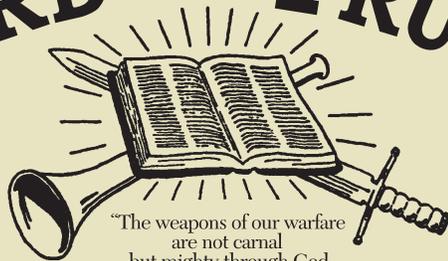


# The SWORD and TRUMPET

"Blow ye  
the Trumpet  
and warn  
the People."

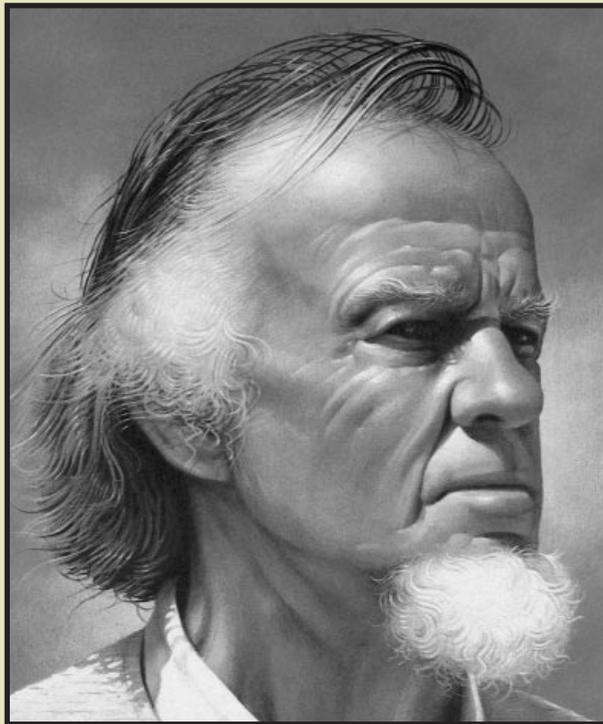


"The weapons of our warfare  
are not carnal  
but mighty through God  
to the pulling down of strongholds."

"Take the Sword  
of the Spirit  
which is  
The Word of God."

## *Guidelines*

**SPECIAL ISSUE:  
The God of the Bible**



*FRANCIS SCHAEFFER*

JULY 2005

\$1.50

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## The Sword and Trumpet

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

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**SWORD AND TRUMPET GUIDELINES** monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a Board representing various constituencies of the Mennonite Church. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for “the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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# Person of the Month:

## Francis August Schaeffer IV

### (1912-1984)

Of German-English ancestry, Francis Schaeffer was born at home in Germantown, Pennsylvania, on January 30, 1912, to Francis August Schaeffer III and Bessie Williamson Schaeffer. He was their only child.

Although Francis had hardworking parents who wanted the best for him, they were not Christians.

While in junior and senior high school Francis was able to also take vocational and technical classes which would be a help to him later since his father expected him to work in the family business, not to pursue intellectual, philosophical, or theological issues. Fran's father believed in working with his hands. Francis learned how to work hard and to do a job well.

After junior high Schaeffer began to be interested in the arts and music—areas that were missing in his home.

Fran felt he should go to church. The only church he was familiar with was the one where his Boy Scout troop met so he began attending there. At the age of 17, he started studying basic philosophical questions about life and its meaning. The pastor of his church preached a liberal social gospel. This did not satisfy the longing of Fran's heart. He thought he should quit the church, since he was an agnostic, in order to be honest. He decided to read the Bible, beginning in the Book of Genesis. In Genesis he found the answers to his burning questions about life. Six months later (1930), having read through the Bible, he became a Christian. From reading the Word he found that the Christian faith was logical, reasonable, and in line with reality. This was not true of any other religion or philosophy—it was *truly* truth! In August of that year he wandered into a tent meeting and heard preaching that confirmed what he had found in his independent study of God's Word. That night he went forward at the end of the service to acknowledge his faith in Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

After his conversion, Francis felt that he should prepare for the ministry. He didn't know how to break the news to his parents about his conversion, much less his desire to preach, as they would not understand. He also knew it would break their hearts for him not to get a degree in engineering. When he finally told them, he received strong opposition to his plan and his decision caused much friction in the family. Fran wanted his father's blessing to go but knew he had to obey God. At that point he did not know where he would get the money for school. Although his father did not want Fran to go, he paid for the first half year of Fran's schooling. He enrolled in Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia in 1931. The Lord provided the funds for him to finish college and to maintain his Christian testimony amidst opposition from other students who were comfortable in their sin and did not want their consciences' pricked by Fran's consistent faith and holy living.

In the summer of 1932, while at home after his first year of college, Schaeffer met Edith Rachel Merritt Seville one evening at church. Edith's background was quite different from Fran's since she was the daughter of missionaries to China. A liberal theologian was speaking to refute the claims of the Bible. Edith was just about ready to speak up with the truth when a young man from the crowd stood up first and did it for her! His name—Francis Schaeffer. That was the beginning of a relationship which would lead to

marriage on July 26, 1935. Francis was 23 years of age. God later blessed them with three daughters and a son.

Schaeffer received a B.A. degree from college, graduating second in his class. From there he went on to Westminster Seminary. Meanwhile, he and Edith withdrew from their home church because its theology was so liberal. The 1930s were years of struggle in mainline denominations in our country. Battle lines were drawn between those who were outright denying the Word of God and those who were standing true to its teachings. The Presbyterian Church, of which the Schaeffers were members, was not immune to this struggle. The seminary where Fran was attending split and the Schaeffers had the opportunity to help a new emerging seminary get off the ground. Fran was the first to enroll at Faith Seminary and the first to graduate. He was also the first pastor to be ordained in the Bible Presbyterian Church. From there he went on to pastor three churches in Pennsylvania and in Missouri. He had a strong emphasis on evangelism and outreach. He also felt that holiness and love must go together. He spoke the truth in love rather than with "acid speech" as he had experienced in the controversy several years previously. He was deeply spiritual and practical. He believed in prayer. He acted in faith on the promises of God. He believed that the Christian life must be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish anything of lasting value for God's kingdom. He lived in the spiritual "now" in communication with the Lord. His faith was real and vibrant.

As the result of an assignment from his new church denomination of which he was a member, Francis had opportunity to tour Europe and meet with churches and church leaders there. He was appalled by the liberal theology that had taken over the churches. This was the era of Karl Barth and others who were destroying the faith of young and old, with their departure from "the faith once delivered to the saints." As a result of this trip he and his family moved to Switzerland in 1948 to begin a missionary work among the youth of Europe when Fran was 36. The family would minister in Europe for a total of 36 years.

The year 1951 was the beginning of spiritual revival and renewal in the life of Francis Schaeffer. He became more aware of the finished work of Christ and what that means in the life of the believer. He also saw the vital importance of prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life.

In 1955, Schaeffer's ministry, known as L'Abri ("The Shelter") was begun as a faith ministry. It was a place where students from many different religious backgrounds (or none at all) could come and hear God's Word proclaimed while participating in a search for truth that would provoke thought. Francis knew that God's Word could be defended intellectually. He stood against falsehood and gave reasons for the Christian faith and why it was true. Liberalism had done its devastating work in the churches and universities of Europe and the United States but many youth were brought to the Lord during those years.

Francis Schaeffer also authored many books, the best known of which are probably *How Should We Then Live?* and *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* The first one shows that we have to have Christian answers as a foundation for human life. The second shows that we have to have moral absolutes based upon the Bible and that those absolutes force us to live out our beliefs in a way that brings good to those all around us.

**Francis Schaeffer** was a man of faith and prayer, empowered by the Holy Spirit, trusting God to supply his needs, holding fast to the truth of God in love, believing that the Christian faith is reasonable and rational; the only one that "squares up with reality" and has real solutions to the problems we face in our culture.

Francis August Schaeffer IV died at his home in Rochester, Minnesota, on May 15, 1984, at the age of 72.

—Gail L. Emerson

# The Prayer We Fear the Most

by Dan Schaeffer

*Can we bring ourselves to pray as Jesus did on His last night on Earth?*

Several years ago I felt God lead me to leave my comfortable pastorate of thirteen years and step out in faith into a new ministry. I couldn't wait to see how God would abundantly bless my plans and my faith.

At first we struggled just to find a place to live. Then my oldest daughter was in a serious car accident, and our car was totaled. On the heels of that I had a significant ministry disappointment, and my bubble of optimism burst. Our savings began to plummet as projected income didn't materialize. Instead of walking on the water, I was slowly drowning.

That's when I realized that I was beginning to become afraid of God. Not fear in the conventional sense; I am absolutely convinced of His love for me. But, while I was patiently waiting for deliverance and blessing in response to my prayers, many of them tearful, I began to fear not what God would do, but what He would not do. I realized that maybe God had already answered my prayer, and the answer was no. I had come to my own Gethsemane.

I've prayed for many things that I haven't received, and I've later recognized God's goodness and wisdom in those answers. I thought I had grown to truly trust Him. Maybe that is why I was so surprised by the fear. How could someone who loves God so much suddenly be afraid of Him?

I remembered a man I met years ago, an enthusiastic believer. He had just quit his job at a computer company to begin his own business. He explained that He

had prayed and knew God was going to bless it. But within several months his entire demeanor changed. His business was failing. His dreams and ambitions were going up in flames, and so was his relationship with God. He dropped out of church, bitter and angry with God. I couldn't help remembering his situation and wondering what this trial would reveal about my own faith.

Jan Karon, best-selling author of the Mitford Series, has her main character, a godly Episcopalian priest named Father Tim Cavanaugh, occasionally pray "the prayer that never fails." Whenever Father Tim gets in a tight spot, the author cleverly teases the reader by having him quickly pray that prayer. But she never tells you what the prayer is until much later in the book. While reading I found myself trying to figure out what prayer you could pray to God that would never fail. If there was anything I wanted at that moment it was a failure-proof prayer! But when I finally realized what the prayer was, I balked. The prayer, of course, is the one that Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father in the garden of Gethsemane, "not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

## *Jesus' Agony—Our Model*

Russ knew that prayer well. His wife, Shirley, was in the midst of a debilitating yearlong depression so severe she could not function at times. The staggering medical costs would quickly lead them into bankruptcy. That same year his oldest daughter became an unwed mother. I

watched this very godly man go through this suffering and marveled at his faithfulness through it all. But I began to get nervous.

If I am afraid of how God might answer my prayers and those of my godly peers, I reluctantly have to concede that I am, at times, afraid of God Himself. I take some comfort, however, in the fact that complete submission to the will of God was difficult even for our Lord Jesus. It is instructive that when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, His labor was so intense that He sweated drops of blood.

The will of God for our Lord included not only the cross, but also separation from his beloved Father. In this way Jesus' Gethsemane experience was unique from ours. But as a man, He modeled to us the perfect answer to the struggle with God's will.

He who knew no sin would bear our sin. The revulsion of this reality for Him who is perfect in every way is not one I can adequately imagine. Yet, it needed to happen. So our Lord prayed the most difficult prayer of His life, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." He prayed this prayer not once, but three times.

Let this thought sink in. *Three times* Jesus asked the Father if it was absolutely necessary to go through the coming suffering. Our Lord was willing to endure the suffering, but it was clear that He didn't want to do it. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," He said.

The will of His heavenly Father was a scary and troubling thing at that moment. He knew it was good and right, and He had come for this very purpose. But this never made it easier. And somehow, I find comfort in that. I'm not alone after all.

For Nan, her Gethsemane involved discovering that her middle son, at the age of 37, had cancer. "In the matter of a few short weeks, I went from knowing the

medical profession would have the perfect treatment necessary—to learning it was a very fast-moving cancer—to facing his imminent death. I went from confidence in fighting the disease to begging the Lord to take me home instead of my son."

***"Lord, You Know How Scared I Am"***

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was tempted by Satan to bypass His Father's will. Satan knew that Jesus was heading towards a place where He would experience unimaginable suffering. And so the gist of all Satan's temptations was this: If God really loved you, He wouldn't ask You to endure something horrible.

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***Jesus knew the will of His Father was good and right, and that He had come for this very purpose. But this never made it easier.***

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Satan wanted Jesus to question His Father's will, to examine it, to see if He couldn't come up with a better idea. He wanted a fear to begin to grow in Him, not only of His Father's will but ultimately of His Father Himself. Jesus refused and resisted the temptation, but when He returned to the Garden of Gethsemane He allowed us to see His struggle.

