. 5). God's love assures us that God is not reactionary or easily provoked. Love does not take joy in unrighteousness but rather in the truth (v. 6). These provide us some added glimpses of what is true of God's love.

Yet love is not all about man. As we noted in our introductory remarks about God's attributes, an attribute must be eternally true of God. "The divine love thus did not begin to be exercised only when creatures-the objects of His love-were created."¹⁹⁴ Therefore, in eternity past, the Father, Son and Spirit shared perfect love among themselves. God's love guarantees that the God-head never acts selfishly, whether as an individual or as the Trinity. It means that

¹⁹⁴ Chafer, 1:206.

God is always concerned for and looking out for the best of others. Jesus said that the Father loves Him (John 3:35). Jesus employed present tense verbs in the context; He didn't say He had been loved, but that God does love Him. Love acts, so at that time, the Father was loving the Son by giving all things into the His authority. He also loves the Son by displaying to the Son everything He does (John 5:20).¹⁹⁵ The Father loves the Son because the Son lays down His life (John 10:17). In this context the Father loves the Son by giving Him authority to lay down His life and to take it back up again (again, a reference to His human nature). Paul called Christ "the Beloved" in Ephesians 1:6. "Beloved" is not a noun but a perfect passive participle.¹⁹⁶ The perfect tense emphasizes an act carried out in the past with a continuing result, so the idea would be "the One having been and continuing to be loved." His also called "the Beloved" by means of the simple adjective *agapētos* from the noun *agapē*. In His human nature, the Son demonstrated His love for the Father by doing what the Father commanded Him to do (John 14:31). It is implied that the Spirit loves the Son by glorifying the Son (John 16:14). This is divine love among the persons of the God-head.

John 3:16 is a well-known Scripture about God's love, and yet many do not understand it. The misunderstanding involves the word "so." It is the adverb *houtōs* [οὕτως] and means "in this manner" or

¹⁹⁵ Both of these appear to be references to the Son's humanity.

¹⁹⁶ A participle is a word which has a verbal sense and a nominal sense. It is classified as a "verbal adjective" see Wesley J. Perschbacher, *New Testament Greek Syntax*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995) p. 383, and Dana and Mantey, op cit. p. 220.

“like this.” It does not mean, “He loved so much...” This adverb points us to how God loved the world. We saw that God’s love is not a feeling as we think of feelings. Some might speak of a man feeling love for a woman, and yet never speaking to her, never interacting with her, but only loving her from afar. This is probably infatuation, not love, and God does not do this. God’s love is different. “It is not a mere affection, but is rather a free choice of God which may be recognized in all that he does.”¹⁹⁷ God’s love is an attitude, a frame of mind which desires the best for the object of His love. With that frame of mind God acts from love. When God loves, He acts. He doesn’t sit around and have feelings of love without acting. Therefore, John 3:16 is stating, “God loved the world like this, He sent His special kind of Son...” It’s not as dramatic as “so very much” but it is accurate with the grammar and in keeping with the definition of love.

If God loves, God acts. God does not sit in heaven having warm fuzzies for others. Therefore, we should not be surprised that when the Scriptures describe God’s love, it seldom says “God loves.” His love normally involves a past event, a past act. If it is in the present tense, the context will explain how God is loving. So in the past, God loved and acted. God bound His love on Israel to make her a great nation (Deuteronomy 7:7); God loved the world by sending His Son (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10, 11); the Son loved Paul and gave Himself on Paul’s behalf (Galatians 2:20); God loved us by making us alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2:4, 5); God loved us by giving us

¹⁹⁷ L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:206.

eternal encouragement (2 Thessalonians 2:16); God demonstrates His love now by what His Son did (Romans 5:8). What is interesting about this last passage is that it does not state that God loves. It states that God commends, demonstrates, or sets forth His love. The love was in the past. It was such a perfect act of love that God does not repeat it. That would mean Christ would continuing being sent, and would die again and again. Rather, if someone wishes to know about God's love, He points (in the present) back to His love.

In the present, God's love still involves activity. If one claims that God loves, then they must explain how God loves. We often make statements such as "God loves you" or "God loves me" and we offer nothing to substantiate that claim. Too many spouses have heard the words "I love you" but no actions back up those words, and the response whether vocal or thought is "Yeah, sure, I don't see it." As I've tried to point out from Scripture, God does not operate in this manner. He does not loosely or casually use the term love. Let's look at several texts which describe God's love as ongoing. We first find that the Father disciplines His sons because He loves them (Hebrews 12:6). His desire for the believer's best, for him or her to become what He has planned, results in His enacting discipline when that individual needs correction. Next, we read that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). One way in which a believer can love another believer, is to give to another's real material need (1 John 3:16-18). When one believer loves another believer, God promised him or her that the Son will manifest (make plainly visible)

Himself by means of that believer (John 14:21).¹⁹⁸ He is also promised that both the Father and Son will make their abode (place to be at ease or relaxed) with that believer (John 14:23). So God loves the believer who is a cheerful giver by doing two things for Him: the Son is made visible through actions of the believer, and the Father and Son make their relaxed presence known to the believer. What privileges He has extended, that we should be able to show out Christ through our lives and have God at ease within us! Third, stated in the form of a question, Paul asked who can separate the believer from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35). One way in which Christ is loving us in the present is by interceding on our behalf at the Father's right hand (v. 34). No one can make Him stop this intercession. Hebrews 7:25 states, "Therefore, He is able to save fully those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede on their behalf." His intercession guarantees this full salvation. Fourth, Paul assured the Corinthians that God's love was with them (2 Corinthians 13:13). As a closing to this letter, it is an assurance of God's faithfulness in the lives of these saints. God does not stop His work, in fact the Spirit will continue that work right up until Christ takes us to be with Him (Philippians 1:6). Finally, in Romans 8:38-39, we find that nothing can separate us from God's love "in Christ Jesus our Lord." From the moment one believed in Jesus Christ, God the Father has logically counted or credited the believer to be "in Christ Jesus our Lord." His love guarantees us that

¹⁹⁸ This requires one to understand that keeping His commandments refers back to loving other believers like Christ loved them (John 13:34).

nothing can not stop Him from counting us to be in Christ. In each instance, God's love is the attitude behind a work or act of God.

God does not use the word love lightly. When He says He loves, He's doing something. If He isn't doing something at present, He doesn't speak of love in the present tense. What is God doing for the unsaved today? He sent His Son in the past, so He speaks of His love as being in the past, "He loved." If we say God loves sinners (though no Scripture says so) then we have to find what that love is moving God to do. The writer of Hebrews explained that if an individual receives no discipline, he isn't a legitimate son of God; he is not an object of God's present love (Hebrews 12:6, 8). So when Jesus addressed the Laodecian church, He warned them, "As many as I am fond of, I criticize and discipline" (Revelation 3:19). The criticism points out areas of failure, and the discipline is a response to that failure. Jesus used the milder term *phileo*, meaning to be fond of. The Laodecian church was not being disciplined, indicating that He wasn't even fond of them. Yes, God loved them in the past by sending His Son. In fact He loved them so perfectly in sending the Son, that until they are within God's family, there is nothing else God needs to do for them. It is inaccurate and without Scriptural support, to say He loves them. God's love is expressed by actions. (Remember that Paul tied God's ongoing provision for food to God's goodness not His love.)

God is love. God has perfect, unselfish love. Love means that God desires what is best for those He loves, whether mankind or members of the Trinity. The God of the universe, the holy and righteous God, is also

love.

Omnipotent - All-powerful

We have seen that God is good and love. Respectively, He desires the happiness of others and what is best for them. The question is then, can God do that which causes another's happiness? Can God do what is best for another? The answer is, yes. God can do this, because God is all powerful.

God sent Jeremiah to prophesy against Judah for their idolatry (Jeremiah 1:15-19). This made Jeremiah unpopular and landed him in the guard house (Jeremiah 32:1-3). While Jeremiah was locked up, the Chaldeans besieged Jerusalem. Through his aide Baruch, Jeremiah acted out a prophecy which promised that God would bring Judah back to the land (Jeremiah 32:7-15). Jeremiah then spoke to God, "Ah Master Jehovah! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You," (Jeremiah 32:17). The word "difficult" translates a Hebrew word meaning "wonderful."¹⁹⁹ The idea is that nothing is so wonderful as to be beyond God's ability. Jeremiah was aware of how dire Jerusalem's circumstances appeared, yet he was confident that God could accomplish anything He determined. God's power to create the universe was a reminder that God could easily bring Israel back from their imminent captivity. God's power was an encouragement to Jeremiah, and can be the same for us.

¹⁹⁹ *Pala* [פלא] Harkavy defines this word, "1) to be remote, inaccessible, difficult, hard to understand, impossible...2) to be singular, wonderful, marvelous" op cit. p. 567.

Power words

Several Hebrew words convey various ideas regarding God's power. Hebrew is not a language of abstract concepts. Hebrew is a picturesque language, and this is so true when looking at the words for power. The noun *koach* [hard ch, כֹּחַ] is the primary word. "In a static sense כֹּחַ suggests the capacity to endure, as of a stone (Job 6:12), but more commonly it expresses potency, capacity to produce."²⁰⁰ Therefore power remains as a stone remains, and because it remains it is able to act. It describes God's power displayed in Egypt (Exodus 9:16). God often rehearsed His work of bringing Israel out Egypt and into the land to remind the people of His power. Through Jeremiah, God taunted Judah regarding her idolatry. By His power, He had made the earth and everything in it (Jeremiah 10:12). Therefore, the false gods would be removed even destroyed, because all other gods have no ability to create. For their idolatry, God would use that same power with which He created the universe to bring Babylon against Judah, and force her to serve Babylon (Jeremiah 27:5). Because Babylon was so ruthless against Judah, and misled the nations, the God who created all by His power, would judge Babylon (Jeremiah 51:15-24). God's power to create assured Judah that He could judge.

Physical images were used to communicate the idea of strength. The noun *yad* [יָד] is properly the word "hand." The hand is where power is displayed (Exodus

²⁰⁰ John N. Oswalt, *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, ed.; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Associate Editor; Bruce K. Waltke, ass. ed., Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1980. TWBOT

14:31) and therefore, often has the idea of God's active power. Similar to this is the expression "outstretched arm" [זְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה] (Deuteronomy 9:29). Numbers 11:23 combined these. Jehovah asked Moses whether His hand was short, that is, not stretched out as part of the arm (cf. 15:6; 32:11). He was assuring Moses that He could respond to Israel's complaints. God brought Israel out (of Egypt) by His power and His outstretched arm (Deuteronomy 9:29). His power was exercised and displayed as the "outstretched arm" through divine acts: the plagues, parting the Red Sea, and provision of food.

The noun *gebvurah* [גְבוּרָה] pictures God as the strong one. So it is said of Him, "Yours is...the power (strength)" (1 Chronicles 29:11, 12). The common form of this word describes strong men as opposed to a common man or *ish* [אִישׁ]. It was one who could raise or lift himself up, and came to describe the power which made that possible [*gabvar* גַּבְוָר]. Therefore, God raises Himself as a strong One. Though Israel rebelled at the Red Sea, God chose to show His power and dried the Sea (Psalm 106:7-9). The Hebrew title "God" [el-אל] itself means a strong one. *Ōz* [עֹז] is God's power and might, which in Ezra 8:22 was against those who abandoned the worship of God, for the worship of idols. God exercised this power by blowing quail into the camp of Israel, so the Israelis might eat meat (Psalm 78:26-27). The common idea was of power that prevails, as in battle. Such an idea was easily conceived in the ancient world where battles were regular. Abraham had 300+ strong fighting men, probably to defend his holdings in land, wells, and livestock. Therefore, the imagery of prevailing in battle was a part of their life. The word *chayil* [חַיִל] is translated

strength, army, and fortress.²⁰¹ “The basic meaning of this verb is “be firm,” “strong.”²⁰² Because God is strong, His purpose is firm. These terms for power give a picture of a creator, a strong man who can stand, gather His forces to His task and stretch out His hand and arm to do His work. He is the God for whom nothing is too hard.

The New Testament has four word families representing the idea of power: *dunamis* [δύναμις], *ischus* [ἰσχὺς], *kratos* [κράτος], *energeia* [ἐνέργεια].²⁰³ The first involves ability, God’s own power. His power overshadowed Mary causing her to conceive our Lord’s human nature (Luke 1:35). Jesus exercised this power to cast demons out of individuals and to heal the sick (Luke 4:36; 9:1; 5:17; 6:19). Creation reveals God’s everlasting power, for it required great power to have brought into existence the vast universe (Romans 1:20). The Son also upholds all that creation by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). God the Father exercised this same power to raise the Son from among dead ones (Ephesians 1:19-20). The second word views power as an endowment. It is endowed to us from God. Paul desired for the Ephesians to understand just how great it is that God’s

²⁰¹ This word has several legitimate translations which do not contribute to our understanding of God’s power.

²⁰² Carl Schultz, TWOT

²⁰³ See Joseph H. Thayer for some distinctions between these four words. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. The distinctions are listed at the end of the article on *dunamis*. While some might suggest that we shouldn’t press too hard for distinctions between these terms, Paul’s use of all four in Ephesians 1:19 suggests that he understood some distinction.

power [*dunamis*] is working as strength [*ischus*] in us (Ephesians 1:19). This word is the endowment of strength, which enables the believer to put on the whole armor of God and resist Satan (Ephesians 6:10). That endowed power enables the believer to serve (1 Peter 4:11). God the Spirit endowed Paul with the strength to be content in any circumstance (Philippians 4:13). God's natural ability encompasses creation, healing, and empowerment of His people.

Kratos is visible power, might which is manifested in a specific act. God's outstanding demonstrations of power include scattering the proud, bringing down rulers, exalting the humble, filling the hungry with good things, and sending away the rich with empty hands (Luke 1:51-53). A form of this word involves a firm grip, a strong hold. Jesus is described as firmly holding the messengers of the churches (Revelation 2:1). This grip implies both authority over them as well as potential to keep them secure. This reminds us of Jesus' words that no one is able to snatch the believer from the hand of the Father and Son (John 10:28-29). A form of this word *pantokratōr* [παντοκρατωρ] describes God as the Almighty. Ten times this word is used, nine alone in Revelation (Revelation 1:8). It is a title which assures the reader of God's ability to accomplish all He has revealed. The four living beings which are around His throne, do not cease to recognize that He is almighty (Revelation 4:8).

Finally, the word *energia* pictures God at work. Work can be accomplished through delegation, and God often delegates. He released Peter from prison by sending an angel to lead him out of the prison (Acts 12:7-10). *Energia* indicates God is personally working

rather than delegating. When Paul served in the sphere of His gift, he did so by the measure of God's in-working power (Ephesians 3:7). In other words, God specifically enabled Paul to serve. He did not send power to Paul through an angel. Neither did He take power from Himself and place it into Paul. He worked His own power in Him. This is the way the whole body of Christ is to operate. There is an in-working in each part and together the body grows (Ephesians 4:16). Paul lived His Christian life, attempting to cooperate with God's in-working (Colossians 1:29). He wrote the Romans that he wouldn't dare to speak of anything but that which the Christ worked out through Him (15:18). John explained that for the one who practices the Truth, his or her works are worked by God (John 3:21).

God's power amazes us. When Jesus calmed the storm, His disciples were afraid, wondering about the identity of this One who could cause the wind and sea to obey (Mark 4:41). On another occasion, Jesus exercised power to heal to prove He also had power to forgive sins. Forgiving sins is an intangible act. No one can see the sins sent away. Yet a tangible act such as healing supported Jesus' ability to send away (forgive) sins (Luke 5:20-26). The word "miracle" is often a translation of the word *dunamis*. Miracles were works of God's power.

God's power, signs and wonders

So, does God do miracles today? "God, of course, could do today what He did in early apostolic history."²⁰⁴ Our God is the God of David, who

²⁰⁴ Robert G. Gromacki, *The Holy Spirit*, Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999, 223.

delivered Goliath into his hand. Our God is the God who rescued the three Hebrew young men from the furnace, and Daniel from the Lion's den. He is the God who empowered Paul to shake off a snake which bit him, and Peter to command a lame to walk. "The issue regarding sign gifts, however, is not His power; it is His purpose. Since God is sovereign, He can also choose not to do today what He did in the first century."²⁰⁵ Demonstrations of God's power were done to authenticate God's messengers, the message, and even the Messiah. When the book of Hebrews was written, the writer viewed the miraculous to have been mostly in the past. God confirmed what both our Lord and His disciples spoke (Hebrews 2:3). "Confirmed" is an Aorist tense verb, and in this context shows the confirmation as mainly past. When God was confirming their word, He provided a witness for them by signs, wonders, and a variety of works of power (v. 4). The gifts of prophecy and knowledge²⁰⁶ illustrate this, for Paul considered them incomplete (1 Corinthians 13:9).

"The point that Paul is making here is that one person did not have full revelation. The New Testament itself was not written by one man but by several men over a period of about fifty years. In the meantime, many prophets, both of the apostolic class and the local church class, were given prophecies and special knowledge. But no one

²⁰⁵ *ibid*

²⁰⁶ Many read "where there is knowledge, it will pass away" as a reference to knowledge and learning, when the context uses knowledge of the gift of knowledge which provided practical instruction - the emphasis of this word knowledge [*gnōsis*] - for which we now turn to the Scriptures.

prophet had complete revelation. This tells us one reason why the gifts of prophecy and knowledge would be abolished. Eventually, something more than these incomplete gifts would be available.”²⁰⁷

What complete thing would replace the incomplete? “The best way to explain the idea of what we call the ‘New Testament canon’ would be ‘completed’ prophecy, which is what the apostle did.”²⁰⁸ Paul reminded the Corinthians that he had done the works of an apostle: signs, powers, and wonders (2 Corinthians 12:12; cf Romans 15:18-19). These works authenticated God’s works through these apostles. God was doing something with them which was very different from His previous work with the nation of Israel. It was necessary to point out that He was behind this new message, and this new entity called the body of Christ.

When Epaphroditus became sick, near to death, Paul did not heal him. God had mercy on him for the sake of Paul and the Philippians (Philippians 2:25-27). How God demonstrates His mercy differs by situation and His purpose. Paul told Timothy to drink some wine for his frequent stomach ailment (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul didn’t heal Timothy or expect Timothy to find one with the gift of healing. In his last letter Paul told Timothy that he had left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). Hebrews, Philippians and both letters to Timothy

²⁰⁷ Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001, p. 181.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.* 182.

were written sometime after 60 AD.²⁰⁹ Much New Testament revelation had been spoken, and written. God was still confirming this new revelation by signs. However, signs were primarily for the Jews, and their persistent rejection of God's work through Jesus Christ served as proof that God had changed the object of His work. While He has future plans for national Israel, the focus of His present work is the Church taken from among both the Jews and Gentiles (cf. Acts 15:4; Ephesians 2:15).

God is still demonstrating His power. However He is not doing it through spectacular miracles but through lives which show out His power. God created by His power, healed by His power, raised the dead by His power. Paul reminds us that it is this power which now works in us (Ephesians 1:19; 3:16). That power is the ability to harmoniously operate within the body of Christ as a member of the whole body. The Spirit empowers us in our human spirits, our inner man so that we are able to maintain the proper attitude toward circumstances around us. It is mental power to resist Satan, because our conflict is not with other people but with him (Ephesians 6:10-12). While Satan uses circumstances, his attack involves thoughts. Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Spirit (Acts 5:3). Since, his attack is mental, we need power in the mind, in our inner man. It was the changed lives of the Thessalonians that echoed through Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond (1 Thessalonians 1:8-9). God's power

²⁰⁹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1943. D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vols 2 & 3, Chicago: Moody Press, 1954, 1962.

allowed Paul to live content in any situation, and could fill full the need of the Philippians to get past their little matters of animosity between saints (Philippians 4:13, 19).²¹⁰ God testifies by His power in the saint today, not spectacular miracles.

The really big rock

God is all-powerful. We've seen many illustrations of that power. We know He exercises that power in us today. Yet, "If God is all powerful, and nothing is too hard for Him, then," some ask, "can God make a rock too heavy for Him to lift?" If we answer, no, then the reply is, "Then God's power is limited." If we say, yes, "Then God can't do everything." Both of their replies are correct. God's all-powerfulness does not mean that God can do anything. It is impossible for God to lie; He cannot be tempted with evil, He cannot look with favor upon trouble and misery; He cannot deny (say no) Himself (Hebrews 6:18; James 1:13; Habakkuk 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:13). Interestingly, in Hebrews 6:18, the word "impossible" is a negative form of the word *dunamis*, *adunatos*. It was not possible [*dunatos*] for Jesus to be firmly held [*kratos*] by death (Acts 2:24). God can't do everything that might be imagined, because lying, being tempted to evil, held by death, etc. are contrary to His nature. This then helps understand the first reply. God's all-powerfulness is limited. God uses His power within the

²¹⁰ "Supply every need" must be interpreted in the context. Paul was addressing the need to serve one another and correct the tiff between two women. The need would not be met here on earth, so it is not an earthly need such as food or clothing. It is a need met by God's riches in Christ. It was a spiritual need. God could meet material needs but that was not Paul's point.

confines of His nature. It is limited to that which is consistent with His character. Within the confines of His nature, God's power is infinite.

Power Corrupts

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."²¹¹ Of course this is true among men, plagued as we are by the sin nature. Is this true of God? How do we know that God does not use His power in a dishonest, egotistical fashion? We have seen that God is holy. Holiness means that God is not in conflict with Himself. Therefore, when God uses His power, it is always in harmony with His goodness, love, righteousness, and truth. We started our thoughts on God's power, asking whether God could do whatever is necessary regarding goodness and love. His power assures us He can, and it also assures us that His power will not conflict with those characteristics either. It was probably strange for New Testament Christians to think of a dictator, one with absolute power and authority, who is truly happy. Dictators by nature are arrogant, self-seeking, and fearful of those who want to oust them. Yet Paul called God the happy God, and the Son the happy and only sovereign (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15). Interestingly, the word sovereign is *dunastes* a form of *dunamis* and describes a person of power. God's power will always be in keeping with His righteousness for, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways" (Psalm 145:17).

Our God is a good God and a loving God, and He has the power to accomplish all that He desires. The only limit to God's power, is His own perfect character.

²¹¹ This arose as a quotation by Lord Acton in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887.

We can agree, "...that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." (Job 42:2 ESV).

God Is All-Knowing

We've seen that God is good, holy, love, and all-powerful. From His goodness, God does what brings about a sense of well-being in Himself and the recipients of His goodness. His love means that God is not selfish, but does what is best for the object of His love, even to the point of self-sacrifice. God has the power to accomplish both of these. His holiness guarantees that the exercise of His power does not conflict with His goodness and love. Yet, how do we know that God's goodness and love might not have been displayed in a better manner? His omniscience or all-knowingness provides us this assurance.

God is all knowing. God knows (declares) the end at the very beginning. He declared a long time ago, things which haven't yet happened (Isaiah 46:10). His understanding (a facet of knowledge) is infinite²¹² (Psalm 147:5). Henry Thiessen explained God's omniscience, "He knows himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible, whether they be past, present, or future. He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly."²¹³ Immediately means that He doesn't have to learn progressively as men do. Simultaneously means that He knows all things at one

²¹² Infinite is literally אֵין מִסְפָּר without number.

²¹³ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Rev. Vernon D. Doerkesen, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, 81.

time. He doesn't have to know them successively as men do (e.g. we learn basic math before we learn algebra). "He does not need to wait for the end to recognize it as the end."²¹⁴ By exhaustively it is meant that nothing escapes God's knowledge, and no part of anything escapes His knowledge. Truly emphasizes that His knowledge is accurate, unlike men who sometimes learn something incorrectly and may even insist that an inaccuracy is correct. This is omniscience.

The word "know" translates the Hebrew *yadah* [יָדָע]. This is knowledge of experience, not merely knowledge by sight (though it can have this sense, it is not as common). It is illustrated by the physical knowledge of a man for his wife (Genesis 4:1) and the skill of the people chosen to build the tabernacle and later the temple (Exodus 31:3; 1 Kings 7:14). They didn't employ workers who had only read about building things, but those with thorough experience. This agrees with the Greek *ginosko* [γινώσκω] which has the same emphasis, distinct from *oida* [οἶδα] which is mental knowledge that may have no experience with what is known. Akin to knowing is the idea of wisdom or the ability to apply one's knowledge in a given situation. Wisdom might be distinguished from knowledge as not the know how, but the know when; when is it appropriate to apply what one knows. The ability to join various parts of one's knowledge and draw conclusions is understanding. The Greek word is illustrative, at one time meaning, to stand together, that is, to stand to facts together. These are some of the basic terms used to indicate the sphere of knowledge.

²¹⁴ H.L. Schafer, *The Doctrine of God*, 14.

God's omniscience is sometimes pictured as His all seeing eyes. "The ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord" (Proverbs 5:21; Job 4:10). His eyes are in every place, so that He sees both good and evil (Proverbs 15:3). Zechariah wrote that the Lord's eyes range about through the whole earth (Zechariah 4:10; 2 Chronicles 16:7). His omniscience is also related to His presence. David knew that anywhere he might go God was there, so God knew when he sat or rose (Psalm 139:7-10).

God's omniscience includes the thoughts of men. He knew David's thoughts from a distance. Before David spoke, God knew all he would say (Psalm 139:2-4). As a result David knew that his wrongs were not hidden from God (Psalm 69:5). When Samuel came to anoint David as king, he met Jesse's first son and was certain this one was God's anointed (1 Samuel 16:6). God corrected Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him, for not as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance²¹⁵, but the Lord looks at the heart" (v. 7). Jesus didn't commit himself to men because he knew what was in all men (John 2:24-25). Jesus had many disciples and even choose twelve close disciples, but knew from the beginning which ones didn't believe in him (John 6:64). When Jesus forgave one's sins, the Scribes privately accused Him of blasphemy (Matthew 9:2-3). They said this in themselves not aloud. Jesus addressed them, knowing what they were devising in their hearts (v. 4). Thus God's omniscience

²¹⁵ Literally, "the eyes" a metonymy for the outside appearance, or looking at the eyes in an attempt to discern from the outside one's character, perhaps similar to our idea of someone having shifty eyes versus solid.

encompasses all the activities, thoughts, and intents of men.

God's knowledge involves all details of a man's life. The psalmist, and Jeremiah were aware that God knew them before they existed, before they were born, and He knew their form (Psalm 139:15-16; Jeremiah 1:5). The hairs upon one's head are numbered (Matthew 10:30). Thus God knows the details of every man's physical state.

God's omniscience encompasses all of creation. No part of creation²¹⁶ exists which is unseen by the eyes of God (Hebrews 4:13). It was by His wisdom and understanding that God created and stretched out the universe (Jeremiah 51:5; Proverbs 3:19). Man studies the universe, attempting to understand the principles by which it operates. God's wisdom created not only the universe but the principles upon which it works. God confronted Job regarding Job's lack of knowledge in the matter of the universe's creation and order (Job 38). By His understand God laid the foundations of the earth, and fastened those foundations in place (vv. 4-6). God determined the rule or order²¹⁷ which causes the universe to operate (rotate and orbit) as we observe (vv. 31-33). We can barely grasp the magnitude of the knowledge and wisdom necessary to design the physical universe.

God's omniscience encompasses not only what exists, has existed or will exist, but it encompasses what could have been. Men claim, "If I had been there, then

²¹⁶ Creation is anartharous, and refers to a quality of creation, leaving it open to anything which would be classified as created, which anything other than God Himself.

²¹⁷ The writer employed **hð;qUj** a rule cut in stone.

this would have gone like this.” But, in reality, we have no idea what if any change we might have been capable of affecting. God is all-knowing. Therefore, Jesus knew perfectly how things could have happened, when He spoke woes over Bethsaida and Chorazin (Matthew 11:21-23). He knew that if He would have done miracles in the cities of Tyre and Sidon, like those He performed in Bethsaida and Chorazin, that the former cities would have repented. He knew that had He performed such miracles in Sodom and Gomorrah, those cities also would have repented and would have still be standing when He spoke (Matthew 11:23ff).²¹⁸

We know God as Father, Son, and Spirit (cf Matthew 28:19). God’s omniscience involves all three persons and their relationship between one another. The Son distinguished Himself from the rest of mankind, by claiming unique knowledge of the Father (Matthew 11:27). In that same statement it is only the Father who really knows the Son. Jesus used a stronger form the word for knowledge [*epiginosko*] to indicate thorough knowledge (Luke 10:22; John 10:15). The Holy Spirit knows the things of God, in fact, He traces out the very deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). Thus the Father knows the Son and Spirit; the Son knows the Father and Spirit, and the Spirit knows the Father and Son. They know each other perfectly.

