

What Paul Might Say Today

**Critiques in the Practical Theology
of 21st Century Western Christendom**

Desmond Paul Allen, Ph.D., M.Div.

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Preface

I love the Church; both the universal body of believers and the local assembly. It's my love and concern for this—the body of Christ—that prompts me to write these critiques. Although born again of the Spirit of God, we are, nevertheless, yet sinners, struggling daily with our Adamic nature, which we possess till death do us part. As we grow in the Lord this struggle gets easier; temptation becomes less severe; our character becomes more Christ-like. But always, day by day, the competition is present at some level; occasionally, we allow our old nature to get the upper hand and we suffer.

Because we are all in the same condition, and because we meet regularly in local assemblies for instruction and fellowship it is only natural that both our victories and our failures affect those about us. Individual and congregational failures were present in the 1st Century churches as well. Considerable portions of the New Testament apostolic letters address specific erroneous or sinful issues within a given assembly. Things are no different today. Until our Lord returns, there will be problems within our personal lives and within our local assemblies. Therefore, a primary function of local church leadership is to tackle these problems head-on: to refute false teachings and offensive behavior, and to confront the perpetrators.

A number of erroneous ideals and practices have become very prominent in Western Christendom. Sadly, relatively few Church leaders are addressing them; even more disappointing, many prominent Church leaders are purveyors of certain erroneous ideals and practices. This work is a series of critiques addressing these issues that have caused me great concern for many years.

Although I approach this from an evangelical perspective, these critiques reach across denominational barriers to address the breadth of Western Christendom. As such, what I take issue with is not the Systematic or Theology Proper of Orthodox Christianity,

but our application. How we manage our daily lives, how we go about implementing our beliefs, the practical aspect of our faith; thus, our Practical Theology.

Several passages speak of the struggles the Church would encounter in the last days. Selfish leaders and teachers of erroneous doctrines, as well as legalism, hypocrisy and an air of self-sufficient egotism would abound. Thus, warnings were issued for those living in the last days lest they be fooled by the charisma of these false teachers and the persuasion of their apparent godliness.

Being in the last days, as I believe we are, these warnings were written to us. Therefore, I offer these critiques to heighten our awareness of the erroneous teachings and practices which have become so commonplace within Western Christendom. Cloaked as righteousness, these deceptive and destructive false teachings have slowly crept into our midst. Diverting our attention, they hinder our mission of evangelism and theological instruction.

Exposing these erroneous teachings will offend some readers. Others will not understand the need for such disparaging remarks. But many will immediately realize the importance. While the entirety of Western Christendom is not likely to change because of these critiques; perhaps the practical theology of a few individuals might.

Desmond Allen, PhD, MDiv.

Apologia

I implore the reader to understand in the following pages that I do not mean to sound as though Western Christianity has apostatized and left the faith, nor that I am an opponent of the Church. On the contrary, I am a devout believer in our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, and in his Church, the elect—everyone in this current dispensation who places their trust in him. Indeed, the impetus for these critiques is my concern for the Church, especially the local church. At the same time, I realize the austere censure in certain chapters might give some readers pause. Good, pause is necessary if we desire to make a clear, objective analysis of what it is, exactly, we are doing.

The issues I address are not points of Systematic or Theology Proper—the deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus, salvation by grace through faith, etc.—but matters of practical theology. As the late, great, theologian and preacher, Dr. J. Vernon McGee used to say, “Where the rubber meets the road.”

We have the proper theology, but when we unsheathe it to wield it about in battle, we often have trouble keeping it untarnished by our grimy little fingers. As sinners, it is our nature. Corruption is part of who we are. Although freed from its power, and even empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome it, our sinful nature is with us till death do us part. As we yield to our Lord we grow more Christ-like, but the Adamic nature never departs this body of corruption, with which we must struggle daily.

Because sin and error is present in our lives, it is also present in the local church. Therefore, a decided vigilance is necessary to detect it, and a determined faithfulness is necessary to expose and purge it. This is a primary task of church leadership. Those leaders who shy from this assignment have withdrawn from their obligation to the church and from their employment for the Lord.

It was no different for local churches in the 1st Century. Indeed, certain New Testament letters were written specifically to

address erroneous practices or ideologies that had arisen within a particular assembly. This work is merely a critical inspection of similar problematic issues present today. It is an inspection of our sword's condition, addressing the smudges left by the misdirected goals and traditions of Western Christianity, smudges that diminish the brilliance of the sword by drawing attention to themselves. To remove them will take a grassroots movement, not unlike the great reformation itself. Yet, on the other hand, as we shall see, we know the Church in the last days would be as such. Therefore, I do not expect these erroneous teachings and practices to cease; however, perhaps some battlefield soldiers will be inspired to polish their little section of the sword.

The Background for This Work

It was 1988. I was nearly finished with a doctorate of ministry degree at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. I was the pastor of a modest church in the Northwest, and I had just finished preaching through the book of First Timothy wherein the Apostle Paul outlined proper ecclesiology. The apostolic pattern of church life had been drawing me in for sometime, and now, once again, it was staring me in the face. I could not escape. I grew increasingly concerned and frustrated over the generally accepted agenda and leadership models of modern western churches. The more I researched, the more I came to realize just how far astray we had drifted from the apostolic prototype.

I remembered another astute observation of the late Dr. J. Vernon McGee. When asked why he had left his denomination, in his decidedly slow southern drawl, he said something like, "*Well, I didn't leave my denomination; I believe the same thing I did seventy-five years ago. Why . . . they up and left me!*" Of course, Dr. McGee's situation was different from mine. His concern was with issues of Theology Proper; mine was with issues of practical theology. His denomination had changed its views; mine practiced the same thing it did when I started. But the more I learned of the early Church, the more concerned I became for our modern practices.

It disturbed me that the leadership I was expected to provide was steeped in programs, meetings, and traditions that had little to do with ministry and equipping the saints. Projects, such as the circulation of local or national political petitions, endless meetings

with the deacon board in which we discussed such things as Let's see, we discussed. . . . Actually, I can't remember what we discussed; but I remember it seemed very important, and I had to be there for several hours every other week. Then there were the regular sessions with the board of trustees to discuss who could use the church property. Sometimes we would weigh the merits of yet another expansion project. Oh yes, and then the monthly business meetings with the whole congregation, at which time members (some of them yet babes in Christ, others perhaps in need of church discipline) would cast votes, each carrying the same weight as those of the pastors, deacons, and trustees.

In all, my role seemed far removed from the leadership exemplified in the New Testament. Most disturbing was the fact that by Western standards this was not an undesirable or a negligent church. In fact, it was considered a model church within its association. Other churches in the region looked to it for leadership. It was the typical middle class, evangelical, western church. It had all the programs: an active youth group, a women's Bible study class, a mid-purest week prayer meeting, a choir, deacons and trustees, business meetings, a women's missionary society, AWANA, Sunday school for all ages, a nursery, a generous missions budget, even a gymnasium. The parishioners were committed to sound Christian doctrine and to the church. But something was wrong. Something was wrong with this normality.

Despite the activities and the parishioner's commitment, something seemed out of focus with the dynamic faith epitomized in the New Testament and practiced by the early Church. I began to feel distant from, and even adverse to, the motif and activities that have become so commonplace to most of us. Many of my Christian brothers and sisters will read this treatise and have no clue as to what I am discussing. I envy their bliss and sometimes long for those days of innocence. Or, as the famed Bob Seger song says, "I wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then."

The following years were frustrating, even emotionally traumatic. At first, I seemed unable to articulate or even clarify my concerns. It was like having someone's name right on the tip of your tongue but being unable to say it. You know what it is, but your mind will not picture it. It will not cooperate. For the moment, all communication is put on hold as your mind and tongue

struggle to establish the verbalization link. In time, I did clarify and articulate my concerns, which are largely addressed in this work. But I still cannot explain and articulate the pain this causes in my heart. Although I agree with the core theological beliefs, I simply cannot abide the temporal and material concerns that so dominate our traditional, western, evangelical assemblies.

Through the years, I have encountered many others harboring similar concerns. They comprise a segment of the Christian population generally overlooked by the local church. Or, more precisely, a segment of the Christian population that actively avoids the traditional, local church setting. I have consoled and counseled many fellow believers, encouraging them to stay the course in their Christian walk, even if compelled to avoid the traditional setting. You might say I have served as a chaplain at large to former pastors, deacons, Sunday school teachers and church members in general—numerous folks who were raised in (or had devoted much of their lives to), the traditional local church only to abandon it. But they have not abandoned their faith. Although some meet regularly in homes with small groups, most are completely cut off, in despair, seldom communing with other believers. Yet all of them have one thing in common. They are disillusioned by the material pursuits, petty squabbles, legalism, or the short sighted socio-political dogma that has such a choke-hold on the local church.

After many years my good friend, a fellow pastor deeply rooted in the system of which I have concern, strongly admonished me. “You have a responsibility; you have made an analysis, now take some action.” He was right. It was time to do something more far-reaching about these concerns, which had burdened me for many years. This work is just that. It is an attempt, feeble as it may be, to articulate and address the practical ideologies of 21st Century Western Christendom that have run amuck.

I know of no name for this ideology. It has a polymorphic appearance with many faces blending to form a common center. This center I shall call Western Evangelical Orthodoxy. It is materialistic—revolving around buildings and ordered with a businessman’s mind set. In ways, it is somewhat Pharisaical with its demanding traditions and blanket condemnations. In other ways it seems almost mystical, with a compulsion for unrealistic prayers, iconic symbols, and orchestrated jubilation. Always, it is

dogmatic—crusading for a cause, even if the cause is far from evangelism and its dogma born of exuberance rather than sound theology.

Over the last two decades, I have discussed these matters with various fellow believers; not just the aforementioned outcasts, but with those rooted in the system. The most common critical response is, “But the Church is imperfect, made up of people who are growing spiritually. You cannot find a perfect church!” Such a response fails even to understand what I am pursuing. I am well aware of the membership’s imperfections. Indeed, I am as imperfect as the next. My concerns have nothing to do with the faults of individual church members per se, but with the prevailing institutional objectives—fostered by many highly visible leaders—and the practical ideologies these objectives generate throughout Western Evangelical Orthodoxy. Transcending denominational lines, these ideologies are deeply rooted in our western culture.

The second most critical response is, “But things are changing. Churches all over the country are having small group Bible studies. Pastors are gathering for prayer. Men are coming together to confront their responsibilities as fathers and spiritual leaders, etc.” This I do not doubt. I applaud such progress, but these are not the changes for which I strive. Changes of this nature are in the air from generation to generation. Eventually they are absorbed back into the mainstream. Eventually they will structure themselves just as the rest of the Western Church has structured itself.