And a struggle it is. For several weeks I wrestled with praying this "prayer that never fails." I felt a sense of entitlement: "I deserve to have my prayer answered my way!" I know that scripturally this is all wrong, but that's the way I felt. Fear is, after all, not truth or error. It's a feeling. He who had saved me more times than I could imagine, He who had never withheld any good thing from me, He who had given me mercies beyond number was now the object of my fear. I knew what I needed to do.

I prayed one of the hardest prayers of my life. "Lord, You know how scared I am. You know how hard this is for me, so

please help me. Lord, may Your will be done in my life. You know what I want to happen, but I give You permission to say 'no' and still be my God. I am no longer going to trust You to do what I had asked for. I am simply going to trust You, period. I know Your will is good and perfect, and if I have to endure some discomfort, so be it. Not mine, but Your will be done."

I didn't sweat drops of blood, but it sure felt like I did. I had surrendered, and surrendering is painful. I still don't know how God is going to answer my prayer, and I have gained a freedom in that.

As Nan looks back upon her experience, she says, "I realize the new depth of intimacy and richness of relationship that developed between Jesus and me because of my absolute total dependence on Him. Accepting the fact I was losing my son was absolutely heartrending and totally unacceptable to me. I couldn't even imagine why God would allow me to undergo such anguish of heart. It was months later during my grieving process that I finally found myself mouthing in complete submission to the Father, 'Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him' (Job 13:15). I realized afresh that when we are in a state of brokenness and have nothing left but God, He will be all we need."

In his Gethsemane experience, Russ learned to stop fighting. "My attitude through that whole year was 'not my will be done' and make me wise to understand

the lessons You want to teach me so I can serve You better."

The hardest part about releasing our fears is giving up life the way we have scripted it. Will God's ultimate plan bring us the same joy that our plan would? After my own very long struggle, I'd bet the farm that it will.

Like Russ and Nan, I've discovered that the greatest joy in life isn't a what, it's a Who. "For the joy set before him," Hebrews tells us, Jesus "endured the cross, scorning its shame" (12:2). His love leads me to trust, despite my fears. Was there any greater joy for Jesus than the knowledge that He had pleased His Father? I believe my heavenly Father wants me to experience the same joy of obedience.

There will be several stops at Gethsemane in all of our lives. We are not led here to relinquish small things of little consequence, but the most precious desires of our hearts. God will meet us here, but Satan won't be far behind. He will give us many reasons why we shouldn't utter "the prayer that never fails." But God, who knows our weaknesses, will help us. Slowly, we will give up our deepest desires to Him, and find that as a result, He has become our deepest desire.

Then it will be time to leave Gethsemane for a while; a little wiser, a little braver, and a little less afraid. ■

—Reprinted from *Moody*, March/April 2003 issue

### SEALED BID AUCTION

We have received from an estate, one of the original bound volumes of *Sword and Trumpet* (Volumes 1-8, 1929-1936). It is in good condition and bears the signature and frontispiece of George R. Brunk I. We are offering it by sealed bid, starting at \$150.00. Please mail your bid to the Sword and Trumpet office, postmarked no later than July 15, 2005.

## **From the Editor's Desk**



Paul M. Emerson

**GUEST EDITORIAL**

# **The Problem of Open Theism**

Author Unknown

Open Theism is a relatively recent doctrine with its origin attributed mainly to Clark Pinnock around 1980 and recently to Dr. Greg Boyd, professor of theology at Bethel College, the educational arm of the Baptist General Conference. The doctrine has as its primary goal, a redefinition of the nature and character of God. Its foundational principle, which allows God to be redefined in numerous ways, is the proposition that God cannot know the future, because the future has not yet occurred and is therefore unknowable. From this premise it is stated that God can still predict certain events in the future and make plans for the future, since He has certain abilities to know how man operates and thinks, but since He cannot know what the future choice of man will actually be, the reality is that He cannot know with certainty what the future will bring or whether He will be able to accomplish the plans that He has made. In this theology, God is a victim of time, being confined to the present, and also a captive of, and subject to, the decisions of man. Because of His deficiencies in knowledge, God does not always do the right thing or make the right decision and is capable of causing unwarranted pain and suffering in the lives of individuals. The God of Open Theism is not sovereign, not perfect, can and does make mistakes, as a result of imperfect knowledge, for which He apologizes and regrets.

The fundamental flaw in the theology is also its basic claim, that God cannot know the future. When the foundation is defective, then the doctrine derived from that foundation is defective also. Open Theism defines God within the confines of the existing material universe in which man lives, but which God created. The assumption is made that God does not exist outside of this material universe, but He exists within, and is subject to, His own creation rather than the creation being subject to Him. It is also assumed that there are God-created entities that have greater authority than the God who created them. It was God who created the element of time in relation to this universe, to which the life and existence of all proponents of Open Theism must submit. It is the Open Theist who cannot know the future because he is subject to the properties and boundaries of the universe established by God.

The proponents of Open Theism would presume that the element of time, although created by God, somehow exerts a superior power over His ability to know, by restricting His knowledge through the means of confining Him to a literal present state of being, within a finite creation. By this view, the proponents of Open Theism deny the unlimited power of God to know the beginning from the end and fail to understand the statement of God in Exodus 3:14, "I Am Who I Am." It is God who is, standing

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always in the present, transcending the boundaries of time itself. Rather than God being subject to the present state of time, it is time itself that is subject to the eternal present state of God, who is past, present, and future all at the same time and who sees the beginning through the end always in the present. The Open Theist does not consider the fact that time is a transient entity, having a beginning and ending subject to the good pleasure of God.

This universe and time, from their beginning to end, are encompassed by the unknowable and incomprehensible power and majesty of God who created all and continues to uphold all by His power. It escapes the reasoning of the Open Theist that God is greater than this universe and its limitations, and is greater than their ability to define and understand the God who was and is, even when this universe had not been created. By what measure was God's knowledge limited prior to His creation of the universe and time? How is it that God becomes a servant to His own created entities? Time itself is a subjective entity even in this material universe. Time at one place can be different from that in another; to the person traveling in space at light speed, time may even stand still for them, while the rest of the universe continues to age at what appears to be a frantic pace.

Was God constrained by some law greater than Himself to make the measure of time as it appears? Could He not have changed that measure, so that what now appears as a year could be a fraction of a second or a million years? How is the infinite God limited to the finite boundaries of His own creation? God has created a universe at His good pleasure and He can and will change that universe at His good pleasure, including the fabric of time itself. God is the sovereign ruler of all that is known and all that is unknown, in this universe and whatever infinitude of spheres in which He exists. He created the universe out of nothing, by His power and He upholds its operation by His power. God created time by His power, and He determines whether it continues or ceases by His power.

The Open Theist engages in a myopic, self-centered delusion by believing that their thoughts and subsequent decisions have the power to change the course of God's determined will. The universe in which the Open Theist exists, and its consequent inclusion of time, is but an infinitesimal speck, itself confined, hidden and lost within the majesty and infinity of the God who is "I Am."

The hidden agenda of Open Theism is apparent, because it is opening the door for a unification of what are now many divergent beliefs. Open Theism can embrace the Mormon church, which is desperately seeking to appear to be mainstream Christianity, and its concept of God who is imperfect and continually in a state of learning. Recently, Gordon Hinckley, Prophet and President of the Mormon church, has equivocated on the historic Mormon doctrine that man can become a god. Consequently, their teaching that the god of this universe was once a man, might eventually be placed in their archives of convenient forgetfulness, opening the way to a connection with mainstream Christianity. The Positive Confession, Word of Faith proponents, such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland, who claim that words and faith have superior power over the will of God and can control the actions of God, and many, many groups in which God is subject to the choice of man, could easily embrace Open Theism with only minor adjustments. With the charismatic experience having already united many Protestant and Catholic groups, the meeting of the charismatic and Open Theistic theologies could further bring about a unity of unprecedented magnitude. To be mainstream is not necessarily to adopt a biblical foundation, and in most cases that is the case. Unity can always be achieved by adopting the lowest common denominator which, in the majority of cases, is to deny the absolute sovereignty of God. Although masquerading under the cloak of historic Christian belief, Open Theism is a very sinister and deceitful heresy of the highest magnitude.

■

# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



*A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**JULY 3, 2005**

## *The Blessedness of the Christian*

Matthew 5:1-16

July's lessons are taken from the Gospel of Matthew. Today's and next Sunday's come from Chapters 5 and 6, The Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount has been called the Manifesto of Christ's Kingdom since it contains the essence of His teaching and instruction for godly living as a member of His kingdom in the present world. Refresh your understanding by reading Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Today's lesson includes the Beatitudes (verses 3-9), the blessedness of suffering for Christ's sake (verses 10-12), and the responsibility of Christian witness to our world (verses 13-16).

Jesus' popularity was on the increase (4:24, 25), and multitudes were thronging to Him for healing and to hear His teaching. To give more direct instruction to those He had chosen to take part in His ministry, He withdrew from the crowds for more intimate and direct instruction in the ways of His Kingdom to His most serious followers. That's the setting for the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus begins His discourse with a series of blessings pronounced upon those who sense a personal need or obligation. These Beatitudes speak to qualities expected of His followers, foundational principles to be observed by members of His kingdom. Duties are prefaced with a blessing, a promise of happiness, and concluded with a promise for their performance.

These Beatitudes speak both to personal spiritual development and to relational issues as one interacts with others

(verses 7 and 8 especially). They portray the blessedness of a right relationship to both God and man. As these Beatitudes point out, the blessing comes to those who realize their own insufficiency in these matters and turn to God for help. Their pursuit puts one on the path to blessing.

In verses 10 through 12 we are shown the blessedness of those who suffer persecution and reproach for the cause of Christ. Maltreatment is usually not thought of in terms of producing rejoicing, but when suffered for Christ's sake, the upside is reward in heaven. In fact, Jesus says, "Be exceeding glad." Such experience identifies one with Christ and His kingdom and secures eternal reward.

Jesus also emphasized (verses 13-16) that those who follow Him have certain obligations as members of His kingdom. First, they are to serve as a preserving and seasoning influence in an ungodly society. And how this old world today needs an ample dose of seasoning! The Christian, by life and deed, is to show the Christ-life to a needy world, to show there is something better than society's norm.

The Christian, as a member of Christ's Kingdom, is also to be a beacon light of hope in a dark and sinful world. He is to be as obvious in society as a city set on a hill, unhidden, attracting attention. Verse 15 tells us that a Christian's responsibility is to shine, to give light that dispels spiritual darkness.

Notice in verse 16 that Christian witness is not to bring glory to the Christian—it may well bring persecution and abuse. Rather, our witness is to bring glory to God, to show to an unsaved society what God can do when He gets hold of

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**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

a sinner. Are we doing our job? The world is watching.

***For thought and discussion***

1. Understand the setting in which Jesus gave this discourse. It is likely that it did not include the large crowds, but only those more seriously committed to Jesus and His cause. Study it out.
2. Study each of these Beatitudes in detail for a more complete understanding of their scope and intent.
3. Few would invite suffering, even Christians. Think through, and discuss, the spiritual benefits of persecution for Christ's sake. Are there dangers?
4. Think about and discuss some ways Christians can be seasoning and preserving influences in an ungodly society.
5. Is the light fading in our dark world? What can we do to increase its intensity?

**JULY 10, 2005**

***Almsgiving and Prayer***

Matthew 6:1-15

In Chapter 6 Jesus continues instruction on principles to be followed by members of His kingdom. In the lesson text today He treats almsgiving, prayer, and forgiveness. Members of Christ's kingdom will be different. They will pursue kingdom interests and not self-interests. Their lives will display kingdom principles, not the principles of an ungodly, self-seeking society. In today's lesson Jesus speaks to motives. Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (verses 16-18) are not wrong in themselves, nor necessarily wrong when done publicly, but come under God's condemnation when done from wrong motives.

Jesus begins this instruction with a warning, "Take heed." The potential for the self-seeking praise of men resides within each of us. We are cautioned to be alert to this tendency and to be certain our motives are pure in the giving of alms

and in our praying.

Jesus said that to do these acts for the praise of men becomes its own reward. Our Father in heaven extends no other reward. Almsgiving should be the response of a generous heart with the gift given for the benefit of others, not self. Given with that motive secures reward from God.