God’s knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are His own. They were never imparted by anyone. No one has been God’s teachers or counselor (Isaiah 40:14).

²¹⁸ Interestingly, God the Son appeared to Abraham and told him what He was about to do in those cities. He could have gone down to those cities and performed those miracles and therefore this more than a hypothetical statement. It was possible.

Omniscience Isn't Foreknowledge

Having established that God is all-knowing, many theologians attempt to explain how God knows all. An average five year old child knows many things because he learned them. He learned to speak by listening to others and by extensive experimentation with noises until he got it right. He knows things as a result of his nature and experience. No one trains a child to cry; it is the normal reaction to discomfort. When the parent responds to the child's discomfort, the child quickly learns that the crying gets him what he wants. Therefore, human knowledge is largely a result of experiential learning: interaction with one's environment. We have seen that no one has been God's teacher. God is uncreated and unformed. God never went through infancy and education.

Some attempt to explain God's omniscience by reference to His foreknowledge. In this they define foreknowledge as God's ability to know things before they happen by seeing what transpires. This explanation comes short in at least two areas. First, this version of foreknowledge doesn't explain God's knowledge of what could have been. Remember that God knows what is and will be, and what could have been. Foreknowledge doesn't adequately explain this. Second, this view misunderstands the idea of foreknowledge, treating it as though God can simply see or observe the future.

Foreknowledge translates two Greek words: *proginosko* [προγινωσκω] and *proiden* [προιδεν]. The latter is built on the stem *oida* [οιδα] from *horao* [οραω] a word meaning to see. It involves the idea of being aware of or seeing ahead of time. It never

describes God's foreknowledge. Once it is related to Scripture foreseeing an act of God (Galatians 3:8).²¹⁹

The second word is built on the *ginosko* [γινωσκω] stem, a word meaning to know with experience. It occurs five times as a verb and twice as a noun *prognosis* [προγνωσις]. The first occurrence describes the Jerusalem Jews' previous knowledge of Paul as a Pharisee (Acts 26:5). They had known him by interaction, perhaps listening to him teach. Believers are foreknown (Romans 8:29). God didn't observe us doing something good ahead of time, for we were disobedient and God-haters when God provided us salvation (Romans 4:5; 5:6-8). God is eternal and able to relate to us even before we existed. He chose us in Christ before the world was in place (Ephesians 1:4). By choosing us, and planning His work with us, He was acquainted with us in His plan. The same idea describes Israel (Romans 11:2). Israel was not God's people because they were desirable or more obedient than others. We saw in our study of God's love, that Israel was undesirable and very disobedient. God's foreknowledge can't be foresight of something good in them or us. It was God's knowledge because He chose to work with them and with us. God is fully acquainted because of own choice and plan.

When people sinned in the Old Testament, God didn't overlook it, though to men and angels it may have appeared such. Rather, before the world was put in place, the Father was fully acquainted with Christ as a lamb slain (1 Peter 1:20). This demonstrates the

²¹⁹ This can't be God's foreknowledge. That would imply that God foresaw that He would do something, which at the time of the seeing, He didn't know He would do.

relational idea of proginosko. The Father planned for the Son to become man, die on a cross and rise again. He foreknew it, because He planned it. It was fixed in His plan. Foreknowledge communicates certainty in God's plan.²²⁰ Peter described in detail the coming of those who pervert God's grace (2 Peter chapters 2-3). His picture of them and God's judgment is vivid. As a result his readers should have a had thorough acquaintance with them ahead of time and were encouraged to guard themselves from their false teachings (3:17). In his first letter, Peter wrote to dispersed believers (1:1). While they were dispersed and despised in the world, they were God's chosen ones. In this passage, Peter connected either the dispersion or their condition as sojourners with God's foreknowledge (v. 2).²²¹ God had planned this dispersion. It wasn't an accident. It was according to His foreknowledge.

Does God Know ALL?

Are somethings outside God's knowledge? God told the psalmist that He would forget his sins (Psalm 103:12). God tested Abraham and Israel as to their faith and faithfulness (Genesis 22:12; Deuteronomy 8:2). Jesus will one day tell those who never believed in Him, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). In terms of experiential knowledge, some things are outside God's

²²⁰ Schafer 15

²²¹ English Bibles translate the adjective "elect" as a verb and "according to the foreknowledge" modifying it. It should modify their status as sojourners, or the dispersion. It helps to translate the opening clauses, "Peter *an* apostle of Jesus Christ to chosen sojourners of dispersion." Translating this, "chosen" is correctly represented as an adjective. See textual note 5 under 1 Peter 1:1 in *The NET Bible*®, Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2005,

experience. God has never acted unrighteous. Therefore, He doesn't know such things experientially, though He defined the boundaries of righteous and unrighteous actions. But, what about the above mentioned passages, and others expressing similar thoughts? When God said that He would forget, He was speaking in human terms, using an anthropomorphism. It is interesting that men are never told to forgive. We are told to be gracious (Colossians 3:14-15). The reason is that forgiveness means to send the problem away, something we can't truly do. We would have to literally wipe the idea from our mind, because placed in the right circumstances, we'll dredge up that wrong done against us, even if it was forty years ago. God isn't a man. God can send it away, and never relate to it again. God hasn't properly forgotten, but human terms express God's actions best for our minds. Second, did God not know what Abraham or Israel would do until He tested them? No. But for the sake of others who observed God's actions-even you and I-God tested them and allowed them to demonstrate their character. Finally, when Jesus judges the unsaved, "I never knew you" involves experiential knowledge. It means that He never had a relationship them. These three serve as examples of the supposed limits of God's knowledge.

God's Omniscience and the Believer

God's omniscience and the christian is to be a comfort. When God works His plan, He does not do so with little knowledge, or a limited perspective as we have. God knows all and operates on the basis of his infinite knowledge. That knowledge is personal. It is as appropriate to speak of believers as "known by God" as

knowing God (Galatians 4:8).²²² God has revealed some of His mind to the believer through the work of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-13). Some of the things He has planned (2:9) involve Christ as the application of God's knowledge to us (wisdom, 1:30). In Ephesus, some claimed that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:18).²²³ This teaching had overturned the faith of some believers, that is, it messed up their spiritual life. Despite this false teaching about the resurrection, Paul assured Timothy that the Lord knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19). God's own are secure, even if they fall under the influence of bad teaching or become discouraged due to the same. The Lord knows *how* to rescue those who honor Him (godly ones) out of temptation, just as He rescued Lot before destroying Sodom (2 Peter 2:9). When considering our future in heaven, we can imagine ourselves becoming lost in the crowd, but Jesus assured His believers (victors) that He would give them a stone with a name upon it that would be known only to Him and the individual (Revelation 2:17). Imagine, He will have a special name for every one of us; we will not be just a

²²² God is anarthrous, a Trinitarian reference.

²²³ D. Edmond Hiebert explained this, "They denied a future bodily resurrection and taught that the only resurrection there was had already occurred in the spiritual renewal of the believer in regeneration. They probably misapplied and allegorized Paul's teaching about the believer's spiritual union with Christ in death and resurrection, and insisted that the doctrine of the resurrection had only a spiritual meaning and application." *Second Timothy*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1958, 70. They may not have taught that there was no other resurrection, but that the "first" resurrection, or the resurrection "to life" had already taken place. This meant that only one resurrection was left and this was the resurrection of judgment, meaning, as it popularly taught in christendom, that there is one general resurrection with one general judgment and God's own will also have to stand before that bar.

number. The writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers that the Lord is not unrighteous to forget their works of service or love (Hebrews 6:10). The word forget means to escapes one's attention [ἐπιλανθάνομαι]. For God to let something escape His attention would have been unrighteous, not because it would have been unfair for them to serve and love without getting credit, but because it would have violated God's nature, His omniscience, and He wouldn't have been right.

God knows all. God knows every detail of our lives-He planned them. He designed and created the universe. He has close intimate knowledge with those who are His and will continue to share that in the future. He has expressed through revelation some of what He infinitely knows. Finally, God's omniscience encourages us that God has worked out His plan in a fashion that does not violate His character and is the best plan-He knows it well!

God Is Righteous

God has revealed that He is content, and loving, has all power to enact His goodness and love. With omniscience, He knows how best to love and do good. In all these God is holy, He never is in conflict with Himself. God's righteousness means that in all His actions, He always does what is right (Psalm 145:17). God does not act unrighteously to maintain goodness or love. He exercises His power in righteousness.

Let's begin by looking at the idea of righteousness expressed in the Hebrew term *tzedeq* [צֶדֶק]. At one time this word likely involved conformity to a standard, or that which is straight. A door is straight or plumb as measured by a standard.²²⁴ Therefore, as this term is used in the Old Testament it involves conformity to various standards such as the Law given by Moses. If Israel would have obeyed God's law, it would have been their righteousness [*tzakaqah* - צִדְקָתָם] (Deuteronomy 6:25). A righteous man is contrasted to a wicked and perverse man in Psalm 7. David named several perverse activities contrary to righteousness: repaying evil to one who had done him no wrong (v. 4), plundering an enemy, bringing forth perversity, planning trouble, bringing out falsehood, and digging a pit to catch another (vv. 14-16). David contrasts himself to these kinds of people, referring to his own integrity (v. 8) and uprightness (v. 10). Again in Psalm 37, the wicked make wicked schemes and plot against the righteous and seeks to slay him, and they take advantage of the poor and needy (vv. 7, 12, 14, 32). Therefore righteousness would involve upholding

²²⁴ TWOT, op cit.

justice, not to show partiality, or hardening their hearts toward but be generous to the poor (Deuteronomy 1:17; 15:7-11). Being faithful or conforming to this standard was a form of righteousness for Israel.

Righteous and righteousness involve right works. We previously saw that goodness and holiness are not about morality. Morality is an expression of righteousness. The words “just” and “righteous” normally translate the same Greek and Hebrew words. Just comes to us through Latin and righteous through Anglo-Germanic languages, and hence there is no legitimate distinction.²²⁵

When this term is applied to God it has frequent connection with the Law. This is not because the Law is an external standard which God must obey. “Since God is the ground of righteousness, God does not require a principle of moral action external to himself.”²²⁶ God gave Israel the Law and in it He promised them blessings and curses for their obedience or disobedience respectively (see Deuteronomy 28-29). God’s righteousness is seen by His upholding that standard.

Aside from the Law, Moses knew that God is righteous as well as being the Rock, just, faithful, without any lack of integrity, and upright (Deuteronomy 32:4). When God subdued the Canaanite king before the sons of Israel, Deborah and Barak sang about God (Judges 4-5:1). They sang that when people watering their livestock would stand around the watering hole,

²²⁵ Justification translates the Greek *dikaiaw* meaning to cause to be or declare to be righteous. We use this word in English because we have no form of the word “righteous” which can singularly communicate this idea.

²²⁶ Oden, *op cit* 1:105.

they would share the stories of God's righteous works (Judges 5:11). They saw God's work in delivering them from oppression as a righteous work (Judges 4:3). When the Babylonian captives returned to Jerusalem, they recognized with Ezra that God was righteous in punishing them with captivity but also in maintaining a remnant whom He had brought back to their land (Ezra 9:13-15). Twice the psalmist wrote that the heavens declare God's righteousness (Psalm 50:6; 97:6). Both passages appear to use heavens as a reference for spirit beings who act as witnesses to God's righteous dealings with His people.²²⁷

The book of Job introduces Job and informs us that he was a upright man (Job 1:8). God allowed Satan to attack Job. Satan was attempting to prove that Job only feared God because God kept him safe and happy (Job 1:9-11). This was an assault on God's righteousness, though knowing God's character, Satan did not press God into action. After the physical attack Satan changed his attack and frustrated Job through the words of his three friends. As Job attempted to defend himself, he became increasingly aggressive towards God's righteousness, which probably in this context involve an aspect of fairness. It was the young man Elihu who summed up Job's complaint, "I am righteous, but God has taken away my right" (Job 34:5). Elihu pointed out to Job, "If you are righteous, what do you give to Him, or what does he receive from your hand" (Job 35:7). When Elihu finished speaking,

²²⁷ Allen P. Ross, Psalms in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985, 831. F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. V, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 127.

God appeared and spoke to Job. He did not defend His righteousness by reference to legal jargon or precedent. Rather, God questioned Job about Job's abilities: had he ever created, did he have knowledge on the workings of the universe, did he have knowledge and power over the wild animals (Job 38-41). God's point was that man is inclined to question His righteousness, when we don't seem to get a fair deal. We look at things in the short term. God is eternal and his knowledge and power so far beyond man that it is impossible for man to legitimately question the rightness of God's acts. Paul wrote, "What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? ... But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed, "Why have you made me like this?" (Romans 9:14, 20).

When God the Son entered the world as a man, he came as the righteous branch for David (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). He died on the cross as the righteous one taking the place of unrighteous ones (1 Peter 3:18). The apostles proclaimed Jesus as the Righteous One (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14). He is now our righteous advocate, one who testifies on behalf of our character (1 John 2:1). He does this by being our righteousness and character (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The Greek *dikaïos* [δικαίος] has the idea of "a. conforming to custom, b. fulfilling obligations, and c. observing legal norms."²²⁸ In Plato it referred to "inner order."²²⁹ At the writing of the New Testament this word family had a strong connection with the Old

²²⁸ TDNT, op cit 169.

²²⁹ *ibid.*

Testament ideas tied to the Law of Moses (cf Romans 7:12). However, Paul wrote that God's kind²³⁰ of righteousness had been made visible, a righteousness apart from law (Romans 3:21-22). Therefore, the Mosaic Law is not the perfect expression of God's righteousness. God's kind of righteousness is imputed (credited) to the believer in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul agreed desiring to be found having a righteousness which wasn't from law but from faith (Philippians 3:9). Paul was referring to righteousness as part of his christian life, not his initial salvation.

When God passed over the sins of Old Testament saints, spirit beings watched. When Christ died and arose, the Father set forth the Son as the place or location²³¹ where He is satisfied (propitiated, Romans 3:25). By doing so, He displayed His righteousness regarding the sins done prior to the cross. God could point at the Son and what He had accomplished as the basis not only for the present sending away of sins but also for His actions during the Old Testament. Therefore, God reinforced the idea that He is righteous and the one who declares righteous (v. 26).

Does God choose and perform righteous acts because they are righteous, or are such acts righteous because God chooses them? The former is called realism and the later nominalism. If the former were true, it would imply that God operates by a standard external to himself. In answering these questions,

²³⁰ This idea is communicated by both the anartharous nature of the two nouns and God in the genitive case.

²³¹ The ending thrion on the word ilasthrion indicates place or manner.

Millard Erickson writes, “But that standard to which God adheres is not external to God-it is his own nature.”²³² Oden adds, “So there is an ironic sense in which the best thing God can do is assert his own will, whereas our best acts consist in following God’s will rather than asserting our own egocentric will.”²³³ God is righteous in all He does, the very standard of righteousness.

God is Truth

The night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples, “I am the Truth” (John 14:6). The Thessalonians had turned from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). David trusted in the God of truth (Psalm 31:5). Isaiah encouraged Jehovah’s servants that their future was sure by the God of truth (Isaiah 65:16). The Scriptures present God to be the true God and the God of truth.

Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth” (John 18:38). For some, truth simply means that God is always honest and does not tell lies. Millard Erickson considers this attribute under the heading Integrity. He breaks this into three dimensions: “(1) genuineness-being true; (2) veracity-telling the truth; and (3) faithfulness-proving true.”²³⁴ As we consider the Biblical revelation on this topic, we’ll find this to be fair view of God’s truth. To see this, we’ll look at three word families which communicate the idea of truth.

The Hebrew word family is represented by the

²³² Erickson, op cit 287.

²³³ Oden op cit. 1:105.

²³⁴ *Christian Theology*, op cit. 289.

word *amen* [אמן]. The first idea of this verb is “TO PROP, TO STAY, TO SUSTAIN, TO SUPPORT.”²³⁵ In its passive stem this verb meant, “(2) *to be founded, firm, stable...*(3) *to be of long continuance, perennial...* (4) metaph. *to be faithful, trustworthy, sure.*”²³⁶ In its causative stem the verb was “(1) *to lean upon, to build upon...*(2) figuratively *to trust, to confide in...*(3) *to believe.*”²³⁷ One sees the progression; it first supports, then it lasts because it is supported, and finally because it is supported, one can have trust or faith in it. Though a single definition can not communicate all that is represented, the main idea of this Hebrew word family is that which lasts or is constant and therefore, trustworthy.

The Greek word family is represented by *alēthēs* [αληθης]. The word is a negative form of a Greek root meaning hidden.²³⁸ The Greek idea of truth then is that which is plainly true or genuine, not that which is hidden. Truth is, “*unconcealed, manifest; hence, actual, real.*”²³⁹ This idea adds another element to our understanding of the attribute of truth. Truth is more than the fact that God does not lie. “To say that God knows all things and that his knowledge is perfect is to say that he is never mistaken in his perception or understanding of the world: all that he knows and

²³⁵ Gesenius, op cit, 58. This is the Qal stem.

²³⁶ ibid 59. This is the Niphal.

²³⁷ ibid 59. This is the Hiphil

²³⁸ αληθης is derived from λανθανω meaning to escape one's attention or notice, to be hidden, G. Abbott-Smith, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937) 20.

²³⁹ ibid 20.

thinks is true and is a correct understanding of the nature of reality.”²⁴⁰ Omniscience must be true or accurate or it wouldn’t be omniscience. Truth is the attribute by which God both knows and responds accurately to all He knows. In the absolute sense, God knows Himself accurately and fully answers to or lives up to what He knows of Himself.²⁴¹ God has never over or underestimated Himself. God has never committed Himself to anything which He is not fully capable of completing, not anything He has no intention of completing. God acts in this way, because He is truth. Everything He says is true (2 Samuel 7:28; Revelation 19:9; 21:5; 22:6). When men disagree with God’s assessment, it is they who are liars. God remains true (Romans 3:4). When God promises, we know it will happen for God can not lie (Hebrews 6:18). Balaam said, “God is not a man, the He should lie” (Numbers 23:19). God doesn’t promise something, hoping He can do it, or with His fingers crossed behind His back. That wouldn’t be truth and God is truth.

It is also helpful to contrast God as truth to false gods. The Bible states that other gods exist (Genesis 35:4; Exodus 15:11; 18:11; Psalm 135:5). While this may alarm us who are monotheists (believe only one God exists), when we continue reading the Bible, we find these others gods are not Gods in the absolute sense. Some are purely the product of men’s labors (2 Kings 19:14-19). Such God’s are catered to by men but can not answer or save anyone (Isaiah 46:6-7;

²⁴⁰ Grudem, op cit. 195.

²⁴¹ Schafer, op cit, 21.

Jeremiah 10:4-5). Other gods are strong beings,²⁴² also known as angels (now fallen angels).²⁴³ These were created by God (Deuteronomy 32:17). They owe their existence to God. However, they pass themselves off as gods and receive the worship directed at the gods (1 Corinthians 10:19-20). These created gods are represented by things from the created order: birds, reptiles, men, etc. (Romans 1:23; Exodus 20:4). The idols can not speak, can not move, and can not help anyone, yet men worship these as though they can act on their own. Men worship that which is false, or even better fake; they are **no gods** (2 Chronicles 13:9; Jeremiah 2:11; 5:7). These beings are not firm or trustworthy (O.T. emphasis), nor are they genuine and honest (N.T. emphasis). A psalmist wrote, “For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him, Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary” (Psalm 96:4-6, NASB). The Hebrew word translated idol is *elil* [אליל]. William Holladay gives as a first definition of this word, “insignificant, **worthless**” and second “**pagan gods.**”²⁴⁴ While the gods of others

²⁴² This is the base idea of the Hebrew word God/god *elohim* [אלוהים]. Alexander Harkavy listed as first definitions “hero. mighty being אל גויים the mighty one of the nations” *op cit.* 23-24.

²⁴³ Angels are spirits (Hebrews 1:13-14). Some of the angels followed Satan in his rebellion and are now the Devil’s angels (Revelation 12:2-4, 7-9). Matthew 17:18 and Mark 9:17-20 refer to the same event where Matthew used the description demon and Mark spirit, therefore, demons are spirits. For a brief consideration of the reality and origin of demons, see C.C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: op cit.* 157ff.

²⁴⁴ William Holladay, *op cit.* 17.

can do nothing, for they are worthless, the God of the Bible, Jehovah, is strong, strong enough to create the universe. So part of God's attribute of truth is His genuineness, the fact that He is the one true God (John 17:3).

The idea of the true God versus that which is false is a prevalent idea in John's writings. Jesus spoke of the Father as true (John 7:28; 8:26). His witness of the Son was genuine. Those who receive or welcome that witness agree that God is true (John 3:33). Jesus came as the true light (John 1:19). As light, He made God's kind of life plainly visible among men (John 1:4). Jesus is the true bread from God, the source of eternal life (John 6:32, 35). Christ is the true vine (John 15:1). John also applied the title true God to the Son (1 John 5:20). When Jesus addressed the seven churches in Revelation He was the Holy and true and the true witness (Revelation 3:17, 14). As the witness of the Father and Son is true, so the teaching ministry of the Spirit is true. Holy Spirit is our anointing and He too is true and therefore He is our dependable teacher (1 John 2:27). There is not other genuine God but God. That is true of the Father, the Son and the Spirit who are one God. They are the only true source of light and life, because their life is the real life.

The Truth (truth identified with the definite article) is a specific doctrine. Jesus promised those who believed in Him that they would know the truth and the truth would free them (John 8:32). He specified that the freedom would be from the sin (i.e. the sin nature) (John 8:34). Therefore, the truth is a body of doctrine how the believer may have victory over his own sin nature. The purpose of this victory is living out or

manifesting God's kind of life. John wrote that those who practice the Truth approach the light, so it can be seen that their works are worked by God (John 3:21). One can only do works like this, when his sin nature is not being manifested. However, the sin nature of man does not want to acknowledge that God alone is God or that God alone can produce these works. Therefore, Paul recorded the past events when men exchanged the truth about God for the lie (Romans 1:18, 25). They attempted to represent God by these false gods. The lie is that the creature can be or is god. In a sense it began with Satan who is the father of the lie [lit. "it"] (John 8:44).²⁴⁵ Satan lied to himself when he said, "I will be like the most high (Isaiah 14:14b). Satan lied when he told Eve that she didn't need God, for by eating the fruit she and Adam could be like God, knowing what would bring about happiness or disaster (Genesis 3:5). The lie is the opposite of the truth. The truth states that there is but one God, that He alone can give the believer victory, and work out His life through the believer.

The Old Testament word *amen* does double duty representing both truth and dependableness. "The vast majority of verses that speak of God's faithfulness, however, simply teach that he is dependable."²⁴⁶ These two ideas are represented by two different words in Greek. Dependableness or faithfulness is indicated by the word *pistos* [πιστος].²⁴⁷ Because God is truth,

²⁴⁵ Some English Bibles have unfortunately mistranslated the singular pronoun "it" at the end of this verse by "lies" as though Jesus meant many. However, Jesus was referring to one chief lie.

²⁴⁶ Feinberg, op cit. 374.

²⁴⁷ πιστος is a masculine form of the word faith πιστις.

everything to which He commits Himself, He knows He can complete. Because God is truth, everything to which He commits Himself, He will genuinely do. This is called faithfulness. In the Old Testament, many of the references to God's truth are references to His faithfulness. When Abraham's servant met Rebekah, he acknowledged God's lovingkindness and faithfulness²⁴⁸ to Abraham (Genesis 24:27). David told the congregation of Israel about God's faithfulness (truth) because God would continue to preserve him, despite his perversities (iniquities) (Psalm 40:10-11). In many Old Testament passages *ameth* is tied to *chesed* [חֶסֶד] a word communicating loyal love²⁴⁹ and therefore adding another aspect of faithfulness (Psalm 57:3; 61:7; 89:14; 117: 2, et al). In Psalm 85:10 we find lovingkindness and faithfulness (truth) meeting together. As a new Generation of Israelis prepared to enter their land, Moses assured them, "Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who guards His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

Like the Old Testament believer, we New Testament saints should have overwhelming appreciation for God's faithfulness. Like David, we can see God's faithfulness extending to the skies (a metaphor for great extent, Psalm 36:5). God is faithful to make believers firm, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:8). He is faithful to

²⁴⁸ The NET Bible combines these two words with the translation "faithful love" and in their notes translate the first by "faithfulness" and the second by "commitment." op cit.

²⁴⁹ "kindness, love, loyalty, mercy." Mounce, op cit. 426.

not allow us to experience a temptation beyond our ability²⁵⁰ (1 Corinthians 10:13). He is faithful so that His promises to us are sure, they are not yes today but perhaps no when we actually need that promise (2 Corinthians 1:18). Our entire sanctification, our being totally set apart to God: spirit, soul, and body, depends upon God's faithfulness (1 Thessalonians 5:24). The Thessalonians were experiencing persecution and hardships at the hands of unbelievers. Paul assured them that our faithful God would make them stand strong and would guard them from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3). God wouldn't keep them from hardship, but that hardship couldn't separate them from God's ultimate plans for their glory (2 Thessalonians 1:6-12; 1 Peter 4:19). Even when we tell God no (deny), or are fail to be faithful, He remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). If He failed, He would be denying Himself, He would not be true. Because God is faithful, we can draw near to God (Hebrews 10:23). When we agree with God regarding our sins, He is faithful to forgive those sins (1 John 1:9). God is faithful to all He is, and all He has promised us.

God is truth. He is the only real God. He fully knows all things and knows them accurately. Every thought of God is true and everything He speaks is true. Because He is true in His knowledge of all things, including Himself, and therefore only speaks truth, He will do all He has promised. He is the faithful God of

²⁵⁰ None of us our sufficient or able for these things. Additionally, many saints would claim that they can't handle such temptations. By Paul's others writings we see that he meant able to depend upon God, or knowing how to let God takes us through, or meet such temptations.

truth.

God's Nature

In our preceding studies we have considered God's essence (God's substance) with its characteristics. We have examined the Biblical revelation about God's attributes or the character traits which describe how God operates. We now want to put this all together and consider the divine nature. These qualities are true of God's essence and attributes. We will see that God is eternal, free, immutable, infinite, and sovereign.

God is Eternal

We begin with eternity. What does it mean to be eternal or what is eternity? If a thing or person is eternal, does that mean that they never had a beginning and will never have an end? While John Feinberg poses a possible definition, "It never comes into being or goes out of being,"²⁵¹ he then states, "The crucial issue is whether something eternal exists within time or outside of time."²⁵² H.L. Schafer notes, "Eternity is one of the most difficult concepts for creatures who have a beginning, who exist in time, and who are limited by space."²⁵³ While the vocabulary of eternity will be helpful, it is not definite. The Hebrew *olam* [עוֹלָם] is used of eternity, the future, but also the distant past.²⁵⁴ In Deuteronomy 32:7 Moses asked the Israelis to "Remember the day of **old**, be mindful of the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you." The word

²⁵¹ Feinberg, 375f.

²⁵² *ibid.*

²⁵³ Schafer, *op cit.*, 26.

²⁵⁴ See Harkavy, 508f.

“old” is *olam*. It refers not to eternity or the future, but to the past, to the times in which their ancestors had lived. In a similar way, the Greek *aiōnios* [αἰώνιος] is an adjectival form of the Greek word meaning “age,” *aion* [αἰών]. This adjective was used in the Septuagint to translate *olam*. Both Jews and Greeks had words indicating eternity, but both words were tied to the ideas of time. Therefore, context, not the very words themselves, will be necessary to form a definition of eternity.

Eternity is best understood by contrast to time.²⁵⁵ When God created this universe, He adjusted the earth’s relationship to the sun, moon, and stars so as to mark day and night, seasons, days and years (Genesis 1:14). The measurement of time is done by the relationship of the earth to these other bodies by its various motions. By God’s design, time is measured within this physical creation. Christ ascended far above all the heavens²⁵⁶ (Ephesians 4:10). This appears to imply that most of God’s infinite essence extends beyond the confines of this physical creation. So Isaiah could write, “For thus says the High and Lofty One, the One inhabiting eternity...”²⁵⁷ (Isaiah 57:15). Moses wrote, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or you birthed the earth and world, even from eternity unto eternity, You are

²⁵⁵ Schafer encourages us, “However, the concept may be grasped without resorting to philosophic explanations of time, or of time as the fourth dimension.” 26. Indeed, an examination of the Biblical ideas is more helpful than many pages of philosophy.