These occasional, periodic movements are not unlike driving the frontage road instead of the highway. Both roads are going the same direction and lead to the same place; only one has more traffic and gets there faster. The infrastructure of the Western Church and the dogma that drives it remain untouched. Still, the best potential leaders must leave the local church to be trained for service elsewhere. Still, millions are wasted on lavish cathedrals. Still, lay leadership positions are filled by the popular and affluent. Still, the Church sees itself as a socio-political watchdog. Still, the twofold mission of the Church is thwarted.

Scripture tells us the last days, before Christ’s return, would see perilous times, false teachers, false doctrines and erroneous practices would flourish. We are in the last days; thus, we must take heed lest we be deceived. As such, the following critiques are set forth to

bring attention to these insidious false teachings and erroneous practices that seek to divert the Church in these last days of spiritual peril.

The Church, Then and Now

In this chapter, many of my fellow believers might be tempted to take offense. Please don't. Rather, read this analysis with an open mind, knowing that it is written in love, with the purist intentions. The picture it portrays is painted with a broad brush, depicting the overall impression of the landscape versus the details. As such, certain aspects of this picture might not be true of your particular congregation. For this be grateful. For those who might have skipped the Apologia for this work (see page 9), I encourage you to read it before proceeding, lest you misunderstand from whence I speak.

The church, one body

Beyond the general charge to evangelize, the Church—both universal and local—is to function as a single body. Jesus is the head, the mind if you will. Church members are the organs, the limbs, the cells. This, the Apostle's metaphor, is most appropriate. The human body is a wonderful thing; so complex yet so efficient, specifically designed to pleasure and serve the thoughts and desires of its mind. It walks, runs, talks, sits, laughs, cries and eats as directed. Instinctively, its blood and fluids nourish, cleanse and protect itself; so that involuntary as well as voluntary acts of fulfillment and self preservation occur.

This is the ideal structure and purpose of the local church. Each member is to have a healthy relationship with both the head (Christ) and the fellow members of the body (the church). Both the individual believers and the church are to respond to the desires of Christ the Lord. When the mind in the human body is joyful, facial muscles become tense as the mouth and eyes betray the emotion. To quench a thirst the mind sends a message to the muscles in the arm and hand, they respond by lifting the tea cup. When the foot needs cleaning the hands perform the duty. When the body needs

energy, the metabolic system begins working overtime to produce it. Similarly, the Lord expresses actions through one or many members of the church toward other members.

Of course, this analogy presupposes a healthy body. For if the body is sick, depending on the illness, certain members will not function correctly. If the femur is broken, the body cannot walk. If a flu virus has invaded, the joints are sore, and there is temperature and nausea. When nauseated the stomach will spew its content rather than digest them. Soon dehydration sets in, causing further weakness and a buildup of acids within the body. So too, sin and sickness within the church, hinder its proper function.

When the human body is sick we tend to it, medicate it, let it rest and mend and do whatever is necessary to return it to health; for many illnesses, if left unattended, will continue to fester and worsen. They may even grow into life threatening diseases. Anyone who has been terribly ill knows that health is perhaps the greatest asset one can have. Health is far more important than are all our material goods, our money, our entertainment. Of what pleasure are any of these if we do not have the health to enjoy them? Yet, simply having good health is a joy in and of itself. Too often we take good health for granted. We forget to thank the Lord for this blessing, but when sick we straight away call upon Him and entreat others to do the same on our behalf.

Like the human body, the local church also experiences sickness from time to time. Someone in the membership has caused offense, is involved in a sinful practice, is harboring ill feelings toward another in the church, etc. Because we are yet sinners at various degrees of spiritual maturity, still learning to grow in Christ, any number of issues can and do arise. Yet seldom do other members, or even church leaders, tend to these conditions as they would their physical bodies. This then allows the illness to grow, to fester, until something very bad happens: membership fades, the church splits; there is a scandal in the leadership; whatever it is, it is never good. Such illnesses were the impetus for some of Paul's Pastoral Epistles. Always, he instructed the church to address these issues, for if not dealt with swiftly they could become debilitating, even deadly. Today, the average local church is in great need of local physicians, members and leaders willing to address conditions festering within the body.

A church, a family

Another analogy for the church is that of a family. But here the terms, illustration, metaphors, and even example, are not strong enough. For the church is indeed a family—a spiritual family of brothers and sisters in Christ, held together by healthy familial ties such as loving, caring, nurturing, teaching, rebuking, encouraging, etc. all the attentive bonds that make a healthy family work.

A close-knit family is not a fraternity or a business. The church is nothing like either enterprise. Yet, we organize it like both. What self-respecting church business meeting is not run according to *Robert's Rules of Order*? So marshaled are many church business meetings, an outsider might think he were attending a shareholders' conference in which investors are voting to protect their stock. The nature of business is to make a profit in a competitive world. The church is to glorify God and make converts. Big business seeks investments in lucrative opportunities. The church seeks to convert souls to Christ and to instruct them in the faith. The purposes of the church can be well served without Robert's handbook and the useless meetings it generates. It is our desire to control the temporal things (the money, the buildings, the choir robes, and the parking lot) that compels such meetings.

Nor is the church like a fraternity. A fraternity's singular purpose is to foster elite, an imagined *crème de la crème*. This is not the church. The local church is a haven for the socially downcast as well as for society's elite. Here, the two meet as one, equal in nature and equal in future glory. The social roles (typically defined by one's personal wealth) so often played within the local church, are nothing short of abominable. It is a sickness in need of a physician's attention.

Polymorphic facets of trouble

Indeed, the typical local church of 21st Century Western Christendom has many troubling facets—sickness on many levels, composing a ubiquitous, polymorphic ideology largely comprised of worrisome issues in practical theology. In no particular order of importance (for they are all in need of attention), let me identify some of the more troubling facets.

Leadership in the 21st Century Church

The appointment and training of leaders was different in the early church from what it is today. From among those willing to commit, certain qualified men were chosen and nurtured for leadership. It was not a popularity contest, nor was a leader selected simply because of his social status. Each congregation had a core of qualified elders trained in biblical theology and ministry. We generally have one. We call him the pastor. Rather than growing this leader from within the church we examine the resumes of outsiders for hire. After a few years we often weary of him, or he of us, and the search begins anew.

A primary function of early church leadership was to guard against heresy and to equip the saints. Church leaders not only exposed and denounced false teachings they also made it their priority to teach sound doctrine to the flock. Modern church leadership generally does not do this. Leaders will refute false teachings in Theology Proper (One God, the Trinity, etc.), but they typically neglect those false teachings of practical theology that have invaded their congregations. And actually spending time with the parishioners, to teach them doctrine and theology, is something few church leaders even think of, much less accomplish. They are too overwhelmed with sermon preparation, administrative duties, program preparations, expansion strategies, and building plans.

To illustrate this point I cite a survey I conducted while doing doctoral work in seminary. I had been concerned for some time about the various leadership roles in our modern western evangelical churches. The title of my doctoral project was “The Pastoral Neglect to Provide Leading Laymen with a Basic Foundation in Theology.” To further research this topic I surveyed pastors, and the leading laymen of their choice within numerous churches from a certain conservative and evangelical association throughout the states of Washington and Oregon.

I expected to find relatively few pastors providing theological and ministerial training to their lay leadership. Likewise, I expected to find a fair percentage of the lay leaders to be less than qualified for their task. However, the results were more staggering than I could have ever imagined. I had peeked behind the facade of neckties, choirs, sermons, beautiful buildings, and spirals reaching to the sky. I felt as though I had ripped the mask off a deeply rooted

and shameful ugliness. I had revealed an aspect of Western Evangelical Orthodoxy that is generally shrouded in pretense. I had uncovered an area about which most of us would rather plead ignorance or make excuses. Not willing to confront it face to face, analytically, and honestly, we choose to simply neglect it, and dutifully don our weekly Sunday vesture to mask the embarrassment.

What had I discovered? I found that although 97% of the leading layman regularly prepared and taught Bible classes, and 78% believed they were qualified to provide spiritual counsel, only 3% of their pastors provided them with hermeneutical training. Less than 20% provided some form of theological training, and only 7% of the pastors provided some kind of training in spiritual counseling.

Although they admitted to having very little training for these tasks, most of the lay leaders believed they were qualified for them. However, as I suspected, their ignorance betrayed itself at the end of the questionnaire. I asked them to answer three simple, but pertinent, theological questions. I didn't attempt to stump them by choosing particularly difficult topics. Rather, I chose subjects that have a special concern to anyone who teaches biblical classes or gives spiritual counsel. Put simply, I chose subjects that anyone doing what they did should know cold. First, "Why does God allow evil?" Second, "Define total depravity." And third, "In what way is man created in the image of God?"

I did not expect lengthy theological treatises or even biblical references. I merely wanted to see if these teachers had a general understanding of things they were teaching. The results were astounding. Only 24% were able to answer the question as to the image of God. A mere 16% correctly answered why God allows evil, and no one, not one, could define the meaning of total depravity. Overall these leading laymen, these spiritual advisors and pillars in their churches, had only 13.5% correct answers, and no one answered all three questions correctly.

Although not comprehensive or conclusive, this small research project had shed light on a great and shameful display of ignorance within the leadership of our local church bodies. Sadly, our churches are largely filled with lay leaders who have little or no training for the task set before them. We might say they are the

modern Nicodemus. How is it, they are teachers of the church and do not know these things?

In this case, they did not know these things because their pastors had not taught them. Yet, this is the responsibility of the trained leadership, to nurture and train would-be leaders in the faith that they, too, can effectively fight the enemy. This means theological training as well as training in ministry, character, and spirit.

The leadership of the Early Church

I was ordained by a Baptist church, attended a well known Baptist Seminary, served as the pastor of two churches with Baptist type church government (congregational rule), and I am convinced that neither this congregational form nor the papal form of church government was the apostolic model. The entire model of early church leadership is far removed from either of these extremes, as it is, also, from the various other modern forms of governance staggered somewhere in between.

The church is to be as a family in every respect, even in its leadership. In a family, parents make the decision and direct family activities; it is not the collective vote of the siblings. But these parents are not aloof either; not untouchable icons on a pedestal. They are active participants in the family: teaching, leading by instruction and example, helping the children to make correct choices and sound decisions, training them to mature, to become adults that they too might raise a family of their own.