As with almsgiving, our praying dare not be done to draw attention to ourselves, else again there be no acceptance by God. These acts of worship are to be private affairs, with God and ourselves being the only parties privy to them. Jesus also speaks to the sincerity of our prayers in warning against verbosity. We do not gain favor with God by high-sounding phrases or multiplicity of words. He desires simple, sincere expression of the feelings of our heart.

In verses nine through thirteen we have what has been variously called "The Lord's Prayer," "The Model Prayer," or "The Disciples' Prayer." According to Luke, this model prayer was given by Jesus in response to a request by His disciples (Luke 11:1).

Note that this prayer form offered by Jesus speaks first in three areas about God, our heavenly Father. First is simply a recognition of His Fatherhood and, with that, the implication that He is the provider of all man's needs, and that we reverence His name. Secondly, we pray for the advancement of His kingdom, and thirdly, we submit to His sovereign will over man's affairs.

Following our recognition of God we turn to personal requests. There is the request for daily sustenance, again implicitly recognizing that God alone is the giver of every good and perfect gift. We then pray for forgiveness, and at the same time express our willingness to forgive those who have wronged us. Thirdly, we pray to be kept from overwhelming temptation, to be delivered from the snares of the evil one who is out to entrap us and derail us from our walk with God.

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In verses 14 and 15 the importance of human forgiveness is stressed as a prelude to receiving forgiveness from God. If we will not forgive, we will not be forgiven. Serious business, indeed.

***For thought and discussion***

1. Explore the idea in verse three of “not letting our left hand know what our right hand does” in terms of almsgiving. How does this work out in a practical way?
2. Why do people seek the praise of men in their religious observances? What are some other areas not mentioned here? How can we guard against reward-less ostentation?
3. Why pray if God already knows our needs? You may want to discuss this issue.
4. Discuss the pro’s and con’s of simply reciting “The Lord’s Prayer,” either privately or publicly.
5. Forgiveness is a serious matter and the key to right relationships. Think through this matter seriously and search the status of your own heart before your fellowmen and before God.

**JULY 17, 2005**

***Jesus Teaches by Parables***

Matthew 13:9-17

Jesus had been busy healing the sick, casting out devils, opening blind eyes, raising the dead, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Tension was building with the scribes and Pharisees because of His healing, His teaching, and His implicit claims to divinity. Because of this rising tension and its potential for conflict, Jesus here in Chapter 13 makes a noticeable change in His method of teaching. He began using parables to teach principles yet to shield the truth from those who refused to listen with open hearts.

Parables have been described as stories with two levels of meaning, the earthly

level and the spiritual level. They use natural illustrations to make spiritual truths more plain and clear to the mind of the hearer. Their beauty lies in the fact that they teach with word pictures and thus enable the diligent hearer to discern a lesson beyond the story itself. Jesus was the master storyteller, using these illustrative stories to pique the minds of the hearers to ask for further clarification where they did not fully understand.

When the disciples asked Jesus the purpose for His use of parables He responded that His purpose was to reveal hidden truths to seeking souls and to hide truth from those who refused truth or listened only to find fault (verses 11-13). Jesus quoted God’s words to Isaiah (Chapter 6) when commissioning him to speak to Israel many centuries earlier. There are two kinds of listeners in every age, those who hear eagerly with the intent of learning, and those who hear with unhearing or faultfinding ears. Jesus was facing this situation at this juncture in His ministry.

It’s not that Jesus wanted some to not understand His message, but that, knowing they would hear only to criticize, His purpose was to teach so the truth would be shielded from them. His purpose was to reveal truth and to save all who expressed an open desire as someone has said, “The effect of the Word is dependent on the state of the heart.”

Jesus commended His disciples for their openness (v. 16) and informed them of the privilege that was theirs (v. 17). Many of God’s people in previous eras had desired to learn the meaning of God’s promises to future generations, but it was hidden from them. But now in God’s schedule the time was right to reveal the “mysteries of the kingdom.” And the disciples, and other eager hearers, were blessed to be recipients of that message.

And what was that message? That God’s promised Messiah had come in the person of His Son, Jesus, and that through His redemptive work man could enter into a personal relationship with the

heavenly Father. Are our ears hearing?

***For thought and discussion***

1. Learn what you can about parables and their effectiveness as a teaching tool.
2. Do you understand why Jesus began using parables in His teaching? Be sure to understand that He was not deliberately hiding truth. The fault lay where?
3. Reflect on the statement: "There is none so blind as he who will not see." Be sure that does not describe your condition.
4. Everyone likes illustrations in a message or a teaching setting. Certainly there are advantages when illustrations are carefully and appropriately chosen. But what might be some disadvantages?
5. What is the difference between listening with a questioning ear and listening with a critical ear? And which is yours?

**JULY 24, 2005**

***Jesus Teaches Forgiveness***

Matthew 18:21-35

We usually think of Matthew 18 primarily in terms of the righting of relationships and reconciliation as outlined in verses 15-17. However, a close reading of the chapter also portrays the themes of humility, living without offense, the importance of a soul and, as in today's lesson, the matter of forgiveness.

Jesus used the parable of the unjust servant in our text today to teach the principle of unlimited forgiveness required of God's children. Peter had just asked the question, "How oft shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" Then, with a professed generosity, he added, "Till seven times?" The Jewish rabbis taught that to forgive three times was adequate. Peter doubled that and added one for good measure. He was soon to learn that his concept of a forgiving attitude fell far short of Jesus' requirement.

**JULY 2005**

To impress His followers, not just Peter, of the importance of a continually forgiving attitude, Jesus told a story. Note that He prefaced the story with a statement relating the story to the standard of His kingdom (v. 23).

A servant who owed his master a staggering sum was called to account. In response to his master's intent to sell him and his family into slavery to satisfy the debt, the servant pled for time to pay. Then his master, out of sheer compassion, released him and totally forgave the immense debt. One would certainly think the servant would have gone from the presence of his master with a huge feeling of gratitude and relief.

But to make His point, Jesus had this man go out and demand of a fellow servant, who owed him a paltry sum by comparison, to pay what he owed—immediately, or else. This man also pled for mercy, and for time, promising to pay when he could. But the unjust servant would show no mercy, casting the man into prison until the debt could be satisfied.

When word of this act of gross injustice came to the ears of the master, his response was to throw the unjust servant to the torturers, and reinstate the debt previously forgiven. There was to be no mercy for one who showed no mercy.

Then Jesus capped the lesson by declaring that that is exactly what the heavenly Father will do to those who do not from their heart forgive their brother. Jesus had already indicated in His teaching (6:14, 15), that one's forgiveness by God hinged on his forgiveness of his fellowmen. Here is added the concept of torment for an unforgiving attitude. In fact, it would imply eternal torment. And that's what makes this principle such a serious matter.

G. Campbell Morgan has this to say in commenting on this parable: "God's compassions are violated by our inability to be compassionate, and will bring down His wrath upon us." Eerdman adds: "To

**PAGE 11**

pardon the penitent reveals the princely spirit of a true follower of the King. It shows also a grateful appreciation of the pardon which Christ has secured for each one who has enlisted in His service.”

Truly “I owed a debt I could not pay; He paid a debt He did not owe.” My obligation is to follow Him faithfully and model His forgiveness in my relationship to my fellowmen.

#### ***For thought and discussion***

1. Why do we, like Peter, seem to be so limited in our willingness to forgive, especially when the same person continues to transgress against us?
2. Why do you suppose Jesus made mutual forgiveness one of the great principles of the kingdom of heaven?
3. There is an element to forgiveness that is hinted at in the first verse of Chapter 18. What is it, and how does it fit in with forgiveness?
4. How should the lesson of this parable affect our relationships to our brother?
5. It is a serious matter to be unforgiving, according to Jesus’ teaching. How can we develop a more forgiving spirit?

## **JULY 31, 2005**

### ***Blessed Are the Merciful***

Matthew 25:31-46

The scene here at the end of Chapter 25 is one of judgment. It follows two parables which also contain the theme of judgment. The scene here in verses 31-46 depicts a final, climactic judgment and subsequent separation based on personal attitudes and actions, good and bad. Some question whether this passage refers to the final great white throne judgment. However, the imagery here and the strong parallels with other final judgment Scriptures, especially Revelation 20 (see verse 12), would seem to indicate that only different aspects of the same event are spoken to in the various Scriptures.

**PAGE 12**

Without getting into a theological conundrum, let’s be sure to focus on the main teaching of this passage which is that we will be judged according to our response to human need. But with Eerdman we are quick to agree that “it is absurd to conclude that our Saviour here teaches that eternal life can be secured by being kind to the poor regardless of any relationship to Him, and in spite of lack of moral character or faith.” This is only part of the picture when it comes to meeting the requirements for kingdom citizenship. But it is an important part.

Jesus’ teaching here reflects a selfless attitude of life and a simple compassion toward those in need. It reflects the unheralded giving Jesus spoke to in Matthew 6:1-4 (lesson for July 10), where assistance is to be given not to be seen, but in simple response to need and the relief of human suffering.

It is notable that those upon whom Jesus pronounced a blessing and passage into eternal life had no inkling that their deeds of mercy to suffering humanity in actuality were ministering to Christ (v. 37). They were done from the motive of love and compassion for the less fortunate in society, not to gain favor with God. But, as Barclay comments, “When we learn the generosity which without calculation helps men in the simplest things, we too will know the joy of helping Jesus Christ himself.”

What was wrong with the “goats”? Why did they fail to see, or use, opportunities to do good to their suffering fellowmen? What lay in the way of their seeing need? Again, the answer lies in attitude and motivation. Their lives were characterized by selfishness and greed, looking out primarily for self-interests, not the well-being of others. And again, Jesus does not condemn a person solely on this principle, but on the basic life characteristics which give rise to such an attitude.

Those fit to dwell in Christ’s eternal kingdom had met the basic requirement of achieving a relationship with Jesus

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

Christ as Lord of their lives. Their acts of mercy and kindness were an outgrowth and response to that relationship. Those bound for eternal destruction had failed in achieving this relationship and were thus cursed with those who rebelled against God. (See v. 41.)

Let's be certain the relationship is right, and the good deeds are sure to follow.

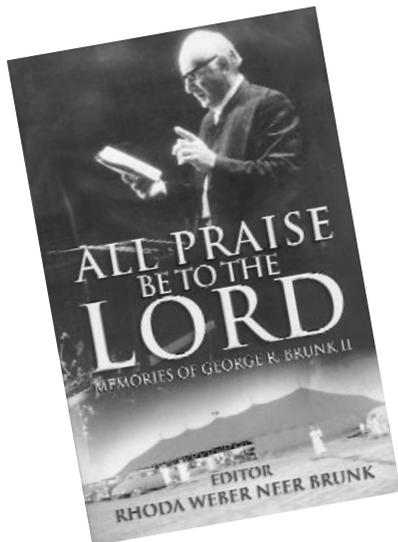
***For thought and discussion***

1. Use your center column references and other helps to compare this passage with other judgment passages. Note both similarities and differences. Are they irreconcilable?

2. In this setting you may wish also to review, and perhaps discuss briefly, other requirements for kingdom citizenship.
3. How does a person get to the place where compassion and assistance become the natural response to human need? Is it an inborn trait, or how is it achieved?
4. Discuss some ways open to individuals and churches to show compassion in meeting human need. And don't overlook the spiritual dimension of material aid.
5. Only family members inherit family treasures (v. 34). Let's be sure we are in a proper family relationship to inherit God's eternal blessings. ■

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# Newslines . . .

by Rebecca Good

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## The Sin Close to Us

Pornographic websites number around 4.2 million—12 percent of all websites. This makes a total of 372 million pornographic pages. The problem is ubiquitous—even among Christians. Someone who works with porn addicts says that the problem is in every church. One survey found that 47 percent of Christians admit that pornography is a major problem in their homes. One former porn addict and pastor said, “Until a man’s core needs are met, he’ll go over, under, and around any boundaries.” In his own case, this pastor says his core needs were closeness with God and other men.

A group called XXXchurch.com is going to extreme measures to combat the huge problem. The group sets up booths even at adult expos and pornographic tradeshows, where they are available to discuss sexuality issues with candor. They also offer internet filters and accountability software. The latter keeps track of web browsing and sends e-mail updates of all online activity to an accountability partner.

—from *WORLD*

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## The Beast Within Us

“Every college pastor I’ve talked to about this says the same thing: Their students, even those in their leadership

groups, people leading Bible studies, and so forth, are sexually out of control.”