²⁵⁶ Paul referenced three heavens in 2 Corinthians 12:2: our earth’s atmosphere, the starry spaces, God’s throne room.

²⁵⁷ The NASB has “lives forever” while the NET interprets the idea as “the one who rules forever.” The translation in the text is present in the ASV, AV, ESV and Darby.

God” (Psalm 90:2). The preposition *ad* [אֶל], translated “unto” would indicate the place of time. Moses saw creation as sitting between eternity which was past and eternity which is future. This present creation is where time exists. Time is marked within this present physical creation. While God is present to all His creation, God does not become that creation and remains above or transcendent to it (cf Ephesians 4:6). The preposition *ad* is here used of eternity, picturing God as sovereignly over all things as He lives where He remains above all creation. The Scriptures present God as sitting in the third heaven far above all the heavens (cf 2 Corinthians 12:2; Ephesians 1:21; 4:10). Three times, Paul uses the combination of eternity with times [*chronos*] (Romans 16:25; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2). Most translations take the word eternal in its adjectival sense. However, it is also possible to handle these three occurrences so that they show the relation of time to eternity. In the first case, it can read “times in eternities” and the later two “times from eternities.” The idea in all three cases is that time sits between eternities and comes out from eternities. Therefore, eternity is outside of time or parallel to it, because it is outside the present universe.

Other things are called eternal. The fire into which unbelieving men will be thrown is called eternal as well as their punishment (Matthew 18:8; 25:41). The sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit was called an eternal sin (Mark 3:29). Jesus spoke of eternal tents (Luke 16:9). The proper response to present sufferings results in an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Our future bodies are described as “eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). Christ obtained an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12). Peter spoke of an eternal

kingdom (2 Peter 1:11). During Daniel's 70th week, an angel will announce an eternal good news (Revelation 14:6). I do not propose an interpretation of each of these. I list them only to show that if our definition of eternal or eternity is just that which has no beginning or ending, then the sin of blasphemy has always existed. Have our future bodies always existed? No. Rather each of these is something related not to time and this universe, but to eternity, outside of time. Eternal fire is outside this present creation. It is real; it is physical, but it does not function within this creation. Likewise, our future bodies are in heaven, not within this creation. They are real physical bodies fitted for a different kind of existence. Therefore, none of these things is eternal in the sense that they had no beginning. Each did not exist at some point, but had a beginning.

Is this also true of God's eternity? Does God simply exist outside of time, but in reality He too had a beginning? No, God is infinite with respect to time. "He is without beginning or end, he is free from all succession of time, and he is the cause of time."²⁵⁸ When He met Moses in the bush, He described Himself as the I AM (Exodus 3:14). In Revelation 1:4 John described the Father as "Him who is and who was and who is to come."²⁵⁹ Now this seems to contradict the idea of I AM. It is equally justifiable to translate this three phrases, "the one being, the one who was being,

²⁵⁸ Thiessen, *op cit.* 78.

²⁵⁹ NASB, NET, ESV, ASV, and with a variation of who to which, the AV.

and the one coming.”²⁶⁰ God’s nature is such that He is! Jesus when speaking with the Jews told them, “before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). God’s existence is an unchanging existence. To God the Son the time before Abraham is no different than what we call the present, so “I AM” makes sense. “Eternity for God is one now, one eternal present.”²⁶¹ Remember our discussion of God’s omniscience; God doesn’t know successively (i.e. a then b then c), but He knows all things at once, not because He knows all, but because being eternal, He does not change with time (this will lead us to the idea of immutability), He is outside of time.

The psalmist contrasted God being eternal to God’s creation growing old (Psalm 102). The psalmist cried for help in his distress (Psalm 102:1-2). He viewed his life and his physical nature as the short life of grass, burned and scorched (Psalm 102:3-4). His enemies arrogantly insulted him. The psalmist feared his own days being shortened, he knew that God’s years continued through generations and generations (Psalm 102:23-24). He recognized that while the physical creation was set in place long ago, it is like a garment which grows old and must be changed (vv. 25-26). By contrast, God stands (NASB endure), He *is* the one,²⁶²

²⁶⁰ All translations represent well the present participle. This translation gives more emphasis to the Imperfect, a tense emphasizing on going activity in the past, hence, “was being.” It also better emphasizes the present tense of the participle “coming.” Such a translation agrees better with other statements regarding God’s eternal nature.

²⁶¹ *ibid*, 79.

²⁶² The Hebrew is a second person pronoun “you” [אָתָּךְ] and a third person pronoun “he” [הוּא]. The idea is that “You are He”, God is the existing one, not the one who changes. Our English Bibles have represented this idea by “But Thou art the same.”

His years do not end (vv. 26-27). So, while God creates, and time exists within that creation, God remains timeless, and does not change with the passing of time. While He acts within creation, He remains the creator, and unchanged by creation.

Isaiah also recorded God's taunt against idolators, asking if there was any god before Him or after (Isaiah 43:10). At first that sounds like God had a beginning, but that statement also precludes any god that could have caused, formed or birthed God. It really is a strong statement of eternity. This idea that only one God exists is set forth several times in Isaiah. Isaiah 44:6 reads, "Thus say the LORD, the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God beside Me." In the last half of verse eight He asks, "Is there any God besides Me, or is there any Rock? I know of none." In 45:5-6 Jehovah states three times that there is no God beside Him. He repeats this in 45:14, 18, and 21. In 46:9 He says, "I am God, and there is no other." The importance of these statements is that there is no god who could be responsible for causing God. If He has no cause, He must then be eternal in the sense that He had no beginning, but has always been.

When John introduced the Son as the Word, he told us, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from, nothing came into being which has come into being" (John 1:3). That means that if something had a beginning, it had that beginning through Him. Therefore, if God had a beginning, He caused Himself. That is not a logical proposition: a non-existent person or thing could bring itself into existence. Again, the eternal God is without beginning or ending (Genesis

21:33; Isaiah 40:28). God is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. He is the source of all things, the reason for their existence, and brings things either to their intended design or their final culmination (1 Corinthians 8:6).

God is Immutable

Eternality leads us to the issue of God's immutability or unchangeableness. Does God evolve? Is God the same today as He was yesterday? A hundred, a thousand, or a billion years ago? The false notions of geological and biological macro evolution affected process theology's view of God. Process theology represented God as evolving and changing. Their view of the world affected their view of God.

In contrast to an evolving God, the Scriptures present us with an unchanging God. God assured Israel that because He does not change, they were not totally wiped out of existence (Malachi 3:6). We are reminded again of Psalm 102:27 that God is He, that is, He is the One, the One who does not change, but remains. The writer of Psalm 77 claimed that the idea of God changing His right hand (representing His power) was grief or that which would pierce him (v. 10).²⁶³ The writer then called to remembrance God's works, to assure himself that God had not changed. The writer of Hebrews assured his readers that God's promises would be certain because of God's unchangeableness (Hebrews 6:17). For God While circumstances of their lives had changed, God and His promises to them had

²⁶³ The writer's soul refused to be comforted. The problem regarding God changing was in his mind. His troubles had so overwhelmed him that he was entertaining the idea that God had changed.

not. James' readers were struggling with their losses and were attempting to acquire new possessions. James was concerned that they might lack a proper perspective regarding possessions. He reminded them that the genuinely good things given come from the God who did not have a changing or shifting shadow (James 1:17). God does not evolve, and neither does He change to match changing circumstances. He is not a God who is concerned for His own when it is convenient, or desires to deprive His own, but He knows we can be happy and content without material prosperity. He has never changed in this regard.

Immutability means that God does not change. "God is unchangeable in his essence attributes, consciousness, and will."²⁶⁴ His essence remains spirit. The qualities of that spirit essence do not change.²⁶⁵ He does not grow larger or smaller, but remains immense. His essence does not become more complex by the addition of substances. It does not become flesh or rock. His attributes remain absolute. His knowledge does not change, He remains all-powerful, His love is not altered, neither His goodness, holiness, righteousness, or truth. As we have looked at the attributes, we've noted that they have both an eternal aspect and expressions related to creation. This does not mean that the attributes changed, but that creation or events within time illuminate aspects of God's attributes we might not otherwise see. Recall Paul's words in Romans nine that sinful men fitted for

²⁶⁴ Thiessen, *op cit.* 83.

²⁶⁵ Thiessen states, "The immutability of God is due to the simplicity of his essence." *ibid* 83.

ruination serve God's purpose to display His wrath and His mercy, both of which are expressions of absolute attributes. These men did not cause God to change, they serve as a context for God to display an aspect of His character which we would not otherwise see. God knows what is true of Himself, but this situation serves to make these aspects of His character known to us.

Hebrews 13:8 is often quoted in support of eternity and immutability of the Son. First, the writer refers to Jesus Christ, both titles related primarily to His human nature. Second, in the overall context of the book, the emphasis has been primarily on Jesus Christ as priest over His own house. Third, this is stated amidst a series of exhortations regarding the readers' conduct. The readers were concerned that they could no longer go to the temple, offer sacrifices, or eat from the altar. Yet their high priest has not changed. What He does and who He is on their behalf does not change. The eternity and immutability of the Son, affect how He operates as the High priest with reference to the present kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

The Psalmist wrote, "The LORD has sworn and will not **change His mind**, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' " (Psalm 110:4). Likewise, Numbers 23:19 reads, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should **repent.**" The words "change His mind" and "repent" is the same Hebrew word *nacham* [נחם]. The former idea appears in 1 Samuel 15:29. Yet in verse eleven the latter idea occurs as God regretted or changed His mind about making Saul king. This is the same word. The Scriptures appear to present God as not changing His mind and changing His mind. Many of the occurrences

the verb refer to God not men (e.g. Genesis 6:6, 7; Exodus 32:14; Judges 2:18; Isaiah 7:24; Jeremiah 26:3, 13). However, the verb is predominantly translated “repent” though this is not a great translation. Repent is a better translation of the Hebrew root *shoobv* [שוב]. The root idea of this verb is to “draw the breath, forcibly, TO PANT, TO GROAN.”²⁶⁶ Like the Greek word *embrimaomai* [εμβριμασμαι] which is used of Jesus in John 11:33 it has the idea of panting or snorting in disgust.²⁶⁷ Jesus expressed frustration and disgust with the people’s lack of faith. Thus God expressed disgust at Saul, not regret in a human sense.

In texts where God is the subject of the verb, the verb occurs only in the Niphal and Hithpael voices. The Niphal is the Hebrew middle/passive voice and the Hithpael the intensive reflexive. The verb occurs in the Hithpael stem in Ezekiel 5:13. God is pronouncing judgment upon Jerusalem and explaining why He is doing so (vv. 11-12). So in 13, God states that He will rest His fury upon them I will “be appeased”²⁶⁸ [NASB]. The ESV’s “comfort myself” is closer, as it reflects the verb’s reflexive voice, God comforts Himself. “No one can comfort God but God Himself

²⁶⁶ Gesenius, *Lexicon*, p. 544. See similarly *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, pp. 636-637.

²⁶⁷ English Bibles miss this emphasis, often translating this verb with something like “moved in” [NASB, ESV] as though He were moved perhaps with compassion. I am indebted to my friend and brother Jim Blackhall for helping me clarify my thinking on these passages. He presented a paper [What Does It Matter What We Believe About the Decree?](#) at the 2014 Grace Bible Conference of First Baptist Church in Royal City. The paper is available online at www.graceteaching.com.

²⁶⁸ AV “comforted”, NIV “avenged”

and to attain that comfort He pours out His wrath on the objects of that wrath.”²⁶⁹ So, God is not expressing disgust with Himself, but for His benefit (reflexive) because of the actions of the people. Deuteronomy 32:36 and Psalm 135:14 also have the idea of God comforting. So, back in Numbers 23:19 the idea of comfort fits only if we understand it in the sense that God neither lies nor comforts Himself to the point that He would change His mind. God is never frustrated with His plan. God may be frustrated with the actions within His plan, but not the plan itself because God is not frustrated with Himself.

This is similar to the matter in our 1 Samuel 15 text. However, in 1 Samuel the verb occurs in the Niphal. It seems best in that context to take the verb in verse 29 as a reflexive and the two in verses 11 and 35 as a passives. In the first case, God does not cause Himself grief or frustration, as though His plan went awry. However, He was frustrated with Saul, for Saul went awry. Saul’s actions caused God grief or snorting, but God’s plans did not cause God grief or snorting. “We must know that failure WITHIN God’s Plan is not failure OF God’s plan! He planned for these failures according to His Divine purpose yet did not cause them.”²⁷⁰

John Feinberg states, “In addition, there is no evidence that God changes his will or purposes, as though he cannot make up his mind.”²⁷¹ Indeed, His purposes do not change. Referring again to Romans

²⁶⁹ Blackhall, op cit. p. 6.

²⁷⁰ Blackhall, op cit. p. 8.

²⁷¹ Feinberg, 270.

nine, Paul suggested, “What if God desiring to display...” (v. 22). By desire, Paul referred to the foundation of His decree. God has determined nothing which He did not first desire. Therefore, when we witness changes they are changes God already planned.

So, in 1 Samuel 15, when we find that God changed His mind, God is explaining His purpose and work in human terms. We speak of these descriptions as anthropomorphisms,²⁷² that is, we are describing God in human terms. “From our limited vantage point, it may *seem* that God’s purposes have changed.”²⁷³ Yet in Genesis 49:9-10, as Jacob blessed his sons, the scepter is in Judah’s hand not Benjamin’s. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. When God grieved or was disgusted regarding Saul, He was not changing His character, His essence, or even His ultimate purpose. His purpose was for the Son to enter the world through descendants of Judah and more specifically David. When Israel asked for a king just as God had said they would, God assured Samuel that the nation was not rejecting Samuel but God from ruling over them (Deuteronomy 17; 1 Samuel 8:7). Samuel warned them of what life under a king would be like, but the people really refused and said they would have a king (1 Samuel 8:11-19). God’s ultimate plan was different.

This idea can also be seen in Genesis 6, where God was grieved or regretted making man and was pained in His heart (6:6). We can ask, did God not plan for this? Was God taken by surprise by men’s actions?

²⁷² An anthropomorphism describes God with physical traits, e.g. hands, eyes, ears. Pathisms are feelings, or passions common to mankind.

²⁷³ Laney, op. cit. 80.

From a dispensational perspective, man's failure leading to the flood demonstrated another failure of man under another set of circumstances. It proved that man's conscience is not a safe guide for life. How could God prove this without allowing mankind to go down this path. At this juncture God did not change His mind, but was grieved or disgusted towards the evil of those within His plan. His plan for that specific time came to its conclusion with men's continually evil imagination. Yet man's evil, apparently his relish for this disastrous way of life disgusted God. God did not smile and say, "How great, they like being evil and have made a real art of it." No, in each of the above instances, God was grieved because although God knew what people would do, He never likes their evil activity. We should not diminish God's response. While God is always good, the best way in which we can understand God's response is pain to the heart. God is not pleased with evil.

Immutability misunderstood

God is eternal and hand-in-hand with eternity, God is immutable. Immutability refers to God's nature. Immutability also refers to God's plan. Some have misunderstood or misrepresented God's immutability. "Some have confused immutability with immobility. However, if God were immobile, then He could not cease activity He had begun; nor could He begin action not started."²⁷⁴ However, within God's plan, God has planned changes. God created. God flooded the entire world. God imposed the Law upon Israel. The Father sent the Son. The Son became incarnate. On the cross,

²⁷⁴ Schafer, op cit. p. 24.

the Father cut off fellowship with the Son. Upon the Son's ascension, He and the Father sent the Spirit. These and many others activities of God were not eternal activities. If immutability means that God must always do the same thing from eternity, then God has been eternally creating, eternally flooding the planet, eternally sending the Son, etc. We know that God created at a point in time, rested from creation (literally, He sabbathed or ceased), and will create anew in the future. He flooded the earth and promised to never send another planet-wide flood. He gave Israel the Law at Sinai and not before, and following the Son's death and resurrection, He ended the Law as a means of daily righteousness and access to God. He sent the Son one time. The Son became incarnate at a point in time, He was not eternally incarnate.²⁷⁵ After nearly six hours upon the cross, the Son uttered the words, "It is finished," speaking of His spiritual separation from the Father and Spirit, it was not an eternal separation. The Father and Son have not eternally been sending the Spirit. Each of these and many others remind us that God does change activities; He begins new ones and ceases with ones He has been doing. Immutability means His nature does not change. The following truth that God is both free and sovereign agrees with immutability but not immobility.

²⁷⁵ Some have understood the Son to possess a humanity the pre-existed. Donald Bloesch holds that "the God of the Bible is a humanlike being." (*Jesus Christ*, (IVP: Downers Grove, IL, 1997) p. 142). He explains Karl Barth's position as believing the Word of God was in some way specially tied to flesh before the incarnation. None of these statements are however reflected in Scripture. The Son or Word appeared on many occasions but sometimes as fire, others in a cloud, and sometimes only as a voice.

God is Free and Sovereign

The reader of Job knows at the outset of the book that Job is a righteous man. The reader knows why the events come upon Job. Job did not. Job's friends did not. Job's friends expressed their philosophies of why people suffer. All concluded that good people don't suffer and bad people do, therefore, "Job, you must be bad." As Job defended himself against their false accusations, he became more incensed not only with them but with God. He asked God for his day in court. He wanted a hearing before God. When God finally spoke with Job, He questioned him at length regarding Job's knowledge and abilities. This questioning goes on for four chapters. When God gave Job a moment to respond, he answered, "Behold, I am insignificant: what can I reply to Thee? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add no more" (Job 40:4-5). At the end of God's words, Job replied, "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted" (42:2). Job was coming to grips with God's freedom and sovereignty: two words almost anathema in some churches. On one had we find comfort from knowing that God is in control. On the other hand, we have uneasiness and even frustration when God's sovereignty seems to run contrary to our purposes.

Freedom and sovereignty are natural conclusions regarding God's nature. If God is truly all-powerful and all-knowing, if He is eternal and unchanging, then it is natural to conclude that He must be free. Freedom refers to how God chooses to exercise His character. Millard Erickson comments on God's freedom, "Nothing in Scripture suggests that God's will is

determined or bound by an external factors. On the contrary, it is common to attribute his decisions and actions to the “good pleasure of his will” (εὐδοκία).²⁷⁶ He later states, “Not only do God’s decisions not stem from any sort of external determination, they are not a matter of internal compulsion either. That is to say, although God’s decisions and actions are quite consistent with his nature, they are not constrained by his nature.”²⁷⁷ Note, His actions are consistent with His nature, they do not conflict with who He is. However, God does not have to express His character in any particular fashion. Did God have to express His love towards us? Did He have to provide us salvation? Before, we too quickly answer, Yes, remember, that many of His angels sinned against Him. No revelation indicates that God was constrained to love them, to provide them salvation. Charles Ryrie applies God’s freedom, “Being free, God is not obligated to us in any way unless He chooses to initiate an obligation.”²⁷⁸

In addition to Job’s perspective, Isaiah asked, “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,” (Isaiah 40:13). The ESV has “measured” which agrees with the translation of the same verb in 40:12.²⁷⁹ The idea in verse twelve is the ability to measure the heavens by the span of one’s hand. The idea changes only slightly in verse thirteen. Isaiah questioned if anyone exists who

²⁷⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, op cit. 278.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.* 352.

²⁷⁸ Ryrie, op cit. 37.

²⁷⁹ The verb is a Piel Perfect of מִדַּל in both verses, meaning to regulate, or measure.

could be a measure or standard for God's Spirit. The next phrase supports Isaiah's rhetorical question by asking who has ever given God counsel so that they caused God to know something. Therefore, it would be presumptuous for anyone to point out to God that He was not measuring up, or that anyone could hold God to a standard either to question Him or keep Him in order.

When David sinned against God in the matter of Bathsheba, he feared that, like Saul, God would take the Spirit from him (Psalm 51:11). He pleaded with God not to remove the Spirit, but to restore to him the joy of his salvation (v. 12). He then asked God to sustain or support him by a "willing spirit." Many translations understand this last phrase to be David's spirit. The editors of the NET Bible note, "The psalmist asks that God make him the kind of person who willingly obeys the divine commandments. The imperfect verbal form is used here to express the psalmist's wish or request."²⁸⁰ However, in the context of David's preceding cry, it seems better to understand the last phrase as referring to the Holy Spirit. The verb "sustain" means to support or hold up.²⁸¹ David was asking God to support him by the Spirit rather remove the Spirit from him. He described the Spirit as willing not compelled. The Spirit would remain of His own volition, David had no ability to constrain the Spirit to remain.

In Romans nine Paul sets forth a case for the free

²⁸⁰ The NET Bible, op cit. Psalm 51:12 tn 32.

²⁸¹ It is the Qal Imperfect form of samek נָדַבְתָּ. "The root *ndb* connotes an uncompelled and free movement of the will unto divine service or sacrifice." *The Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*.

sovereign work of God. At the end of Romans eight, Paul concluded that nothing is able to separate the believer from the love of God. He then anticipated the question, “Well, if that’s true, then what about Israel? Weren’t they separated from Gods’ love?” Chapters nine, ten, and eleven explain God’s righteous purpose and dealings with Israel. In this section Paul cited God’s activities, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (9:13), “I will be merciful to whomever I might be merciful, I will be compassionate to whomever I might be compassionate”²⁸² (9:15), “Therefore, on whom He wishes, He shows mercy, on whom He wishes, He hardens” (9:18). This led Paul to anticipate the response, “Why does He (God) find fault? Who has resisted His choice?” (9:19). He answered this objection by picturing the individual as a lump of clay and God as the potter. The potter determines what He will do with the clay. The clay does not determine its final shape.²⁸³ God is free. This freedom leads logically to the idea of sovereignty.

The English word sovereign can mean “supreme power or authority.”²⁸⁴ The New American Standard Bible uses the word “sovereign” to translate the Hebrew *malkuth* [מְלֻכָּוּת lit. kingdom or kingdom authority] and the Greek *dunastes* [δυνάστης] meaning a powerful one. The NET Bible uses “sovereign” to translate

²⁸² In both phrases, Paul first uses a Future Indicative followed by a Present Subjunctive, thus the “might” translation.

²⁸³ It should be remembered that at the point God made this statement, He was shaping fallen of sinful lumps of clay. The statement is not referring to a determination such as dual predestination.

²⁸⁴ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, Apple Computer, Inc., 2005

shaddai [שַׁדַּי]²⁸⁵ or Almighty as well as the Greek *dunastes*. “Sovereignty is that divine prerogative of the nature of God whereby the persons are able to express the divine nature without fear or favor from themselves or their creation.”²⁸⁶ God can use His power to do anything which is consistent with His nature. He is free in that nothing from outside or even any compulsion in Himself drives Him to act. “Whereas omnipotence tells how much and which powers God has, sovereignty clarifies the extent to which God uses those powers.”²⁸⁷ Sovereignty extends to more than God’s power. It involves all God’s attributes. By contrast, Satan will be judged by God, and cast into the Lake of fire; he won’t go willingly. Men are often moved to action by influences beyond their knowledge. God hardened, or more accurately, “strengthened” the heart of Pharaoh for the purpose of displaying His power. None of these individuals were sovereign. Only God is sovereign, for God’s hand can not be forced.

A common objection to God’s sovereignty is the one Paul mentioned in Romans nine or simplified, “What about man’s free-will?” It is suggested, “If He is just (and He is), then He must be unchangeably just at all times to all persons in all circumstances. And if He is loving (and He is), then He must be unchangeably

²⁸⁵ The origin of this word is either from a word meaning destroyer, hence power to destroy, or mountain, hence the God of an all-powerful mountain. See Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. The NET also applies sovereign to Adonai - master, Eleyon - high one, Gebuah - majestic one, and Zaboath - host or army.

²⁸⁶ Schafer, op cit. 25.

²⁸⁷ Feinberg, op cit, 294.

loving to all persons at all times in all circumstances.”²⁸⁸ This is a philosophical stricture on God’s nature that denies freedom. God never acts in conflict with any of His attributes, but neither is He required to use His attributes in the same manner. God is always righteous, and never violates His righteousness, but righteousness is not always the attribute He emphasizes. Likewise with His love, He is not compelled to emphasize His love, though He will not violate it. Through the Psalmist, Jehovah stated that His soul hates the one who loves violence (Psalm 11:5). On numerous occasions God speaks of His fury and His anger towards unrighteous men. God also loves believers by chastening (Hebrews 12:6), but He does not always chasten believers, but is longsuffering or has a long fuse versus a short temper with regard to us (2 Peter 3:9, 15). His judgment of unsaved mankind is not in love but righteousness. So, regarding one group of people God exercises His righteousness and on the other He also does so but in conjunction with His love. Paul stated that after God chose Abraham, for the next two thousand years, God let the rest of mankind go their own way. He was not compelled to interact with them and demonstrate special acts of His power as He did with Israel (Acts 14:16). All these serve to remind us that God is free. Theologians and philosophers may struggle with this concept for some feel it runs roughshod over the will of the creature, but we must remember, God is the creator, we are the creatures. We

²⁸⁸ Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1999, 237. Geisler correctly rejects extreme Calvinism but in doing so poses a philosophical idea of God’s nature that rejects God’s freedom.

will deal more with God's sovereignty under the heading of God's decree.

God's Plan (The Decree) ²⁸⁹

The previous study considered God's freedom and sovereignty. This naturally leads to such questions as, "If God is sovereign, is God in control? If God is in control, does God have a goal, a game plan, or is God winging it (not to be disrespectful)? If God is in control, do His creatures have their own will, and if so, is their will free?" The big question is often, "If God is sovereign, why do bad things happen in the world?" These questions are addressed under the theological heading of God's Decree.

The discussion of God's decree often centers around two chief positions: Calvinism and Arminianism. The former position is named after the Sixteenth century Swiss²⁹⁰ reformer John Calvin. The latter takes its name from Jacob Arminius, the reluctant Dutch opposition of extreme Calvinistic views. These two positions are part of a broad spectrum with both reasonable and extreme positions. The extreme positions on both sides were more the product of Calvin and Arminius' followers than the men themselves. In both cases, many of the extremes arose following the deaths of Calvin and Arminius.²⁹¹ Extreme Calvinism stresses God's sovereignty in every event of history to

²⁸⁹ The following is a revision of material originally used in the seven sets of Grace Notes in 2001.

²⁹⁰ Calvin was French-born but his impact on the Reformation was during his more than Thirty year service in Geneva. For point of reference, Calvin was about Twelve years old when Luther nailed his ninety-five theses on the door at Wittenberg.

²⁹¹ Arminius' views were posthumously written down as a five point remonstrance (forceful protest) to the five points of Calvin. Arminius was born four years before Calvin's death (1560-1609).

the point that God is the author of sin (i.e. determined for creatures to sin). The extreme Arminian position subjects God to the will of His creation, allowing for a loss of salvation, and in some cases limits God's knowledge.²⁹² Beyond this introduction the present study will not focus on these two positions.²⁹³ God's decree is plainly revealed in Scripture. It is upon the Scriptures that this study will be based.

Many doctrines serve to encourage the believer when he is under one set of circumstances but frustrate and perhaps even anger him when he is experiencing other circumstances. God's decrees, which includes the issue of election, is one such doctrine. God's decrees are in part related to His prerogative of sovereignty.

Sovereignty should be an encouraging truth for believers. The last chapters of Genesis record the lives of Jacob/Israel and his twelve sons. Due to jealousy between the brothers, ten of them conspired against their brother Joseph. They sold him to some Midianites, who in turn sold him to an Egyptian. Joseph spends years as a slave and then a prisoner. God eventually exalted him to the second highest seat in the Egyptian government. As the account comes to a close, Joseph expressed his confidence in God, "And as for you, you devised calamity against me; but God devised it for good ..." (Gen. 50:20). Joseph understood that in God's

²⁹² This is sometimes called the Open view of God. According to the Open View, God is not omniscient, and even learns. This is a God who is more creaturely than creator.

²⁹³ In full disclosure, I have been a Calvinist, and at present, much of what I understand the Scriptures to teach would be classified as Calvinism, but this is due to similarity, though Calvinism often rests upon philosophical conclusions, not Scripture alone. Some Calvinists make claims which go beyond what Scriptures states.

sovereignty, He was the one truly in control. That knowledge and confidence caused Joseph to respond to his circumstances in a proper manner. About two thousand years later, Paul wrote, “But we know, that for the ones loving God, all things work together for good ...” (Romans 8:28). While this verse is not a catchall for every believer, it is an encouragement for the saint who is loving God. He is assured that God will use circumstances in his life so that he may worship²⁹⁴ as well as be conformed to the image of the Son.