In the apostolic model there was a select group of men who led the church (we will call them elders). Actually there were three terms used in the Greek New Testament to identify them: pastor, bishop, and presbyters or elder (ποιμην, ἐπίσκοπος, and πρεσβύτερος). The titles were used interchangeably, borrowed from idioms of their day, each denoting a certain aspect of leadership. *Pastor* speaks to the role of a tender shepherd. *Bishop* signifies a business-like function, *Elder* denotes a wise counselor. These leaders were a self-perpetuating, self-nominating, and self-disciplining body, which instructed and protected the flock. It was not an easy thing to become an elder. To qualify for the appointment one had to be a man of proven character and

spirituality, a man above reproach both within and without the local church body. It was not a position to be taken lightly (*1Ti 3*).

Training leaders the old way

If modern church leadership emulated the practices of early church leadership there would be no need for seminaries. Everything essential for ministry and leadership can be, and should be, taught within the local body. However, as another portion of my doctoral survey revealed, current leaders who are trained in ministry and theology (the pastors) are too busy with program preparation, organization, sermon preparation, and plant management to train (or more precisely, even attempt to train) their lay leaders effectively in basic biblical theology and ministry. Consequently, the majority of responding pastors viewed their teaching responsibility as a low item in the order of necessary weekly tasks.

This was not so in the early church. Future leaders learned theology and ministry from within the context of the local church, from their elders. When the local church trains and reproduces leaders from within its ranks, giving them the necessary skills to effectively exegete, teach, and preach the Word of God, to effectively minister to the membership, the church is strengthened. There is no need for the most promising young men to relocate for training, and then, only to serve elsewhere. With this model they remain in their present ministries. They and the church reap the benefit of their studies as they put into practice that which they have learned. The student is able to retain his present means of livelihood and the great expense of seminary is avoided.

“Who will teach them?” you might ask.

“That is simple,” I answer. “The pastors; after all, according to Paul that is their job.”

“But are they qualified?” should be your scripted response.

“If not,” I contend, “they should not be pastors.”

If a pastor’s only skill is to provide emotionally charged sermons, then he should be in sales, not in the ministry. An elder, a pastor, is to be a scholar of the Word who teaches and trains others. This is a mandate. Theology is not something found in musty libraries. It is not a dead subject for theologians and scholars to

research and debate. Theology is life. Every Christian lives his particular theology whether it is scripturally correct or incorrect.

Training for ministry is two fold. It necessitates information processing (academics) and experiential learning (practical ministry). One does not thrive without the other. Without the scholastics we may fall prey to false teaching. Without the practical ministry we are impotent to serve. The two are best learned together within the context of the local church. Therefore, Paul charged Timothy to “*entrust these things to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others as well*” (2Ti 2:2). This is not the responsibility of some far off-seminary. It is the responsibility of the local church, its leadership, and its pastors.

This was a pastor’s role for the first few centuries. Although this role was abandoned long ago, the duty has not been negated. The biblical mandate has not expired. It is still the task of the elders, the pastors, to teach biblical theology and exemplify practical theology to prospective leaders, to instruct the flock in such matters, and to protect them from heresy.

The church, the building

The local church is a family in every respect. It is the physical manifestation of the spiritual family joined by the union of the Holy Spirit. A great misnomer affixed in the minds of modern Western Evangelical Orthodoxy is (at least subconsciously, for our verbiage betrays us) to equate the building, the edifice, the temple, with the local church. But the local church exists totally apart from the edifice with its steeple, pews, pulpit, stained glass, and cross.

So embedded has the edifice become in our western culture that most people (Christians and non-believers alike), think of it as something holy, even calling the main meeting room, the sanctuary. As if it is a place where God Himself dwells, a place to be revered and endowed with some mystical honor. This sanctuary is perceived as the place where it is one’s duty to sacrifice time and money. This is an especially popular concept in our culture. It lends itself to our fast and busy lifestyles; where one can simply give a few dollars, spend an hour singing a few songs, say a few prayers, sit through a sermon, and, having done these duties, disappear for the rest of the week. The holy deeds are done with no need to waste the time necessary to become personally and emotionally involved in the lives of other “worshippers.”

Consequently, it is of no surprise that this holy building is at the center of much trouble in many local assemblies. Fortunes can be spent to beautify it, to expand it, to control it, and to make it acoustically pleasing to the “spirit of worship.” Yet every year any number of local churches becomes embroiled in bitter arguments over the use of their particular sanctuary and its peripheral structures. This often leads to a bitter split. Each faction has invested their time and money into this holy site. Maybe their fathers did as well, and nothing is going to stop them from standing up for their rights and their investment. “Let the membership dissolve if it must, but don’t lay a hand on my church.”

But Christianity is not Judaism. We do not have temporal sanctuaries and sacrifices. Our sanctuary is in our hearts and our sacrifice is love. These perceived material sanctuaries only complicate and distract us from spiritual growth.

These holy structures were not a problem the early churches had to face. Churches met in private homes, often in the homes of the leadership. In times of persecution they were known even to meet in the catacombs. Wherever they met the symbol of a “fish” was often etched nearby to signify their presence. The appropriateness of this symbol was twofold. Not only had Jesus called his disciples to be fishers of men, but the Greek term for fish, ἰχθῦς, served as an acrostic for the phrase Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ, *Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior*.

Christians met with a particular church body because of its love for them, and because of the character, spirituality, leadership, and teaching ability of its elders. Their meetings were centered on fellowship and instruction, not a physical structure. There was no investment in an edifice and therefore, no holy sanctuary to protect. Their only investment was in the souls of men and women.

The early Church got along just fine without formal structures for the first four centuries or so until the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. After his conversion, Imperial persecution ceased and suddenly, Christianity was in favor. In time, the holy temples of pagan worship became the holy temples of Christendom, and these holy sanctuaries have been the source of trouble ever since. If it sounds as though I am suggesting that we do away with local church structures, good, I am . . . sort of.

However, I am not so naïve as to expect or desire believers (even those who sympathize with my views), to up and leave their congregations to start a church in their home. I would never encourage splitting a church over the building; this would be tantamount to one of the very issues I am raising. One of the reasons for ridding ourselves of these structures is to stop the bickering and division that is often generated over them.

It is not so much getting rid of these structures as it is coming to grips with the reality that the structure is not the church. If only we were able to dissociate the two. However, I doubt that can ever really happen, so long as the current model stays in vogue. It is too ingrained into our psyche and the psyche of the entire western culture. But those who are planting new churches could do so without the aspiration to build such structures. Those who have found themselves without a church home because they could no longer tolerate the misplaced affection for the edifice and the celebrated performances which they endured week after week, seated next to friendly strangers in pretty clothes. These folks could return to the early Church model.

So while I realize established congregations are not going to sell their prized structures and opt to meet in their homes, at the same time, I truly believe local church bodies would be far better served if they met in small groups, in private homes, to fellowship and to study the faith, that is, to learn theology. As the group grows it cordially divides; the new group being directed by leaders that have been trained in theology and ministry, disciplined for this position by the current leadership. Each month the many small groups could congregate at some larger designated site to join for testimony, baptism, ordination, and evangelistic services. The site need not be an elaborate edifice. It could even change from time to time: under an oak tree in someone's field in the summer; maybe in someone's barn in the winter; a school gymnasium; the community center; anywhere large enough to hold them.

Such a model would accomplish several important things. Close familial bonds would form. Theologically informed believers would increase. Disputes over the material buildings would vanish. The fallacious concepts of the holy sanctuary, and the church being the white building with a steeple, would cease. The extra money, once used to feed the infrastructure of comfort, could be used for

missionary endeavors. Instead of appeasing their conscience by giving \$50 or \$200 to several missionaries they barely even know, the church could give full support to missionaries trained and sent out from within its own body. Imagine the dynamic between the missionaries and the congregation, the interest, the personal involvement, the desire to be a part of the work.

The material structures of the Western Church are largely an embarrassment to the Gospel. Yet, sadly, we are compelled to keep building them, as if they, themselves, are church growth.

Church government

Congregationalism is a widespread form of local church government employed by Baptists and others. Most Pentecostal, independent and community churches also order themselves in this way. The congregational form of government is a democracy generally sporting a pastor or two and several figureheads called deacons and trustees. Major issues are determined by congregational vote, every member having one, so that, the vote of a new believer (who has yet even to learn many basic biblical truths), counts the same as that of a deacon, a trustee or a pastor.

The majority of a given congregation has little interest in making decisions for the church and, therefore, seldom attends one of the monthly business meetings where such issues are discussed. A typical scene, played time and again at a typical monthly business meeting of a typical local church with a typical congregational form of government, might be as such: It is Wednesday evening, 8:30 PM. The prayer meeting is over and business is about to begin. Forty-five of the church's two hundred and fifty members are present for the business meeting. It takes a two-thirds majority to pass a motion that has been seconded. Three of the voters are new babes in Christ. They should no more be voting than a ten year old should vote for a president. Five of the voters, if the truth were known, should be under church discipline—some perhaps excommunicated. They are rabble rousers, troublemakers, bent on pursuing a personal agenda. Another twenty-one voters are meek and mild souls without opinions on most of the issues to be discussed. They are easily swayed one way or the other. The rest of the voters are the deacons, the trustees, the pastor, and their

families. Throw in a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order* and without doubt God's will is a done deal.

The very concept of a democratic form of government is incongruous to the concept of leadership and governance. To my knowledge there has never been a successful democratic society on earth. For a family or a society to function correctly there must be leadership; ergo, there must be someone in charge. Leadership implies, even necessitates, authority. There has to be someone making decisions. There has to be somebody setting the course and taking responsibility. At some point, someone must call a spade a spade.

Decision making determined by the vote of the populace is weak, too easily corrupted as the ignorant and indifferent are manipulated by the crafty. The very concept of a democratic system is born of rebellion to, and mistrust in, authority. For this reason, in a democracy there is no authority, so "no one" is in charge. The argument (at least in a church setting) that people need to vote in order to keep the leadership in check is comical. The leadership is supposed to be the spiritually and theologically mature of the two. Leaders are supposed to be keeping the congregation in check, not the other way around. Yet, in the congregational form of government, the leadership is so mistrusted that the pastor generally doesn't even have a vote on the deacon board. Here, he sits in as an *ex-officio* (that's a nice way of saying outsider) to lend technical advice.