—Quote from Greg Thompson in an article by Lauren F. Winner in *Christianity Today*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Baby Makes Three

Research shows that the marriages of today’s young couples suffer when a baby joins the family. The drop in marital satisfaction after baby arrives is 42 percent larger among the current generation than it was in their predecessors. Indeed, the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University concluded in its 2004 annual report that “children seem to be a growing impediment for the happiness of marriages.” Why? Today’s generation has higher expectations than ever—children are expected to be smart, and highly involved in the arts and athletics. Also many new mothers cut back to part-time work or leave the workplace entirely. This can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. According to a study by psychologist and marriage expert John Gottman, it is the husband’s behavior that determines the level of marital happiness when the family begins. Couples who remain happy together after baby arrives are those in which the husband loves and respects his wife, pursues romance with her, and seeks to understand his wife’s inner life.

—from *Newsweek*

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### More Change in North Korea

Observers of North Korea speculate that military leaders and high-ranking civilian officials are taking control over more and more of that government from dictator “Dear Leader” Kim Jong II. Official North Korean media have recently urged the people to follow the “head leadership” instead of only mentioning Kim Jong II—this is very unfamiliar terminology. A slow-moving but dramatic revolution may be taking place. —from *WORLD*

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### The Cost of Raising a Child

The USDA estimates that it costs middle-class Americans \$178,590 to raise a child to age 18 (this does not include college). —from *Newsweek*

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### Missionary Tale Comes to the Screen

Those who loved *Through Gates of Splendor*, by Elisabeth Elliot, have something new to look for—a docudrama that tells the story of the five missionaries, their families, and the Waodani Indians. Available now to churches, it should be released on home DVD in October (see [www.everytribe.com](http://www.everytribe.com)).

A full-length film of the story, called *The End of the Spear*, is scheduled to be released in theaters in January 2006.

Here is a fascinating anecdote from the showing of the documentary to the Waodani. When the men who participated in the massacre tell the story of what happened that day, they said they were frightened after they had killed the missionaries. They saw and heard hundreds of foreigners on the treetops, accompanied by lights and music.

When the former warriors saw the docudrama, they reacted excitedly to trumpet music in the film: “That’s it! That’s the music we heard that day.”

—from *Charisma*

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### Biblical Worldview Undergirds Biblical Lifestyle

Ron Sider, in his new book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, reports on some revealing findings by George Barna. Though about 8 percent of Americans claim to be evangelicals, a much smaller group within evangelicalism holds to certain important beliefs. Barna says these have a “biblical worldview.” They believe “the Bible is the moral standard” and “absolute moral truths exist and are conveyed through the Bible.” They also “believe that God is the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator who still rules the universe, that salvation cannot be earned by their deeds, and that the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches.”

These worldview evangelicals were much more likely to avoid “adult-only” material on the Internet, boycott objectionable companies and products, choose not to watch a movie because of its bad content, and avoid tobacco products. They were much more likely to volunteer to help the needy.

Sider sums it up: “Barna’s findings on the different behavior of Christians with a biblical worldview underline the importance of theology. Biblical orthodoxy does matter. One important way to end the scandal of contemporary Christian behavior is to work and pray fervently for the growth of orthodox theological belief in our churches.” —from *WORLD*

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### The Heresy of Autonomous Congregations

Ron Sider comments on independent congregations: “It’s simply wrong for a local congregation to have no accountability to a larger body. Now I’m not saying it has to be one of the current denominations. There can be new structures of accountability. Any congregations that feel they must break away from older denominations that are no longer faithful

theologically or in terms of moral practice should be a part of some new denominational, organizational structure so they're not isolated lone rangers. They need to have a larger structure of accountability. It is flatly unbiblical and heretical for an individual congregation to say, 'We'll just be by ourselves and not be accountable to anybody.'

—from an interview with Ron Sider in *Christianity Today*

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**Is It Racist to Insist Upon Legal Immigration?**

Is it moral to hire an illegal alien? Victor Davis Hanson, a professor at California State University-Fresno, farmer, and author says, "No." His recent book *Mexifornia: A State of Becoming*, discusses the problem. He says that in public discourse and debate on the issue, when the "racial chauvinist screams 'racist' in lieu of logic, we all need to quit recoiling and apologizing" and chastise them "for polluting legitimate discussion with race." In a recent interview in *WORLD* magazine, Hanson shed light on the issues by asking some provocative questions.

"Is it so ethical to hire someone, pay him cash, break the law in doing so, and then expect the public to pick up the cost when such an employee is sick, hurt, laid off, or aged?" He continues, "By subsidizing cheap illegal labor, are you ensuring poor American citizens will not have jobs, will not be able to organize and unionize, and will not be able to compete for entry-level jobs? What is so moral about hiring illegal aliens to dig trenches on construction projects in Los Angeles when 30 percent of African-American youth are out of work and headed for trouble?"

Hanson says, that yes, Mexicans are hardworking and eager to handle the dirty work most Americans do not deign to perform. Most Californians do not

want seasonal jobs working in the fields, so some California counties boast 15 percent unemployment rates while saying they have to hire illegal aliens to bring in the harvest. Employers would rather hire Mexicans than "deal with the hassle of hiring our own unemployed, welfare recipients, the parolees, or the uneducated."

Hanson says we must return to immigration policies that work: measured and legal immigration, strict enforcement of our existing laws, stiff employer sanctions, and end to bilingual documents and interpreters, and ethnic chauvinism. English immersion—in other words, an end to the disastrous salad bowl and a return to the successful melting pot." —from *WORLD*

\* \* \* \* \*

**Piracy Today**

The Chinese government and people are guilty of grand larceny on a huge scale. One of the mainstays of their economy is copyright piracy, an estimated value of \$50 billion a year. The Chinese love to copy western products, and then sell these counterfeits as brand-name products. The government seems to wink at the problem. When a Chinese manufacturer sees something at a trade show, he tends not to think about patents and license fees—he is planning how he can make the same item more cheaply.

More than 90 percent of all CDs and DVDs and computer software sold in China are illegally copied. An example of another common trick: There is a chain of coffeehouses in Shanghai called "Starsbuck." More than 40 Chinese companies sank to the unbelievable low of manufacturing fake baby formula. Thirteen children died and 200 were harmed because the infant formula lacked protein, fat, and essential vitamins. —from *The Washington Times*

# God

by E. F. Kevan

When our Lord was speaking to the woman of Samaria, He answered one of her questions by saying, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). This is one of the easiest things for us to believe, and yet at the same time it is one of the most difficult things for our mind. We are so used to seeing things and feeling things that we find it not at all easy to think of One whom we cannot see and whom we cannot touch with our hands. Our Lord Jesus Christ on one occasion said, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). From these words, therefore, we understand that God does not subsist in a material body as we do, even though He may sometimes use a body like our own. Paul calls God the "invisible" God in Colossians 1:15, and in 1 Timothy 1:17 he gives praise to "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God."

## *God Manifesting Himself*

I have just said that although God does not subsist in a physical body like ours, He does sometimes appear in bodily form. This reminds us of the occasions when God did thus manifest Himself to men in this outward way. We are told, for example, that Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel "saw the God of Israel" (Exodus 24:9, 10). This is a very mysterious passage, and we are not clearly told what the appearance of God was like on this occasion. Isaiah tells us that he, too, once saw Jehovah (Isaiah 6:1). But I can hear you saying, What are we to make of the words in John 1:18, where we read, "No man hath seen God at any time"? And what are we to make of Paul's words about God being invisible? There is no contradiction here, for what Moses saw, and what Isaiah saw, was not God Him-

self in His invisible reality, but a form in which God appeared. They saw what we must more properly call a manifestation of God.

I wonder whether you have ever been interested in what the Old Testament has had to say about the "Angel of the Lord"? If you study such passages as Hagar's experiences of God, recorded in Genesis 16:7-13 and 21:17, 18, and similarly the experience of Abraham in Genesis 22:11, 12, noticing carefully the words in verse 12, you will see that "the Angel of the Lord" is none other than the Lord Himself. Study carefully the other appearance of God to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 18:1-33, and also what is said concerning the Angel in Judges 2:1-3. A clear distinction is made in the Hebrew of our Old Testament between "an angel of the Lord" and "the Angel of the Lord." The Revised Version always preserves this distinction, but the translators of the Authorized Version did not constantly keep this clear. Many devout students think that this "Angel" of the Lord was the Son of God before He finally came in the form of our human nature.

No thought about the forms in which God has manifested Himself can be regarded as complete without some reference to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Using the words of John 1:14, we may say "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." Paul says that God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3); and writing to the Christian believers at Corinth he affirms that the knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). In this way our Lord Himself explained to His disciples that those who had seen Him

had really seen the Father (John 14:9). Our Lord Jesus Christ is the highest and last way in which God has appeared in a material and physical form.

### ***One God—Three Persons***

The Israelites lived among heathen people who worshiped many gods. It was the glory of Israel's religion that to them had been revealed the fact that there is one God only. This is what Moses means in Deuteronomy 4:35, where he says, "Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him." It was for this purpose that God raised up Israel as His witness in the world. See Isaiah 43:10; 44:6; and 45:5. The Lord Jesus confirmed this great truth in His words in Mark 12:29, 30. This has an important and practical bearing on our spiritual experience, when we learn that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Although it is true that there is but one God, the mystery is also revealed to us that God is Three in One and One in Three. I have called this a mystery, because it is the deepest mystery of everything that has been revealed to us. It is to this mystery that we refer when we speak of the Trinity. Turn to such passages as Genesis 1:26; 3:22; and Isaiah 6:8. If you will examine these passages carefully you will find God speaking of Himself in the plural, by the use of such pronouns as "us" and "our." If you look at John 1:1, you will discover the same truth there. God's Son who is called "the Word" is said both to be God and to be with God. This truth about the Trinity comes into much clearer statement in passages like Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. Do not try to explain to yourself how God can be Three and yet One. We must accept this as something which God has made known to us about Himself. There is nothing to be wondered at in the fact that we meet

with mystery in the revelation of God. God would cease to be "God" to us, if we could measure and explain and comprehend Him completely.

### ***The Character of God***

If we are baffled in seeking to plumb the depths of God's wonderful being, we shall not find it so difficult to appreciate His character.

God's character may be rightly understood as holy love. We need both these words to describe Him properly, and if ever we separate His holiness from His love, or His love from His holiness, we have a poor and a one-sided idea of God.

In the very earliest use of language, the word *holy* meant that God was apart from us; but in the Bible it means, more especially, the apartness of God through His purity and faithfulness and truth. In these things He is far beyond us, and it is this that the Bible means when it says that God is holy. Look up such passages as Joshua 24:19; Isaiah 6:3; and 57:15. In Isaiah 5:16 we learn that it is only by righteousness that we honour the holiness of God. Peter reminds the Christians of his day that because God is holy, He expects holiness from them. Find this in 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

On account of God's holiness He must resist all evil and punish all sin. God's wrath is the expression of His holiness when it is in the presence of iniquity and sin. See Deuteronomy 25:16; Exodus 34:6, 7; and Psalm 5:4-6. In the New Testament, read the solemn words in Romans 1:18-21.

God's justice, righteousness, truth, and faithfulness are based on His holiness. By these words we mean the way in which a holy God acts towards His creatures. He rewards goodness (2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 6:10) and punishes evil (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23). He speaks truth (Hebrews 6:18) and keeps His promises (Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 1 John 1:9). We can count on God always to do right. See Genesis

18:25 and Psalm 145:17.

The love of God is written as plainly in the Scripture as is His holiness. This love is spoken of just as freely in the Old Testament as in the New. In the Old Testament it is often spoken of as mercy or loving-kindness, and in this sense it has a special reference to God's love for the sinner. Psalm 103:8 says, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." See also such passages as Deuteronomy 4:31, and Psalm 86:15. God's mercy is promised to those who forsake their sins, and to those alone (Proverbs 28:13). Toward those who truly repent God delights to show mercy. Look up Exodus 34:7; Psalm 51:1; Isaiah 55:7; and Micah 7:18, and see if these lovely words do not make your heart beat faster.

God's love comes to full expression in His gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. Read slowly and reverently such words as those in John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8, and John 4:9, 10. It was by the love of God that the remedy for sin was provided (Ephesians 2:1-10), and by that same

love we are lifted into the very family of God Himself (1 John 3:1, 2).