God’s sovereignty extends to the believer’s life and death. The psalmist knew that God had written in a book every part of his physical makeup (Ps. 139:14-16; 51:5). God has written the very number of a believer’s days in one of His books (Ps. 139:16; 69:28). A man’s days even his months are determined²⁹⁵ and the bounds are set so that he cannot pass that number of days (Job 14:5). When Jesus rose from the grave, He took the authority of death from the devil, so that the devil could no longer use death as a means of causing fear to God’s people (Hebrews 2:14-15). The writer of Hebrews explained that Satan had used the fear of death to keep believers enslaved. The devil could motivate people to not obey God out of fear. In His sovereignty, God had allowed Satan that authority in the past. But now, the grace believer should not fear death, but be comforted facing death. He can know that the moment of his death and the means were written by God long ago. In fact

²⁹⁴ The word “pray” in Romans 8:26 is *proseuchomai*. It is the word which best represents the idea of worship in the NT epistles.

²⁹⁵ The Hebrew verb meant to cut in stone. The noun form is translated “statute” in the context of the Mosaic Law.

our Lord Jesus Christ has the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). He is the one who exercises authority over when the believer dies and this is in keeping with His plan. Death is not a random event. God's sovereignty is assuring.

Joseph's life, Paul's statement in Romans 8, and the truths about life and death are examples of the comfort God's sovereignty can provide the believer. This sovereignty is not ruthlessly exercised. God is also good, holy, love, righteous and true. God exercises His sovereignty in keeping with His character. Neither is God capricious in His plans. God is a God of purpose, and His decree, whether we can see it or not, has order, it has design. God is transcendent, but He is also personal. Contrast this to Islam, "There is no doctrine in Islam that speaks of having a personal relationship with Allah as a child would relate to a father. To imagine such a relationship violates the sovereign transcendence of Allah."²⁹⁶ Because God is free, his purpose is not a result of any compulsion or counsel from His creatures. His purpose arises from His own desire, yet His purpose often expresses His good, loving, and righteousness character (Ephesians 1:11).

The relationship of God's sovereignty to the doctrine of salvation often frustrates and at times even angers believers. However, God's decree is not limited to salvation, as seen by the above examples. Some people deny the idea of the decree because of its connections to the issue of salvation. Yet to ignore what God has said concerning His decree and salvation only results in grief as one fails to understand that God has a

²⁹⁶ Emir Caner and Ergun Caner, *More Than a Prophet*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003, 32.

purpose and events are not random. God remains the creator, sovereign over His creation.

Several terms contribute to our understanding God's decree: omniscience, desire, counsel, council, determination, good pleasure, purpose, foreknowledge, predestination. The order of the preceding words is the order that the Scriptures reveal when the syntactical relationships between the words are compared. We will now consider the key terms used for God's decree and then the key passages which demonstrate how these ideas are ordered.

The Key Words Concerning God's Decree

Following is a list of key terms necessary for seeing God's decree. These are Greek terms. Several of these words have Hebrew parallels. However, the Hebrew terms are not combined syntactically so as to show their relations. Such relationships are necessary to observe the order in God's decree, that is, what came first (from a human perspective). I have not listed derivations²⁹⁷ or sources of these words unless it is deemed necessary to a proper understanding.

Panoida [πανοιδα] is God's omniscience, the attribute of knowing all things that are or could be. It is knowledge as fact rather than knowledge by experience. This word was considered under the attribute of omniscience.

Thelēma [θελημα] describes the result of God's desirous will. It derives from the verb *thelo*. The *ma* ending indicates a result. It is that which God desires or

²⁹⁷ i.e. Cognates. In the sphere of linguistics or words cognate means, "having the same linguistic derivation as another; from the same original word or root."

wishes, that which results from His desire.

Boulē [βουλη] is God’s counsel or choice. It results from the Trinity’s council in which they decided what they would do.

Boulomia [βουλομαι] is the act of determining or choosing. It is the verb of the noun boulē (see above).

Eudokia [ευδοκια] is good pleasure, that for which God’s opinion is “good.” It derives from dokeō [δοκεω] meaning to have an opinion. However, unlike mankind, God’s opinion is always accurate (righteous).

Ekleptomai [εκλεγομαι] is the act of choosing or selecting.

Prothesis [προθεσις] is God’s purpose, that which God has previously placed or set something out ahead of time. It derives from *tithemi* to put or place and *pro* that which is before, in this case, before in time.

Prognosis [προγνωσις] is foreknowledge. Ginosko [γνωσκω] indicates experiential knowledge, therefore it describes God’s previous experiential acquaintance with that which He has determined. This word was considered under the discussion of God’s omniscience, where it was demonstrated that prognosis never refers to an act in which God saw something happening before it happened. Rather it involves God’s acquaintance with what He has planned.

Prohorisen [προωρισεν] and prohoridzo [προωριζω] are the fixing of boundaries or horizons within which God relates to those who are the object of His predestination. English Bibles frequently translate this “predestination” though this word refers less to the ultimate result and more to the path to the result. It describes how God moves the objects of His plan toward the goal/s of His plan.

The Key Passages for Ordering God's Decree

The above words are used in the following passages. In each passage the general relationship of the words will be examined. Since no one passage provides the complete order of these words in the decree, it will be necessary to collate the relationships to provide the whole picture. In subsequent verses it might be found that other ideas intervene in this order. This will be done after examining all the passages. For the sake of space, words or phrases extraneous to this specific study will be omitted.

Ephesians 1:5, “having **predestined** ... according to the **good pleasure** from His **desirous will**.” The preposition *κατά* translated “according to” indicates that the **good pleasure** is a standard or measure which must logically precede the act of fixing boundaries. **Desirous will** is in the Ablative²⁹⁸ case which I take to express the source of God's **good pleasure**. Therefore, this order begins with God's **desirous will**, followed by His **good pleasure** and then **predestination**.

Ephesians 1:9 This mystery truth had its source in God's **desirous will**. The mystery is also measured by the standard of God's **good pleasure**. In 1:5 **good pleasure** had its source in God's **desirous will**. Therefore the preposition *κατά* causes **good pleasure** to modify mystery, not **desirous will**. Finally, God **purposed** that which was His **good pleasure**. The order is **desirous will - good pleasure - purpose**.

In Ephesians 1:11 Paul used four of these terms. “In Whom also we were made an inheritance having been **predestined** according to a quality of **purpose**”

²⁹⁸ Brooks and Winbery, op cit. p. 21 “Ablative of Source.”

from the one energizing all things according to the **determination** coming from His **desire**.” **Predestined** is measured by and therefore follows God’s **purpose**. The **purpose** is from the one who energizes all things according to His **counsel** or **determination**. What God has **determined** comes from His **desirous will**. The order here is God’s **desire**, His **determination**, **purpose**, **predestination**. This passage is also important because it demonstrates that God desires before He chooses or determines, and determines before He formally sets it out as His purpose.

Romans 8:28-29 has three terms. “... the ones called according to a **purpose**, because, whom He **foreknew** (was previously acquainted with), He also **predestined** ...” This order is simple, purposed, foreknew, predestined.

Romans 9:11 uses the term chosen, “in order that the **purpose** of God according to **election** (choice) might remain.” Here, **election** is the measure or standard of the **purpose**. The order would be election followed by purpose.

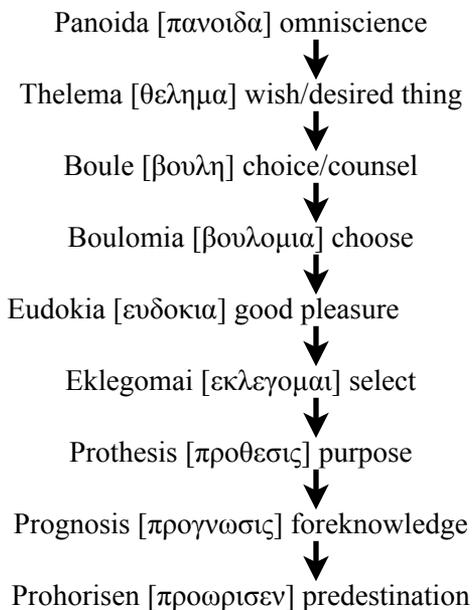
In Acts 2:23 Christ was delivered by the fixed **counsel** (plan) and **foreknowledge** of God. The words **counsel** and **foreknowledge** share something in common because they both involve the plan for Christ.²⁹⁹ Both words are in the instrumental form (dative) hence the translation “by.” His betrayal and

²⁹⁹ The article noun *kai* noun construction is known as Granville Sharp’s rule. However, Granville Sharp’s rule does not apply to plural nouns or things. It applies only to people. Therefore, choice and foreknowledge are not identical. When used with plurals and things (i.e. not persons), it points out an area of similarity in that context. They share something in common. The case involving things or plurals demonstrates close shared qualities not identity.

being handed over was God's choice. Because God had chosen that Christ would be treated in this manner, He was fully acquainted the events.

Each of the above passages provides us both a logical and grammatical order of these words. By paying attention to this order and collating the material one is able to arrive at the following order. God knows all. God desired some things. God determined some things. God is well pleased with His choice. God chose [elect] because He is well pleased with that choice. What God chose or elected to do, became God's purpose. God is fully acquainted with all He has chosen to do. God set boundaries within which He carries out these parts of His plan to assure that His plan is completed.

The following is a diagram of the order.



The Divine Council

It would be nice if we had a passage which plainly pictured or stated that the Trinity counseled together as a council. We have only statements which imply such a council. We have yet to consider the Bible's teaching on the Trinity, but in brief the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three distinct persons. They eternally and completely share the one divine essence. Since we have already seen that God is always active, even before any creation existed, we must conclude this is true for all three persons of the Trinity. God has a decree³⁰⁰ or a plan which is sure (Ps. 2:7). As an example, God made such a decree regarding the shore and the sea, that the shore is the boundary. This decree is "eternal" or for a very long time³⁰¹ (Jer. 5:22). God's decree was made before the earth was set in its place (Eph. 1:4). Therefore, God has a plan and unlike human plans, none of God's purposes can be cut off or "thwarted" [NASB].

If the persons of the Trinity are indeed equal, then the decree resulted from a council of those three persons. If you recall, when the noun "God" occurs without the definite article (in the Greek) the noun usually refers to Deity or the Trinity, not to a specific person of the God-head. So, in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, we are told to rejoice, worship, and give thanks for this is God's will for us. In this statement, "God" occurs without the definite article, and therefore

³⁰⁰ The Hebrew word *choq* [חוק] indicates that which is cut in stone, therefore an absolute sure boundary or limit. See Harkvay, op cit, p. 194.

³⁰¹ The Hebrew word *olam* [עולם] can mean eternal but also refers to long periods of time. It must always be interpreted in context.

means that the whole Trinity wants us to do this. Peter encouraged his readers (who were believers) that *the* Lord is not slow and has not determined that any believer will come to complete ruin (2 Pet. 3:9). Though we add a “the” for smooth English, Peter omitted the article because he was speaking about the determination of the God-head, all classified as Lord. Twice, John described the Word (the Son) facing [*pros*] the God (Jh. 1:1, 2). While this expression could merely indicate the Son’s relationship to the Father, it may also indicate a position in which a discussion is conducted, that is, “facing the Father” may indicate the planning of God’s decree. This is further supported by the use of the word “beginning” without a definite article, though it is translated with a definite article in English. John’s use of “beginning” without the definite article considers anything that would be classified a beginning. Officially making the decree, creation of spirit beings, creation of the physical world, entrance of the Son into the world via the incarnation, each of these is a beginning, a beginning of something new. The Son’s activity facing the Father is indicated by this same construction in 1 John 2:1, where He acts as our advocate.³⁰² The idea of the Trinitarian council is most strongly indicated in Hebrews 13:20 in the thought of an eternal covenant. It is an eternal covenant not because it is as eternal as God, but because it was made outside the boundaries of time and space. In eternity, the Father promised to give sheep (believers) to the Son

³⁰² The Greek *parakletos* [παράκλητος] is not a lawyer, but a friend called as a character witness. He faces the Father as our righteousness.

as a Shepherd who would lay down His life and rise again. This was a covenant or contract agreed upon by at least two person of the God-head, and they made this agreement in eternity. Hebrews 9:14 may also imply that the Spirit was involved in that contractual relationship as He is specially identified as the “eternal Spirit.” However, we should caution that we are not to see the Trinity sitting in some boardroom wheeling and dealing, bargaining and arguing. Such a picture does not agree with the Scriptures’ portrait of God’s character or of what it will reveal regarding the Trinity.

So, Why is there evil?

Why do evil and sin exist if God is sovereign? If God has a decree and sin and evil are present, we must conclude that they are part His plan. Does this mean God wanted men to sin? Does this mean that when I sin, I sin because God wanted me to sin? If sin is part of God’s plan, then why does God hold anyone responsible for his or her sin? These are the types of questions which commonly arise when God’s sovereignty and decree are discussed. It is very easy to resort to philosophical and supposedly logical statements to either attack or support the Biblical revelation of God’s decree. However, as in our previous studies of God’s character, we need to rest solely on Scripture.

We can’t understand this issue until we define the terms evil, sin and unrighteousness. In the Old Testament “evil” translates several words but over 100 times it translates the related words *ra* and *raah*. These

words indicate distress, disaster, or calamity³⁰³ and do not indicate something immoral or unrighteous of themselves, for even God does evil in the sense that He brings disaster or calamity (Isaiah 45:7). These words indicate that which is immoral or unrighteous only when one intends to bring disaster upon himself or another in disobedience to God. So Joseph's brothers intended disaster for Joseph when Joseph had done nothing to deserve it, and this made their actions unrighteous (Genesis 50:20). The Greek words *kakos* and *poneros* both describe something which is deficient or lacks in character of what one would expect. Jesus used *poneros* of a *sapros* tree producing *sapros* fruit. *Sapros* is rotten or mealy. One comes to a fruit tree and does not expect mealy or rotten fruit. He expects good fruit, fruit which is pleasing and enjoyable. Therefore, an "evil" tree is not producing the fruit one would expect or desire from such a fruit tree.

"Sin" is a tricky subject because people often define sin by what is unappealing or contrary to traditions and not strictly according to Scripture. The Hebrew word translated "sin" is *kata*. The verb is used in Judges 20:16 of one slinging a stone at a hair and "misses not" where "misses" is *kata*. It was, therefore, the missing of a mark. However, as God refined this term in its usage, it came to be not an unintentional missing of the mark, but intentional. When Jonathan urged his father not to sin against David, he was not speaking of Saul unintentionally erring with regard to David (1 Samuel

³⁰³ "1. Of bad quality, inferior...2. disagreeable, unwholesome...3. bad, of no value, contemptible...4. bad-tempered, evil, morally depraved" are some observed definitions. Holladay, op cit. p. 341.

19:4). David had not sinned against Saul, and so Saul should not intentionally act against David. To do so would have been an intentional shooting at the wrong mark. The Greek verb *hamartano* shares the same idea. It is formed from by a negative prefix to *meiromai*, “not to become participator in, not to attain, not to arrive at the goal.”³⁰⁴ Therefore, it meant a failure to arrive at or reach one’s goal. However, like the Old Testament, God refined this definition. It is not an unintentional failure but an intentional failure. John wrote, “Sin is lawlessness” [*anomia*] (1 John 3:4). Lawlessness is the refusal to recognize any restraint or limitations. Therefore, sin means one fails to reach his target because one refuses to recognize any restrictions or requirements God may have placed upon him or her.

I would suggest that our last term, “unrighteousness” encompasses more than does the term “sin.” God is righteous. Unrighteousness is the opposite. God does not have an attribute we would call “not sin.” Therefore, anything which is contrary to God’s righteous character is unrighteous. Sin is one aspect of unrighteousness. Therefore, if everything God does is righteous, then the fact that God does not sin is a corollary truth.

We begin by reminding ourselves that God is righteous. He is righteous in everything He does. Paul stated that there is no unrighteousness with God (Romans 9:14). Both 2 Chronicles 19:7 and Zephaniah 3:5 state that no perversity exists with God. The NASB and ESV translate *awlah* “injustice” in Zephaniah and the NASB translates this same word “unrighteousness”

³⁰⁴ Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895) p. 98.

in 2 Chronicles. “Likewise the basic meaning of this Hebrew root means to deviate from a right standard to act contrary to what is right.”³⁰⁵ It is part of a family of words which involve the idea of twisting or perverting something. Both these passages assert that there is nothing twisted, perverted or unrighteous with God. Therefore, if God does only righteousness and no unrighteousness, nor injustice or perverseness exists with Him, we can assert in a preliminary way that God does not “cause sin.”

When a believer experiences temptation, he can never say that it is from God (James 1:13). The New Testament has two Greek verbs which can be translated “test.” However, each verb has a distinct emphasis. The verb *dokimadzo* means to test with the goal of finding that which is good. “It carries the idea of a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness.”³⁰⁶ The verb James used is *peiradzo*, which also means to test or attempt, but involves failure. Paul attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem but failed (Acts 9:26). Paul attempted to go into Bithynia but could not (Acts 16:7). Therefore, it is the negative side of testing. To test in this fashion is to elicit to unrighteousness actions. James wrote his readers that God does not tempt men with evil, that is, He never attempts to draw out from them an evil response.

³⁰⁵ *Avlah* [עולרה] Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. Accordance electronic ed., version 1.6. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.

³⁰⁶ Mounce, op cit. p. 719.

God did not make men unrighteous, nor did He cause them to sin. God's evaluation of His creation was, "it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). By good, God did not mean "moral" but that it was fitting, proper, and suited to satisfy. C.F. Keil noted about this goodness, "everything perfect in its kind, so that every creature might reach the goal appointed by the Creator, and accomplish the purpose of its existence."³⁰⁷ When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, He placed them into a good environment, with every tree good for food (Genesis 2:9). God did not create a fractured creation, or one with built-in flaws. Here we come to the hard question; why did God allow Adam to be tempted? What we can safely conclude, was that it accomplished God's desirous will, for Paul wrote that God works all things according to the standard of the choice which comes from His desirous will (Ephesians 1:11). God defined sin by setting down a restriction, a boundary, "from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:17). Why did God choose to place a tree in the garden by which Adam could disobey God? Again, because it fit within God's desire. Did God do this so that man could exercise freewill? Ultimately, these are questions which God does not answer. The closest answer we have, is that God does what He pleases (cf Psalm 135:6). For us, this can be an uncomfortable thought, but we remind ourselves that with which we began this discussion, God is righteous in everything He does.

Let me suggest a model that reflects much of Scripture. Sometimes called compatibilism, it affirms

³⁰⁷ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. I*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) p. 67.

that first, God is sovereign, second, that God allows His creatures do what they most want to do, unless He prevents it, third, God knows how to bring about the willing choice on the part of His creatures. This is not an absolute model for every situation, but it does fit much of God's revelation.

Did God plan the Fall of man? God knew Christ as a lamb slain before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19-20). In the context, Christ is a lamb slain to provide for redemption (v. 18). Yet, if no one needed redemption, why would it be provided? This means that God planned for the Fall before the Fall happened, even before the world was founded. God however, being righteous and having created all things good, did not make Adam sin. God was able to control circumstances in such a manner that first, Adam would sin, second God would provide redemption through Jesus Christ.

We have some hints at how God accomplished this in account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Some interpreters and critics have argued that these two chapters present two different perhaps even contradictory accounts of creation. However, chapter 2 provides a detailed account of a portion of creation. If God had not given us Genesis 2, Adam's sin in Genesis 3 would make little sense, because chapter 2 sets the circumstances for Adam's sin. God had created Adam without yet creating Eve. He placed this man in a garden with everything good, everything that would provide for his sense of well being and happiness. God also planted a tree which would allow Adam to demonstrate his obedience and dependence upon God. God brought all the animals before Adam, not so Adam could practice zoology and name or classify animals by

taxonomy but that Adam would see he had not counterpart in any of those creatures. The phrase “to see what He would call them” in Genesis 2:19 has the same verb *qarah* which Adam used with his wife in verse 23. Adam called her Eve which meant “from man.” Adam had seen all the other creatures and none of them were “from man” and so he named them appropriately. However, Eve, taken from Adam was a counterpart to him and appropriately named.

Satan tempted Adam by tempting Eve. He did not direct his temptation first and directly at Adam. Adam had one counterpart out of all creation. Satan, who had been in Eden before man, attempted to rest authority from Adam by getting Adam to rebel against God. He did this through the one thing Adam had only one of, his wife, his true counterpart. Consider all the details which had to be in place for Adam to willingly sin against God, and without Adam’s sin, man would have needed no redemption. Without need of redemption, Christ would not have been redeemer. Without Christ redeeming by His death, God’s love to hostile sinners would not have been seen (Romans 5:8, 10).

Bruce Ware proposes what some theologians call God’s “middle knowledge” to explain how this type of scenario is accomplished. “According to the notion of middle knowledge, God can envision a free agent in various sets of circumstances or states of affairs, and it is claimed that God knows what the agent would do in each differing state of affairs.”³⁰⁸ Ware provides the lengthy example of Joseph’s sale into slavery by his

³⁰⁸ Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004) (p. 113).

brothers and God's purpose. He demonstrates the many details that had to happen at specific moments: God giving Joseph dreams, the visit to the pastures, the absence or Rueben, the presence of the Ishmaelite caravan. God knew precisely what circumstances needed to exist and what circumstances needed to be allowed to accomplish His purpose.³⁰⁹ Ware draws the reader's attention to the brothers' intent and God's intent in Genesis 45:5 and 8. They sold him, but God sent him. So verse eight reads, "So it was not you who sent me here, but God." These two verses mean that God did not simply allow these men to make a choice to do something evil and then He responded and turned it into something God. God from the very beginning planned every detail of this event to accomplish His purpose. His purpose was even larger than rescuing the family of Israel from the famine. God's purpose was to allow the people to be enslaved, mistreated and enter into doubt and disbelief, and from that sad state of affairs to bring them out of Egypt and back into the land He had promised Abraham five centuries earlier.

Middle knowledge is a theological explanation that God knows not only all things that will be but any possible alternative. We saw this when we considered God's omniscience. Christ knew that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented and remained, if He had done the same type of works in them which He was doing in the cities of His day. He didn't and those cities did not repent resulting in their destruction forever. Whether we use the term middle knowledge, or simply recognize the extensiveness of

³⁰⁹ *ibid*, pp. 125-129.

God's knowledge/omniscience (which seems simpler to me), we're talking about the all knowing God knowing precisely all details potential and actual for every potential or actual situation. God knows all, and that directly ties to His working out His sovereign plan.

God's sovereignty and use of man's will is illustrated in bringing Israel out of Egypt. God wanted to bring Israel out from Egypt in a miraculous fashion which demonstrated that He alone had brought them out. Therefore, when Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh, God told Moses and Aaron that He would harden Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 7:3). The Hebrew verb "harden" is in a stem which emphasizes causation, that is, God would cause Pharaoh's heart to be hard like flint.³¹⁰ This idea occurs in several statements in Exodus and deserves a brief consideration here. The next reference to this idea occurs in Exodus 7:13. The verb *chatzaq*, translated "hardened" in the NASB, meant to be strong.³¹¹ Pharaoh's heart (the location of decision making) was strong, therefore, he would not be easily swayed from his purpose. We might say he strengthened his resolve. In verse 14, the LORD described Pharaoh's heart as heavy [*chabvod*],³¹² therefore, not sensitive. The state of Pharaoh's heart in these two verses was precipitated by his magicians making their rods into serpents as Aaron had done (vv. 11-12). In verse 22, Pharaoh's magicians repeated the act of Moses changing the water to blood, and his heart

³¹⁰ The verb is חשק in the Hiphil stem.

³¹¹ The verb is a simple Qal stem.

³¹² It is an adjective in a verbless clause "Pharaoh's heart *is* heavy."

was strong [*chatzaq*].³¹³ In 8:18, Pharaoh appealed for Moses and Aaron to ask Jehovah to relieve the plague of frogs (v. 8), but when the plague stopped, Pharaoh made his heart heavy [*chabvod*]³¹⁴ and did not listen to Moses and Aaron (v. 15). In 8:18, though Pharaoh's magicians were unable to duplicate the plague of gnats, his heart was strong [*chatzaq*]. The next plague was flies. Pharaoh relented and allowed Moses and the Israelis to leave for three days (8:25-28), however when God removed the plague, Pharaoh caused his heart to be heavy [*chabvod*]³¹⁵ (v. 32). Pharaoh's heart was heavy [*chabvod*] in response to the plague on the Egyptians cattle (9:7). The plague of boils was severe, so that Pharaoh's magicians could not stand before Moses (9:11). Apparently due to the severity of the plague, Jehovah really made Pharaoh's heart strong³¹⁶ (v. 12). After the plague of hail ceased, Pharaoh made his heart heavy so that his heart was strong (9:34-35). When Pharaoh would have relented, following the next two plagues, God really made his heart strong (10:20, 27).

The account of Jehovah, Moses and Pharaoh provides a good demonstration of a compatiblistic model. The accounts begin with God's sovereignty, in which He would make Pharaoh's heart hard like a flint. In the following plagues, it was Pharaoh who strengthened his own heart and made it heavy or unresponsive. It was only after the plagues reached a severity in which Pharaoh's resolve was weakening that

³¹³ It is another simple Qal.

³¹⁴ This is a Hiphil, the causative stem.

³¹⁵ Hiphil, the causative stem.

³¹⁶ This verb stem is Piel, an intensive, hence "really..."

God strengthened Pharaoh's heart. We can say, that Pharaoh did what he most wanted, he refused to allow the Israelis to leave. Did Pharaoh's will truly change in the last instances? Probably not. God strengthened his resolve so he could do what he wanted to do. God did not force Pharaoh to anything he didn't wish to do. God could have done so, but in this case He did not.

This was the point of Moses' address in Exodus 9:13-17. God had Moses explain that God had raised Pharaoh up for the purpose of making His power visible and His name known. By Pharaoh's arrogant stubbornness, God was able to display His character. God further revealed to Moses that He had made Pharaoh's heart heavy so that He might show His signs. It also provided a history of God's to be repeated to successive generations so they might know that He is the God who Is³¹⁷ (10:2). God had foretold His plan (Exodus 6:6). Forty years later, He asked if any other god had distinguished Himself by such acts (Deuteronomy 4:34). God had a purpose, to demonstrate His power and bring Israel out of slavery by undeniably divine means. For this reason, God raised up Pharaoh, a man of arrogance who would not humble himself before God (Exodus 10:3). His strong will made him an ideal antithesis for God's power and goodness on behalf of Egypt. In His sovereign design, God used those qualities for His own purposes.

³¹⁷ The name Jehovah meant something to the Israelis. It was built on a Hebrew verb root mean to "be" or "exist." Whenever an Israel used that name, he was calling God the "One Who Is," not the one who was or will be. God is always an is, as He said, "I Am."

Examples of this nature could be multiplied. Many nations hated Israel, and aspired to broader dominion. Yet God sets the boundaries of nations, both physical and time (cf. Acts 17:26), therefore, those nations could only go where God allowed. When God established Israel as a nation and gave them a law, He promised them the curse of war and slavery for disobedience to that law. Israel's history is filled with acts of disobedience followed by God bringing those surrounding nations against Israel. God used Assyria to punish His people (Isaiah 10:5). However, Assyria did not intend to be God's instrument of punishment (v. 7). Assyria willingly went against Israel but that was to fulfill its own goal to destroy and cut off many nations (v. 7). Again, God had a purpose and used others to accomplish it, allowing them to do what they most wished.

Not only does God use evil men and nations, but even fallen spirits to accomplish His purpose. When the Holy Spirit left Saul, a spirit of disaster [evil] came and terrified Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). We do not know all of God's purpose in doing this but we can draw a conclusion from some of the facts. God had removed the anointing from Saul because Saul had disobeyed by not killing everything belonging to Amalek and he stepped over the boundary between the king's function and the priests' (cf 1 Samuel 15).³¹⁸ God anointed David and was demonstrating David's character before others. Saul's terror from this spirit provided a reason for David coming before Saul (1 Samuel 16:17-23).

³¹⁸ Removing the anointing did not mean Saul lost salvation, but he lost the divine aid for ruling as Israel's king.

The terror also demonstrated that the anointing had been removed from Saul, as he demonstrated a different attitude and operated increasingly out of fear (cf 1 Samuel 18:12). Yet in all these activities, David demonstrated himself to be wiser than all Saul's servants (1 Samuel 18:29-30). An evil spirit provided a contrast for David's character.