In truth, the sole purpose for the congregational form of government in the local church is to protect the investment—to protect the holy temple into which these folks have put their time, money, sweat, and tears. They built it and they are going to have their say about it. If there were no physical buildings to protect and control, there would be no congregational form of government in the local church. Because the building is the focus, neither the Lord nor the congregation is.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the Papal Rule. A form of church government against which the congregational form was born in rebellion. This too, is a situation centered on possessions, many of them. However, in this form of government the people have no say at all. All power is given to one man. But man is a sinner and absolute power in the hands of any one man is doomed

to failure. As history records, eventually it leads to tyranny. Neither of these two extremes, congregationalism or papal rule, was the apostolic model. They both fail miserably.

By far the apostolic model for church government is the best. I need not take much time to explain it. Paul did that perfectly in his letters to Timothy and Titus. It consists of a group of godly men who are qualified, gifted, and of irreproachable character. They are properly trained in theology and ministry. They are self-perpetuating and self-disciplining. Their purpose is to teach, train, and protect the flock.

Paul's model for church life was clearly the practice of the early local churches. It was followed for centuries until at last the holy edifice arrived. From that day forward began a downhill slide in church leadership. Soon the whole focus and purpose of leadership would change. From that day forward idolatry became a necessary part of church life: for some, a statue, an artifact, a painting or picture; for all, Catholic and Reformers alike, a mystical holy sanctuary.

I say humbug! Away with it! Let's encourage new congregations to set aside our twisted traditions born in rebellion and mistrust, to abandon the material temples that serve primarily to distract, and to get back to the original, focused on doing it the way we were told to do it in the first place; the way the Apostles intended, the way the early church did it before corruption took hold.

Materialism

The opulence of Western Christendom is breathtaking. And I do not mean that in a good way. We have grown fat. This is not a call to a monastic style of poverty, but a call to balance and perspective. Many Christians in America are more concerned with prosperity than discipleship. This is materialism. It permeates our society and has infiltrated the Church. Indeed, it all but consumes it.

In our culture, a man's self-worth is conditioned upon his material success in life. Many leaders in the Christian community promote this image of wealth and material success. Television evangelists look and sound like Wall Street businessmen. Not long ago I saw one of the more prominent televangelists giving financial

investment advice to his listeners. He fielded one question after another. One might have thought he was a representative of a powerful investment firm on Wall Street, rather than a leader of the Church.

I think of a conversation I once had with a young seminarian. I asked him if he was interested in mission work after seminary. His response was completely honest and without shame, without conviction. "No, my wife and I are both too materialistic. We like fine clothes and expensive cars. I wouldn't make enough money at that."

With leaders like this how can the conscience of Western Christianity be anything but seared with regard to its blatant materialism? And this materialism is not confined to the believers' personal lives. It is fostered and perfected within the local church itself. Millions are spent to erect lavish, gaudy buildings of worship. These temples far surpass any claim of mere comfort. Yet we have Christian brothers and sisters in other countries who don't even know from where their next meal is going to come. We overlook them, placating our conscience now and then by sending them a few dollars when someone drums up a special relief fund. But try as we might, the lavish lifestyle of Western Christendom cannot be justified. We will have to answer to God for it.

Pharisaic legalism

Too often, what is taught on paper and what is practiced are two different things. On paper it is believed that everyone who receives Jesus Christ as their Savior is a Christian. In practice, only those who conform to a particular, favored dogma are considered truly spiritual; all others are phony, or at best spiritually immature. Various circles have their own special bent on things. For some it is baptism into their church. For others it is some mystical babble. For others, it is a certain day to worship. For others still, it is a tithe of their income. And yet for others, it is being a social nuisance, forever protesting and making a public outcry about some perceived injustice to someone. On paper, believers are believed to be free in Christ. In practice, those who participate in activities, of which we do not personally approve, are considered spiritually inferior. This is legalism. It is suffocating the Church.

Legalism attacks the integrity of Scripture. Legalistic dogmas, claimed to be scriptural by church leaders, cause many who have faith in the integrity of the church to doubt the integrity of Scripture. Church leaders say a certain activity is wrong, yet the conscience of the individual does not agree. Thus, the individual concludes that the Bible must be mistaken or, perhaps, should not be interpreted literally, as the church leaders have supposedly done.

For example, I recall a middle-aged woman many years ago who challenged me on the authority of Scripture and the process of literal interpretation. She was raised in a Christian home, had been taught this doctrine and had always accepted it as fact. But lately she had begun to question it. Her fiancée, although a Christian, sometimes had a beer and enjoyed square dancing. She had participated in these activities with him and felt no guilt. However, her church, claiming biblical support, condemned such activities as evil. She was confused. She believed her church when it said the Bible teaches these specific activities were wrong. Therefore, she had concluded that the Bible itself must be wrong. Now I realize that she could have sought the answer for herself by searching the Scripture, but this is not the point. The point is that her church, and many others just like it, was teaching a personal dogma as Gospel truth, thereby discrediting the Gospel. It is exactly what the Pharisees were doing at the time of Christ.

This Pharisaic legalism misrepresents the faith. It is more than rigidity. It is the overt outward display of presumed holiness. It is strangling the Church. It is a pseudo-spirituality of spiritual infants. It looks pious, but as Paul said, it only satisfies the flesh (Col 2:23). While it may impress others it does not impress God. Man is forever trying to make his faith ornate and visible. Jesus chastised the Pharisees for praying on the street corners, yet modern day Christians proudly pray over their meals in restaurants, eager to display their piety to everyone about them. Some construct idols. Some build temples. Some order codes of conduct. Others are forever marching and protesting a cause. It is all false. True faith is made ornate and visible through love—love for God and love for one another. Man-made rules and regulations please no one but the one making them.

Traditions

Rigid tradition is another issue. We have programs for everything. But some programs, which once had a purpose, today only serve to frustrate the committed. They frustrate because they do not meet needs. Yet everyone is expected to participate in them. This is traditionalism. It is restricting the Church.

Perhaps the most dazzling tradition, that seems to edify but actually hinders the objective, is what we call the worship service. Unwittingly, those who mean well have taught us to think of worship as a jubilant time of praise and song. But in Scripture, worship is viewed as something more involved than simple jubilation. It is portrayed as that point at which an inconsequential man contemplates who he really is and who God is. There is but one response to this realization. He falls flat on his face, overwhelmed, in humble submission to the awesome, powerful, glorious God. It is a time of silence before the King. This is worship. After this experience his heart wants, perhaps even needs, to sing praises. This is good, expected, edifying. It is the aftermath, or maybe conclusion, to worship. Nevertheless, songs and praises themselves are not the sum of worship. It is a great misnomer and major theological error to presume so.

By calling our songs and praises worship we have effectively overlooked the most essential aspect of worship, the instinctive humble prostration before the Mighty God. So eclipsed is this concept that we no longer even have a term for it. And since we don't have a term for it, we don't speak of it, and thus we don't do it. As a result our singing and our praises are weak. It is for this reason that we must hire an enthusiastic song leader to manufacture the "spirit of worship" for us. Every time I hear the phrase "worship service," I cringe in dismay.

Coupled with this worship service is the Sunday morning variety hour: a sideshow and sermonette. In some churches the sermon is little more than an energetic theatrical performance; in others, it is a dry monologue, seemingly designed to put people to sleep. Neither is very edifying. Valuable time, which should be used for training and teaching and fellowship, is often wasted on egotistical theatrics or insipid monologues which generally have to do with any number of contrived issues springing from passages too often taken out of context.

The Wednesday night prayer meeting is another example of tradition. For generations, a mid-week meeting in the sanctuary has been a mainstay for the local church. But the truth is that people don't want to come to it. Aside from the new converts, most see it as some kind of duty and sacrifice. I believe it is not the meeting itself they oppose, but the content. In general, it is yet another one man show for the congregation to sit and watch.

Why not have small groups meet within their respective neighborhoods; give them opportunity to fellowship and commune with each other? Why not indeed? It would be sacrilegious. We cannot close the sanctuary. That would be a step toward liberalism. So regardless of the fact that relatively few people attend, the sanctuary doors remain open and small in-home prayer groups are discouraged, or at best they are not encouraged. They are not part of the program.

Over the centuries, the Western Church has accumulated multiple useless traditions: the weekly fashion show in which members are dressed to the nines, the frequent passing of the offering plate, choir robes, ministerial robes, standing to pray, sitting, standing again to sing, sitting again, standing again to mingle and shake hands for two minutes, sitting again, routine Sunday and Wednesday evening gatherings to endure yet another sermon. One's conformity to these customs is viewed as adherence to the faith. But they are only traditions, made by man and practiced merely to satiate. Primarily, they serve to frustrate and confuse.

Mysticism

We are all aware of the mysticism of Roman Catholicism. But Western Evangelical Orthodoxy has a certain flair of mysticism about it as well. A prime example is what we call prayer. I do suspect that our typical group prayer practices are far different from Scripture's intent.

In Scripture we are admonished to "*ask and it will be given, seek and you will find.*" The promise is that prayer is answered. But seldom, if ever, are such frivolous group prayer requests granted. This should indicate that something is amiss. Something is out of order. Is the Bible mistaken? Is Jesus deceiving us? Of course not! If Jesus' promise is true (which I believe it is), then perhaps something is wrong with our prayers.

Could it be that we have misunderstood what prayer is? Fostered a distorted view of prayer? Listen to the requests at a typical Wednesday night prayer meeting. The leader stands to field one petition after another, which might be something along these lines: legislation for prayer in school, Johnny's co-worker's wife's uncle's bladder, the election of our desired politician, even a 'let us win' from the Christian athlete, ad infinitum. Someone volunteers to pray, and then another and another. Our culture is so hung up on such meaningless placation that we have little concept of what prayer really is. Yet we feel mystically compelled to participate. To call such activity, prayer, is akin to calling song, worship. It too, is a great misnomer that causes many to neglect the real thing.

How did we ever come to practice group prayer in this manner? We learned it from tradition. It has been passed down from one generation to the next as some mystical necessity. But it needs to be reevaluated. Perhaps reviewing scriptural examples would be of benefit. Certainly, a study of biblical prayers reveals something quite different in content than our current practice. Even the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. I suggest that we need to make the same request.

Return to our roots

I believe the answer to our present dilemma is to return to the way it used to be. Many things are necessarily different now than in the days of the Apostolic Age. We are a different culture with vastly different customs and lifestyles. But some things need not have changed, should not have changed. To these things we must return.

To begin with, I suggest we return to the apostolic model of church government. We should choose and train a multiple of qualified men for leadership roles within the church. These men need to teach doctrine and promote familial life and fellowship within the church body. Then they need to teach and train others to take their places.