Holy love! Think on these two words, and always think of them together. God is never holy at the expense of His love; God is never loving at the expense of His holiness. The perfect and equal manifestation of God's love and holiness is found in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. No one ever loved sinners as He loved them; yet no one revealed more perfectly the sinless purity of the holy God than He. The tenderest words of sympathy and pardon fell from Jesus' lips (John 8:1-11; Mark 2:1-13; Luke 23:39-43); but also from Him we receive the fiercest and the sternest denunciations of sin and threats of judgment (Matthew 11:20-24; 23:13-15). By His death as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) God's holiness and love find harmonious expression, and God is both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). ■

—Taken from "What the Scriptures Teach"

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# God's "Omni" Attributes

by Andrew S. Kulikovsky  
November 12, 2000

## I. INTRODUCTION

Probably the most well-known of God's incommunicable attributes are what have become known as the "omni" attributes—omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. However, none of these words are actually mentioned in the Scriptures, but are in fact Latin derivatives used to identify the theological constructs pertaining to God's power, knowledge, and presence.

It is because of this that these attributes of God have been misunderstood by many people—both Christians and non-Christians. People's understanding of God's power, knowledge, and presence seems to be limited to their understanding of the words *omnipotence*, *omniscience*, and *omnipresence* respectively. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to expound the proper meaning of these words in relation to the attributes of God and the teaching of Scripture.

## II. OMNIPRESENCE

### 1. Definition

The term *omnipresence* is borrowed from Latin. It is a compound of *omni*, meaning "all," and *praesens*, meaning "here." Thus, God is always here, close to everything, next to everyone.<sup>1</sup> This means that God is unlimited with respect to space. As Wayne Grudem puts it, "God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with His whole being, yet God acts differently in different places."<sup>2</sup>

A. W. Tozer posits that fewer truths are so clearly taught in Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Scriptures teach that even though the highest heavens cannot contain God (1 Kings 8:27), He is still

nearby when we pray, unlike other gods, which don't even exist (Deuteronomy 4:7). Yet, God is not just nearby, He is in fact everywhere! He fills heaven and earth and no one can hide from Him. There are no secret places where He is excluded (Jeremiah 23:23, 24). The Psalmist summarizes this truth beautifully:

Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths,  
you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast (Psalm 139:7-10, NIV).

### 2. Objections

It appears that Colossians 2:9 presents a real problem for this doctrine: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." Yet Christ is apparently not omnipresent. Indeed, verses such as Matthew 26:64 and Mark 16:19, which describe Christ as "sitting at the right hand of God," present a similar problem.

On the other hand, John 3:13 contains a variant reading which adds the phrase "who is in heaven" to the end of the verse. The majority of the United Bible Societies' committee rejected this variant's authenticity, labeling it as "an interpretive gloss, reflecting later Christological development,"<sup>4</sup> but David Alan Black has pointed out that there is overwhelming evidence (both internal and external) suggesting that the variant is, in fact, original.<sup>5</sup> If this is the case, John 3:13 teaches that the "Son of Man" was in heaven when Jesus uttered the words of that verse. Yet

Jesus Himself is identified as the “Son of Man” throughout the gospels. This implies that the “Son of Man” was not only in heaven but was also living among humans on Earth. Thus, according to John 3:13, it is possible for the “Son of Man” to be in multiple places at the same time.

But how can this be? How can a physical body in time and space be omnipresent? Henry Thiessen resolves the problem by stating that omnipresence is not a necessary part of God’s being, but rather, is a free act of His will: “If God should will to destroy the universe, his omnipresence would cease, but he himself would not cease to be.”<sup>6</sup> John Walvoord adds:

To explain a body as omnipresent, however, ends in a concept of a body which has lost all of its distinguishing qualities. . . . For this reason, it is preferable to regard the qualities of the human nature of Christ as finite. The body, soul, and spirit have locality, but do not have the infinite qualities that belong to the divine nature.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the second person of the Trinity (God, the Son), who was incarnated as Christ Jesus, is omnipresent—even while Christ was living on earth. The Word, who was with God in the beginning, and who was God in every aspect, became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:1, 2, 14). Therefore, the incarnation does not necessarily lead to a falsification of omnipresence.

### **3. Life Application**

The doctrine of omnipresence is extremely comforting and subduing to the believer since God is always available to help (Psalm 46:1). He is near to all those who call on him (Psalm 145:18), and always will be to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20b). On the other hand, the doctrine is also a strong warning and a deterrent, since no one can escape the presence of God.

## **III. OMNISCIENCE**

### **1. Definition**

Again, the term *omniscience* is borrowed from Latin. It is also a compound of *omni*, meaning “all,” and *scientia*, meaning “knowledge.” Grudem explains it in this way: “God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and external act.”<sup>8</sup> Or, as Tozer describes it, God knows “every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, God is infinite in regard to knowledge. He knows Himself and all other things perfectly (Job 37:16), whether they be actual or merely possible, throughout all of time (Isaiah 46:10; 1 John 3:20b). He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly.<sup>10</sup> Since God knows all things perfectly, He knows nothing better than any other thing.<sup>11</sup> Tozer adds that God knows instantly and effectively

all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, if God has perfect knowledge, He has no need to learn. Moreover, such perfect knowledge implies that God has never learned and, in fact, cannot learn.<sup>13</sup> Thus, God does not need to reason toward His conclusions or ponder carefully over His answers.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Isaiah writes:

Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to

enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13, 14, NIV).

Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that God's understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5), and that all persons of the Trinity know each other perfectly (Matthew 11:27; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11). Nothing is hidden from God's sight—everything is uncovered and laid bare before Him (Hebrews 4:13). The Lord watches all of Mankind and considers everything they do (Psalm 33:13-15). His eyes are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good (Proverbs 15:3). Each person's attitudes, behavior, and choices are in full view of God (Proverbs 5:21). No thought, action, desire, or motive can be hidden from Him—as the Psalmist explains:

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD (Psalm 139:1-4, NIV).

He knows even the most minute details about everything (Matthew 10:29, 30), and about every person:

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:15, 16, NIV).

And, of course, the many prophetic predictions in Scripture show that God also knows the future, although it should be noted that, if we assume that God is outside of, and not constrained by, time, then God does not actually know *the* future. He does, however, know events which are future relative to

any particular point in the space-time continuum. As Cook rightly points out, "a timeless God does not strictly fore-know anything, he just knows. . . ." <sup>15</sup> Indeed, all knowledge is ever-present in His consciousness, <sup>16</sup> and He is never surprised or amazed.

Not only does God know all actual events throughout time, He apparently also knows all *possible* and *hypothetical* events. For example, in 1 Samuel 23:10-13, when David was in Keilah he heard that Saul was plotting against him, so he asked God whether Saul will come down to Keilah in order to capture him, and whether the people of Keilah, whom he had delivered from the Philistines, would hand him over. God revealed to David that Saul would indeed come down to Keilah, and that the people of Keilah would hand him over. Therefore, David left Keilah and Saul's trip to Keilah never eventuated, so the people of Keilah never had the opportunity to hand David over.

In Matthew 11:21, Jesus declares that if the miracles that were performed in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Similarly, in Matthew 11:23 He declares that if the miracles that were performed in Capernaum had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

In addition, Isaiah 48:18 demonstrates that God knows the potential and universal result of our actions and choices.

Note, however, that omniscience should not be confused with causation. Just because God *knows* that events will happen at a point in time which is in the future by our reckoning does *not* necessarily mean that God *determined* these events—foreknowledge and foreordination are not necessarily the same. <sup>17</sup> Free actions do not take place because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because they may possibly take

place. Thus, the prediction or prophecy of a morally evil event or action does not remove the human perpetrator's ultimate responsibility and accountability for their actions.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, as Cook rightly points out:

a timeless God does not strictly fore-know anything, he just knows, and knowledge of something occurring by no means entails that that which occurs cannot be contingent and autonomous. What God timelessly knows would depend, in part, on what I freely choose. He would infallibly know all my choices without determining them.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Objections

If God is perfect in knowledge and knows everything that can be known throughout all of time, then He must know evil things. But how can a holy and righteous God know evil? Indeed, such objections were raised long ago in the days of Thomas Aquinas:

Further, what is known through another and not through itself, is imperfectly known. But evil is not known by God; for the thing known must be in the knower. Therefore if evil is known through another, namely, through good, it would be known by Him imperfectly; which cannot be, for the knowledge of God is not imperfect. Therefore God does not know evil things.

However, such objections were also answered long ago. Aquinas responds:

To know a thing by something else only, belongs to imperfect knowledge, if that thing is of itself knowable, but evil is not of itself knowable, forasmuch as the very nature of evil means the privation of good; therefore evil can neither be defined nor known except by good.

God's statement in Isaiah 43:25 also seems to present a problem for omniscience. "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."

How can an omniscient God erase something from His memory, and yet still be regarded as being perfect in knowledge? The Hebrew word translated "remember" carries the idea of recalling past events and experiences such that they effect present thought, feeling, and actions. Therefore, in Isaiah 43:25, God is declaring that He will *not* let past events affect His present thought and actions. Thus, the use of this word does not mean or imply that the past events and experiences have been completely erased from the memory.

Grudem points out that another possible objection is based on Jeremiah 7:31: "They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind."<sup>20</sup> This verse gives the impression that God was surprised by these actions and caught unprepared. However, looking back over history reveals that burning children had occurred centuries before (2 Kings 16:3; 17:17), and God Himself forbid the practice 800 years earlier in Leviticus 18:21. Thus, Grudem suggests that the clause "nor did it enter my mind" would be better rendered such that endorsement for the practice had never entered His heart, in the sense of Him willing or desiring it, i.e. ". . . nor did I wish/desire it."<sup>21</sup>

Grudem also points out that some theologians have concluded that God does not know the future—at least with any certainty—because, according to them, such knowledge would take away our freedom to act.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Francis Beckwith also points this out. He notes that some theologians and philosophers

have tried to resolve the supposed conflict by denying that God knows the future, although they believe that he is nevertheless omniscient. What they mean by this is that God knows everything that can be known, but since the future is not actual and

hence not a thing his not knowing it does not count against his omniscience.<sup>23</sup>

However, Beckwith concludes that

the limited omniscience position is inconsistent with the Biblical test for a prophet, for when they are juxtaposed the following conclusion is drawn: God is not God. But this is absurd. Furthermore the five possible ways of avoiding this conclusion do not seem to work. Hence unless one wants to give up a high view of Scripture the limited omniscience position is logically untenable and ought to be rejected.<sup>24</sup>

Brian Leftow raises another objection. He argues that a propositionally omniscient being is impossible and therefore, God is not propositionally omniscient. He reasons that for each person there is a truth that that person alone knows. An example of such a truth statement is a man named Herman saying, "I am Herman." While others may know that Herman is indeed Herman, only Herman knows what it is to *be* Herman. Therefore, there are some things which God does not know which makes Him less than omniscient.<sup>25</sup> However, this objection appears to be defining omniscience in terms which are far too narrow. God does indeed know Herman, and, as a result of the incarnation, knows what it is *like* to be Herman.

### **3. Life Application**

The doctrine of omniscience is truly frightening to those who have something to hide, since nothing can be hidden from God's sight—God knows it all! On the other hand, God's omniscience is comforting to those who are open to God's conviction. It is also comforting to know that God knows what it is like to live as a human being, what it is like to have needs and wants, what it is like to be tempted, and what it is like to suffer (Hebrew 4:15). Furthermore, it is comforting to know that God knows our

needs before we even ask for His assistance (Matthew 6:8).

## **IV. OMNIPOTENCE**

### **1. Definition**

As with the other *omni* terms, "omnipotence" is a Latin compound of *omni*, meaning "all," and *potens*, meaning "power." Grudem defines it in this way: "God's omnipotence means that God is able to do all his holy will."<sup>26</sup>

Omnipotence implies the possession of all power, and unlimited power. An omniscient God can do anything He pleases (Job 42:2) and is never exhausted. His power is unlimited in regard to both its extent and its magnitude. What is impossible for man *is* possible for God (Matthew 19:26). Nothing is too hard for Him (Jeremiah 32:17). Furthermore, anything can be done as easily as anything else, and all acts are done effortlessly.<sup>27</sup>

Note also that the possession of omnipotence does not demand its exercise: "God can do what he wills to do, but he does not necessarily will to do anything." In other words, God has power over His power.<sup>28</sup>

### **2. Objections**

It is important to note that omnipotence also includes the power of self-limitation. For example, God created other beings which have free will, and His Son voluntarily took on the form of humanity (the incarnation). Because of this self-limitation, God does not keep sin out by force, or force people to repent and believe (that power lies solely with each individual person).