God used an evil spirit to instigate a punishment against Israel late in David's reign (1 Chronicles 21:1). In this case "Satan" in the NASB, NIV, AV and even the JPS translation is the Hebrew noun *satan* which means adversary. Though not all expositors agree, it is likely a reference to Satan himself. The account recorded in 1 Kings 24:1 tells us that God was angry with Israel. We do not know why, but many times Jehovah's anger burned against Israel, and always for her sins against Jehovah, for her disobedience to the Law. The Samuel account links God's anger with inciting David to number the strong fighting men. Therefore, with the two accounts, we can conclude that Israel did something which angered Jehovah. Jehovah then used Satan as an instrument of punishment, by allowing him to move David to number the men. The verb "moved" in both passages is *suth* meaning to entice, often with a note of cunningness.³¹⁹ In both passages it occurs in the hiphil stem, which indicates causation. God responded to David's sin with punishment upon Israel. Punishment that was also due to the original, unidentified source of God's anger. God's anger and the adversary [Satan] enticed David to number the people. God accomplished

³¹⁹ TWOT, op cit.

His purpose by allowing Satan to do what He most wished.

Finally, in 1 Kings 22:19-22, we are treated to a scene in heaven. This scene informs the previous passages regarding God's interaction with and use of spirit beings, both fallen and unfallen. In the context, God desires to kill Ahab, the wicked king of the northern tribes of Israel (1 Kings 22:20). The armies of heaven (i.e. spirit beings, angels) are standing to His right and left (v. 19). He asks the spirits who would entice Ahab to go out in the coming battle so that Ahab might fall. Different members have different ideas (v. 20). One spirit states that he would do so by being a deceiving spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (v. 22) and this is the course Jehovah takes. We have this bit of revelation because the king of Israel, Ahab, and the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat are uniting against the king of Aram. Ahab appears to fear for his life, but all his prophets were assuring him that he would be safe. At Jehoshaphat's encouragement, Ahab also calls for the prophet Micaiah, who was a true prophet of God. Ahab did not wish to listen to him because he always prophesied bad things about Ahab, because he was prophesying the truth. It is Micaiah who relates this heavenly scene and by it, he explains why Ahab's prophets were assuring him of success and safety. Ahab went into battle and was killed when an archer shot an arrow at random, that is, he was not aiming at Ahab, and the arrow struck Ahab in the joint of his armor (v. 34). Of course, none of this was coincidence. Nothing was truly random, and knowing how God works, from the outset God know exactly how He would bring about

Ahab's death. He allowed a fallen angel to do what he wished most to do.

Therefore, whether it is men, nations or spirit beings, God is able to incorporate their will into His plan and with the use of their desires accomplish His purposes. There are times when the purposes of individuals and nations are thwarted. Paul wished to go into Bithyina, but it was not God's will for him, and so Paul was unable to succeed. The Philippians were mindful to provide for Paul's need but lacked opportunity (Philippians 4:10). The imperfect tense of the verb "lacked opportunity" indicates an ongoing situation in the past, while in the present (when Paul was writing the letter) they had an opportunity. So, desire is not sufficient, one also needs an opportunity.

The Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 (2 Kings 18:13). Yet his invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem was ended by God when the Angel of Jehovah (God the Son) went through Sennacherib's camp and killed 185,000 of his men in one night (2 Kings 19:35-36). Sennacherib had no desire to abandon his siege of Jerusalem, but without an army, he had no reasonable option but to return to Nineveh. By killing his army, God removed Sennacherib's opportunity to act against Jerusalem and Judah.

God's intervention regarding Sennacherib and Jerusalem illustrates Paul's statement that God has placed the boundaries both physical and temporal for nations (Acts 17:26). He has determined the time in which specific nations would exist, and the exact physical boundaries in which those nations would operate. This would include conquest, colonialism, trade and ultimately the rebellion of nations previously

conquered. In this same way, God is able to align events so as to direct the individual choices men make.

God's sovereignty also explains how He produced the Scriptures, and guaranteed that they were precisely what He wished written. Jude intended to write about the common salvation (v. 3), but the appearance and influence of teachers who perverted the message of grace within the churches necessitated that Jude write about the faith³²⁰ (vv. 3-4). Jude had a concern, and God used that to accomplish His purpose in the writing of Scripture. The Corinthians asked Paul questions which he set about to answer (1 Corinthians 7:1). In this way, God used the concerns of others so Paul would write for a larger purpose. Some of God's Old Testament prophets prophesied from grief over the religious, moral and political state of their nation. Habakkuk cried out to God from his frustration and grief over Judah's evil (Habakkuk 1:2-4). When God explained that He would bring the Chaldeans against Judah (Habakkuk 1:5-6). Habakkuk struggled to understand how God could use an evil nation such as the Chaldeans to punish his people Judah for their evils (Habakkuk 1:12-13), but he rested in God's character (Habakkuk 2:4; 33:1-19). Habakkuk's concern became a basis for announcing the coming of judgment.

The Scriptures also serve as an example of God's sovereignty overriding human intent or understanding. Some of the Law was written directly by God's finger (Exodus 31:18; 34:1; Deuteronomy 9:10).

³²⁰ The Faith is not the sum total of Christian doctrine, but the collection of God's promises to New Testament believers. It is identified as the Faith because believers live by directing faith at those promises in daily living.

When Moses wrote down the Law, (Leviticus is a good example) he was taking dictation. He was writing precisely what God told him. God wrote the initial part of the covenant summed up in the ten commandments (Exodus 34:1), then He had Moses write down the remaining words of the covenant (Exodus 34:27). These words were written precisely as God gave them to Moses because of the accuracy of the covenant. A covenant was a contract and contractual language is precise, for it states the responsibilities and benefits of each party.³²¹ Yet the Law served a larger purpose. God gave the law to shut the mouth of everyone (Romans 3:19). The law was added for the cause of transgressions (Galatians 3:19). The Law proved to Paul that he was a sinner (Romans 7:7-16). Had the language been compromised, the larger purpose of the Law would have also been compromised.

Distinguishing God's will from His will

Not everything that God has willed He has willed. Without clarifying the meaning of the word “will” the preceding sentence appears contradictory. When the New Testament was written, two Greek words expressed the idea of will but each with a different emphasis. As previously noted βουλη and βουλομαι express the idea of determination or the determinative will. They both involve the act of choosing or deciding. θελω refers to the act of desiring and θελημα the result of a desire or the thing desired. Our English New Testaments do not always make the distinction between these two clear. Greek lexicons do

³²¹ “The existence of a written covenant at this period is not unusual.” John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) p. 307

not always maintain good distinctions.³²² Sometimes lexicographers translate words based upon accepted popular interpretations of certain passages.

Thelō, thelēma - θελω, θελημα

In some passages the idea of desire is easily deduced. So, Paul saw God's desire, "Who would have (desires) all men to be saved and to come to a full experiential knowledge of truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Since we know that not everyone will be saved, we know that this is what God desires. God desires all to be saved but He has not determined that all will be. His desire is seen in the translation, "But now God has set each of the members in the body even as it pleased Him" (1 Corinthians 12:18). God's desire is seen in Matthew 7:21 and 12:50, "But the one doing the will of My Father in heaven."

This pair of words describe "the will of God" which so many Christians are interested in knowing. God has revealed many aspects of His will. He desires believers to give thanks in all things, to be sanctified, to give themselves in service to other believers

³²² Mounce (op cit, p. 788) does not distinguish these words, but treats them both with roughly the same meaning. Stephen Renn (op cit, pp. 1045-1047) does make some distinction. For *thelo* it is written, "The underlying sense is that of to 'be willing,' 'desire,' 'want,' or 'wish.'" For *boulomai* the meaning is, "'to will' in the sense of 'express a purpose, intentions, or desire.'" The Rev. Samuel G. Green distinguished the two, "boulomai denotes the will rather on its intellectual side, 'to choose;' qelw, will with intent and power to perform." *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, nd, p. 374. In his short discussion, he sees the idea of determination or choice in the former and describes the latter in terms which show it to be desire or choices not intellectually thought out. An examination of all occurrences bears this out.

(1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18; 2 Corinthians 8:5). This is God's desirous will for the believer. The believer may or may not do God's desirous will. (Matthew 7:21). In John 5:21, the Son's desire is expressed in His act of giving eternal life to those to whom He desires to give it.

Boulomai, boulē βουλομαι, βουλη

Other Scriptures describe God's determinative will, those things which God has determined He will do or bring to pass. When Christ prayed to His Father in the garden, He prayed, "Father if you are determining, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my desirous will but yours." (Luke 22:42). Here, the question was not whether the Father wished the cup to pass, but whether He would choose for the cup to pass. When the Son was delivered up to be crucified, all that happened was according to the Father's determinative will (Acts 2:23; 4:28).

God's counsel or choice is immutable, it can not be changed (Hebrews 6:17). In fact, Paul anticipated the reaction, "Who has resisted His will (i.e. that which He has determined, Romans 9:19). It was by His choice (His determinative will) that He caused us to be born (spiritually) by the word of truth (James 1:18). It was God's choice (determination) that David serve as king in his generation (Acts 13:36).

These words for God's choice are not always translated correctly and thus are misleading. The American Standard Version of 1901 translated βουλομαι "desiring" in Jude 1:5, "Now I desire to put..." Rather, Jude determined to remind his readers. The ASV also translates this word "wishing" in 2 Peter 3:9. The AV translated it "willing" and is understood by

many to refer to God's desire. Peter's statement was not with regard to everyone (saved and unsaved) but specifically believers. Some believers were influenced by the false teachers who mocked God's coming judgment. Still, God is not slow! He does not tarry! He has determined that none of us will perish, but all will come to repentance. The object of God's longsuffering and determination is not the unsaved world but "us" [A.V. "us-ward"]. No believer will perish or come to complete ruination. Every believer will make it because God has determined that every believer will!³²³

Benefits of understanding God's decree in relationship to salvation

Foreknowledge and the Salvation of Old Testament people

The Old and New Testaments contain words which are translated similarly or identically. For example the Hebrew *gael* [גאל] is normally translated by some form of our English word "redeem", which is used to translate four different Greek words. However, nearly all the occurrences of גאל refer to physical redemption rather than spiritual redemption. This is just the opposite of the New Testament which has primarily a spiritual emphasis. The same is true of the words translated by cognates of our English word "save". In Psalm 49:15 the verb *padah* [פדה] does appear to be used in a spiritual sense, where the Psalmist wrote of

³²³ This is not determined by lexicography but by context (which always affects meaning). The context is not about God's salvation of the unsaved, but of His concern for His own, and the influence that uniformitarian, evolutionary unsaved men have upon them. 1 Timothy 2:4 speaks to the issue of God's desire, for which 2 Peter 3:9 is wrongly applied.

God ransoming his life [soul] from the power Sheol. In Job 33:28, Elihu tied this verb to God's rescuing him from the pit and in the context with granting him to see God's face with joy and having God restore His righteousness to man (v. 26). So while, the Old Testament words may have similar translations to the New Testament counterparts, the use of the word in context is different. The Old Testament placed little emphasis on the spiritual nature of salvation, while the New Testament places a great deal of emphasis on the spiritual side of salvation.

While the nature of spiritual salvation is not always clear in the Old Testament,³²⁴ it is clear that God did save some people during that time (cp Romans 4:3-8). God did not save them on the basis of obedience to the law or through any of the sacrifices specified in the law (Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:1). Our salvation is based upon Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 4:25). Christ's death and resurrection is also the basis of salvation for those who lived before Christ died and rose again, though it was not a plainly revealed truth, and it was not the object of their faith.

Because God is eternal and knows completely what He has determined to accomplish, He saved Old Testament people on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection. From a human point of view, we sometimes say God saved them in anticipation of Christ's work. However, eternity alters the concept of God's anticipation. Peter provides a good example of how this works. We were redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, who was like an unblemished and

spotless lamb (1 Peter 1:18-19). Before the foundation of the world, God was fully acquainted with [foreknown, NASB] Christ as a lamb slain (v. 20). However, it is only at the present time [lit. “upon the last times”] that this has been plainly visible (v. 20). Therefore, though men could not plainly see Christ slain, God did and on the basis of this, He saved those Old Testament people who believed His revelation for them at that time.

When Christ died and rose again, the Father made [lit. placed] Him as the location where God is satisfied [A.V. “propitiation”] (Romans 3:25). By doing this, God displayed His righteousness because He had passed over the sins which Old Testament people had done. For the sake of spirit beings and mankind, God demonstrated that He is righteous. He did not violate His righteousness when He declared many people righteous throughout Old Testament times. Those people sinned just as believers today. Christ’s work reached back to deal with their sins just as it reaches forward to deal with ours. Because God determined to provide salvation in this manner, He knew exactly what He would do. Therefore, He could save Old Testament people on the basis of Christ’s death. He accomplished this without any conflict with His righteousness.

Evangelism and Election

The book of Acts records many occasions when Paul evangelized large groups of people. Paul could honestly announce that Christ had died for their sins (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). He could point them to God’s act of giving the Son as His perfect act of love (Romans 5:8; John 3:16). He could also assure his whole audience that those who would believe in Christ would

be forgiven of their sins and be declared righteous (Acts 13:38, 39). Paul also knew that God had chosen some. Therefore, when Paul announced the gospel to these groups, he did so in order that the elect might obtain salvation (2 Timothy 2:8-10). This freed Paul from becoming wearied over those who did not believe. He knew that only those who were chosen would believe.

Understanding this does not remove the believer's responsibility of announcing the good news. It removes the unnecessary weight with which believers are sometimes burdened. It is not biblical to make believers think that if they do not evangelize an individual, that individual might go to Hell. This practically makes the one evangelizing a savior. Paul knew better.

God's act of choosing the Thessalonians was a cause for thanking God (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The word "chose" in this passage is not "elect" but derived from the Greek *αἰρεῶ* [*haireo*], "*to take...to take for oneself, to choose, prefer.*"³²⁵ God had picked them out from a beginning to salvation. Paul thanked God not the Thessalonians for this choice. Because God chose them Paul charged them to stand firm and hold to the tradition taught (v. 15). God's choice is also the basis of assurance because God provides eternal (not merely temporal) comfort and hope. The certainty existed because it was God who had chosen. This comforted them as they suffered at the hands of those who willingly refused to be saved, by refusing to love the truth (2 Thessalonians 1:4-9; 2:10).

"Knowing God" often describes one who is saved. Paul restated this from God's perspective, "or

³²⁵ Thayer, *op cit.*

being known by God.” (Galatians 4:9). “Being known by God” is a powerful thought. [See comments under Omniscience]. This expresses God’s full acquaintance with the believer.

Personal responsibility

Paul knew that when he evangelized, the elect would obtain salvation. This fact does not remove the individual’s responsibility to believe the gospel. God still holds all people accountable for their choice. When Paul spoke the gospel at Pisidian Antioch, he concluded that, those who rejected it had, “judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life.” (Acts 13:46). Yet Luke records just two sentences later, that those who believed Paul’s message had been appointed to eternal life (v. 48). The term appointed is *tassō* [τασσω] and refers to the act of putting in order or organizing.³²⁶ As God organized His plan, He set or scheduled certain ones to believe at certain times. The responsibility of the Grace believer is to give the good news. He is not to be burdened with getting the individual saved. It is true that all who will be judged willingly rejected God.

Why are all men held responsible? Paul wrote twice, “all sinned” (Romans 3:23; 5:12). The English “all have sinned” communicates a Pelagian idea that each individual sinned and fell at a time in his own life. “Pelagius taught that God created every soul directly (he despised the traducian theory), and that every soul therefore was innocent and unstained.”³²⁷ The tense of

³²⁶ Abbott-Smith, op cit, 440, “primarily, in military sense, then generally, *to draw up in order, arrange in place, assign, appoint, order.*”

³²⁷ Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1989, p. 311.

“sinned” is Aorist and John Witmer explains, “So the entire human race is viewed as having sinned in the one act of Adam’s sin (cf. “all have sinned,” also the Gr. past tense, in 3:23).”³²⁸ He concludes, “As a result God considered all people as participating in the act of sin which Adam committed and as receiving the penalty he received.”³²⁹ Since all sinned all have been corrupt from the moment of conception (Psalm 51:5). All have rejected God, and bear responsibility for that rejection.

This means, that if God had placed any two other person in the garden instead of Adam and Eve, they would have made the same choice. Indeed, all did make that choice in Adam. It was in the garden that all mankind exercised their free will against God’s will. God gave Adam every good tree bearing fruit for food (Genesis 1:29 2:9, 16). Adam, along with all mankind, chose the one tree from which he was not to eat (Genesis 2:17). It wasn’t necessary that God create Adam with a free will but He chose to do so, and with that will, Adam chose to disobey God.

Paul demonstrated in Romans that mankind has persisted in exercising their will against God’s will. When mankind knew God, they would not worship Him as God (Romans 1:21). This is from the time of the flood to Babel. At that time man didn’t even find it acceptable to have God in their experiential knowledge [*epignōsis επιγνωσις*] (1:28). Paul then singled out the Gentiles and demonstrated their willful rejection of God (2:3-5). The Jews willfully rejected God and His

³²⁸ “Romans” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983, p. 458.

³²⁹ *ibid*

revelation (2:17-29). His final conclusion concerning both Jews and Gentiles is found in Romans 3:10-18. Verse 11 is especially important, “There is none who understand, there is none who seek God.” This is man’s willful choice. As a result all men are responsible for this willful choice.

In the Body

Every believer was placed into Christ at the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). He was placed exactly where God desired and determined he should be (12:11, 18). That placement included a spiritual gift appropriate to his placement. God operates (energizes) in the believer for the use of these gifts (12:4). It is the believer’s responsibility to properly relate to others in the body and to use his gift for the profit of the whole body (12:7). God previously prepared good works for each believer (Ephesians 2:10). Some of these good works are the proper use of one’s gift within the new man (body of Christ), which is God’s creation (Ephesians 2:10, 15, 16). While God prepared the good works, it is the believer’s responsibility to use that gift and do these good works (1 Peter 4:10). God gifts the believer, and schedules opportunities to use his gift. The believer must choose to serve in those appointments.

The grace believer is to work out [render out or use] his salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). It is God who operates in the believer so he has desires for things well pleasing to God (v. 13). God also works³³⁰ those same things into action in the believer

³³⁰ The verb is ενεργεω and indicates a direct personal work of God in and individual.

(v. 13). The believer's responsibility is to determine or choose. God puts the desire there, the believer must choose. He chooses to use his salvation to do these things while it is God who originates or makes it possible.

Christ held the cities of Chorizan and Bethsaida accountable for their rejection of Him in spite of the works of power [A.V. "miracles"] which He did (Matthew 11:21-24). This illustrates God's plan and determination. Christ stated that if those same works of power which He had performed in Chorizan and Bethsaida, had been done in the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, Tyre and Sidon would have repented long ago, and Sodom would still have been in existence. If that was so, then why didn't Christ appear then and perform those miracles? Because it wasn't what God planned.

We should note that God the Son appeared to Abraham with two angels before Sodom was destroyed (Genesis 18:1, 16ff). He was right there and could have gone down to Sodom and performed those works of power. God had a different plan with a different objective. The people were still held personally responsible. Christ didn't let the first cities off the hook because they didn't see the miracles. Even those cities bore responsibility for their choices. Some theologians would be uncomfortable with these facts. They teach that if God can do something that would alter history in a positive way, then God must. However, as we considered under God's freedom, God is not bound by anything but His own nature. God must only be true to Himself.

God's decree encompasses salvation. Those

whom God has chosen will be saved. However, all mankind bears the responsibility for their own choice. God has given believers gifts and desires to use those gifts. It is our responsibility to choose to do so. God has given us a great salvation. We choose whether we will work it out in our daily lives, or neglect so great a salvation. God's decree in these and other areas never frees the creature from personal responsibility.

Predestination? Purpose?

The words predestination and foreordination describe one aspect of God's decree. The English words impress us with destiny or outcome. Louis Berkhof expressed the traditional reformed position, "Foreordained unto what? The words always refer to the foreordination of man to a certain end, and from the Bible it is evident that the end may be either good or bad, acts 4:28; Eph. 1:5."³³¹ Wayne Grudem introduces his study of election, "Several passages in the New Testament seem to affirm quite clearly that God ordained beforehand those who would be saved."³³² Within the Reformed tradition, God acts to determine final destiny.

The Biblical revelation presents a broader view of this idea. The etymology of the English "predestine" appears to match the etymology of the Greek προοριζω [προοριζω]. Both have a prefix "pro" and "pre" describing that which precedes or goes before. However

³³¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941, p. 112.

³³² Grudem, *op cit.* 671.

horidzō [οριζω] which can refer to a “boundary”³³³ does not in this combination refer to a “destiny” which has been previously determined. Prooridzō describes boundaries which are set out ahead of time. This term refers not only to **where** one is going but **how God deals** with him on the way and **how God gets** him there. Therefore, prooridzō means to mark out beforehand, and often to mark out the boundaries.

In God’s decree, the Son’s betrayal was marked out (Luke 22:22). Each step, each event was part of God’s plan. Many of the events fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. In this verse, “determined” is horidzō, the mark or boundary. God had set out all the boundaries for the Son’s experience.

The shorter form, horidzō is also used in Acts 17:26. God has marked out or set the boundaries for all nations. Every nation has had boundaries drawn by God within which He allowed them to operate. The boundaries are both physical and temporal, how far that nation can go (i.e. what lands it controls) and how many years it rules. As will be seen in a coming study, God limits how far a king and his nation may expand. Old Testament revelation revealed this was true and Paul indicates it remains so in our present time.

God decreed not simply that Christ would die. The Trinity determined that Christ would die an ignoble death preceded by intense humiliating abuse (Isaiah 53:1-6; Psalm 22; 69:19-22). Therefore, Peter and the

³³³ K.L. Schmidt explains *horizō*, “This word (from *horos*, “boundary”) means “to limit” and then figuratively “to fix,” “to appoint.” Time as well as space can be limited.” in Gerhard Kittel, and Gerhard Friedrich. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Abridged in 1 vol. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985, p. 728.

other apostles stated that, the people did whatever God's hand and counsel had previously set out [prooridzō] to come to be (Acts 4:28; 2:23 A.V. "determined"). The Trinity determined not only the end but marked out before hand the events which would lead to the cross.

God decreed that the Son is to be the judge of all. Christ Himself said that the Father had committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). The Son is the judge because the Trinity previously set out the boundaries in which the Son acts as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). God even established the day in which the Son will judge the world (Acts 17:31). Again this involves how God gets to this point, not just the final point.

In modern English, "son" is not considered a term of equality but inferiority within a family relation. In New Testament times "son" could be used of a young male child or of a male who enjoys an elevated status of privilege. It is the later idea which is expressed when the Bible speaks of God the Son. God the Son emphasizes the equality, between the Father and Son. He expressed His full ability as the Son to perfectly represent the Father. When Christ called Himself, "the Son of God" He was calling Himself God (cp John 10:33, 36).

God marked off the boundaries for the Son before He became flesh (Romans 1:4). Those boundaries involved the exercise of power. The Son often manifested God's power. These manifestations are popularly known as miracles. The Son also related to the Spirit of holiness during His earthly ministry. Finally, He was raised out from the dead. In fact,

because He is indeed the Son of God, He not only was raised by the work of the Father and the Spirit, but He raised Himself (John 2:19; 10:17-18). All these were events which the Trinity in counsel desired, determined, and then marked out ahead of time. The Romans 1:4 occurrence is important because it illustrates not the end but the means. The Son was already the Son. However, in time, during His incarnation the Father dealt with Him within the boundaries of His Son-ship.

Predestination and the believer

God has determined that He will deal with the believer as a son (Hebrews 12:6-8). In the world of the New Testament son is did not communicate the same idea as child. Child emphasized that one was in the family by birth. Son emphasized a privileged position within the family. (see above) At the same moment that we were born by God into His family, we were also placed as sons.³³⁴ This wasn't normal in the world of the New Testament. Paul stated that the even though one was heir of all, he wasn't a son until the time his father decided to place him as a son (Galatians 4:1-5).

God's purpose is that we be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29), therefore, He previously set out the boundaries so that we will be conformed. He deals with us in this sphere of son-ship. Son-ship is not only our ultimate destiny, but the boundaries within which God deals with us at present. The focus is on the boundaries within which God deals with us, while keeping the final goal in view.

³³⁴ Robert G. Gromacki agrees, "A person becomes a child of God by regeneration or the new birth; he is then adopted or put into the position of a full grown son by God." *Salvation Is Forever*, Chicago: Moody, 1973, p. 65.

To be a son, one must be placed as a son. God previously set out the boundaries that we would be placed as son (Ephesians 1:5). The English word “adoption” translates a Greek term which describes a male child’s graduation within a family from childhood to adulthood, hence he becomes a son. This is a different activity than the type of adoption with which we are familiar. In the New Testament, adoption never describes the act of making one who has not been a member of one’s family a legal member, as in modern English.³³⁵ It is always used of a change of status within a family.

Because God has previously marked out that we would be sons, since son-ship is the sphere within which God deals with us, God applies discipline to us (Hebrews 12:6). God’s discipline is not applied on the basis of our being children [by regeneration]. The believer is a son. “This gives him equal responsibilities and privileges with those Christians who have been saved longer (Gal 3:26-4:7).”³³⁶ Because a son has a more privileged status within the family, a higher quality of conduct is expected consistent with that status. More is expected of a son. Blatant sin in the face of our honored status as sons is the cause of God’s loving discipline.

We are heirs with Christ of all things. We have also been made part of Christ’s inheritance. God marked this out beforehand (Ephesians 1:11). The

²⁰⁰ This word supposedly has this meaning outside the New Testament, but no examples of it occur in the New Testament.

³³⁶ Gromacki, *Salvation*, p. 65 op cit.

A.V.'s translation "obtained an inheritance" misrepresents the Passive voice. Paul did not state what we have obtained, but that we have become an inheritance because God marked this out ahead of time. This means that God placed boundaries in which He deals with us as Christ's inheritance. Those boundaries His inheritance must be kept secure and guaranteed. These make up the boundaries within which God deals with us.

God marked out before hand how He would apply His wisdom in our present tense salvation (1 Corinthians 2:7). God marked out this wisdom for our glory. If by "predestine" the final goal is meant, we have missed Paul's point. By predestine Paul meant that God set out boundaries beforehand regarding how He would use this part of His wisdom for our glory. In the present dispensation of Grace, we not only await future glory, but have the opportunity to live out some of that glory in our daily lives (cf 2 Corinthians 3:18, from glory to glory). We have this potential because God set out the boundaries within which He would apply His wisdom to us.

Purpose

The last words which we will consider are the Greek words *prothesis* [προθεσις] and *protithēmi* [προτιθημι]. These have two uses in the New Testament: that which a person purposes or sets down before; a thing placed out in plain view. The root *tithēmi* means to place and the preposition *pro* means before, either in time or location. When *pro* refers to time, the word indicates a purpose which was previously set down. When *pro* refers to location the word indicates a position in front of, as the A.V.'s

“shewbread” or literally “the bread of the presence” or “the bread placed before”. This bread was placed in the first room of the tabernacle before God (Hebrews 9:2).

God’s “marking out beforehand” [see above] is measured by God’s purpose (Ephesians 1:11). Therefore, God set out this purpose, His intent, before He marked out the boundaries. This is clear; when building a house, one stakes out the boundaries of the foundation, only after one has expressed his intended goals. [See the introduction to God’s Decree].

In the present dispensation, God is governing the daily lives of His people by grace (Ephesians 3:2, 9). Part of God’s purpose in doing this is to make known an aspect of His wisdom to spirit beings (v. 10). The spirit beings observe how God applies to us His wisdom in the sphere of grace. By observing, they learn something about God. This dispensation was previously a mystery [unrevealed in the Old Testament] though God’s purpose to do this was eternal (v. 11). He intended or purposed to make known His wisdom to spirit beings by governing our lives by His grace. He simply didn’t reveal it prior to Paul’s ministry.

Calling is another term in God’s decree. In the New Testament it refers only to salvation. It is never used of a call to ministry. God’s calling us to salvation is measured by His purpose (Romans 9:11). God purposed for us to be saved and conformed to the image of His Son. Therefore, God called us to that salvation.

God saved us and called us to this salvation according to His purpose and grace. He did not call us according to our works (2 Timothy 1:9). As with Jacob and Esau, God made a choice before either of them had done anything good or bad (Romans 9:11). Had God

waited until the two had begun to act, it might have been claimed that His choice was based upon their actions. With us, as with Jacob and Esau, God made His own choice which was measured by His purpose. God is the sole source of His purpose. His choice of Jacob to be the chosen seed or His calling us to salvation is not based upon human works or merit. Paul added that God gave the grace to us in Christ before times in eternities (2 Timothy 1:9). From God's point of view His grace was extended to us in eternity. He purposed for us to be in Christ, and chose us to be holy and blameless in Christ. God brought these about in time, but since He is not bound by eternity, He could relate to it as though it were done before time had begun.