I suggest we be deprogrammed; entertain a new, or rather, the original understanding of what the church is. Let me elaborate. The ultimate purpose of the local church is synonymous with God's ultimate purpose for creation: His glory. The Church, both universal and local, brings glory to God by teaching truth and building relationships (Eph 4:11-16). We organize these events

through various activities and programs, but it is God's Word around which we rally, and dynamic, truth oriented relationships for which we assemble, not the programs or the building.

While we cannot divorce the ultimate purpose of the Church from its present activities and programs, neither can we confuse them. When the programs are misunderstood to be the purpose of the church, we are out of focus. Programs exist to facilitate the needs of the group. The group does not exist to facilitate the programs. Programs must come and go. They must remain in flux. Their purpose is simply to provide structure for the teaching of truth and the building of relationships.

Universally, all believers are united spiritually through their relationship with the Holy Spirit. However, interpersonal relationships in the local assembly bind believers together corporeally, as co-workers and fellow servants of the Lord. When the gifts of the Spirit are exercised, the local church is edified. Truth is taught and interpersonal relationships grow. Needs are met. People are satisfied. Spiritual growth takes place. Paul is referring to this when he says,

Speaking the truth in love . . . the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph 4:15-16).

I also suggest we limit our dogma to that which is biblical. Scripture specifies several sins with which most folks have enough trouble. Let's not create new lists to our own liking. Man made regulations reflect individual preferences. Your preferences are not mine, and they are certainly not the worlds. Let us refrain from forcing righteousness upon a society that cannot receive it. Refrain from looking down our noses at those who do not comply with our personal standards.

It is true that Paul instructed us to evaluate one another's spiritual progress. We are to reprove the offender, restore the repentant, and encourage the discouraged. But these critical appraisals are to be based upon scriptural, not personal, criteria. And they are confined to believers. We have no business correcting the unbeliever. To him we are to present the Gospel of salvation, not a personal critique of his troubled life.

Give the Holy Spirit room to work. He speaks to every man's conscience. Let each believer establish his own personal preferences with the Holy Spirit's guidance. His perspective is pure; ours is clouded, discolored by personal bias. Let's not presume the job that is reserved for Him. He does not need your help or mine. He is perfectly capable. John sums it up like this, "*If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God . . . those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them*" (1Jn 3:21-24).

If we feel compelled to speak against something that disturbs us, let's not claim biblical support if none exists. Let's be honest. Let's not promote holiness—or rather, our own biased view of holiness—through deception.

Furthermore, let us look beyond our own selfish desires and remember the Psalmist's admonishment that material wealth does not redeem (Ps 49:5-11). Nor does it give us personal identity. Nor, in the end, as Solomon conceded, does it satisfy (Ecc 2:11). We need to look beyond new cars, boats, luxurious homes and IRA's, even beyond our opulent holy temples. We must set our sights on that which is permanent, that which is spiritual, that which will yield eternal benefit.

Am I dreaming? Am I speaking of ideals impossible to attain? I hope not. As mentioned in the apology for this work, the removal of these smudges on the sword will take a grassroots movement not unlike the great reformation. Yet on the other hand, it was prophesied that the Church in the last days would be as such in these last days. Therefore, I do not expect these erroneous practices to cease; however, those individuals who are aware and concerned for them might be encouraged to polish their little section of the sword.

Finally, for those to whom what I have addressed in this chapter is a mystery, is unfamiliar territory, you are blessed, and may you remain so.

The Church and Socio-Political Activism

Introduction

A malignant false theology is running rampant within Western Christendom. It is not so much a systematic as it is a practical theology, which, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, has crept in amongst us, mingling freely within the apostate flocks as well as flocks that otherwise are theologically sound. Sadly, this false theology is promoted by many Christian leaders. Because it is their job to guard the flock from such errors, this is perhaps the most distressing of all blemishes in modern Western Christendom.

Without doubt there are many readers of this work who are bold, proud practitioners of this ideology. No doubt their participation is done with good intentions, and is perceived to be a Christian duty, a vehicle by which the Church diligently promotes righteousness.

But this popular movement is contrary to the teachings and practices of Jesus, the Apostles, the Old Testament and the New. Ostensibly it advances righteousness, but in truth it promotes a lie of Satan and effectively neglects a fundamental doctrine of Scripture—the doctrine of total depravity which is explicitly taught in many passages.

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Ps 14:2-3).

What then is this erroneous practice of which I speak? It is nothing less than institutionalized socio-political activism on the part of the Church. This widespread, ever-increasing agenda within Western Christendom is the product of passion and distorted truths. Far from being an innocuous or simply futile activity, it is counterproductive to our Lord's commission—abrogating, even sabotaging the mission of evangelism. May this short treatise serve as a strong warning to those who are leading their flocks astray.

Without discussing specific socio-political ideals, and before expounding upon the discord this activism strikes with the reality of total depravity, let us consider the objectives set forth for both the Church and the world's governments. Each was instituted by God. Each has a different purpose.

The Role of the Church in This Present Age

Once we allow ourselves to step back from any emotional attachment to our current socio-political state of affairs (be they national or global), we are free to analyze the issues objectively. As the fog of pathos saturating the atmosphere about us begins to lift, our vision becomes clearer allowing us to look back to the time of Christ, to recall and understand the significance of the assignment he gave his disciples.

All power in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. You, then, are to go and make disciples of all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you and, remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Mt 28:18-20, Phillips).

Five significant concepts immediately stand out in this passage: (1) Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth; (2) disciples are to make converts worldwide; (3) disciples are to teach theology to the converts; (4) Jesus will be with the disciples; and (5) the age will come to an end.

In times past, God dealt with mankind in various manners such as direct verbal contact, prophets, covenants, etc. In the future, God will deal with mankind in other ways: angels will proclaim His glory to the four corners of the earth, evangelists with the seal of God upon them will proclaim Jesus to the world, two prophets of old will walk among the people performing miracles, and finally, Jesus himself will reign as King of Kings. But today, in this age, God's primary dealings with mankind are His dealings with the Church—the calling and sanctifying of the elect.

This is not to say that God is utterly disinterested in nonbelievers and the state of their world affairs. It is to say that His purpose in this current age is the gathering of the elect—the converts (both Jew and Gentile) who complete the Church, the bride of Christ. As such, as clearly stated in the Great Commission, the occupation of Jesus' disciples is a twofold mission: to make

converts worldwide and to minister to those who convert. By this God is glorified and His objective for this present age is fulfilled.

Both themes, evangelism and the instruction of the saints, are repeated several times in the New Testament. The task of evangelism is accomplished by proclamation and testimony, as Peter said, “*Proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1Pe 2:9). With the proclamation aspect we have no trouble. Having the knack for spotting those opportunities that allow us to express and debate our particular point of view on any number of issues seems to be a Western trait. Indeed, this book is a prime example. But proclaiming Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, is one thing; being a living testimony is another. Thus, we are to make converts by our actions as well. To do this Jesus explained, “*You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Mt 5:14-16).

Once converts are made, we are to teach them sound, biblical theology. Paul spoke to this, explaining that various gifted leaders have been provided to instruct the elect. God has given apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors, and teachers:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Eph 4:12-14).

Paul’s charge goes far beyond the mere delivery of a naïve motivational Sunday morning sermon, as energetic and full of enthusiasm as it may be. An hour of *I’m so happy songs, and a peppy speaker telling us God loves us and wants us to succeed in life, that He has given us the power to overcome; now go out there and be happy!* is not what Paul had in mind.

He instructed Timothy to teach sound doctrine, sound theology, to give his listeners the knowledge necessary to fight the spiritual battles they will encounter. He reminded Timothy that in the last days some shall depart from the faith, teaching false doctrines and lies and making various legalistic demands on the people. For this the brethren must be prepared:

Nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, . . . These things command and teach. . . . Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Meditate upon these things; give yourself wholly to them; that your profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this you shall both save yourself, and them that hear thee. (1Ti 4:6-16).

Herein then is the mission of the Church: to make converts worldwide and to teach them sound theology. Adherence to these duties has eternal consequence. The Church, the body of elect, is assembled; and the eternal rewards for every believer are defined by their personal efforts to execute this mission to the capacity, and with the gifts, they have been given.

The Role of Government in this Present World

There are four things to understand about the world's governments. God has ordained them. They are serving His purpose. He has their destiny in store. And finally, although He has ultimate authority over them, He has currently granted control to Satan (Gen 11; Ps 2; Eph 1.9-11; Lu 4:5-7).

It is worth paying special attention to this fourth item. Although Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he is not exercising this power at this time. Currently the world is Satan's domain; he is even called the god of this age (2Co 4:4). As we recall, he offered the kingdoms of the world to Jesus. Not being omniscient, Satan did not know for certain if Jesus—veiled in his humanity—was indeed the Messiah. Therefore, knowing man's lust for money and power, immediately after Jesus' baptism Satan put him to the test with the old ploy of selling one's soul to the devil. Of course Jesus refused:

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, All this authority I will give you, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if you will worship before me, all will be yours (Lu 4:5-7).

Years earlier Satan had tried to kill the baby Jesus. The word was out that the Messiah had been born; again, not being omniscient, Satan did not know who this babe was, so he inspired King Herod to search for him. Unable to find the child, he eventually murdered all the babies and toddlers in Bethlehem, up to two years old in his

attempt to murder the Messiah who, one day, would strip him of his kingdom (Mt 1:7-16).

The point of referencing the birth and temptation of Christ is twofold: (1) to show that presently Satan has been handed authority over the kingdoms of the world and (2) to show that although Jesus has the ultimate authority over the world, he is not exercising it at this time. Upon His return, He will most definitely exercise His power; for then He will reign as King of the earth. But at present, this does not suit his objective.

The False Commission

Many have perverted or simply disregarded what we generally refer to as the Great Commission, having replaced it with a mission more to their particular liking—a temporal mission of social reengineering, seeking immediate, tangible rewards. Various Christian organizations, theologians, and multitudes of pastors (the very persons set in place to protect the flock from such false teachings) propagate these ostensibly righteous missions; but these missions are very different from those which the Lord commanded.

No doubt the reader is familiar with some, or, perhaps all of the many forms in which certain errant leaders have endeavored to place ambitious goals of social reformation on the Church. But many readers will be surprised to learn that these seemingly righteous goals do not align with God's purpose for the Church or with the commission with which He charged it. That being said, it is not the purpose of the Church to convert the world, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, to institute godly governments within Satan's domain, to embark on world-improvement programs or to implement social reformation.