When describing the doctrine of omnipotence, it is not entirely accurate to say that God can do "anything," for God *cannot* do anything that would deny His own nature and/or character.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Thomas Aquinas writes:

All confess that God is omnipotent; but it seems difficult to explain in what His omnipotence precisely consists: for

there may be doubt as to the precise meaning of the word "all" when we say that God can do all things.<sup>30</sup>

God is able to do whatever He wills, but His will is limited by His nature. In other words, God cannot contradict His own nature.<sup>31</sup> God cannot sin, because sinning means that God does evil, and evil is something which is outside of the will of God. So if God sins He is going against His own will, which is absurd. Therefore, it is legitimate to say that God cannot sin, yet also maintain that God is omnipotent.

Indeed, God cannot do anything that is absurd or self-contradictory. For example, God cannot make a boulder so heavy that He cannot lift it, or create a square circle. In any case, these are not objects of power and so "denote no limitation of God's omnipotence."<sup>32</sup>

Aquinas, on the other hand, raises the question of power and effect. Power is made known by its effect, otherwise it would be ineffectual, but if the power of God is infinite then it must produce an infinite effect, which is impossible. However, Aquinas also offers a solution to this problem. The power of a univocal agent is wholly manifested in its effect, but it is clear that God is not a univocal agent, since nothing compares with Him either in species or in genus. Therefore, it follows that His effect is always less than His power.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. Life Application

The doctrine of omnipotence is also a great source of comfort and hope to those who seek God, since there is no one God cannot save, no situation where God is unable to intervene, and no circumstances which are too harsh or difficult for God to handle. He is able to do even more than we can possibly imagine (Ephesians 3:20). On the other hand, the doctrine of omnipotence is a warning and source of fear to unbelievers, since they have no excuse for rejecting God (Romans 1:2) and will ulti-

mately endure God's wrath.

### V. CONCLUSION

The *omni* attributes of God must be understood correctly if they are to be considered as coherent doctrines. When they are understood correctly, they are a source of great comfort to Christians, and provoke us to worship our awesome God. However, to those who are running and/or hiding from God, they are a source of great fear and distress. ■

### ENDNOTES

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5. D. A. Black, "The Text of John 3:13" *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (Sep 1985) 49-65.
6. H. C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979) 80.
7. J. F. Walvoord, "The Present Work of Christ—Part VIII: The Present Work of Christ on Earth" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122 (Oct 1965) 292.
8. Grudem, 190.
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10. Thiessen, 81.
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14. Grudem, 191.
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17. Thiessen, 81.
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19. Cook, 89.
20. Also in Jeremiah 19:5.
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23. F. J. Beckwith, "Limited Omniscience and the Test for a Prophet: A Brief Philosophical Analysis" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (Sep 1993) 357.
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25. B. Leftow, "Time, Actuality, and Omniscience," *Religious Studies* 26 (1990) 310.
26. Grudem, 216.
27. Tozer, 92.
28. Thiessen, 82.
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33. Aquinas, 1.25.2

# Thomas Oden's Charge of Heresy

*Concerning the Denial of God's Foreknowledge*

by John Piper

The articles in *Christianity Today* (Feb. 9, 1998) by Roger Olson and Timothy George and Thomas Oden intensify the concern that we should have over the teaching of Greg Boyd (especially concerning the foreknowledge of God), professor of theology at Bethel College and preaching pastor of Woodland Hills Church. Of particular relevance is the recent article by Thomas Oden, a Methodist scholar who has become famous in recent years because of his turn from old-line liberalism to evangelicalism.

Oden knows theological liberalism and how a group gets there. Oden's comments are all the more significant for two other reasons. Oden is an Arminian. This is significant because the question of whether Greg Boyd's view is orthodox has been deflected by some, as if it were an intramural tiff between Calvinists and Arminians, which it isn't. Here is what Thomas Oden said of the view that Boyd (and Clark Pinnock and others) teaches and writes:

If "reformists" insist on keeping the boundaries of heresy open, however, then they must be resisted with charity. The fantasy that God is ignorant of the future is a heresy that must be rejected on Scriptural grounds ("I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come"; Isaiah 46:10a; cf. Job 28; Psalm 90; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1), as it has

been in the history of the exegesis of relevant passages. This issue was thoroughly discussed by patristic exegetes as early as Origen's *Against Celsus*. Keeping the boundaries of faith undefined is a demonic temptation that evangelicals within the mainline have learned all too well and have been burned by all too painfully. (Thomas Oden, "The Real Reformers and the Traditionalists," *Christianity Today*, Feb. 9, 1998, p. 46, emphasis added)

There is no point in equivocating here about the degree to which the future is known. In this context in *Christianity Today*, with Clark Pinnock involved, and the issue of the "openness of God" on the front burner, the reader is not left in the dark as to what Thomas Oden is referring to. He is referring to the very kind of doctrine that is being taught at Bethel College and defended in three books from Greg Boyd (*Letters From a Skeptic*, *God at War*, and *Trinity and Process*, with another volume promised, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*).

In other words, a leading Arminian evangelical theologian who is not marginal or alarmist or fundamentalistic or narrow calls this view "heresy." He does so not in a huff behind closed doors, but calmly and with charity in a mainstream evangelical publication. This is very significant. ■

—from [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)

# What Does God Know?

by Robert B. Strimple

The most basic element of our Christian faith, namely, our doctrine of God Himself, especially His omniscience has historically taught that God is the One who declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), the God who knows perfectly not only the present and the past but also the future. For this reason the psalmist can confidently trust that “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16).

## *The Present Crisis*

The attacks on the doctrine of God’s all-inclusive foreknowledge have been spearheaded by Richard Rice and Clark Pinnock. Their boldness (chutzpah) in denying this universally held Christian doctrine is truly remarkable, because they themselves recognize that, although Christian theologians have held differing views of the relationship between God’s foreknowledge and His foreordination, and between God’s foreordination and human responsibility, the entire broad historical stream of orthodox Christian faith has affirmed the comprehensive character of God’s foreknowledge. They refer to the view they are rejecting as “traditional theism” or “classical theism” and readily acknowledge that this has been the theism of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Arminianism.

## *Old Socinianism or New Evangelicalism?*

Many readers may never have heard of the Socinians. They were a small splinter group that arose shortly after the Reformation. Socinian churches were especially influential in Poland for a time; later the Socinian movement spread to England, where it was soon absorbed into Deism and disappeared as a separate movement. Socinianism is usually remembered for

(1) its denial of the deity of Christ and (2) its denial of the need for a substitutionary atonement and for justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. Socinianism, therefore, was considered a heresy regarding the person and the work of Christ.

But Socinianism also held to a heretical doctrine of God. The Socinian doctrine can be stated very briefly, and it must be contrasted with both Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinism (or Augustinianism) teaches that the sovereign God has *foreordained* whatsoever comes to pass, and therefore He *foreknows* whatsoever comes to pass. Arminianism denies that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass but wishes nevertheless to affirm God’s foreknowledge of whatsoever comes to pass. The Socinians denied not only that God has foreordained the free decisions of free agents but also that God foreknows what those decisions will be.

That is precisely the teaching of the “freewill theism” of Pinnock, Rice, and other like-minded “new model evangelicals.” They want their doctrine of God to sound very “new,” very modern, by dressing it up with references to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle in physics and to the insights of process theology. But it is just the old Socinian heresy rejected by the church centuries ago.

Right down to some of its most basic arguments, it is Socinianism all over again. For example, the oft-repeated affirmation by Rice and Pinnock is that they believe in God’s omniscience, yes; but, after all, *omniscience* means knowing all that is knowable, and the free decisions of free creatures (and the consequences of those decisions) are not knowable. This is not only an argument from Richard Swinburne (often cited) but also a direct echo of the Socinian argument.

Nowhere in the writings of the contemporary exponents of the “open view” of God, however, do we find a reference to the Socinian roots of their doctrine.

Why is it important to recognize that this allegedly “new” doctrine of God is not new at all? Certainly not because being an old view makes it a wrong view, but that we might guard against the false notion that the “new model” evangelicals are presenting now for the first time some creative new idea and that perhaps if our forefathers had only known these ideas they would have rethought their doctrine of God. Quite the contrary, our forefathers were presented with the modern Rice/Pinnock arguments in the form of Socinianism and clearly rejected them.

### ***God’s Sovereignty and Human Freedom***

It is tempting to enter into a point-by-point rebuttal of the arguments presented for the so-called “open view of God.” Instead, I would like to present a brief, positive statement of the biblical doctrine regarding God’s sovereignty and human freedom. I shall do that by making just *two* points (the first at some length, the second briefly).

#### **God’s Sovereignty Is Not the Problem**

The Bible never presents the fact that God orders all things according to the purpose of His will as a threat to human freedom. Rice and Pinnock see a great tension, even an impossible contradiction, between any affirmation of God’s sovereignty and an affirmation of man’s true freedom. The Bible does not. The insistence by these “freewill theists” that there is an irrational tension here—and thus we must choose which truth we shall affirm, God’s sovereignty or human freedom—strangely echoes the concern that has been the driving motivation of modern atheism, whether in Ludwig Feuerbach (who influenced Karl Marx so strongly) or in Friedrich Nietzsche or in

twentieth-century existentialist Jean Paul Sartre. We might call this a seesaw (teeter-totter) conception: if humans are to “go up” (be recognized for all that they are, as significant and valuable), then God must “go down.” God is viewed by such thinkers as the greatest imaginable threat to the dignity and freedom of man. But the Biblical perspective is diametrically opposed to that notion.

Modern atheism answers the alleged threat (solves the supposed tension) by declaring that God does not exist. Deism had earlier handled the alleged threat to human freedom by removing God from His creation once He had “gotten the ball rolling.” Rice and Pinnock, on the other hand, present a supposedly reduced or “limited” removal of God from the picture. They refer over and over again to the fact that God does not know all the “details” of the future, that “some” actions are not under God’s control, namely, those actions that result from human decisions and the consequences of such actions. Rice emphasizes that

God knows a great deal about what will happen. . . . He knows infallibly the content of His own future actions, to the extent that they are not related to human choices. . . . And He knows the ultimate outcome to which He is guiding the course of history. All that God does not know is the content of future free decisions and this is because decisions are not there to know until they occur.

He even suggests that

the openness that genuine freedom entails may actually constitute a small proportion of what will happen. . . . [Those future events that are certain to occur] would include divine actions that are not dependent upon circumstances in the creaturely world but arise solely from God’s personal decision . . . [unrelated to] free creaturely decisions. . . . Genuine freedom in particular requires only that the future be open to some extent.

Similar assurances that God knows much about future events and that it is

only some “details” that remain unknown to God until they actually happen appear repeatedly in Pinnock’s argument. But are Rice and Pinnock being candid with us when they emphasize the “modest” character of their proposal? Either they are disingenuous, or they have not thought through sufficiently the implications of their position.

Think about it. Just how “limited” is the part of this world’s ongoing history that we are asked to see as not under God’s control, nor even within His present knowledge? How many truly significant occurrences in our world are *not* the actions of human beings or the consequences of such actions? Pinnock and Rice give us surprisingly few specific examples of such occurrences—preferring to speak vaguely of “divine actions that are not dependent upon circumstances in the creaturely world.” Perhaps the fact that the sun will shine on my picnic tomorrow would be one such event. But even a “natural” phenomenon such as whether or not tomorrow will be sunny in southern California may well be determined by how much smog has been produced by how many automobiles whose drivers decided to turn the ignition key in the past several days. And, of course, at a global level, how could God know it as absolutely certain that someone would not have made this planet uninhabitable before tomorrow by recklessly unleashing a nuclear holocaust?

Other contributors to the book *The Openness of God* reflect further on the kind of confidence freewill theism can offer in the final triumph of the God of love. One thing, of course, is clear: no assurance can be offered to individual sinners. Any certainty must remain general at best, never personal. According to contributor William Hasker, “God governs the world according to *general strategies* which are, as a whole, ordered for the good of the creation but whose detailed consequences are not foreseen or intended by God prior to the decision to adopt them.” Therefore, David Basinger acknowledges

that he “naturally find[s] prayers requesting even noncoercive divine influence in the lives of others to be very problematic.” And there is a poignant sadness to his conclusion at the end of the volume:

There are certain risks involved. Things do not always turn out as expected or desired. But the God to whom we are committed is always walking beside us, experiencing what we are experiencing when we are experiencing it, always willing to help to the extent consistent with our status as responsible creations of His.