An understanding of God's purpose reinforces the Biblical truth of eternal security. Before time, God had already given me grace. If his plan for my salvation began then, to the point of giving me grace, how secure is my salvation in time? Divinely secure according to His purpose. Because I am part of Christ's inheritance, the Spirit seals me, securing all of Christ's inheritance. God has also placed boundaries within which He deals with me. The boundaries also secure me in salvation because God deals with me as a son. God's decree is more than theoretical theology, the writers of Scripture believed and demonstrated that it is also practical to our outlook.

Election , Chosen, Selected

Probably no term related to the study of God's decree causes more frustration or hostility than the word elect. The study of God's decree often hinges on one's understanding of human choice. If human choice is secondary to God's decree then the idea of election is

emphasized. If human choice is elevated above God's decree, then election is de-emphasized.

Various views have been set forth to describe the term elect. Some denigrate election to a minor matter though the word occurs many times throughout the New Testament. Some consider "elect" to describe only groups, such as Israel or the church. This is corporate election, the choice of a group or body of individual. However, "elect" and its cognates are used of individuals. This is individual election. Elect also has various uses.

God's act of election is the measure of His fixed purpose, "that the purpose of God measured by election should remain" (Romans 9:11). His election precedes in time His "predestination" [God's boundaries, see the last study] (Ephesians 1:4, 5). In this sentence chosen is the main verb and predestine is a participle indicating action which follows³³⁷ the choosing. Because God chose us to be something, He set boundaries within which He then deals with us.

The words "elect" or "chose" represent the Hebrew בחר [*bachar*] and three Greek cognates: εκλεγομαι [*eklegomai*] -"I choose", εκλεκτος [*eklektos*] -a chosen one or thing, εκλογη [*ekloge*] -the act of choosing. The Greek terms are used in thirteen passages to refer to aspects of salvation. The Hebrew term is not used of spiritual salvation. Both the Hebrew and Greek words describe other aspects of God's decree, some not directly tied to salvation. These

³³⁷ We do not take the participle as antecedent to the main verb. The Aorist summarizes the placement of boundaries. It does not determine its time. H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey note, "(1) *Antecedent action* relative to the main verb is ordinarily expressed by the aorist or perfect. Nevertheless, the aorist frequently expresses contemporaneous (Mt. 22:1) or subsequent action (Heb. 9:12)." op cit. p. 230.

passages indicate God's plan regarding Jesus, men and angels (cp. 1 Pet. 2:4; Jh. 6:70; Acts 1:2; 15:7; 1 Tim. 5:21). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul used a different word [*haireomai* αἰρεομαί] to refer to salvation, "because God selected you from a beginning to salvation by sanctification by the Spirit." God chose some. Ignoring or rejecting this truth will not alter the fact that it is true. God has revealed it in His Word. Perhaps, for some ignorance makes it easier to emphasize the human element over the divine. However, for many believers the lack of understanding God's elective purpose results in more grief.

Election can refer to areas of service, or specific purposes of God. God chose Moses to lead Israel, and Aaron to be priest for the people (Numbers 16:5, 7; 17:5). God chose David to rule over His people (2 Samuel 6:21). Christ was the one God chose to be Savior and the corner stone of God's holy temple (Luke 23:35; 1 Peter 2:4, 6). Paul was an elect vessel, chosen by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). God chose to use Peter to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7). Each of these individuals was elect to an area of service, chosen for a work. None of the above instances refer to spiritual salvation.³³⁸

Election can refer to a group chosen for a purpose. Israel is called an elect nation. God chose them from among the nations to display His work (Acts 13:17; Romans 11:28). Christ chose disciples/apostles for a special ministry (Lk. 6:13; John 6:70; 13:18). Elect describes believers from Israel and the Gentile nations who will live during Daniel's 70th week. God will deliver them from that time and will shorten those days for their benefit. Because Church saints are elect as well as the saints of the Tribulation some have argued that

³³⁸ This also serves to remind us that salvation is not God's sole purpose.

Church saints will go through the Tribulation. Yet as seen above, “elect” does not designate one particular group. “Elect” can refer to any group or anyone who has been the object of God’s selection. That choosing may be for different purposes.

Some individuals are elect in two ways, corporately, as part of a group, and individually. Israel was an elect nation. That is not an election to salvation. Within that nation God has a chosen remnant, individuals who were chosen by God’s grace (not merits, Romans 11:5, 7). It is/was only these chosen individuals out of the chosen nation who obtained salvation. Both a corporate and individual election is found in this passage. The nation was chosen for one purpose and individuals to salvation. All twelve of Christ’s disciples were chosen to be disciples. Only eleven were chosen to bear fruit (John 15:16, 19). Thus, some of the disciples were both corporately as well as individually elect. The Church is a chosen race, distinct from the Jews and the Gentiles (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 10:30). The Church is also made up of elect individuals. Therefore, Grace believers are both corporately and individually elect.

When Peter wrote, “make your calling and election sure” he was encouraging them to know they were genuine believers in the face of false teachers (2 Peter 1:10). The elect don’t wear badges labeled “elect” by which they can be identified. The authenticity is borne out as one’s salvation is worked out. This is not corporate but individual election. It isn’t a group making certain it is elect but individuals.

Elect describes angels once (1 Timothy 5:21). Since the Scriptures reveal no application of Christ’s saving work to angels, this is not an election to salvation. Since some angels followed Satan and thus fell, it is consistent that just as God has chosen some men to salvation, He chose some of

angels to not fall. This is a deduction in light of other Scriptures regarding God's decree and should not be pressed to far.

Benefits of Understanding Election

Election is valuable to individual believers in their daily lives. It is a source of security. Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect ones (Romans 8:33)? If it was God who chose the individual, how could another bring a charge which would nullify God's choice? Election is also the basis of Paul's charge to live up to the election in conduct (Colossians 3:12). This status as elect individuals encouraged the believers who were sojourners, dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia ... (1 Peter 1:1). Here elect is a noun describing the believers. It is remotely tied to foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is tied to the dispersion. Though they were dispersed and without citizenship or "disenfranchised" on earth, to God they were elect, or chosen ones.³³⁹

Election encourages proper perspective. Believers are not saved because they are superior to those who are not saved. Paul wrote the Corinthians to consider their calling. God did not chose many important, wealthy, wise and powerful people. To display His purposes He chose from among the weak, foolish and insignificant. By this He put to shame the people and things which the God-rejecting world holds in high regard (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

³³⁹ Elect is not according to the foreknowledge of God. Some have taught that God chose some, because with His foreknowledge, He saw them choosing Him. However, this is built upon a faulty understanding of foreknowledge (see the section on God's omniscience). Foreknowledge, in this context, is tied to the dispersion and indicates that God had fixed the event of the dispersion. He used it to move believers out into the world, to keep them from being cloistered away in Jerusalem.

Election should also be a source of rest in Christ for the Grace believer. There remains a sabbath type rest for the believer who believes God will provide this rest and ceases from his works as God did from His. God's works have been completed from the foundation of the world (Hebrews 4:4). God fore-knew Christ as a lamb slain before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20) and on the basis of Christ's work redeemed mankind. Before the foundation of the world, God chose believers to be holy and blameless in Christ before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4). Since God chose this for the believer in Christ and redemption is applied in Christ, God considered the works completed long ago. Keeping this in mind becomes the basis of rest. It adds a dimension of depth to the thought that the believer has been graced in Christ (Ephesians 1:6). Note, that this passage does not state that God chose us to be in Christ. He chose that the believer in Christ would be "holy and blameless before Him in love." "The purpose of God's choice was our perfect standing."³⁴⁰

Therefore, when one reads "elect" or "chosen" he must determine in that context to what it refers. It does not always refer to salvation. Israel was an elect nation. Individuals can be chosen for an area of service. Sometimes it may even refer to an aspect of salvation but seldom does it refer to God's choice for one to be saved. Still, in some passages have special emphasis upon God's election regarding certain individuals and groups within His plan.

³⁴⁰ Gromacki, *Salvation*, op cit. p. 38. Gromacki rightly understands this to be the believer's standing in Christ. Bruce Demarest makes this Christlikeness and a life or moral excellence. He takes this passage to describe lifestyle. *The Cross and Salvation*, Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997, p. 141. Demarest's understanding comes closer to the Reformed idea of perseverance than the Biblical security.

Dispensational Distinctions in God's Decree

Prior to the ministry of Paul, the dispensation of grace was hidden from ages and generations (Ephesians 3:9). Ages indicate spirit beings and generations humans. God's plan for this present dispensation was fully known to God but it was hidden from His created intelligent beings. God planned to govern the daily lives of his people by the principle of grace. He hid³⁴¹ this fact until He brought Paul on the scene, one whom He separated even at his birth and called him to reveal His Son (Galatians 1:15-16). Through the apostle Paul, God revealed His present purpose. The Godhead planned this from eternity but only made it known to believers for the past 2,000 years.

This principle of grace by which God governs the lives of His people expresses something concerning His wisdom (Ephesians 3:9, 10).³⁴² Two ranks of spirit beings, principalities and powers, are mentioned in Ephesians 3:10. These spirit beings are learning something about God's wisdom by watching God use His grace to govern believer's lives today. This aspect of God's wisdom was planned before the foundation of the world. God has only revealed this wisdom (which was a mystery) in the present time [since Paul] (1 Corinthians 2:7). Grace believers are part of a lesson for these angels concerning God's wisdom, planned in the past but only present now.

From the time of Sinai until the day of Pentecost, God kept his people (Israel at that time) locked up from the faith concerning Christ (Galatians 3:22). By faith, Paul

³⁴¹ God did not hide this in a negative sense, but because it served no purpose to reveal it. His work was with Israel, and that work involved a life lived by law.

³⁴² The A.V.'s "fellowship of the mystery" supported only by the Textus Receptus should be "the dispensation consisting of a mystery" supported by the Majority Byzantine texts as well as others).

meant that which one lives by, not that which initially believes the good news. Under the Mosaic Law, no one could mature. God had long ago, marked His calendar for the exact moment that His Son would become a man and enter the world (Galatians 4:4). Through the Son, God released those who were under law from the Law and made it possible for believers to mature today. He has graduated His people (today the body of Christ - Galatians 3:27-29) from immature childhood, expressed by the noun *napios*, to adult status as sons (Galatians 4:5-6). This had been God's plan though He had not revealed this prior to Pentecost.

From the time God separated Abraham to form the nation of Israel, they were God's people. However, for the past 2,000 years the Church not Israel has been God's people (cp 1 Corinthians 10:32; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Israel is still part of God's plan. God is not done with them as a national people but they have been set aside nationally for the past 2,000 years. God has not rejected them so that they have been displaced by the church as much of Christendom teaches (Romans 11:1-2). During the present, God is taking a small remnant out from Israel and placing them into the church just as He does with Gentiles (Romans 11:5). That remnant is part of the body of Christ. They are God's chosen ones [elect] by grace. God did not choose them based on anything in them which would make them acceptable to Him. He choose them based on His own grace and as a result they are part of the one new man. This one new man is no longer Jew or Gentile but the Christ (Ephesians 2:15-16; 1 Corinthians 12:12). God planned this as part of His decree but did not reveal it until the present time. Paul calls these truths "mysteries" (Ephesians 3:3-4; Colossians 1:26).

God revealed much in the Old Testament concerning the future kingdom from the heavens. Unrevealed in those

prophecies was the truth of a corporate entity known as the Christ, a new man consisting of all believers since Acts 2, the body of Christ and Jesus Christ as the head, hence the title “the Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:15 see above).

God has a prophetic purpose for this entity in that future kingdom. God planned for this entity to be involved in heading up or governing all things in that kingdom (Ephesians 1:10). Jesus Christ’s rule over that kingdom is/was no mystery. The Old Testament revealed that. The mystery is that Christ does not rule this alone but with His Body, also known as the Bride or the Church. The church is united with Him as one. God planned this. It was a mystery [an unrevealed truth during the Old Testament]. It was a mystery regarding God’s desirous will which was measured by His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself (Ephesians 1:9). It was part of God’s decree but God didn’t reveal this until He brought Paul on the scene.

Christ ended the Law as a means of righteousness for the Grace believer (Romans 10:4). Law was never a means of righteousness for eternal salvation. It was Israel’s righteousness which allowed them to approach God at the tabernacle and later the temple (Deuteronomy 6:25). The believer now has access to God at the throne of grace, therefore, his merit is not counted, only the gracious merit of Christ. The believer is no longer under law (Romans 6:14). In practice, when the believer is led by the Holy Spirit, he is under no kind or quality of law (Galatians 5:18). Under the Law, God set apart one day out of seven as a day in which all

physical work was to cease (Exodus 23:12).³⁴³ This day is commonly known as the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10, 11). The Sabbath was a sign between God and His Old Testament people Israel (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12).

When the church began at Pentecost, the first of the week was the day in which the Church remembered and celebrated the resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; cp. Matthew 28:1). The Sabbath is not a prominent feature of the New Testament writings. In order to evangelize Jews, Paul often spoke on the Sabbath. Jews gathered on their sabbath in synagogues, allowing Paul easy access to them. No mention is made that Paul was personally observing the Sabbath (cf Acts 13:14ff; 16:3; 17:2).

As important as the Sabbath was to Israel, it is noteworthy that a sabbath is mentioned only twice in the New Testament letters (Colossians 2:16; Hebrews 4:9). Writing to the Colossians, Paul instructed them not to let anyone judge them with respect to the sabbath (Colossians 2:16). They were not to allow anyone to judge them because they didn't keep sabbath. They were free from the Law, which Christ had removed (Colossians 2:14). The Grace believer does have a sabbath kind of rest. E. Schuyler English regarding the word *sabbatismos*, "*Sabbatismos* is not the ordinary word used for "sabbath" either, but is derived from *sabbaton* and refers to the celebration of the sabbath, or the sabbath's joyful rest. It is used here then because, the case having been proved that there is another rest beyond God's creation-rest and the Canaan-rest, declaration is thus made that a different and better rest, a

³⁴³ The verb שָׁבַת *shabat* is a form of sabbath. Harkavy lists as first definition, "to cease" and secondly, "to rest." (op cit. p. 695). cf Genesis 2:2; Exodus 31:17. In this last case it is a simple Qal Perfect indicating that God stopped an activity.

heavenly rest, is forthcoming.”³⁴⁴ God previously set out with boundaries for this sabbath rest for us (Hebrews 4:7). Because Joshua did not give the people the rest which God had promised due to their unbelief, a rest remains for the Grace believer (vv. 6, 8, 9). This sabbath rest is not a cessation of physical labor as under the Law. It is a spiritual rest from our works (v. 10). God’s works were completed from the foundation of the world (v. 3). They were completed in Christ, Whom God foreknew as a slain lamb before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20-21). God chose the believer to be holy and blameless in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). The grace believer who knows this is able to rest. He rests from his work to gain God’s approval. He rests from his work to enter God’s presence.

The Old Testament idea of being worthy to stand in God’s presence, to speak with God is often reiterated today by Grace believers who have failed to see that in God’s decree, there is a sabbath type rest available for him. This rest allows him free access to the throne of grace, where the believer sits in Christ (Hebrews 4:16; Ephesians 2:5,6). The throne is not the throne of the believer’s works or merits but of grace.

All these details are part of God’s present plan for this rule of life [dispensation]. Each is part of God’s decree. He planned it in the past, though only He knew that part of His plan. That plan has now been revealed and He is working it out in the present.

God’s Decree and Human Government

In addition to matters of initial salvation and spiritual growth, God’s decree also involves earthly activities, governments, kings, people. God made all men

³⁴⁴ E. Schuyler English, *Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Traveler’s Rest, South Carolina: Southern Bible House, 1955, p. 119.

from one man [Adam] (Acts 17:26). God set out the boundaries for mankind upon the earth. He fixed the times and boundaries of where Nations exist. Many nations have lived and died. Every people group that has existed upon the earth, lived within the time frame God marked off on His “calendar”. Every people group was limited in their dwelling by the boundaries which God imposed. God exercised His sovereignty in history past and the history which is yet come.

Some believers might, by observation, question God’s sovereignty in human government. Observing the immorality of those in power, the persecution of believers and the blatant opposition to righteousness, it is easy to wonder what God is doing. Some use the word *theodicy* to describe the issue of God’s righteousness as it relates to the presence of evil. This word combines the Greek words for God and justice.³⁴⁵ J. Carl Laney listed three errors in some theodicies. First, “God can’t prevent all evil,” then “God won’t prevent all evil,” and Evil is not reality.”³⁴⁶ The issue of theodicy is men attempting to defend God’s righteousness against the faulty understanding of men. We have seen that God is righteous in all He does. God can allow evil activities to play a role in His overall plan without violating His righteousness.

The Scriptures are clear regarding God’s sovereign authority in human government. Human government is part of Satan’s cosmos [world] system. It is his means of attempting to control or box in the sin natures of his subjects - unsaved men. God’s estimate of earthly governments is seen in Daniel 7 where four governments are pictured as

³⁴⁵ John S. Feinberg, “Theodicy,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, op cit. p. 1083.

³⁴⁶ Laney, op cit. pp. 141-142.

wild beasts. Yet even these beastly governments, directed and exercised by Satan, are under God's sovereignty.

The Apostle Paul, writing while under the unrighteous, idolatrous and immoral Roman government, assured the saints living in Rome, "for there is no authority except that by God, but the ones existing have been set in order by God." (Romans 13:1). The verb *tasso* [τάσσω] is the act of setting in order or organizing. In this context it expresses the idea of a calendar and events set in their order to be fulfilled. The picture is that God put down on His calendar [decree] the time during which the Roman government would be in authority. God had decreed that the Romans would rule.

When Daniel lived in Babylon under their idolatrous rule, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king, "That the Most High is ruler over the kingdoms of men and He gives it to whom He wishes, and sets over it the basest of men." (Daniel 4:17b, 25). God is the one ruling but He rules through those men who are in authority. He is the one who places rulers in their position of authority.

As well as placing kings in their position of authority, God also deposes kings (Daniel 2:21). 1 Kings 22 records God's sovereign work through spirit beings and prophets to depose Ahab (1 Kings 22:20). God allowed a fallen spirit being to be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (v. 22). Disguised, Ahab went off to war and was killed by the random arrow of a bowman, an arrow which found the very joint in Ahab's armor (vv. 30, 34). God deposed Belshazzar, the son or grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, through Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:25-31). God remains sovereign.

How do we reconcile God's righteousness with the unrighteous Babylonian and Roman governments? We must

understand what God is accomplishing through means of human government. God has demonstrated in the past from the time of Babel to the time of Abraham, that mankind fails under human government. When Noah and his family disembarked from the ark, God gave them governmental rules to be enforced regarding the penalty for murder (Genesis 9:5, 6). However, the first city, built in opposition to God's instructions to scatter and fill the earth (Genesis 9:6, 11:3-4) was the kingdom of a man named Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10). Nimrod means "rebel." The description, "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord." is better translated "He was a mighty hunter against the Lord"³⁴⁷ or "He was a hunter of the mighty before the Lord." The first human government was quickly perverted from God's instructions. The first ruler Nimrod became well known as one who opposed even hunted those who were mighty before God. Therefore, was it God's purpose to make men righteous through such instructions or was it His purpose to demonstrate that men fail?

God used Pharaoh to demonstrate His power to Israel while delivering them from Egypt (Romans 9:17). God had used Egypt and Joseph to divinely provide for Israel. The nation of Israel started in the land, but God had prophesied in His first covenant to Abraham that his descendants would be sojourners in a foreign land (Genesis 15:13). His descendants would serve as slaves the people of the foreign land and would be afflicted. God cause this to happen, so the people would see His power and would know that their possession of the land was by His divine power, not their own (Deuteronomy 8:10-18; Romans 9:17). They

³⁴⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, Victor Books: Wheaton, IL., 1990, p. 49.

possessed the land because of God, not their own righteousness (Deuteronomy 9:4). For this reason, when Moses went before Pharaoh, God strengthened Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh would not be moved to human pity or compassion (Exodus 4:21; 7:3, 13 et al). God then displayed His power to the nation Israel. God exercised His sovereignty in the unrighteous government of Egypt and in the unrighteous heart of the king to demonstrate something about Himself.

God also demonstrated His righteous judgment through His sovereign actions in governments. Both the Assyrian and Babylonian governments were used by God to punish Israel and then Judah (Isaiah 10:5-7; Jeremiah 50:23; 51:20-24). God used their aggressive natures to accomplish this. To conquer other nations was in the heart of the Assyrians, but they did not intend or plan it, implying that God put it in his heart (Isaiah 10:7). God punished Assyria severely because of their ferocity (Isaiah 10:12-15). Habakkuk complained to God about the unrighteousness he saw among his own people Israel (Habakkuk 1:2-4). However, when God explained that He would use the Babylonians to punish Judah, Habakkuk could not understand how God could use a nation which was even more unrighteous than Judah (Habakkuk 1:12-17). The rest of Habakkuk's prophecy records God's woes against that violent nation, and Habakkuk's song of worship regarding God's past work and how it assured him of a future for Judah. With both the Assyrians and Babylonians, God held them responsible for their actions though in His sovereignty He used them to judge His people.

God has also sovereignly used kings and people in government to accomplish His good and faithful purpose. 150 years prior to his rule, God named Cyrus through the

prophet Isaiah (44:28; 45:1). Jehovah stirred up Cyrus' spirit to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23). God divinely protected Israel from annihilation by bringing a Jewish queen into favor with the the Persian King Ahasuerus [Xerxes] (Esther 2:15-17). Her uncle Mordecai told her, "And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

The final human ruler over this world system will be the man of lawlessness also known as the Beast (Revelations 17:10-13). When he comes on the scene it will be by Satan's power. God puts the idea of placing their kingdoms in the control of this man into the minds of the world's rulers (Revelation 13:2-4; 17:17). In fact, Satan can not bring him on the seen until God permits, for God the Spirit is presently restraining him (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8). It will be God the Son who will personally judge and make war against him (Revelation 19:11, 20).

One practical application of this truth to the believer involves his willing submission to earthly government. Paul wrote the Romans, "Let every individual submit to the authorities being over *him*" (Romans 13:1). He explained that those authorities were placed in their position by God (v. 2). God's chief rule for human government is to maintain order, and therefore, those in government bear the sword, i.e. to enforce order (v. 4). Human government has never been intended to enforce morality in our refined biblical sense. Rather, it uses the threat of death to keep some from causing others harm. One response of the believer should be his willingness to pay his taxes (vv. 7-8).

What if the authorities over the believer require him to engage in or cease from an activity God has spoken? In the future the world will be forced to worship the world-ruler (Revelation 13:11-17). Yet this runs contrary to God's

revelation against worshipping other gods or idols. God's people will not obey and will be victors, paying the price of death (Revelation 15:2-4). When the apostles were told to cease speaking in the name of Jesus, Peter replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). However, when they suffered, they did not complain about this as an injustice, but departed "rejoicing that they were considered worthy to be shames for His name" (Acts 5:41). They obeyed God but paid the consequences.

Perhaps like the Jews of Moses' or Esther's day, believers today might question what God could possibly be accomplishing through the actions of governments which at so many points seem opposed to God. Yet the divinely recorded history provides examples that assure believers that God is still sovereignly in control. God's purposes in specific events may not be clear at the present but be assured, God remains good, righteous and faithful.

Trinitarianism

The Bible presents us with two truths which at first seem to be incongruous, God is one, and three are God. Some choose to call this a mystery (not the Biblical definition), by which they mean it is a truth which is just too hard to really understand. Biblical Trinitarianism is the synthesis of the Biblical revelation on these two sets of facts. It is the teaching concerning the Trinity, the Three in One: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. “That God is triune is a teaching peculiar to Christianity. It is hardly found at all in philosophical theisms, and only rarely in the history of non-Christian religious consciousness.”³⁴⁸

Monotheism

This synthesis begins with the Bible’s teaching that there is only one God! Monotheism describes belief in one God, from *mono* one or only, and *theos* god. In Deuteronomy 6:4 Israel heard that Jehovah is one God. Man’s fallen human nature is bent toward idolatry. Man’s history involves the worship of multiple gods. When God gave the law to Israel, one of the points He emphasized is that there is but one God and not many. This was to be a contrast between Israel and the nations around them. The statement that there is only one God did not mean that Israel was allowed only one God, or for us that there is only one God, but that only one God exists anywhere, period! God taunted Israel with her foolish idolatry in Isaiah. He told them, “I am Jehovah, and no other, no other God beside Me.” “Before Me no god was formed, and after Me none shall exist, none but Me, the Lord...” (Isaiah 45:5; cf. 43:10, 11; see also 44:6; 45:21).

Paul agreed that there is one God (Romans 3:30; 1 Timothy 2:5). He reminded the Thessalonians that after they

³⁴⁸ Thomas Oden, Vol I, op cit. p. 186.

believed, they abandoned their false gods and “Turn to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). While idols and demons are called gods they are not real gods; they are not the true God (1 Corinthians 8:4). There is one true God. Biblical Trinitarianism does not contradict this fact. Biblical Trinitarianism is monotheistic [belief in one God].

Monotheism does not indicate the number of persons who are one God, but the singularity of essence. In this way, God is one in a different way than God is three. One refers to the divine nature, while three refers to the number of persons who share that nature. Cornelius Plantinga expressed this, “These three are wonderfully unified by their common divinity, that is, by the possession by each [one of them] of the whole generic divine essence-³⁴⁹” “Generic essence” is a good expression of what we find in Scripture. The essence does not have personality of itself. The three persons Father, Son and Spirit give individualization to that single essence.

Sharing One Name

We then must consider passages which reveal more than one person being God, called God or related as God. These passages do not state the truth of the Trinity but may imply it and are its basis. What is interesting is that many of these passages are found in the Old Testament, which Trinitarians agree supported monotheism and was not Trinitarian, (though it is not anti-Trinitarian). In fact the key text for Israel’s monotheism, Deuteronomy 6:4 can be literally translated, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our Gods,

³⁴⁹ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra & Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 27-28, cited by Peter Toon, *Our Triune God*, Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 1996, p. 59

the LORD is one.”³⁵⁰ David, himself, recognized two distinct persons who were both God. “The LORD says to my Lord” (Psalm 110:1). He wrote of one as his Lord [Adonai] and one as Jehovah [LORD]. Yet David was a monotheist living under the Mosaic Law, which forbid having other gods. Therefore, if David did not recognize his Adonai as being in some sense equal with Jehovah, David was in violation of that Law. This does not mean that David was a Trinitarian but it demonstrates that even with the limited revelation concerning the Godhead available to him, he did see more than one person being God. Isaiah recorded the activity of three who are identified as Jehovah, interact with one another, speak to one another, and cooperate. In Isaiah 48:16 we read of the Lord God who sent Me, and His Spirit also was involved in the sending. The Me is identified as “Jehovah, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel” (v. 17). Thus, we have the Father and Spirit sending the Son. In Isaiah 61:1 Jehovah (identified in 60:16, 22) is anointed by Jehovah, as Adonai God puts His Spirit upon Him. Isaiah 44:6 identifies two who are both called Jehovah, Jehovah, the King of Israel and Israel’s Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts (cf. 49:7 where He is identified as Israel’s Redeemer). Jehovah spoke to Hosea about saving Judah by means of Jehovah their God (Hosea 1:4, 7). While the Old Testament established the existence of only one God, it did not contradict the idea that the one God is more than one person. In fact it appears that some Old Testament Israelis were aware of more than one who was God, though it is unlikely they understood the idea of the Trinity as we do.

³⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 193. Merrill Unger also noted that the text has *ehad* not *yahid*. The former expresses, “compound unity” and the later “single.” *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol I, Chicago: Moody Press, 1981, p. 242.

In the New Testament, the doctrine of the Trinity comes into focus. The Old Testament passages which hinted at the Trinity, find their explanation in plain statements. When Jesus declared Himself equal with God, we understand how David could have a Lord distinct from Jehovah. When Jesus spoke of being sent from the Father, we are able to understand Isaiah's statements. Jesus directly applied Isaiah 61:1-2a to Himself (Luke 4:18-19). When Jesus united three persons in one name, we understand how Isaiah could relate three as each being Jehovah and yet in some sense three distinct persons. The New Testament limits the number of persons who are God to three and reveals them to be the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is necessary for us to look at the Scriptures which plainly unite more than one person to the title God, the characteristics of God, the prerogatives of God and the works of God.