None of these reformation objectives is the mission of the Church. Furthermore, each cuts absolutely contrary to the authentic, two-fold mission of the Church. Yet, for many Christians, these misplaced ambitions have become the focal point of their faith. The result is a misguided Christian community, pursuing various unattainable, temporal, pseudo-missions, which effectively displace the real mission—the Great Commission—and subtly work against it.

Each of these reformation objectives is but a clever ploy of our enemy. In the game of chess we refer to this tactic as deflection: a

maneuver, employing either sacrifice or attack, designed to draw the opponent's piece away from attacking or defending an important square. Here, our enemy tempts us to chase these bogus, temporal objectives that we might be drawn away from the critical, eternal point of concern: the Great Commission, evangelism and theological instruction for each believer.

Try as we might, no one, no movement, no religion, no government will, or can, achieve any of these socio-political objectives. The world will be converted, the kingdom of God will be established on earth, righteousness will reign, social conditions will be rectified, and the world will improve; but all of these will take place upon Christ's return.

Upon Christ's return in power and glory he will strip Satan of his current domain and claim it for himself. In the meantime, any effort to reform the world, Satan's domain, is an unrealistic and unattainable goal. The rulers of the world, for the most part, follow a different god. To them the Gospel, as well as the power to overcome evil (which salvation brings to the believer), is hidden. As Paul said:

If our Gospel is veiled, the veil must be in the minds of those who are spiritually dying. The spirit of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, and prevents the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, the image of God, from shining on them (2Co 4:3-4, Phillips).

Among these various missions of societal reformation, for the last few decades American Christianity has largely been consumed with seeking to establish a godly administration in Washington, one that promises to legislate morality. Whole movements have been launched in this regard. The ideals are preached from pulpits, discussed in Sunday schools, posted on websites, circulated in trade papers, and written about in books. Many churches and seminaries seem to put more energy into achieving this goal than into evangelism and discipleship; indeed, many have come to view this as evangelism and discipleship.

But, on several levels, it is a great mistake for the Church, as an institution, to be actively and overtly involved in socio-political reform. Aside from displacing the Great Commission it makes for strange bedfellows. Politicians are as fickle as teenagers struggling with peer pressure. It is not wise for the Church to be yoked with them in any fashion (2Co 6:14-18).

Too many Christians in America confuse the personal freedoms granted by the Bill of Rights with their spiritual freedom obtained at rebirth. The two are not equivalent. They should not, they must not, be held with equal esteem. The first is a temporal issue of little consequence in the overall scheme of things; the second has enormous eternal import. A pursuit of the first does not fulfill the expectations or obligations of the second.

When the advancement of socio-political issues becomes the focus, the Church is necessarily yoked with others of like mind in such issues, and some will be more insidious, more dangerous than politicians. Inevitably, in this quest for socio-political reformation, the Church will be yoked with heretics. It will stand side by side with pseudo-Christians, teachers of false theologies that deny the very power of the faith: the deity and resurrection of our Lord.

If establishing a godly government was our mission we would have received instructions for the same. Jesus would have addressed it. At least one of the Apostles would have addressed it. But Jesus did not. The Apostles did not. The fact of the matter is that under the Roman government people suffered far worse conditions than we scarcely imagine. The world in which Jesus and the Apostles lived was a brutal environment.

In this hierarchical society, slaves, void of any rights, were at the bottom. Slightly above them were freed slaves, and then free-born citizens. Even the free-born citizens were divided by class so that each had certain rights. The father, as head of the household, held complete control over his household, from slaves to relatives. It was called *patria potestas*, "father's power." He could force their marriage or divorce, claim their property as his own, or even sell his children into slavery. As *patria potestas* he had the power to punish (by death if he so desired) any member of his household.

Jesus, eleven of the twelve Apostles, and thousands of believers were murdered by Rome: burned, beaten, crucified, stoned, made sport of and flayed alive. Yet neither Jesus, the Apostles, nor the early Church Fathers ever spoke out against Rome or encouraged socio-political reformation. Jesus certainly spoke out against the injustices in Israel, the people of the covenant, and the Apostles chastised the Christians for their inequities; but none spoke against Rome or encouraged their followers to do so. Their lack of voice

was not due to cowardice, or even to a lack of concern. Their silence was motivated by their sense of duty.

It was Jesus' duty to take his cross upon himself that he might provide a propitiation for our sin. It was the Apostles' duty, and still is that of the Church, to proclaim Jesus and teach theology to the believers. These duties have eternal consequences. Establishing an earthly government is a temporal achievement with temporal rewards, and it is not our mission. The government, any government, no matter how godly it may seem, will wither with future generations; for man is a sinner by nature and the unconverted heart will always follow its nature. It is powerless to choose any other course.

The Divisive Mission of the Church

While a primary role of human government is one of conciliation and compromise, in which opposing mindsets and worldviews find mutual ground upon which they can stand together, the mission of the Church is divisive, in direct opposition to this conciliatory, compromising feature of government. Of this divisiveness Jesus said,

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household (Mt 10:34-35 NIV).

Of course, Jesus was not advocating war or internal familial battles; the family is a prized institution to be honored and cherished. Yet, at the same time, he knew the Gospel would create schism so divisive that even family members would be ostracized.

Being a follower of Jesus requires an admission of personal guilt and the need for a personal savior. The world loathes this scenario. It is offensive to them, to their pride, to their sense of self worth. It is for this reason the world hates Christianity and Judaism. The biblical doctrine of total depravity sheds light on man's sinful nature. The world has no problem with Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, or followers of any other world religion because none of them convicts man of his sinful nature, which, if true, predicts the need for a qualified redeemer. This is insulting to those who fancy themselves self-sufficient. Thus Jesus said:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Mt 10:16-20 NIV).

It is impossible to model the world, or even a society, after the Judeo-Christian ethic. It cannot be legislated, nor coaxed with pleas to the conscience, for the heart of man is dark, born in sin and in sin it lives until, and if, reborn of the Spirit of God. There is a universal ethic, a universal conscience acceptable to the world, but it is very narrow. Such things as murder, theft, rape, unusual cruelty, etc., are generally intolerable, but even these can be justified when convenient. The unbeliever's conscience, as tender as it might be, can generally justify an offense to its own convictions when expedient, because its moral compass is ephemeral—an existential moving target that adapts to the situation. Because it rejects the Creator it abides no ultimate standard; therefore, everything is relative.

The Law Convicts

The law cannot, nor was it ever meant to, reform anyone. Man cannot be reformed, and attempting to reform him is an exercise in futility. The purpose of the law is to convict not to contain or reform. The law is simply meant to make the sinner aware of his sin; it is not meant to make the sinner righteous. In this it is impotent. Paul explained it as such: “*the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless*” (1Ti 1:9). “*I had not known sin, but by the law*” (Ro 7:7). Having inherited the nature of sin from Adam, man is unable to obey the law. It is only the new birth, and the Holy Spirit living within, that gives the believer the necessary power to follow the law.

What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Ro 8:3-4).

Yet, even with this power dwelling within, the believer, still shackled to the Adamic nature, struggles to do that which he knows is right and is motivated to do. Therefore, attempting to make the spiritually dead live up to that with which even the spiritually alive struggle, is futile.

A society in spiritual darkness being ruled by a society of moralists does not promote evangelism. When it is attempted it has disastrous results. C. S. Lewis observed this with the wit we might expect:

Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their conscience.¹

Those who suffer under such tyranny comply only under duress. Always, they are looking for opportunity to rebel. They will never, in good faith, convert to the totalitarianism which they despise.

Well meaning, but mistaken charismatic leaders are escorting us up John Bunyan's cliffs of Mt Zion, and we follow with great intensity. Evangelist warned Christian not to be tempted by the mountain's appeal;² but, he too, had to see for himself. In the end he was sorry for his misguided zeal. So too will we. As long as the Church continues up the path of socio-political reformation it shall continue to work against God's eternal design, and it shall continue to impede its evangelical effectiveness. Of this I am certain.

Civil Rights

Now this is not to argue that believers, as citizens of a free state, should not be socially and politically involved. Indeed, a case can be made that we, as individuals, ought to perform our civic duties as much as possible. In the context of being good citizens, we should let our lights shine by the nature of our deeds and godly

¹ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Paperback - 346 pp.; Eerdmans, 1994), p. 292.

² A reference to John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Paperback; Fleming H Revell Co., 1999).

behavior. We have evidence of such civic participation in the Apostle Paul. Although imprisoned and eventually martyred by Rome for his faith, neither as a Christian nor as an Apostle of the Church did he ever speak against Rome's violation of him and his faith. However, in that he was a free Roman citizen, he did exercise his right to be heard by Caesar. And while he used this as an occasion to proclaim the Gospel, he did it without seeking imperial reformation.

There is a great difference between the Church, in an official capacity, supporting certain politicians or socio-political issues, and the individual, as a good citizen, doing the same. The individual, as a good citizen, has a civic license for such activity. The Church, as God's institution given a specific spiritual task, does not. Regardless of the liberties any government might bestow upon the Church, the Church's spiritual mission supersedes its intervention in temporal, divisive objectives because such interventions frustrate the spiritual mission. Temporal issues necessarily create division. Often, even believers are on both sides of an issue. For the Church, or theologians, or pastors as representatives of the Church, to take sides in political controversy is contrary to the mission. It is playing into the opponent's deflection tactic.

We might recall this is what the Pharisees attempted to get Jesus to do in regard to taxes. Their reasoning was such that if they could get him to say the Jews should pay taxes to Rome, the people of Israel would be upset with him; and if they could get him to say Israel should not pay the taxes to Rome, the Roman government would be after him. Of course, his answer confounded their entire scheme, for he refused to take the bait: *"render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Mt 22:21).

The Church has a mission to proclaim the Gospel, not to reform temporal, socio-political establishments. The individual believer has this same mission, but as a free citizen he/she also has a civic duty to the socio-political establishment—even an invitation and a legislative right to participate. But this individual participation must be within the scope of the Great Commission as well as that of civic responsibilities. The Great Commission does not expect or desire the Church, as an institution, to legislate civic reformation, nor does society expect or desire this reformation.

Socio-political reform is not God's goal

These pseudo-missions of socio-political reformation (upon which much of Western Christendom has embarked) have never been God's goal in any age. When the Church, as an institution of God, seeks to establish godly governments, to bring social reform, to make non-believers conform to Christian ethics, it is working contrary to every dealing God has ever had with man through the ages. Reformation of the human condition has never been God's objective.