The role of the God of freewill theism thus seems to be reduced to that of a well-meaning but essentially powerless grandparent, who desires the best for his grandchildren but can do little to bring it about.

In a response to *The Openness of God*, Timothy George speaks of “the vague hope that somehow good will triumph over evil,” and he makes this comment: “But the ‘open God’ cannot guarantee that it will. He can only struggle with us against the chaos and keep on trying harder.” The argument that because God has a *limitless* number of plans (A, B, *ad infinitum*) we can be certain that His loving purpose for humankind will ultimately be fulfilled is guilty of the same logical fallacy as the evolutionist’s insistence that given drafts of time sufficiently vast, mere chance could have produced everything, including human persons, who are the image of God. If a cause sufficient to produce the desired result is not at work at some point—and remember that the fundamental premise of freewill theism is that God must never “overpower” human freedom by transforming the hard hearts of sinners—that result will never be accomplished.

In order to emphasize the sharp contrast between the popular contention that, if God were truly sovereign and ultimately in control, genuine human freedom would be destroyed, and the *Biblical* perspective, a little fish story may be helpful. One day it occurred to this fish as he swam in the vast ocean with water all around him, on

every side, that this water was hemming him in, cramping his style, limiting his freedom and his opportunity to fulfill the full potentialities of his “fishness.” So he swam over near the shore, and he huffed and he puffed and he threw himself up on the beach. And he shouted out: “I’m free at last!”

But you and I know what was really the case. Almost with that very shout he was not free but *dead!* The water all around him had not been limiting his freedom as a fish or making it impossible for him to fulfill all the potentialities of his fishness. On the contrary, that water was the very element in which he lived and moved and had his being as a fish. It was the necessary and perfect environment in which to fulfill his fishness.

For us as human beings created in God’s image it is, as the apostle Paul emphasized, in God that we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). It is a common misunderstanding to think that our “problem”—as far as being free and fulfilling our full potential as women and men created in God’s image—is that God is sovereign, that He works all things according to the purpose of His will. *The truth is that the sovereignty of God, far from rendering meaningless the freedom and personality of men and women, guarantees that their actions will be full of meaning.* The atheist, for example, has every reason to conclude that human actions are meaningless, ultimately of no significance, given his philosophic premise. But the fact is that men and women do not live in that kind of universe—an impersonal, chance-is-ultimate universe in which human actions take place in the vacuum of the unknown. They live in *God’s world* in which God has ordained that the decisions and actions of His image (men and women) shall have *eternal* significance.

The ultimate test of any doctrinal formulation is to be found in its consistent faithfulness to the evidence of Scripture. Only in submitting, truly, to the authority

of Scripture does evangelical theology honor the evangel itself. That is the test, ultimately, of this new “openness” proposal. What does the Word of God say? The simple fact is this: *The relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility is never presented in the Bible as a problem.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ announced in Luke 22:22 that He, the Son of Man, would go from that last supper with His disciples to His arrest and crucifixion “*as it has been decreed*” by God. But does this fact of God’s sovereign foreordination in any way lessen human responsibility and guilt? Not at all! Our Lord makes this quite clear as He immediately adds, “but woe to that man who betrays him.” Woe to him because he will be held *accountable* for his sin; he will be judged by God, the holy judge; and he will be punished.

In Acts 2:23 the instructive conjunction of the two truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility again appears. The handing over of Jesus of Nazareth to those responsible for His execution was “by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge”—a most clear and strong affirmation of the sovereign divine ordination of this evil act, the arch-crime of human history, the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. But immediately we read that it was through the agency of “wicked men”—*wicked*, notice, because *responsible* for their action and *guilty* of the sin—that He was put to death.

Acts 4:28 is quite similar. Herod, Pontus Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, when they met together to conspire against God’s holy servant, Jesus, “did what [God’s] power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” But there is absolutely no suggestion that those wicked sinners were anything but responsible and guilty for their evil conspiracy and heinous actions, and it is for that reason that they will suffer the penalties spoken of in that second Psalm to which Peter appeals here.

Now, it is true that for our limited, creaturely understanding it does present us with an ultimate *mystery* in the sense that

we cannot perfectly see through the way in which our acting as free, responsible agents is interrelated to God's acting. In reality, here is where the true *limitation* comes into the picture. It is not *God's* knowledge but *our* finite human understanding that is limited. The ultimate mystery exists for our limited minds. That is true because of the two doctrines that the Bible everywhere sets before us, sometimes in the same verse, as we have already noticed in Luke-Acts: (1) God is the eternal God who has foreordained (and therefore foreknows) whatsoever comes to pass; and (2) a man or a woman, His creature, is a *person*, that is, a free agent who acts on the basis of decisions that are his own and for which he and he alone is therefore responsible. And those two truths are the truths that "light up," so to speak, all reality and all our experience so that this mystery does not puzzle us or distress us but rather reveals to us what we need to know in order to worship and serve our God aright.

Consider the Biblical doctrine of inspiration. The Holy Spirit's "carrying along" the prophets so that they spoke from God (2 Peter 1:21), God's "breathing out" the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16), clearly reveals to us that there is absolutely no tension between the sovereign control of God and human freedom. Indeed, the Biblical writers were most perfectly free when they were most totally controlled by the Holy Spirit.

It is unclear how the inspiration of the Bible is to be understood from a "limited omniscience" perspective. Did God have to wait to see what the prophet or the apostle would pen next in order to decide whether that could be included in His inerrant, authoritative Scripture? Are we to picture God peering over Paul's shoulder and saying, "Oh, I like that! That's good! I want that in my New Testament"? John Sanders asks, "What sort of relationship can we have with a God who cannot act or communicate clearly?" A good question. But how can the God of freewill theism communicate clearly through human

words if He cannot control human decisions regarding word choice any more than other human decisions?

This is our first point, then. The fact that God is sovereign is not our problem. That is not what limits our freedom and our fulfillment of all that we should be as God's children. The all-embracing sovereignty of God is as much our proper element, as God's creatures, as the sea is the proper element of the fish. Our problem, as the Bible consistently sees it, is *our sin*, and this is my second point.

### **The Problem Is Sin**

For our forefathers in the faith, the "problem" for man's free will was a *theological* (ethical) one, not a *philosophical* (metaphysical) one. They were speaking of the fact that man, who was created holy and good (according to Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), by the bad use of his free will lost himself. That is, by his willful, voluntary sin, his rebellion against the sole authority of his Creator and Lawgiver, man became guilty before his God, incurring the penalty for his sin—death (psycho-physical, spiritual, and eternal death)—and sinners are in slavery now to sinful hearts.

The Fall did not alter the fact that man is a free agent, a person, not a robot or a merely instinct-driven animal. His decisions are from-within-determined by a decision of his own will. This is true of fallen men and women just as much as it was true of Adam. There is a vast difference between an *enslaved* will and an *annihilated* will.

As our Lord taught (for example, in His parable of the good tree and the good fruit and the bad tree and the rotten fruit, Matt. 7:17, 18; 12:33-35), what is needed is a new heart. And a new heart is God's gracious gift, not man's attainment (see Ezek. 36:26, 27).

This is the second of our two points, then. As the Bible sees it, our problem is sin, and our need is for the Saviour and for His liberating, life-giving Spirit. True freedom is not simply a metaphysical human

attribute. True freedom is God's gracious gift to those whom He, by the Spirit, makes His bondslaves in union with Christ.

It is nothing short of amazing—and most distressing—that the lengthy discussions by Rice and Pinnock concerning the freedom of the human will are totally silent on both these counts. They simply do not speak about the effects of sin or about the need for a Saviour. They do not reflect on the fact that men and women as they are, apart from the grace of God, apart from Christ, apart from the Holy Spirit, *cannot* make the right decisions. Reading their presentations, one would think that sinners on their own can do all that is necessary to please and obey God. As a matter of fact, pleasing God and obeying God do not seem to be in the forefront of concern.

***But What Difference Does This Really Make?***

Some readers may still want to ask, "After all is said and done, what difference does it make whether I view God as foreknowing all things or not? Perhaps this matter of whether or not God's omniscience is 'limited' is one of those esoteric questions that professional theologians get paid to debate but that 'regular people'

need not concern themselves with." The importance of any single point of Biblical doctrine is that Biblical theology "hangs together." Pinnock himself recognizes that "no doctrine is more central than the nature of God. It deeply affects our understanding of the incarnation, grace, creation, sovereignty, and salvation."

In a 1989 essay tracing his personal "pilgrimage in theology," Pinnock describes the way in which he has had to rethink the atoning work of Christ. In his 1990 book *Tracking the Maze*, he insists that such "orthodox doctrines" as "belief in plenary inspiration, vicarious atonement, the deity of Christ, etc." should not be "the litmus test" of what is true evangelicalism.

The Reformers, on the basis of their Biblical doctrine of God, presented a Biblical doctrine of salvation. A Socinian view of God leads inevitably to a Socinian view of salvation, which is not the good news of salvation by God's grace, through faith, in Christ to the glory of God—but rather a message of salvation by one's own efforts, a false gospel that is not good news at all. It is the *gospel* that is at stake in this debate. ■

—Taken from "The Coming Evangelical Crisis," John H. Armstrong, ed. Moody Press, 1996.

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## **The God of the Bible**

by Louis Gifford Parkhurst, Jr.

Where do we begin a systematic study of Christian truth? Where the Bible begins: "In the beginning God" (Genesis 1:1). The Bible tells us there is one God. This is the consistent teaching of both the Old and New Testaments. There is one God, but God is three Persons. We are not to think of God as the mathematical formula: one equals three. Rather, God is one in essence: God is Spirit; God is Light; God

is Love. But in another sense, God is three Persons.

In Genesis 1 we read, "God created," "the Spirit of God was hovering," and "God said, 'Let us make man in our image.'" In John 1 we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . Through him all things were made." From the beginning of Christianity, Christians

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**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

claimed that they were worshipping the God of the Old Testament, and that in the Old Testament they found evidence that allowed them to be consistent with the Old Testament when they taught that God was three Persons. They also believed that they were being true to the teachings of Jesus, their Lord and Saviour.

When Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world, He told them to teach and baptize “in the name [singular] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). At the Great Commission, Jesus told His disciples once again that there is one God, but this one God who is there is in reality three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His disciples were commanded to go out and teach *all* that He commanded, and this certainly included teaching who God is in three Persons.

When Jesus prayed to God, calling Him “Abba,” He was calling God by His real name, “Father.” It isn’t that Jesus used the name “Abba” (Daddy) when He prayed, as though this were just another name for God among many. Rather, when Jesus prayed “Abba,” he did so because God is really “Father,” and in a special sense God is really “Jesus’ Father” *in reality*. When Jesus prayed to God as His Father, He was also telling us something He wanted us to know about the real nature and character of God. “God is Father, and God is Jesus’ Father,” is a true proposition about the God who is really there. When Jesus told His disciples that they could pray, “Our Father,” He was telling them something about the nature and the character of God that could make a real difference in the way they prayed and lived in relation to God.

When Jesus told His disciples He would send them another Comforter, He was speaking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Person of God who is sent to indwell the believing Christian. The Holy Spirit is not an “it” or a “she,” but as the Spirit of Christ and of the Father, the Holy Spirit is “he.” The Holy Spirit is personal.

He speaks, and we can grieve Him by our words and actions. The Holy Spirit gives us a relationship with God and a power we couldn’t have before Jesus was crucified, dead, buried, and raised from the dead.

Before Jesus’ crucifixion, the Apostle John reports this incident between Jesus and the Jews who did not believe in Him:

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds (John 8:58, 59).

The Jews picked up the stones as a punishment for blasphemy, because they knew Jesus was telling them “*I am* God.” “I am” is the holy name of God, which God gave to Moses when Moses asked Him about who he should say had sent him to the Jews in Egypt. Jesus’ use of “I am” is a special feature of John’s Gospel, and Jesus uses “I am” several times to make this point about His identity with God.