Ontological and Economic

One hindrance to our understanding the Trinity are the relationships the three persons have with one another. When we study God, we observe both ontological and economic relationships between them. Their ontological relationships involve all that is true of them as God. Each is God. Each equally possesses and can use all of the divine nature. On an ontological level, each one sees Himself as being equal to the other two persons, and they being equal to Him. Kevin Giles uses the word immanent for this relationship.³⁵¹ "The immanent Trinity is God present to himself, God in his own inner life (Latin *in se*). In other words, the immanent Trinity is the transcendent Trinity, the triune God as he is even if there were no created world. In

³⁵¹ We used immanent in its normal theological use, of God's presence to His creation (see God's essence).

this usage the word *immanent* means “inherent in.” The idea is that God is inherently triune.”³⁵²

Their economic relationships revolve around the out working of their plan, a plan concerning which they counseled together (Acts 2:23).³⁵³ God is not a God of disorder and therefore, the members of the Trinity do not trip over one another trying to do the same work.³⁵⁴ Consider; only one person of the Godhead became man, lived among man, died on a cross and rose again. While the Son did this, the Father and Spirit carried out works relative to His incarnation. These relationships were related to time. Most

³⁵² Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006, p. 249). Giles is an egalitarian. His book defends an orthodox view of the Trinity against attempts to find an eternal subordination of the Son as an example for the subordination of women. I too am a complimentary, but disagree with their view of the Trinity.

³⁵³ The noun *boulh* is a decision or choice which results from council or deliberation. 1 Corinthians 4:5 appears to be the one New Testament exception to this principle. The idea is then that the determination of God was chosen in council by the members of the Trinity. (see the section on God’s decree).

³⁵⁴ The economic relationships have given rise to faulty understandings regarding the Trinity such as the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. Eusebius Pamphilus wrote the creed agreed upon at Nice in AD 325. It stated, “We believe ... and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father; God of God, light of light, true God or true God begotten, not made” He explained reason for the expression begotten, “the word made, they said, was common to the other creatures which were made by the Son, and to which he has nothing similar; and that therefore he is not made like those who were created by himself, but is of a more excellent substance than any created being. The divine oracles inform us, that he was of the Father, by a mode of generation, which can neither be conceived nor expressed by any created intelligence.” *Ecclesiastical History*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint 1991, pp. 44-45.

of the problems people have with the Trinity arise from a failure to identify economic relationships. Man sees the Son in subordination to the Father's will and deduces that He is eternally subordinate. Subordination is economic. Ontologically, the Son is not subordinate to the Father. It is necessary to distinguish which relationships are eternal and which are temporary.

Finally, we must realize that we are finite beings, one person existing in one single, limited essence. No two persons share a single human nature. God is not human. God is spirit and infinite spirit at that. God's spirit essence is one of the reasons that the three can indeed be equal. They can each equally use every part of their nature at the same time without limitation. That could never happen in a human nature. To illustrate, three persons would have to take turns using a human hand if one wished to eat cake, one wished to swim underwater and one wished to dribble a basketball. It would be impossible to do all three simultaneously with the same hand, due to the limitations of a physical human nature. Therefore, Biblical Trinitarianism isn't impossible to understand, it isn't even hard to understand; it's just different than anything which we might experience in this created universe. God is different! God is unique and in that we praise Him.

God is more than one person.

A plurality of persons is indicated in several Old Testament passages. Some passages use the plural title of God [elohim- אלהים] with the plural verb and/or the plural pronoun. Normally, this plural noun is used with the singular verb or pronoun, therefore, the occurrences with the plural

are unusual.³⁵⁵ We find Genesis 1:26, “Let US make man in our image”. Genesis 3:22 reads “Now man has become like one of US”. “Let US go down and see...” (Genesis 11:7). Finally “Whom shall I send, and who will go for US” (Isaiah 6:8). Each of these involves God speaking of Himself with a plural pronoun.

Some passages speak of more than one person being God. Hosea 1:4 and 7 relate two persons both called Jehovah. In verse four we find, “Then Jehovah said to him ...” and then in verse seven, “yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by Jehovah their God.” Isaiah 44:6 relates two persons. “Thus says Jehovah, King of Israel, and His Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts.” Isaiah 48:12 & 16, 17 relates three persons. Verses twelve introduces the first “I am He, I the First, I the Last...” then verse 16 adds, “I have not spoken in secret... the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me” and finally verse 17 states “Thus says Jehovah, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am Jehovah your God...” Isaiah 61:1 relates three persons. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because Jehovah has anointed Me.” The Me is “Jehovah your Savior” in 60:16 (remember chapter and verse divisions were not original and therefore, they break the thought). Jesus quoted this in Luke 4:18 and identified Himself as the “Me.” Haggai 2:4,5, 7 relates three

³⁵⁵ John Feinberg has an extended discussion of the plural noun *elohim*. op cit. pp. 448-450. Some interpret these plurals as “plural of majesty” that is, a plural used of a single individual due to the individual’s majestic character. George Bush commented, “The evidence, however, drawn by some from this fact in proof of the doctrine of the Trinity, is not in itself conclusive, as similar idiom in Hebrew in respect to words denoting *rank, authority, eminence, majesty*, is by no means uncommon.” “The use of the plural in such cases seems to be merely for the purpose of giving to the word greater *fulness, emphasis, and intensity* of meaning.” *Notes on Genesis, vol I*, Minneapolis: James & Klock Publishing Co, reprint 1976, p. 26.

persons. First, verse four reads, “Says Jehovah of hosts ... so my Spirit remains (v. 5) ... they shall come to the Desire of Nations” (v. 7). Each of these Old Testament texts have two or three persons called God, or addressing each other as God. We wouldn’t call Old Testament saints trinitarians in their theology, but their statements indicate some understanding broader than unitarian monotheism.

Only Three are God

New Testament revelation clarifies that only three are God. There are not four or more who are God, but only three. First are passages which equate two persons as God. In John 10:30 Jesus identified Himself and the Father as being One. One is a neuter adjective [hen εν]. The neuter adjective meant one thing. In the context, this one thing is God’s attributes of power and truth pictured as a secure hold in the Father and Son’s hand. Jesus’ enemies clearly understood His statement to be blasphemy and took up stones to stone Him for this statement. In John 5:17-29 Jesus identified the Father as uniquely [ιδιον ιδιον] His Father. This meant that He was making Himself “equal things” with God. Equal things is a neuter form of *isos* [ισος]. By using *idios* Jesus was claiming a unique relationship to the Father, one which indicated that He himself is God. Jesus identified the Spirit as being the very same kind [αλλος] of Helper that Jesus had been (John 14:16). Therefore, if He were God, this would also be true of the Spirit. Therefore, Father and Son are equal, and Son and Spirit are equal.

Three Persons Tied to Divine Activities

Other texts associate these three Persons with divine activities. Regarding spiritual gifts, it is the same Spirit, same Lord, same God (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Each one has a distinct yet harmonious role in the gifts given to believers. When Paul encouraged the Ephesians with the genuine unity,

he wrote of one Spirit, one Lord, one God even Father (Ephesians 4:4-6). In Christ's earthly ministry, the One who sent John (the Father), told him that He could identify the One baptizing by the Spirit (the Son), by seeing the Spirit descend and remain upon Him (John 1:29-34). Three are the source of grace and peace: the One who is, and the One who was, and the One who is coming (the Father), the seven Spirits before the throne, Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness and firstborn from among the dead, the One ruling the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:4-5).

Paul wished for God to provide him a good journey to see the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:11). The verb "direct" [NASB] is a singular verb. However, it has a double subject, "our God and Father and Jesus our Lord." Grammatically, this should require a plural verb, but the singular supports the unity of the two persons, both of whom are God.

When Jesus instructed His disciples regarding the water baptism of disciples, He tied three to one name: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). He did not say, "in the names of," but a single name shared by the three.³⁵⁶ In this case the "name" could be "God," and this would be correct, depending upon how we understand "God." In this case, we can't read "God" and substitute "Father." It is not likely that Jesus was using "name" of a title, but of character. Therefore, Jesus was speaking about individuals being baptized with reference to the character of God, exhibited by each of the three persons who share that character. This was not intended to be a formula which must be spoken over the baptismal candidate, but focuses on the

³⁵⁶ Kevin Giles (op cit), notes the significance of the singular, and each person being differentiated in connection with that name. (p. 125).

nature of baptism. Later teaching in Paul's letters tied water baptism to Spirit baptism which unites believers in Christ, and therefore, also in the Father and Spirit (cf 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Romans 8:8-9). By water baptism, the individual is testifying to a union with all saints in relation to all three persons of the Trinity.

When Paul closed His second letter to the Corinthians, he saw each person providing the Corinthians a benefit. We read, "grace from the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love from God, and the fellowship from the Holy Spirit" (13:13). This passage is interesting because the Father (the God) is placed between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit. Each is tied to a work or benefit. This passage may illuminate the "name" issue in Matthew 28:19. That union involves grace, love and fellowship. Each are from God, but each provided by a different person of the Godhead.

Three Persons are called or declared to be God.

Now, we will consider passages in which these three are individually called God, either by the writer, or others in the context. We begin with the Father. He is "One God the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:6). Grammatically, this is the same kind of construction in the final clause of John 1:1, "the Word was God." Similarly we find that "One God the Father" indwells us (Ephesians 4:6). He is "the God even Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6). The title Father is connected to our Lord Jesus Christ. In the future, after the Son has ruled, the Son will turn the kingdom over to "the God even *the* Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24). The Father, the God sealed the Son (John 6:27).

The Son is called God. He personally claimed to be God. He told Satan, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." (Matthew 4:7). This was in response to Satan's words, "Since you *are* the Son of the God..." (v. 6). Jesus' response

was not that He should not tempt the Lord God, but that Satan should not tempt Christ. The Son agreed with the High-priest, who questioned, “Are you the Christ, the Son of God?” (Matthew 26:63-64; John 9:35-38; 10:34-38). He didn’t deny, but rather said, “You said it!” He called Himself the I AM, God’s Old Testament name Jehovah (John 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5, 6, 8; 4:26; 6:20; 13:19). This title is important in the John’s gospel. The Father called Him God in Psalm 2. The writer of Hebrews applied that statement to Jesus (Hebrews 1:8, 9). Others called Him God: Matthew (Matthew 1:23); Paul (Philippians 2:6,7; Acts 20:28), “Our Great God even Savior Jesus Christ“ (Titus 2:13); Peter, “Our God even Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1); John (1 John 5:20; John 1:1, 18; Revelation 1:8, 11).

The Spirit is called God. He is the Spirit of God (Matthew 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:11-12). This can be “the Spirit who is God.” “Of God” [του θεου] is in the Genitive case. The common use of the Genitive is further description. “A quality that could have been described by an adjective might be put in the genitive. This use of the genitive is nearest to the basic meaning of the case.”³⁵⁷ He is God and by dwelling in the believer, He constitutes the believer a temple of the God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). He is the Spirit of the Living God (2 Corinthians 3:3). Paul called Him the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Peter called Him God. When Ananias and Saphira lied, Peter said that they had not lied to men but to God, to the Spirit.(Acts 5:3-4).

Most do not question that the Father and Son are genuine persons. However, some question whether the Spirit is a person or simply God’s spirit, that is, an extension of God in the form of God’s actions. Yet the Spirit can be lied

³⁵⁷ David Alan Black, *It’s Still Greek To Me*, op cit. p. 50.

to and grieved. He can reason, choose and desire. None of these are true of impersonal power or force. Additionally, several of the above passages tied the Spirit with the Father and Son, expecting the reader to understand Him to be a person like the first two.

Three Persons have the characteristics which are ascribed to God

We begin this section considering characteristics or attributes (not used in the technical sense) which are shared by all three Persons. We will attempt to focus on characteristics which are unique to God. Therefore, holy is applied to angels, and isn't a unique characteristic of God. However, some characteristics are attributed to God with special emphasis. Therefore, while creatures may love, love is given special emphasis when John writes, "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Characteristics of God's Essence

God is eternal (Romans 16:26). We saw that other things are described as eternal, but only God is eternal in the absolute sense, that God has no beginning, ending, and does not change. The Father is eternal (1 Timothy 1:17). The Son is eternal "Father of eternity" (Isaiah 9:6). "Eternal Father" is not an accurate translation. The Spirit is eternal (Hebrews 9:14).

God is present everywhere (omnipresent), because God's essence is immense (Jeremiah 23:23-24). The Father is present everywhere (Matthew 6:4, 6). The Son is present everywhere. John 3:13 records Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. He told Nicodemus that the Son of man was "the

one in heaven.”³⁵⁸ His omnipresence is also emphasized in Matthew 18:20; 28:20; and Hebrews 13:5. The Spirit is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10). David did not know where he could go away from God’s Spirit.

God is self-existent. This means that no one created or made God. The Latin expression was *aseity*. In Exodus 3:14 we read, “I AM that I AM. The Son is self-existent. According to John 1:1-3, He caused everything that ever came into existence to come into existence. Therefore, if He had a beginning or a cause, He was His own cause and not the product of another. He could not have derived from the Father by begetting or creation. Therefore, we conclude that He is self-existent. By similar reasoning, 1 Corinthians 8:6 states that one God the Father *exists*. So, the Father is self-existent. I am aware of no specific statement regarding the Spirit’s self-existence. Yet, being identified as God, it is safe to say that this is also true of Him.

God is life (Matthew 26:63). God does not derive life from another. The Father is life (John 6:57). The Son is life (Colossians 3:4; John 14:6; 1 John 1:2; 5:20). The Spirit is life (Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6). God is light (1 John 1:5). Light is the visible expression of God’s life by means of activity. Light is not a moral term, aside from God being righteous. The Father is the father of lights (James 1:17). The Son is light, even the light of the world (John 1:4, 9; 8:12; 9:5). The Spirit is light (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

God’s Attributes

God is Truth (1 Thessalonians 1:9). God is genuine, sees all things accurately and answers accurately to all He

³⁵⁸ These words are omitted at the end of the verse in some Greek texts. They are omitted in some of the earliest texts, but also comprise a harder reading. It is more likely that the words were omitted by scribes who didn’t understand Christ’s full deity.

knows. The Father is truth (John 3:33). The Son is truth (John 14:6). The Spirit is truth (John 14:17; 15:26). God is Good (Mark 10:18). Good is not a moral term but one of well-being and happiness. The Father is good (Matthew 7:11). The Son is good (Romans 9:3 “blessed”, 1 Timothy 6:15 where “blessed” is “happy”). The Spirit is good (Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 143:10). God is Holy (Leviticus 19:2). God is unique to Himself, and never in conflict with His nature. The attribute of holiness is applied to the Father (John 17:11), the Son (Acts 4:27, 30), and the Spirit (Romans 1:4; Ephesians 4:30). God knows all things (omniscience). The Father is omniscient (Matthew 6:8). The Son is omniscient (John 1:47-48; 2:24-25). The Spirit is omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

God’s Prerogatives

Three Persons exercise or experience the prerogatives of God. A prerogative is a “special right or privilege, esp. of one holding a certain rank or status.”³⁵⁹ Therefore, these are unique to God.

When John fell before the angel, he was told that God alone can be worshipped, and that the angel was a fellow servant (Revelation 22:8, 9). Worship belongs uniquely to God. It is God’s prerogative to receive worship. The Father is worshipped (John 4:23). The Son is worshipped (John 20:28; 9:28). Regarding the Spirit, the word worship is not used specifically of Him. However, the activities of worship are directed to the Spirit. Paul called Him “the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29). He is also addressed with the Father and Son in Isaiah 6:3, 8, and is joined as the source of divine activity in Revelation 1:4.

³⁵⁹ [Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary Revised Edition, p. 541].

God alone is to be the object of faith, for God alone can make sure promises (Mark 11:22). The Father is the object of faith (John 5:25; Romans 4:24). The Son is the object of faith (John 1:12; Acts 16:30). The Spirit is the object of faith (Galatians 3:14). He is the promised Spirit. Faith requires a promise which becomes hope, and hope is the basis of faith.

God alone gives the good gifts (James 1:17). Things given or acquired through the world system are ultimately not good. The Father gives gifts (1 Corinthians 12:18, 24). The Son gives gifts (Ephesians 4:8, 11). The Spirit gives spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7-8).

When David sinned, he acknowledged that he has sinned only against God (Psalm 51:4). This is because God defines sin. The act of sin, may involve others, but it is an act of lawlessness against God. Therefore, one can only sin against God. The Father can be sinned against (Daniel 9:11; Romans 3:23). The Son can be sinned against (1 Corinthians 8:12). This passage sees Jesus Christ connected to His body the church. An action with disregard for the body is then seen not as a sin against the body but against the Christ. The Spirit could be sinned against (Matthew 12:31).

God alone is sovereign, that is, He has absolute power, and is not directed by others. Job came to see that no purpose of God's can be stopped. The Father is sovereign (Matthew 11:25-27). The Son is sovereign (1 Timothy 6:15). The word translated "Sovereign" in the New American Standard Bible and "Potentate" Authorized Version is a word meaning powerful one, one able to do something, one who rules with absolute power and sovereignty.³⁶⁰ The Spirit is

³⁶⁰ W. Grundmann, "Dynamai", et al in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985, pp. 186-191. p.187

sovereign (Isaiah 40:13). He exhibits sovereignty in His choice of gifts for individual believers (1 Corinthians 12:11). In this passage “as He *wills*” translates *boulomia*, the act of choosing or determining.

The Works of God

Similar to prerogatives are the works of God. These are works unique to God. God is creator (Isaiah 45:18). The Father created (1 Corinthians 8:6). The Son created (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). The Spirit created (Job 26:13). He also beautified the heavens. (John 33:4; Psalm 104:30). God makes alive or raises the dead (Luke 20:37, 38; 2 Corinthians 1:9). The Father raises the dead and makes alive (John 5:21; Ephesians 2:5). The Son raises the dead and makes alive (John 5:21; 1 Corinthians 15:22). The Spirit raises the dead and makes alive (Romans 8:11). God alone can save and be savior (Isaiah 43:11). This idea is repeated often in Isaiah and the prophets.³⁶¹ The Father forgives sins and saves (Mark 2:6-7; Acts 8:22).³⁶² The Son forgives sins and saves (Luke 5:20; Titus 2:13). The Spirit saves (Titus 3:5). He regenerates or affects the birth from above (John 3:3-6).

Three are connected as one yet remain distinct

God is one spirit essence in which the attributes inhere. The Scriptures do not teach the existence of three spirit essences. Yet the Scriptures distinguish three persons who are one God, or possess the one spirit essence. This would be akin to three humans sharing one human nature.

³⁶¹ An examination of the many statements of God’s saving actions recorded by the Old Testament prophets demonstrates that physical salvation or deliverance is more likely in view than spiritual salvation as explained in the New Testament.

³⁶² The act of forgiving sins, while here viewed as a work, could also be classified under God’s prerogatives.

The limitations of humanity do not allow for this. However, God is infinite, and His nature does allow for the total and simultaneous sharing by three divine Persons.

God's oneness has given rise to some heretical attempts to explain God's oneness and threeness. Dynamic monarchianism is the view that only one is the cause of all things.³⁶³ Those holding this view were not only monotheists, but unitarians, believing that only one person could possess the divine nature. Since only one person could be God, the other persons, usually just the Son, were creations, subject to God. "Jesus was not of the same nature as the Father, but rather was a mere man who was adopted to be God's Son."³⁶⁴ Our previous studies have demonstrated that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all identified as God, by titles, direct attribution, attributes, works, and prerogatives. Therefore, dynamic monarchianism does not reflect the Biblical revelation regarding the Trinity.

Modalistic monarchianism (Sebellianism) is the errant view that only one person is God, but is distinguished from dynamic monarchianism by teaching that this one person reveals Himself in different modes. Therefore, the Son and Spirit were also God, but not different persons. They were merely the same person expressed in different modes. For traditional Modalists, the designations "Son" and "Spirit" are not distinctions within the Godhead, but different names of God under different situations or actions.³⁶⁵ Traditional modalism taught that the Father was God, and the Son and Spirit were just different titles. This

³⁶³ Monarchian meant *monos*, one or only, and *arche*, origin, therefore, single origin or source. See Feinberg, *op cit*, p. 474.

³⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 475.

³⁶⁵ *ibid.* p. 475.

lead to patropassionism or the teaching that the Father suffered on the cross, because He is the Son. Some pentecostal groups are also modalists, but teach that Jesus is the person, and the Father is just another expression of Jesus.³⁶⁶ These groups have made much of baptizing in the name of Jesus, some even teaching that baptizing in the three names as indicated in Matthew 28:19 is inaccurate and does not bring salvation (hence these are unbelievers, as they hold to baptismal regeneration).³⁶⁷

What modalistic monarchianism does not adequately allow for, is the interaction between the Persons of the Trinity. How can one person carry on a conversation with Himself, without being considered crazy? Yet the Son prayed to the Father on several occasions.³⁶⁸ John 17 records Jesus' communication to the Father, in an I and you relationship. He said, "I have glorified You...completing the works which You gave to me to do" (v. 4). Then He asked, "And now,

³⁶⁶ See Carl Brumbeck, *God in Three Persons*, Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1959, p. 12. This was an error in the United Pentecostal Church as well as some other Pentecostal groups. James White has an article [Loving the Trinity](#) on his website [Equip.org](#) which address oneness doctrine, and deals with the errant views of the musical group Phillips, Craig, and Dean which are pastors in a group of pentecostal churches noted for both modalism and baptismal regeneration.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.* p. 161ff. This chapter deals with the group's position on baptismal regeneration. Brumbeck, however, does not wish to claim that these people are unbelievers. "To me, it is a mistake for us to attempt to exclude them from the kingdom, for, no matter how much we may object to their false teaching and proselyting tactics, we must admit that the overwhelming majority of them have experienced the new birth and the baptism with the Spirit." pp. 14-15. Because Brumbeck placed stock in the pentecostal acts of the Spirit, he is forced to conclude that these are believers despite their contradiction with essential truths.

³⁶⁸ In a personal conversation with a oneness Pentecostal, he stated that indeed "Jesus" was talking and praying to Himself.

You, Father, glorify Me” (v. 5). In John 11:41-42 He spoke to the Father before those gathered at Lazarus’ tomb, “... I thank You that You heard Me, I know that You always hear Me...” When the Son was transfigured before three of His disciples, the Father spoke out of heaven while the Son was present, “This one is My beloved Son” (Matthew 17:5). When the Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke, and the Spirit descended upon the Son. “And the Holy Spirit, in a bodily form like a dove, descended upon Him (the Son), and a voice came from heaven, which said, You are my beloved Son; in You I am well pleased. (Luke 3:22). How can one person play three roles at the same time? The persons speak to one another. Unless one person is speaking to Himself or misleading others to think there are three persons, these passages demonstrate that there are three distinct persons who are this one God.

We also find passages in which the persons function together with distinct works. These also do not reflect modalism. The Son asked the Father to send the Spirit (John 14:16). The Son and the Father sent the Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7). Was this the Spirit sending Himself, or asking Himself to send Himself? In John 16:13 Christ explained that the Spirit would speak what He heard, and He would not speak from Himself. Yet, if He is one person, how can his speaking not be from himself? The Father raised the Son (e.g. Acts 10:40). At the time of His resurrection, the Father exalted the Son and graciously gave to Him a name above every name (Philippians 2:9). Did He exalt Himself, or as is the natural sense of the text, do we have interaction between two persons? Hebrews one records the words of the Father to the Son, “You are my Son, Today I have begotten you” (Hebrews 1:5). In the same verse, “I will be to Him, a Father, and He will be to Me a Son.” In verse thirteen of the same

chapter, the Father said to the Son, “Sit at My right hand.” If there is but one person, how can He sit at His own right hand? The plain reading of the text does not support dynamic monarchianism, but trinitarianism.

The Scriptures present one God. The Father and Son are one essence (John 10:30). The word “one” is singular and neuter. One indicates that the Father and Son are the same essence³⁶⁹ and attributes. This can be understood even without a knowledge of Greek, for in this context, one refers to the Father’s “hand” and the Son’s “hand.” They are one hand. Hand is a metaphor for God’s power, not a literal hand, because God is spirit. Therefore, one does not indicate more than singularity of purpose. If purpose was what He meant, “no one would have accused him of blasphemy. When the Jews heard this, however, they took up stones to stone him.”³⁷⁰ Jesus applied one to essence by the use of “hand.”

The Father and Son can represent each other (John 14:8-11). Jesus told Philip that if he had seen the Son he had seen the Father (v. 9). Having just concluded our consideration of the monarchian errors, we know that He did not mean they are the same person. They are the same God. Their oneness is so full, that when the Son worked, He did exactly what the Father would have done. Additionally, They can not be two separate beings with two similar or identical

³⁶⁹ J. Carl Laney, *Moody Gospel Commentary: John*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1992, p. 195. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Leicester, England: Apollos, 1991, pp. 394-395. Carson questions the decisiveness of the “oneness” due to the application of the term to Jesus’ disciples in John 17:22. He concludes that we are not one as they are one. However, Jesus’ request for the disciples’ oneness was not earthly unity, but the oneness which exists in the body at the Father’s right hand in Christ.

³⁷⁰ Feinberg, *op cit*, p. 458.

divine essences. Such a situation would be insufficient for representing each other as completely as Jesus did. In Paul's words, "the fullness of the Godhead was settled down in Him bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

The Father and Son interpenetrate one another (John 14:10-11). This was Christ's explanation of seeing the Father in Himself. Their oneness is so full, that they are within each other as one. Being of one essence makes them totally interrelated. The Son is in the Father. The Father is in the Son.

Regarding the Spirit, the Son indicated their oneness, when He spoke of sending another Helper/Comforter. The word "another" is *allos* [ἄλλος] rather than *heteros* [ἕτερος] and indicates one of the same quality. "As such he would be another of the same kind as Jesus (John 14:16, *allon parakleton*)."³⁷¹ Therefore, the Spirit is of the same quality that the Son is! The Spirit must be of the same essence as the Son or else He could not be compared to the Son by the adjective ἄλλος. He would then be similar but not the same. Jesus had been with His disciples, the Spirit's presence assured them they were not being orphaned (John 14:18). Jesus had been the disciples' teacher. The Spirit would take over that function (John 14:26). Jesus had made His disciples witnesses, instructing them in what to say. The Spirit would now do this work (John 15:26-27). When the Spirit would come, He would convince the world, guide the disciples in the Truth, and glorify the Son (John 16:7-15). He can, because He and the Son are of the same essence. They are one Deity.

³⁷¹ Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007, p. 67.

The Father is the Son's own (John 5:18). The Son used the term *idios* [ἴδιος] which indicated a special relation to the Father distinct from Israel's relation to God as a Father. The Son and Father ideas in the Hebrew and Roman world did not involve the idea of generation but one of special privilege and position. It meant that the Son was a perfect representative of the Father (see above). The Son's use of the pronoun ἴδιος made this even more true, therefore the Jews accurately understood Him to be making Himself equal to God.

The Son is equal things with the Father (John 5:18). The word equal is not masculine but neuter. Normally its gender matches the words with which it is used. Father and Son are masculine nouns, therefore it does not derive gender from either. Equal things in this context explains how the Son is able to do the works of the Father and was working right up to that point just as the Father was working. Equal things points to their singular shared essence, with its abilities and qualities.

We can then conclude that the Son is God, equal with the Father. The Scriptures present the Spirit as equal with the Son. Using the algebraic formula if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$, we conclude that the Spirit is God, equal with the Father. This, briefly, is the Trinity as presented in Scripture.

The following are statements regarding the Trinity, from class notes presented at Dispensational Theological Seminary by Dr. H.L. Schafer. The clarity of these statements as representations of the teaching of God's Word recommend them to our consideration.

Five Important Statements on the Trinity³⁷²

³⁷² Dr. H.L. Schafer Trinitarianism notes from Theology 211 at Dispensational Theological Seminary, p. 9.

1. There can be no subordination, as to essential Being, but only in relationship to authority of the one person of the Godhead to another.
2. The subordination is only in respect to order and in relationship to this creation, and related to the present decree only.
3. There is no subordination as to the possession of the divine essence, but in the manner of personal subsistence and in manifestation, i.e. subordination is only in the manner which one manifests himself.
4. Certain personal operations are not performed by the three persons jointly but by distinct persons exclusively.³⁷³
5. This oneness of essence explain the fact that (while Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as respect to their personality, are distinct subsistences) there is an inter-communion of Persons and an immanence of one divine person in another which permits the peculiar work of one to be ascribed, with limitation, to either of the other, and the manifestation of one to be the manifestation of the other (cf. John 14).