Upon confronting Adam and Eve with their sin, God did not offer a rehabilitation program. He did not suggest they reform their ways. He promised a Redeemer. God eventually surrendered the antediluvian world to its lusts, condemning the people to their own desires. He did not tell Noah to establish a better government that might enforce justice and ethical issues. God told Noah to build a boat that would save him from the coming destruction. Within five hundred years the postdiluvian world had also rebelled against God. He condemned it as well, not with immediate destruction, but with disinterest. Thus, God made a covenant with one man, Abraham. God did not tell Abraham to establish a better government among the Gentiles but demanded separation from them. Later, Moses was given laws to govern God's chosen people, but there was no instruction to impose these laws upon the Gentiles. And, as pointed out earlier, although Rome was an evil Empire, neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever sought to reform it.

We must not fool ourselves; socio-political evils are nothing new. These troubles were just as prevalent two millennia ago when our Lord walked the earth. As far as our modern Western world is concerned, things were even worse than they are for us today. Yet neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever spoke out against Rome, never encouraged social reform or political rebellion. Later, the early Church fathers did nothing to reform it. None of them attempted to institute socio-political reform simply because it was not, and still is not, the mission of the Church. If it were, two things would certainly have happened. First, Jesus would have demonstrated it. He would have done a little social reform Himself. Secondly, He would have given a commandment to this regard. You would think at least one of the apostles would have mentioned something so important. But He did not. They did not. After all, what would be

the point? As Peter so succinctly reminded, “*The dog is returned to its own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*” (1Pe 2:2).

Of course, Jesus did speak out against Israel—God’s chosen people with whom He had a contract, one which they had all but forgotten. Having institutionalized an outward form of righteousness with their endless laws of godliness, few in Israel any longer held God dear to their hearts. Jesus’ rebuke of Israel was a point of house cleaning. He rebuked them for their apostasy and their injustices, but He said nothing to those outside the family, nothing to Rome or the Gentiles at large. Rather, he said, “*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” (Mt 15:24). Likewise, later, when certain local churches strayed from the path an apostle rebuked them, but never did an apostle rebuke Rome, or seek to establish a better government.

Human government always fails

The doctrine of total depravity predicts that human governments must fail. All have sinned and fallen short; therefore, in that human government is an extension of the human condition, all human governments must fail:

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Ps 14: 2-3).

Even Israel’s attempt at self-government failed as predicted. When Israel rejected Samuel (their God-appointed judge), insisting upon a king similar to those of surrounding nations, God consoled Samuel,

It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. . . . but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights (1Sa 8:7-9).

He will take your sons and your daughters and the best of all you have, and when you call to the Lord for relief you will not be heard. But of course, they did not heed the warning.

The results were very disappointing. What followed was century after century of self-serving kings with relatively few godly ones. Even when a righteous king sought the Lord, the people would soon rebel, and, once another king was on the throne, they would return to their evil ways. Eventually their kings were stripped

of power and Israel came under Gentile rule. Then Israel began to construct its set of endless extra-biblical, religious laws which promoted an outward form of godliness. They became puffed up and full of self-righteousness, developing the pharisaical mindset Christ found and reprimanded.

So it is that even God's chosen people aptly illustrate the doctrine of total depravity. In spite of a strong priesthood, the prophets of God, and anointed kings, Israel's attempt at self-governance failed miserably. The antediluvian civilization had done the same. Though great patriarchs walked among them—those who had walked with Adam and Eve, who had walked with God—in the end, God would bring but eight people from the ancient civilization through the flood and into the new world. In prophetic events yet to come, even with Christ physically reigning as King of the earth, multitudes will rebel (Rev 20:8). Thus, it is quite clear to all, but the willingly ignorant, that man's self rule is doomed to failure.

This being understood let me take it a little further. The very idea of a godly or Christian nation is absurd. It is a subtle ploy of the enemy to distract us from our real mission. You can have an Islamic nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, an atheistic nation, or a nation of any other religion, for world religions merely require varying degrees of outward conformity and self-righteousness as one seeks to achieve a certain sense of heightened pseudo-spirituality. But you cannot have a Christian nation. Christianity is not like the world's religions. It is more than an outward conformity of distraught self-righteousness. The requisite righteousness of Christianity is not something achieved by one's own power, but by God's. It is a power bestowed on each believer upon spiritual rebirth. This cannot be legislated, and the mere outward conformity to the Christian ethic does not a Christian make. But it does make a nice hypocrite.

There has never been a Christian nation, nor has there ever been a command to establish one. Nations and kingdoms come and go like the grass. They are temporal and physical; our kingdom is eternal and spiritual. Our kingdom is not of this world. Any attempt, no matter how righteous it may appear, to establish a holy nation or kingdom on earth is a disturbance, effectively replacing, abrogating, even sabotaging the true mission of the Church.

Detrimental Consequences of Social Reengineering

As evidenced by the chosen people of God (the children of Abraham), the doctrine to establish a righteous human government flies in the face of the biblical doctrine of total depravity. Although we may experience apparent positive changes for a few years or decades, ultimately, nothing good comes of imposed socio-political reform.

Beyond being diametrically opposed to the great commission, there are three detrimental consequences to the fallacious practice of social reengineering which the Church seeks to impose Christian ethics upon non-believers. Individuals might, to a considerable degree, will themselves to obey. But short of being reborn of the Spirit of God, their sinful nature is still in charge. It is for this reason Paul cried out “*O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death*” (Ro 7:24). Of course, he concludes that Christ Jesus is the answer.

No good thing can come of imposing godliness on the ungodly. Although some superficially conform to these imposed ethics, this conformity is likely to culminate in disdain and revolt, for their hearts are still ruled by “*the law of sin and death*” (Ro 8:2) toward which the law of righteousness is weak and unable to deliver (v.3), and thus, any outward conformity to righteousness is contrary to their nature. Those who live in the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh; they are at enmity with God and not subject to the law of God. They cannot please God (vv. 5-8) and they cannot please themselves; eventually they rebel in some form and to some degree against any righteousness that has been imposed upon them, for “*no servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other*” (Lu 16:13-14).

The second possible unseemly outcome of imposing Christian ethics on the unbeliever is an assumed self-righteousness. Vainly overlooking their sin, focused only on what good they might have accomplished or are accomplishing, they puff themselves up, convinced they have no need of a savior: “What need does a good man have of a savior? Surely the good outweighs the bad and eternity is secure by these deeds alone.” Again, false conclusion is a rejection of the doctrine of total depravity, which clearly states, “*We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags; we all*

fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa 65:6). For, “there is none righteous, no not one” (Ro 3:10).

Because of this truth, any supposed reform achieved by imposed ethics is not only temporal, but condemning. When judgment day comes these individuals will be held accountable for yet another failure—the self-righteousness they assumed while proudly conforming to the imposed ethic.

The third detrimental issue with Church-imposed social reengineering is that it makes folks turn a deaf ear to the Gospel. The Church’s views on certain temporal issues are sure to offend many citizens, simply because their nature will not and cannot abide the virtues the Church will promote.

The first rule of effective evangelism is to establish common ground. Find an issue upon which we, and the one with whom we are attempting to share the Gospel, can agree. From here we lead into the presentation of Christ and salvation. Thus, Paul said *“I am all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1Co 9:22)*. He is finding common ground from which he might share the Gospel. Imagine the outcome at the Areopagus (Ac 17) if Paul had introduced his theology by first condemning the beliefs and hedonistic practices of the various religions with their altars dedicated to their many pagan deities. Rather, he meekly observed their altar *“To The Unknown God”*; to which he said, let me tell you about Him.

As stewards of evangelism, our objective is to escort souls to an introduction with the one who bestows life and righteousness. It is not our role to hurl stones of righteous indignation. We are mere fellow sinners fortunate enough to be elected unto redemption, the reality of which should humble us to the point of tears. How can we look upon those in darkness with anything but sympathy? We do not have the right to reprimand them or their actions. For they are us; we are them. The only distinction: we have experienced the grace of God.

After warning his listeners to judge not lest they be judged, Jesus warned against the hypocrisy of looking at the speck in their brother’s eye but not considering the plank in their own. He then instructed them, *“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces” (Mt 7:1-6)*. In the issue of Church instigated socio-political

reformation, all three warnings are applicable. We shall be judged with the judgment we employ; we ourselves are struggling sinners; and why bother imposing righteousness on those who do not want it, cannot receive it and have rejected it? Of course, with this last issue of “casting pearls before swine,” Jesus was primarily speaking of continuing to proclaim the Gospel to those that have rejected it, but this principle also extends to godliness itself. Continuing to cast godliness in the face of the ungodly is a futile endeavor. There is a better option.

Having received this grace, we are now the salt of the earth, expected to bring forth and enhance the pathos and savor of life. We are not to be bitter herbs that turn a stomach into knots. We are the light of the world extending hope to those in darkness. We are not the judge giving the sentence to darkness. Leave the sentencing to God. He is just. He is qualified.

When the Church becomes involved in the passionately heated battles of socio-political reform, we effectively negate many opportunities to establish common ground with the very society we hope to reach. We cannot establish common ground with someone who will not listen to anything we have to say. And be assured, once passions are inflamed over one of these mere temporal issues, deaf ears are turned to all who oppose their passion. I learned long ago that there is a standing rule in all debates over ideals: passion is never convinced by logic. Once you oppose and enrage passion, you have effectively lost all credibility. You cannot infuriate a person over one issue and then expect to persuade him in another.

It is one thing to offend with the Gospel: indeed proclaiming the Gospel and having it offend the hearer is the expectation. But unnecessarily offending those to whom we wish to proclaim the Gospel by arguing about temporal issues that are ultimately doomed to failure regardless of the sitting government is contrary to our mission. Furthermore, even if we were to convince them to abide by our ethic, eventually they would either rebel or become self-righteous, neither of which is our objective.

Effective Witness

Proclaim the Gospel and give a living testimony; these are the means by which we give effective witness for our Lord. It is this aspect of “living testimony” in which western evangelical orthodoxy

often falls short. Too often our testimony is eclipsed by misdirected ideology. Our traditions, our legalism, and our pharisaical dogma over minor temporal socio-political issues overshadow our testimony, making it virtually of no effect. A message is seldom heeded when the messenger is held in contempt or mistrust. We seem not to grasp the reality that proclamation without effective testimony is little more than empty words.

This living testimony is best exhibited by love. Jesus said, *“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another”* (Jn 13:35). People are in pain, spiritually and emotionally. They need to be loved. We need to be loved. We need God’s love. We need God’s love demonstrated through others. And just as important, we need to demonstrate God’s love to others. The population to which we proclaim the Gospel is in spiritual darkness, living in Satan’s domain. They need to know God. They need to be enlightened by the Spirit of God. The Church is the vehicle that provides them knowledge of the Savior. This is the mission of the Church.