Jesus claimed to be God, and either He was or He wasn’t. If He was, we know something wonderful about God and His great love for us. If He wasn’t, Jesus was either deranged or an evil blasphemer. But people who deny He is God almost universally admit that Jesus was one of the world’s greatest ethical teachers. Deranged blasphemers are not accorded that honor, and so the idea that He was deranged or a blasphemer simply is not rational. Jesus’ claims about Himself and Christianity’s claims about Jesus are either true or false. Jesus’ claims are true to reality or they are not. They are either true to the Old Testament or they are not. Christians claim that they and Jesus are true to the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments, as well as true to reality.

Christianity says that Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God and the Father is God, but Christianity refuses to believe in more than one God. Christianity teaches that in one sense there is one God, but in another sense God is three Persons.

When Jesus was baptized by John, we see God in three Persons in one place.

Jesus was baptized in the water, His Father declared from heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,” and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and lighted on Jesus (Matthew 3:16, 17).

Christianity stands or falls in the truth of the reality that there is one God in three Persons. In His essence, God is personal and in a personal relationship with Himself, as each Person of the Trinity loves and communicates with each other Person.

But what about the person who doesn’t believe in the Bible? Or what about the liberal, who teaches that Jesus didn’t really claim to be God, that the New Testament writers just put these words in Jesus’ mouth to make Him look great, and then tried to justify their claims about Him? What about the cults that honor Jesus and teach about Him, but, like the liberal, deny His deity?

Francis Schaeffer could still talk to these people. He first approached the person where he was, and asked him to explain his beliefs. He showed love and respect for the other person’s personality, as created in the image of God no matter what He said He was. And He prayed that what He said about the God who is there might make a difference in the other person’s beliefs.

If the problem was not understanding the Bible’s teaching, he taught what the Bible taught, as I have briefly outlined it above. If the problem was one of comparative religions, as he talked to a Hindu, for example, he showed how the Christians’ God compared to the Hindus’ gods as well as to their pantheistic god. If the problem was a cult teaching, he would approach the person according to the cult’s teaching. On the other hand, if the problem was of a philosophical nature, he could show how belief in the Trinity answered the philosophical questions. All these methods are used in his books and tapes.

To answer some of the standard questions about the Trinity, Dr. Schaeffer

would say that belief in the Trinity means that God has always existed in a personal, loving relationship as three Persons. God is whole and complete. God did not need to create in order to have something to love or relate to. God created from his own free will and not from necessity. Personality and personal relationship are at the core or root of existence in God Himself; therefore, we live in a personal rather than an impersonal universe. Created in the image of God, man has a reason for the personality he feels and cannot deny; man has a reason for his need to be in a relationship with some other person. Created in the image of God, man has a reason for his own creativity. The Trinity answers the questions modern man poses. Christians didn’t invent the Trinity to answer modern man’s questions, but Christians discovered that the doctrine of the Trinity (which they found in the Bible) answers modern man’s questions and solves his problems.

The existence of the Trinity makes it reasonable for us to believe that God can have a relationship with us that includes speaking to us and telling us true things about Himself and the world. As a matter of fact, this is what we should expect from God—a personal communication from Him to us and from us to Him. Just as we can’t know everything about another person, we shouldn’t expect to know God exhaustively. But just as we can know some true things about another person by his words and actions, so we should expect to know some true things from a personal God who can speak and act.

The existence of the Trinity also answers the philosophical question of the one and the many. Is reality at its root or foundation *one* (monism) or *many* (pluralism)? If reality is one, how do we have the existence of or explain the existence of particulars (individual objects are “particulars”)? If “what really is” is one, are particular things—such as you, I, and the sky—just an illusion (the answer Hinduism gives, for example)? If reality at its

foundation is many, what gives each particular its meaning? Where did the many come from? How did the many things get here? Philosophers, trusting in their reason alone and beginning only from themselves, without a revelation from God, have not been able to give adequate answers to the problem of the existence of the one and the many, of monism and pluralism. We find the answer in the Bible.

The doctrine of the Trinity answers the problem by saying that at the root of existence is God, and the nature of God is both one and many. There is one God, but this one God has always existed as three Persons, and this one God created a world outside of Himself, in the sense that the world is not an extension of God. The particulars, the many, have their real existence and their meaning explained on the basis of having been created intentionally by a personal God, who created them for a purpose which He has shared in part with

the personal man whom He also created.

Without an inerrant Bible, Christians cannot answer the questions modern man asks, questions that reality poses for him, questions that should drive him to the conclusion that God exists, but then to ask, "What kind of a God is the God who is there?" For this reason, among others, Dr. Schaeffer fought for the inerrancy of Scripture. Likewise, the fact that the Bible answers so well the modern questions people have is a good argument for its inspiration and authority.

*It is reasonable to expect* that God is able and willing to tell true things to us about Himself and reality, and to do so in a way that protects the individual personality of the Bible writers, while protecting the accuracy of His Word written! *It is reasonable for us to expect* that He would do nothing less! ■

—Taken from "Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message"

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## Preaching the Attributes of God

by Herbert Carson

"That sermon preacheth itself best unto others," said John Owen, "which preacheth itself first in the preacher's own heart." Before we consider preaching, whether in content or in method, we must begin with the preacher, and we must begin with him as a man under God. This realization and acknowledgment of his position comes as a sobering and at the same time an encouraging thought.

It is a sobering reflection that each time a man preaches he is answerable to the omniscient God who knows him, the quality of his preparation, the diligence or lack in his praying and the motives behind his preaching—whether it is to please a congregation, to satisfy professional ego or to glorify God. It is sobering to reflect that the omnipresent God is present in the con-

gregation. We preach before the God to whom at the last day we shall give an account.

It is also an encouraging thought. When Ezekiel was sent to a stubborn and impenitent people he went with the assurance of God: "Be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words." It is such confidence we need in a day when not only our gospel, but the very concept of preaching is rejected. In a day when the pulpit is denigrated, preachers need the reassuring awareness that they are men sent by God, the God who, in Paul's words, "works all things after the counsel of his own will."

Our consideration of the attributes of God in relation to the task of preaching must begin with the preacher himself bowing in adoring wonder before the Lord God

Almighty. To meet the task of preaching without a deepening knowledge of the Most High is to face the prospect of being crushed by the difficulties and discouragements, or of being destroyed by sinful pride seeking, as it does, for worldly success, which God will reject as wood, hay, and stubble, fit only to be consumed by the flames of His judgment.

The preacher then goes to his task as one sent by God, with a message from heaven, depending upon the Holy Spirit to give him the words and the power, aiming to glorify the God whose gospel he expounds. With such a conception of the ministry, there can be no tolerance of suggestions that he should be clever, witty, or popular. As an ambassador of the King of kings he is answerable ultimately to his sovereign, and in his words and in the quality of his life he must never forget the God whose commission he bears.

How then, do we preach the attributes of God? How do we set forth in preaching the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? It should be emphasized from the outset that we must not do so in such a way that the attributes appear as abstractions rather than as the ways in which the living God reveals Himself. The attributes of God are not isolated concepts which we string together in our mind to form some overall concept of the divine. We isolate them to study them, but we must be careful to set our studies in the context of a personal knowledge and a living experience of the God who has revealed himself in a variety of ways. There is one God whose unity shines out to us in the diversity of His attributes and we must never lose sight of this unity of essence.

This stress on God's unity will safeguard us against another danger: that of interpreting the attributes of God from the standpoint of a human analogy. In a human personality there is one person, but a variety of human attributes. In man the attributes may clash and cause tension. There may be an overemphasis of one and

an underemphasis of another. In God there is never a clash, never a competition between one aspect of His being and another. Thus, for example, we must not set His justice against His mercy, as if God faced the inner tensions which can often be so severe for us as we find ourselves pulled in different directions. The essential unity of the Godhead means that there is a harmony in which every aspect of His being, as He reveals Himself to us, forms a coherent pattern. The being of God is like a diamond with many facets, which shines brilliantly from whatever side we approach. However, the diamond is not simply the sum total of the facets, nor is God the totality of His attributes. He shines with an undimmed and unchanging glory. Faith approaches, now from this direction and now from that, but always looks beyond the facet under consideration to the essential glory of the God who has condescended to our finite thinking by revealing Himself in a diversity which we can consider stage by stage, element by element.

Turning to the general issue of our mode of presenting these truths, we face the fact that preaching is not a stereotyped procedure. The preacher is not a worker in an assembly line, but a craftsman. This means that each sermon will not only bear the stamp of its author, but will have a distinctiveness of approach about it. All preachers worthy of the name are under the direction of the Spirit but, where the Spirit of the Lord is, says Paul, there is liberty. In preaching therefore, while there are spiritual conditions for exercising gifts, there is a freedom in the precise way in which they are exercised.

In this matter there are basically two approaches: the topical and the expository. I use these terms with hesitation because a man may take a topic and yet root it in solid exegesis. I use the terms simply to contrast the approaches which, in the matter under consideration, would deal with the attributes of God as a subject for a series of sermons, or in the context of continuous exposition of the Word. Shall I,

for example, preach on the subject of God's holiness or God's grace or shall I, in the course of general expository preaching, expound these truths as they emerge? My personal preference is for the latter method.

One reason for my approach is that our doctrine of God is not one particular subject within Scripture, but is the background and context of every other truth in Scripture. The Bible is the Word of God. Our basic starting point is that God has spoken. In every word of His revelation His being shines through. To declare what is implied in the revelation in the course of exegetical preaching is to underscore the fact that God's essential being is the context in which His counsel is made known.

There is also the practical issue of the demands of a continuing ministry in one local church. The itinerant preacher may deliver his series to a congregation and move on to deliver it again in a fresh situation, but the pastor who ministers to one congregation faces a different problem. The attributes of God can be classified under a limited number of heads. To expound them thus is to reach the end of the series fairly soon. To return to the same topics at an early date is either to give the impression of the preacher's hobbyhorse being paraded again, or to introduce, even subconsciously, the feeling that the preacher is just treading a well-worn path, or even that he is rather short of ideas! To preach the attributes of God in the course of general exposition is to set them in the context of the Spirit-given variety of the Word. It means that each aspect of God's being is viewed again and again in such varying contexts that the repetition of the theme does not become monotonous, but is, rather, the strong connecting link binding the varied sub-themes of our preaching into a coherent unity. To preach the attributes of God in the context of a continuing expository ministry is to discover them as the underlying theme of all we do, throwing light as they do on all the varied aspects of God's truth, and being brought into prominence

themselves at the same time.

God has revealed Himself in many and varied ways, as the opening statement of Hebrews reminds us. There are His explicit self-disclosures, when in a direct verbal encounter, He makes Himself known. Thus to Abraham He declares Himself as God Almighty. To Moses He reveals Himself as the eternal God, "I AM THAT I AM." He also makes Himself known in His actions in history, whether in creation, providence, or redemption. "My Father works," says Jesus. He is the God who acts, and in His decisive actions He discloses His being. His actions are not however, bare actions which are susceptible of whatever interpretation we may choose to append to them. God Himself interprets His own actions. Biblical revelation is not simply a record of what God has done, but a divinely communicated statement of the significance of His actions. Thus, we expound biblical history with a view to disclosing the character and will of the God who has acted in history, either directly or through His providential overruling of events. Our exposition of God's own commentary is our attempt to echo the voice which has spoken decisively from heaven through prophet and apostle and, supremely, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It goes without saying that true preaching is directed to the whole man. The preacher is not simply conveying information, vitally important though the truths are which he preaches. His aim is not a mere orthodoxy in which the acquisition of a doctrinal system is an end in itself. The aim, rather, is so to preach in the power of the Spirit that the Word may be applied to the lives of those who hear. A preacher's desire is to see minds enlightened, consciences probed, hearts moved, and will stirred into action. True biblical preaching will see the saints moved to worship and adoration, to praise and thanksgiving, to glad and willing service, to joyful and consistent witness. ■

—Taken from *The Way Ahead*, Carey Publications 1975. Paper read at the Carey Conference.

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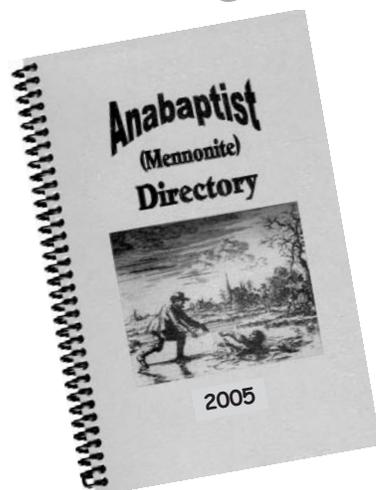
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