He adds an additional 21 summary statements regarding biblical trinitarianism.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ For this, compare the Greek prepositions in relation to the persons: *ek* - Father; *dia* - Son; *en* - Holy Spirit.

³⁷⁴ Notes on Trinitarianism op cit pp. 10-11.

1. The Trinity is three eternally inter-constituted, inter-related, inter-existent, and therefore inseparable Persons within one Being and of one substance or essence.
2. The unity of God does not infer that He possesses but a single personality, but a oneness of essence and being, as the one and only deity. This unity is, therefore, a compound or composite unity rather than a simple or single unity.
3. Thus, the one indivisible divine essence, as a unity, exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that each person possesses the whole essence, and yet is constituted a distinct person by certain incommunicable properties not possessed in common with the others.
4. God is thus not one and three, but one in three.
5. Therefore, the essence is not one constituent factor by itself, apart from the persons, nor the persons three constituent factors by themselves, apart from the essence.
6. The one essence is simultaneously shared totally by three persons, and the three persons are one in essence. The Trinity is simple and uncomplex.
7. Therefore, the Trinity is not an essence without distinctions united with three distinctions so as to make a complex being.
8. This doctrine is logically consistent because it affirms that God is one in another sense than He is three; and three in another sense than He is one.
9. We do not state that three beings are one being or that three persons are one personal or that three intelligent beings are one intelligent being; but we do state that in the same undivided essence are three personal distinctions or personal subsistences.

10. The divine nature is distinguished from human in that the divine nature can subsist wholly and indivisibly in more than one person simultaneously.
11. A trinitarian person is thus the entire divine nature subsisting in a particular manner, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
12. Therefore, when it is stated that there are three persons in one essence, it does not mean that the essence is a fourth thing.
13. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each simultaneously the whole divine essence so that while there are three persons, there is but one essence.
14. The substance of one divine person is the substance of the others, both numerically and identically. In this instance, there is no division of substance. The whole undivided divine nature is in each divine person simultaneously and eternally.
15. One human person exists externally to another, and separate from him but one divine person exists in another, and inseparable from Him. Thus one human person can exist apart from another a divine person cannot. John 14:10, 20; 12:44.
16. The difference between one divine person and another is greater than the difference between the person and the essence. The essence is predicated of each divine person but the personal characteristics cannot be predicated of any divine person except the one to whom it belongs.
17. A trinitarian person is not so comprehensive as the Godhead. A trinitarian person includes all that is in the unity, but not all that is the trinity of God. Thus He does not possess the personal characteristics belonging to the other two persons.

18. The trinitarian persons are not so real as to constitute three essences, or beings, but the whole divine essence is in each trinitarian person.
19. the three persons are so real and distinct from each others, that each possesses a hypostatical or trinitarian consciousness different from that of the others. These three hypostatical consciousness constitute the one self-consciousness of the divine essence.
20. There is only one essence, having one understanding, and one will (i.e. desirous will), yet this unity of essence, understanding and will has three different forms of consciousness because it has three different forms of subsistence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
21. The divine self-consciousness is not a fourth consciousness additional to the three hypostatical consciousnesses but is the basis of the Three. The three consciousnesses are the one divine self-consciousness, and the one divine self-consciousness is the three hypostatic consciousnesses.

Some Practical Implications of Trinitarianism.

We've seen what the Bible reveals about the Trinity. We've traced several lines of Biblically based arguments to prove that an equality exists between the persons of the Trinity. We've seen the Trinity has its basis in the unity of God's spirit essence (it is one essence) and the fact that the three distinct Persons share that singular essence.

We now ask a crucial question, is Trinitarianism an esoteric doctrine? Is it so impractical that more than a brief consideration is a waste of time? Some cults which pervert the Christian faith teach that the doctrine of the Trinity is confusing and impractical. Most Biblical truth is practical at some time in history, though few truths are timelessly

practical. Trinitarianism is essential to several doctrines and has practical implications for the believer.

Revelation and Scripture

We begin by looking at special revelation. Special revelation is distinguished from natural revelation, which is revelation observed in nature. Special revelation involves a special act of God at a point of time in which He reveals truth. It may be a personal appearance: God in the burning bush to Moses, or words in the mouth of David.

God has used created beings to reveal truth. He has employed angels, human prophets and writers. Yet even this revelation originates with God. Peter wrote that no prophecy ever originated from itself, but men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). We have already seen that the Holy Spirit is person. He is not God's spirit, force, or power. Because He is God, He is qualified to reveal divine truth. He put words on David's tongue (2 Samuel 23:2; Acts 4:25). He carried along the prophets. Paul knew he was a mouthpiece of God by the Spirit's work. In 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 Paul explained that among men, only the individual knows what the individual is thinking, likewise, only God knows what God is thinking. Since the Spirit is God, He knows the things of God, and He is able to reveal those things to others. If He were not God, He wouldn't be capable of knowing and revealing these things which God has prepared for those loving Him (1 Corinthians 2:9). Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 2:9-14 that the Spirit assured the accuracy of His verbal revelation. Through these statements, God assures us that the written revelation from Deity is accurate.

The Son also revealed truth. John introduced His text on the Son, "In a beginning was the Word." (John 1:1a). John called Him the Word four times in the first chapter and once

in John 17 (see also Revelation 19). This title originated in the Old Testament where the Word came to men and spoke over one hundred times (cf Genesis 15:1).³⁷⁵ Arno Gaebelein wrote, “The Holy Spirit had before spoken of the second person of the Godhead as the Word. “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Psalm 33:6); “He sent His Word and healed them” (Psalm 17:20); both passage may be interpreted as meaning the Son of God.”³⁷⁶ He called the Word because He was the member of the Trinity who spoke God’s plan. In Genesis one, He is the member say, “Let us...” It was God’s plan, and He spoke that plan at the time it was to be enacted. This can also be said for all of God’s revelation to men. God planned not only to reveal but exactly when and the Word performed the revelation.

The Word also revealed God to men. According to John’s account, “No one has seen God, ever, the unique (AV only begotten) God, the one in the bosom of the Father, has explained Him.” (John 1:18. The word “explained” translates a verb which meant “to lead, show the way” and therefore, the metaphor was “to unfold, narrate, declare.”³⁷⁷ “There can be no question in the presence of this positive statement “no man hath seen God at any time” that all the manifestations of God in Old Testament times were not the

³⁷⁵ Leon Morris sees in these appearances the background for John’s usage of “the Word” as in John 1:1. “There were similar speculations about the Word, based on such biblical passages as that in which we read “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made” (Ps. 33:6). This reminds us that in the account of creation in Genesis 1 we read repeatedly that God spoke; that was all that was needed for him to create. There is power in the Word of God. The Word is given almost an existence of its own when we find that “the Word of the Lord came” to this or that prophet...” *New Testament Theology*, 226.

³⁷⁶ *The Gospel of John* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1965) 12.

³⁷⁷ Abbott-Smith, op cit. 160.

manifestations of God the Father, but of God the Son.”³⁷⁸ The Son is called the “unique God.” The majority of Greek manuscripts have “unique Son”, however, eight important manuscripts have “God,” two of which are early: papyri 66 which dates about AD 200 and papyri 75 in the third century. It seems less likely that someone would alter Son to God, than to alter God to Son especially with the adjective “unique” or “only begotten.” Unique God is also supported by the point of the sentence, that the special God (i.e. the Son) explained God (i.e. the Father). The Son explained the Father by the manner in which He lived.

The Son’s life revealed the Father. He became human (flesh) so that men could see His glory in a manner men could understand (John 1:14). John used the title “Jesus” 245 times, Matthew 182, Mark 103, Luke 104. This statistic supports John’s introduction that in the man (flesh) God was seen. Jesus emphasizes the Son’s humanity. In John 17 Jesus spoke to the Father that He had glorified or expressed the reputation of God by completing the works the Father had given Him to do (v. 4). He had made the Father’s character (name) visible (manifest) to His disciples (v. 6). He told the disciples, “If you have known Me, you also have known the Father” (John 14:7). When Philip responded, “Show us the Father...”, Jesus replied, “Have I been such a long time with you, and you don’t know Me, Philip? The one who has seen Me has seen the Father.” (John 14:8-9). This was true because the Son is God. How He acted, His abilities, what the disciples could observe was God’s glory. Only one person who is God could adequately in this manner make God known.

³⁷⁸ Gaebelein, op cit. 27.

The Spirit also reveals God. He is called Spirit and Holy Spirit because He emphasizes the fact that God's essence is spirit. Paul says of Him, "The Lord is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:17). The articular title Lord refers to His deity. In verse 16 Lord does not have an article as it generally refers to God: Father, Son, and Spirit. Paul changed this in verse 17 by referring to the Spirit. He is a specific person who is deity (Lord). The Spirit then is able to reveal something of Deity's glory (v. 18). Both occurrences of the word Lord in verse 18 are anartharous (without an article). Like verse 16 they refer generally to Deity. The Spirit is able to cause the believer to act like a mirror and reflect Deity's glory, to reveal Deity through the individual believer. The Christ-likeness of the fruit from the Spirit is only possible through the indwelling Christ and indwelling Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24).³⁷⁹

Apart from Biblical trinitarianism revelation from God can not reliably exist. Words or observation as of creation can reveal God's character, but actions and words of daily life best reveal God's character. This requires a person of the Godhead to live out that character. Simply, supernatural revelation is vital to the Christian faith, and trinitarianism is vital to that revelation.

The Incarnation

The Son became man for a number of reasons. We have seen that by becoming man, He was able to reveal God in human terms. When the Son became man, He did not cease being God. The incarnation or act of becoming flesh

³⁷⁹ In Galatians 5:24, the words "Christ's" or "belong to Christ" should be taken as a qualitative genitive not as possessive. A possessive genitive would indicate that to belong to Christ, one must have crucified his flesh with its passions and lusts. Paul's point is that those who bear Christ's character (qualitative genitive) have crucified the flesh. One cannot manifest Christ-like character while his flesh is operating.

(human) and the fact the He is God made possible the work of salvation.

Paul wrote the Philippian saints to address the issue of conflict between them. Two individuals were not getting along and refused to serve one another. It isn't clear what the nature of the conflict was, but it is clear that the repercussion was a cessation of service to one another. In chapter two, Paul gave four examples of the proper attitude toward service: Christ Jesus, Paul, himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. The example of Christ Jesus began with the assertion that He existed in the form of God, and did not consider being equal with God (the Father) to be seizure (Philippians 2:6). If He were not God, but a created being, then being equal with God would have been seizure. It would have been the very thing which Lucifer had attempted, to seize at being equal with God. For the Son, equality was His by nature and right.

Despite being in God's form and being equal with God, He emptied Himself (Philippians 2:7). This act of emptying has been the point of much controversy. Did He stop being God to become man? Did He give up His outward glory? Did He give up His divine attributes? All the questions show an agreement that the Son is/was God. The context explains that He emptied Himself of the free exercise of His attributes. He took the form of the servant (2:7). He humbled Himself and became obedient to death (2:8). Who was He obeying? Verse nine seems to indicate that it was the Father, because He exalted Jesus in response to Jesus' willing humility. The writer of Hebrews wrote that the Son came to do "Your desirous will" (Hebrews 10:7). John recorded Jesus' own words that He had come to do the desirous will of the one who sent Him (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38, 39). The Son is eternal, Deity, a member of the Trinity, yet He willingly

humbled Himself, and subjected His will to the will of the Father. This subjection is how He emptied Himself.

The example for the Philippians would have little punch if Jesus were a created being. It would make no sense for Him to subject Himself to the Father's will if He were a created being, because He would already be subject to the Father. Paul meant to encourage the Philippians to serve one another, to take Christ's attitude. He was fully God, and yet willing became a servant, therefore, they too should become servant to one another.

The incarnation allowed the Son to be a mediator. This is not required of all mediators, for Moses mediated the law between God and Israel, and Moses was only a man (Galatians 3:19, 20). Yet Christ is called a mediator four times, once with reference to a better covenant, and twice of the new covenant (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15, 12:24). The 1 Timothy passage is interesting because it does not delineate of what He is a mediator. Some understand Him to be mediating salvation. Kenneth Wuest wrote, "Our Lord is mediator in that He interposed Himself by His death, and made possible the restoration of the harmony between God and man which had been broken by sin."³⁸⁰ While partially correct, the context seems to include more than initial salvation. In verse two Paul instructed his readers regarding communication with God regarding their earthly leaders. The purpose of such communication is that we might "lead tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and seriousness." The words tranquil and quiet deal with a calm undisturbed state, the former on the outside and the latter inside.

The goal of such a state is to honor God (godliness) and maintain our focus on God's purpose (serious). Godliness refers to activity or a way of life which honors God. Paul ties

³⁸⁰ *The Pastor Epistles*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 41.

godliness to eternal life in Titus 1:1-2. The believer honors God by living out the eternal life which God promised. It is God's desire that all men would be saved so that they could honor Him in this manner. Unsaved men attempt to honor God, but always by their own efforts and plans. God has planned how we can honor Him, by living out what He has given us. Christ Jesus gave Himself as a ransom in place of all. The word ransom is *antilutron*. The prefixed preposition *anti* emphasizes substitution, hence "in place of." The purpose of this ransom is release or freedom. The base of the word *lutron* derives from the verb *luō*.³⁸¹ The freedom according to 1 Peter 1:18 is that believer might be holy, and in Titus 2:14 that believers might be purified for good works. This holy life and good works honor God and are only possible when the believer lives out eternal life.

God promised the believer eternal life. It was the future expectation of the Old Testament saint, but it is the possession of the New Testament saint (1 John 5:11-12). That life is the kind of life God has (John 1:4). Jesus had that life (John 5:26). As deity, He had possessed eternal life. As the man Jesus, He was the first human to possess eternal life in his human nature. We possess eternal life because we have the Son indwelling us (1 John 5:11). However, because the Son is Deity, He merely used the life which was already His in His human nature. He did so because it was the Father's will for Him.

Three times the writer of Hebrews tells us that the Son mediated a better and new covenant which benefits the New Testament believer (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). That

³⁸¹ Abbott-Smith, *op cit.*, 273.

covenant is tied to an eternal³⁸² covenant between the Father and Son (Hebrews 13:20). In this context, the Son is called the “great Shepherd of the sheep.” One of Christ’s actions as shepherd is giving His sheep abundant life (John 10:10, 11). Eternal life is one of the benefits of the new covenant.

So how does this tie to Christ being mediator? By His death, He mediated the new covenant. That covenant provides the believer eternal life through Christ’s indwelling. That eternal life is to be lived through the believer. When eternal life is lived out, it honors God; it is godliness. In this way Christ is mediator, between God and man by being both God and man. He is mediator by providing the believer a real experience with who God is by the believer using eternal life. In this way, He mediates this relationship between God and man, and it relies upon both His deity and humanity. This fact also agrees with the references to Jesus as mediator in Hebrews. The first two state that Christ is mediator, not that He mediated.³⁸³ According to Galatians 3:20 a mediator is between two not one. Christ mediates the relationship between God and save men, not just by His death in the past, but by His present indwelling, and He indwells in the realm of His omnipresent divine nature.

Christ’s work on the cross

The cross work is part of the basis upon which God saves individuals. That cross work had to address Adam’s trespass, sin, and transgression. His transgression brought a curse upon the earth and upon those who dwell on the earth. His sin brought physical death to mankind. His trespass

³⁸² The words “eternal” and “covenant” do not have definite articles. The writer referred to a covenant which pertains to eternity, not a covenant which as always (eternally) existed.

³⁸³ Both occurrences use ἔστίν a present tense verb. The last occurrence in Hebrews 12:24 is a verbless clause. The copula supplied for verbless clauses is the present indicative of the “to be” verb.

brought spiritual death and condemnation. On the cross He was wounded for the transgressions of Israel (Isaiah 53:5, 8). Isaiah 53 references primarily Christ's physical sufferings on the cross for those transgressions.

Christ also suffered spiritually at the hand of God. Isaiah 53:4 states that Christ was struck and humbled by God.³⁸⁴ Both words are passive forms,³⁸⁵ Christ being the subject of God's actions. Again in verse six Jehovah caused our (Israel in the context) perversity to be laid³⁸⁶ on Him. Finally in verse ten we see that Jehovah was pleased to crush Him. All three statements indicate that one person was causing these negative actions to another. It does not make sense that God is only one person who did this to Himself. He could not be simultaneously pleasing Himself and suffering. In this case God and Jehovah refer to the Father, who was pleased in His acts of punishment against the Son.

This one who experienced the punishment described in Isaiah 53 is also God. Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders of "the church of God, which He purchased through means of His Own blood" (Acts 20:28). Here the pronoun "His own" is *idios* expressing a unique relationship. It is His own blood, not another's. Yet God is spirit and does not have blood. Other Scriptures reveal that our redemption was affected by the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). Therefore, the one who

³⁸⁴ Two similar ideas are expressed in the phrase "Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." The words "stricken" and "smitten" are distinguished by the former [נגג] emphasizing the effect of a plague touching an individual, in this case the plague being the response to Israel's disobedience and the latter [נכה] the act of striking or hitting. The latter is tied to God's act.

³⁸⁵ The former is a Qal passive participle and the latter a Hophal participle, the Hophal being a passive causative stem.

³⁸⁶ This verb means to meet or encounter. This context indicates a negative encounter. Laid does communicate the idea.

died on the cross was both God and man, and He is distinguished from another called God, who laid punishment upon Him.

God reconciled the world to Himself by means of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19). Here again, two separate persons play two distinct roles: God reconciling, Christ doing the work which affected the reconciliation. This is explained in greater detail in verse 21. God is the subject implied from the preceding verses. Christ is the object of God's actions, and this is indicated by the words "the one not knowing sin" being in the Accusative case, the case of the direct object. God made Christ to be sin, who didn't experientially know sin." Theologically, we call this imputation, specifically, negative imputation. In addition to this passage and Isaiah 53, Peter also states that He (Christ) carried our sins in His body upon the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). The twenty-four elders speak of the Lamb's worth for redeeming them for God (Revelation 5:9). The Lamb redeemed for another. The acts of redemption and reconciliation involved interaction between two distinct persons.

These Scriptures show that the work of Christ upon the cross involved the Father doing something to the Son, by which the Son became the basis of redemption and reconciliation. Jesus' words, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me" (Mark 15:34) express part of this interaction. God's actions in Isaiah 53 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 are the basis of Jesus' words. The Father abandoned the Son while He bore Israel's transgressions and our sins, and was being made sin in our place. That abandonment is also known as spiritual death or separation from God. In His humanity, the Son experienced separation from the Father while He was physically alive upon the cross.

The gospel of John does not record the above statement of abandonment, rather we find, “I thirst” (John 19:28). In the context of John, with Jesus’ statements about the Spirit, water, and drinking, Jesus was expressing His craving for the Spirit (John 14:10, 14; 7:37-39). On the cross He experienced separation from the Father and the Spirit. This is only possible if indeed there are three distinct persons, or the Trinity.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed to the Father, “Let this cup pass from Me” (Mark 14:36). He did not force His own desire but submitted to the Father’s desire, “But not what I desire, but what you *desire*.” This demonstrates a difference in desirous will between the Father and Son’s human nature. His communication demonstrates that the Son was either schizophrenic or recognized another as God in addition to Himself. The Father heard the Son’s supplication (Hebrews 5:7). His communication indicate distinctions between the Father and Son, allowing such an interchange.

The basis of our salvation is the work of Christ. That work took place while He hung upon a cross. It involved interactions between the Father and Son, and abandonment of the Son by the Father and Spirit. It is interesting the those who deny Trinitarianism have no certainty of salvation. They base salvation on human works, rather than God’s work. Unitarians can have no saving transaction between Father and Son, because they have only one person. Polytheists have no saving transaction as the Son is frequently a created lackey or a lesser god, and therefore, He cannot be Savior. Trinitarianism is not an impractical, esoteric doctrine, but essential to our salvation.

Male and Female Roles

The church has debated the role of women in the Church for centuries. One side of the debate avers that women are equal in function and should not be denied any role in any area of Christian service. The contrary position views men and woman serving in distinct yet complementary roles, while being equal in Christ. The former is egalitarian and the latter complementarian. For example, the egalitarian position claims that a woman may serve in the local church office of bishop,³⁸⁷ and may teach or exercise authority over men (cf 1 Timothy 2:11-12). The complementarian position asserts that women serve in vital roles within local churches but may never serve as bishop of an assembly, and are restricted in both whom they may teach and over whom they may exercise authority.

In recent years, complementarians have focused their arguments by reference to the Father and Son's relationship. Complementarians have argued for some form of eternal submission of the Son to the Father. They agree that they are equal, but that the Father is always first. "The Father differs from the Son in that he is and has always been the Father, relating to the Son as a Father, leading, initiating, and directing the Son. The Son differs from the Father in that he has always been the Son, joyfully obeying and submitting to the Father."³⁸⁸ Wayne Grudem, a Complementarian, wrote of the Trinity, "For example, if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally 'Father' and the Son is not eternally 'Son.'"³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ As Baptists we have avoided this term and substituted "pastor" which is the gift necessary for service as a bishop, though

³⁸⁸ John S Hammet *Human Nature in A Theology for the Church* ed. Daniel Akins (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007) 392.

³⁸⁹ Grudem, op cit, 251.

Egalitarians have responded that the Father and Son are equal in all respects, and that the Son's submission only relates to His humanity. Kevin Giles argues, "that to teach that the Son must always obey the Father, that he is eternally subordinated in authority to the Father, also implies his ontological subordination."³⁹⁰ Giles defends the full eternal equality of the Son to the Father. He sees the the statements regarding the Son's subordination relate to His incarnation. On Hebrews 5 he sees, "This growing obedience, the author of Hebrews adds, took place "though he was a Son." He sees it as paradoxical that the eternal Son of God had to learn obedience through suffering. This was what the incarnation involved."³⁹¹ On 1 Corinthians 15:28 he quotes Robert Reymond, "At the end he yields "up to the Father not his Sonship but his delegated authority as the Messiah and his special mediatorial dominion." Then "the universal and eternal dominion of the triune God" will be reestablished."³⁹²

While I am a complementarian regarding the roles of men and women, I agree with Giles and others that the Son is eternally equal and that subordination is a temporal matter related to the incarnation. This view fits the argument of Philippians 2:5-9, that the Son emptied Himself and became obedient. But this view says something about the roles of men and women. I do not think that the Scriptures present the present roles between the sexes as eternal. Eve was created as a counterpart to Adam. Submission, or Adam's

³⁹⁰ Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 59.

³⁹¹ Giles, op cit, 116-117.

³⁹² Giles, op cit, 114. He quotes Robert Reymond, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 280-281.

right to rule³⁹³ was part of Eve's curse (Genesis 3:16). If we accept that man's slavery to death and working the ground in sweat and toil will be removed, we too should accept that women's roles will change. Women will no longer be giving birth, for as Jesus said that in the resurrection humans do not marry nor are given in marriage. The marriage relationship is temporary, existing only during this present life. Just as the Sons' subordination to the Father is temporary, so to is the present status of women. Not only will our physical bodies be delivered from bondage when our Lord appears for us, but the present roles too will be removed.

Praying to Whom?

Who is the object of our communication? As Trinitarians we recognize that each person is fully and eternally God. We have also seen that there are economic or temporary relationships between the persons. We have seen that they do not all attend to the same work or in the same way. In salvation, each plays a role, each does a work. Remember, we are talking about the God or order, not chaos, not the three Stooges stumbling over one another attempting to do the same work at the same time. Does this affect our communication with God?

Millard Erickson devoted a chapter to the effect of Trinitarian doctrine on worship and prayer. He concludes, "It seems, however, that worship is properly to be directed primarily to the Triune God. or all three persons collectively. ... The same applies to prayer. For the most part,

³⁹³ "...the precise nature of the rule is as various as the real situations in which the action or state so designated occur. It seems to be the situation in all languages and cultures that words for oversight, rule, government must be defined in relation to the situation out of which the function arises." lAvDm in the *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, op cit.

we will pray to the Triune God.”³⁹⁴ The gospel writers record several occasions when men worshipped Jesus (Matthew 8:2; 9:18; Mark 5:6; Luke 24:52; John 9:38). Jesus spoke of worship to the Father (John 4:23). Worship is directed at both the Father and Son in Revelation 5:12-14. The word worship is not used of the Holy Spirit, but the writers of Scripture worship Him by attributing divine characteristics to Him (cf Hebrews 9:14; 10:29; Psalm 51:12 “free Spirit”). We agree that all three persons receive worship and are the objects of worship.

Erickson, like many Bible students, uses “prayer” for general communication, including asking. It can be demonstrated that the Greek *proseuchomai* [προσεύχομαι] is not a general term, but is used in the epistles for the new meaning of worship. It is used with other words for communication and distinguished from them. In 1 Timothy 2:1 it is not the larger term, but placed second in a list of three, demonstrating that it has a distinct idea. The reason for point this out is to ask whether the other words for communication are directed at all three persons, or at just one? Erickson reasons that if we desire a work of a particular person, such as the Spirit filling us, it is logical to ask the Spirit.³⁹⁵

In John 16, Jesus told His disciples that a time was coming shortly when they would no longer ask Him, but the Father (John 16:23-24). Paul addressed his requests to the Father (Ephesians 3:14-16; Romans 10:1). Erickson concedes that the Spirit is the means of communication, though no specific Scripture states that we ask Him

³⁹⁴ Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995) 328.

³⁹⁵ *ibid*, 327.

directly.³⁹⁶ Paul requested the Lord three times that a thorn in His flesh would be taken from Him (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). In this case, the Lord is Christ. This one instance does not open the door for all our communication. Jesus set the tenor, our asking communications are directed to the Father. This is a practical application of the economic Trinitarian relationships. Some may claim that since they are a Trinity, does it make any difference. It does. God has told us how to approach Him, and to Whom we address communication. Changing to whom we address our communication is similar to claiming the Father died on the cross, or that the Spirit became incarnate. It alters God's revelation. It seems best to stick with the order of communication God has revealed.

The Future

The Scriptures reveal many details regarding God's plans for the future (theologically titled eschatology, for last things). The Trinity also is a necessary truth for understanding accurately the future. It is not the Father or the Spirit who will come for believers. Jesus told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them, and that He would return for them to take them where He is (John 14:2-4). Paul reveals that New Testament believers' hearts will be presented blameless in holiness before God the Father when our Lord Jesus is present with His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:13). The "coming" or presence of the Son is before the Father. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 reveals why the Son will be present before the Father with His saints. He has come for His own, caught them to be with Him and then returns to the Father.

Trinitarianism is Biblical. Trinitarianism has effects on various doctrines. It is practical. Apart from Trinitarianism, the Biblical revelation of revelation could not have taken

³⁹⁶ *ibid*, 324.

place. Apart from Trinitarianism, the salvation described in the Bible could not have been achieved. Trinitarianism has implications for the future of male and female relations. Trinitarianism also encourages us to proper communication with God. Trinitarian doctrine is not esoteric, it is about the Almighty God. It is practical.

Prolegomena or Introducing Theology

Everyone makes theological statements. Some statements are lucid and have sound foundations. Others are babble and built on the shifting sands of human opinion. Those who claim that they don't wish to bother with theology are stating a theological opinion that the things of God are insignificant, perhaps unknowable, or irrelevant. Regarding Christian theology, such statements imply that God wasted a great deal of ink and paper (in modern times) because we don't need to know all these extraneous facts.

Traditionally, theologies begin with a prolegomena, a study of the principles upon which theology is based, and particularly those principles which the author or teacher of the theology plans to follow. While theologies may have points of agreement, no two are identical. This is because various theologians have different principles by which they decide what truths they will consider, and what sources they will use to arrive at conclusions, and what principles will be used to evaluate their sources. Even those who have similar principles, and sources arrive at different conclusions for the simple fact that each one is an individual who may see these things with slight differences.

Theology is the study of God. Broadly and popularly it is also the study of the things which pertain to God: His acts, creation, salvation, and future plans. Christian theology deals specifically with the Christian God.

Some theologies are largely an interaction with what other theologians or Bible students have written. At the other pole are theologians who restrict their study to what the Word of God reveals on any given topic of truth.

A prolegomena based upon interaction with God

God approached Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses as the I AM

Paul's message in Acts 13 is a rehearsal of history. He accepted that God genuinely acted. He then presented that Jesus Christ is, followed by belief and people who follow Paul. In Thessalonica (Acts 17) they threw their lot in with Paul and Silas. Therefore, it is a theology that accepts the text of Scripture.