The Apostle pleaded to the Galatians, who themselves were misdirected in certain issues, *“as we . . . have opportunity, let us do good to all men . . .”* (Gal 6:10). This is the tender and loving spirit that Jesus demonstrated to the harlot at the well, to the repugnant lepers, and to the greedy tax collector. It is a spirit far different from that which incites and rallies protesters to picketing, sit-ins, public condemnation rallies, class or race baiting, and righteous terrorism. The mission of the Church is evangelism carried out in love. It is not social reformation inspired by bitter dogmatism.

We cannot animate a dead body, no matter how long we do CPR, or how many infusions of epinephrine, atropine and bicarbonate we provide. Dead is dead. The world is dead in spirit, severed from the only means of righteousness, the head, Jesus Christ. No attempt by the Church to revive those who are dead in spirit is evangelism.

Conclusion

While it may seem righteous, even necessary, for the Church to cry out over socio-political issues, in truth, such actions hinder the true mission of the Church. Ironically, in principle this attempt to establish a false national holiness is doing the very thing that Moses

refused to do. That is, to substitute the eternal for the temporal. In faith, his refusal to exercise his privileges as an Egyptian citizen and aristocrat pitted him against his own people.

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward (Heb 11:25-26).

While it may not be sin for the Church, overtly, to use its clout to manipulate socio-political issues, it is certainly an exercise of faithlessness. In faithlessness, we are bent upon controlling temporal issues, disregarding the effect upon the eternal mission set before us.

It is not the mission of the Church to pursue socio-political reform, nor will it ever be. It is simply not, nor ever has been God's objective on earth. The righteous kingdom will be established in time, upon Christ's return. Then all will walk by God's law. Until then, we are to proclaim the Good News, the news that a Savior was born who paid the price for our sin with His death; the news that He has risen from the grave and offers forgiveness to all who seek him.

As appealing as it may be, the Church must deny the temptation to orchestrate socio-political activism and godly nation-building. The Church must recognize this temptation for what it is—a subtle diversion set in motion by our enemy. Sadly, the consequences of such activities go far beyond what one might expect of a more subtle diversion, for when the Church pursues these diversions, losing sight of its mission, it is effectively losing the battle. Even when seemingly victorious, bringing society about to an outward conformity to our ethic, we have lost. A few, or even many, skirmishes might be won; a summit might be taken, the flag raised and righteousness established as the rule of law in the land, but we have lost because we have fought the wrong battle, taken the wrong summit, advanced the wrong kingdom. Our mission is to establish a kingdom in the hearts of men, not under their feet.

Not only is it the wrong battle, but it is counterproductive to the real battle. Our efforts merely spawn strong negative ideals and emotions among the very souls we hope to reach, thereby setting in motion the resultant aftermath. A non-believing society's heartless

conformity to unwanted morals generates one of three possible scenarios: rebellion, self-righteousness, inflamed passions.

Meddling in the emotionally charged affairs of the spiritually dead, withering, temporal world accomplishes nothing good. However, by inciting the hearts of those we hope to evangelize, we aggravate our evangelical mission. For once we have offended the myopic passions of their beloved, fleeting causes we have little to no hope of ever reaching them with the Gospel. At this point, we have lost all credibility in their eyes. Our message of eternal salvation merely falls on deaf ears, ears that are fervently plugged with the stained and decaying rags of the ever-present temporal issues. Regardless of any seemingly honorable societal structure we might achieve, men's hearts are evil, in need of spiritual rebirth, not temporal conformity.

Furthermore, no matter how ordered or encompassing all governments, all socio-political structures, are transitory. In the end, they crumble, giving way to total depravity. Christians are charged to go out among the world and evangelize, to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts of men, not to cloister themselves in singular communities, isolated from the world, isolated from those in need of salvation. Nor are we commanded to construct nations of such singular communities. There is no biblical command or precedent to justify such an abrogation of duty: that our children might have better lives; that we might be better equipped to send forth missionaries; that we might contain evil deeds; that we might honor God; that we might . . . , etc; they are all excesses of either the theologically ignorant or the theologically deceived. Nothing good has ever, or can ever, come of attempting to build a godly or Christian nation. Yes, it sounds like a righteous cause, but it is not Christianity's objective. It is a subtle, self-gratifying diversion, a hindrance to the true mission set before us.

Attempting to bring in the kingdom before its time is not that dissimilar to Israel's strong desire for the Messiah to come in power and glory versus humility. So committed were they to this objective that they vehemently rejected his clearly prophesied sacrificial appearance. Let us not be those who seek to put the cart before the horse, attempting to bring in the kingdom before its time. Not only is it futile, it is contrary to our charge. The world and its governments are in Satan's control. Any attempt at societal

reformation disregards the doctrine of total depravity: *“They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Ps 14:2-3). Thus, reform of any kind is not an option. It is, however, the commission of the Church to

Go and make disciples of all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you and, remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Mt 28:18-20, Phillips).

We seem to have forgotten that God established governments for a purpose, even evil governments. Certainly our actions show no consideration of this. Have we no faith in Him? Are we so foolish as to believe that He needs our help? Ultimately, God is in control. Just as the Holy Spirit works upon your conscience, and mine, so too He works upon the consciousness of those in power. He works as a restraining force against evil (2Th 2:6). If God so desired, He could shatter any and every government like a broken mirror (Am 9:8). The only power they have is the power with which He has entrusted them (1Ki 16:1-4); they are working according to His plan. When the Church speaks ill and displays animosity toward the government, it is essentially displaying displeasure with the way God is orchestrating the course of the world.

There are many governments that have little or no Christian constituents; our efforts of persuasion would be better spent seeking to birth them some. This is the mission. It is a mission with eternal consequence. Governments and societies are transient. They come and go like the seasons. Overpower this one and tomorrow you face another. It is a temporal and fleeting battle, whereas souls are eternal. Let us leave the building and toppling of governments to God. After all, He’s been doing it for a while, and so far everything has gone according to plan. My wife is a wonderful cook. I am not. So I suppose it is appropriate that when I walk into the kitchen half way through the preparation of a particular dish, and give a few suggestions, she runs me off in an obvious display of irritation. Let us let God complete His project as planned. He doesn’t need us straying into the kitchen and shaking the spices. He has commissioned us to a different project. Let us stick to the task at hand.

1 C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Paperback – p. 346, Eerdmans, 1994), p. 292.

2 A reference to John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Paperback; Fleming H Revell Co., 1999).

Love and Marriage

Introduction

Marriage is a wonderful thing, Solomon (generally considered the wisest of the wise) said, *“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor of the Lord”* (Pr 18:22). But in recent years, marriage has suffered a violent assault within our western culture. Christians have not been immune to this assault. Today, Western culture virtually accepts divorce as a right of passage, something through which almost everyone will pass. Wedding vows are constructed to be subordinate to prenuptial agreements with the understanding that love for one’s spouse might wane, but love for one’s money shall remain till death do us part.

This assault on marriage has intensified so that the very sanctity of this holy union, as an institution between a man and a woman, is under attack. States are passing laws to allow marriages of man with man, and woman with woman. Next, I suppose, we will see man with beast. Such is the heart of man. Is this not reminiscent of the antediluvian society, which, we are told, would reemerge before Christ’s return?

More than the world’s abuse of this sacred union, of great concern to me is the casual perspective so many within Western Christendom have assumed toward marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The world’s perspective that marriage can be donned and discarded like soiled vesture, replaced simply by pulling another garment from the hanger, has slowly crept into the Church. Over the last several decades, the divorce rate among Christians has reached a number similar to that of the world, ranging from 33 to 42%. Some have calculated that perhaps half of all American marriages end in divorce: 33% to 50% of first marriages, 60% to 67% of second marriages, and 73% to 74% of third marriages. Of course, all these statistics are debatable, varying slightly depending upon the survey and the criteria used for the survey. But the actual numbers are not that important, the pattern is clear. There is a problem; this, no one who values marriage can deny.

A unique bond

Marriage is the first institution established by the Lord. This alone makes it special. But it is more than a tradition, more than an institution, more than a legal contract, more than a civil ceremony, more than a religious duty, more than a mere equal partnership. Marriage is to be a living, loving union, a mystical fusion in which each nourishes, cherishes, and esteems the other as they would their own selves. This truly unique bond, unmatched in all creation, is designed to transcend all other earthly relationships: acquaintances, business associates, close friendships and blood relatives—from aunts, uncles and cousins to siblings, grandparents and parents.

This takes on special meaning when we consider the visceral bond generated by the blood relationship which often provokes deference even for those relatives whom we might not particularly care for; as the colloquial observation says, “blood is thicker than water.” When we consider the even more powerful and visceral parent-child bond, this special meaning is taken to a whole new level, for the marriage bond is to transcend even the parent-child relationship. “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*” (Gen 2:24).

Many parents and children alike fail to acknowledge this *leaving and cleaving* aspect of marriage. They fail to reverence the *one flesh* nature of this bond. As a result, parents meddle in a child’s marriage, or, conversely, a child places parents above his/her spouse. Either is a recipe for disaster. The couple is to leave their parents, to unite and become *one flesh*.

This *one flesh* aspect of marriage is hard to define, impossible to fully articulate, harder even than attempting to define love for one who has never experienced love. Simply discussing or attempting to define this unique relationship does not do it justice. Like love, but even more difficult to comprehend, this being *one flesh* must be experienced to be truly appreciated.

The wounded

Unfortunately, too many marriages never experience this mystical union of being *one flesh*. Too many marriages never achieve this unique relationship; their bond never matures, never grows to its full potential. Without this bond marriage can be a source of great sorrow. Too many marriages suffer a weak relationship; with

couples painfully remaining together (at least legally) for the kids, for the church, for their reputation. Other marriages simply dissolve in divorce as each partner, typically, and casually, moves on to another. Then some, although relatively few, who have achieved this special bond, manage to fracture it, and let it fester until it also ends in divorce. Those in this category experience a loss from which they can never fully recover. This open wound makes it very unlikely that either will, or can, rush into another truly meaningful relationship. For if their failed marriage had indeed formed this genuine bond in which they were as one flesh, dissolving it was truly like cutting off their right arm.

The Lord spoke of this same wound with Israel, His metaphorical, estranged wife. So the prophet might better understand how the Lord felt about Israel, He instructed Hosea to take an unfaithful wife that he might also experience the pain (Hos 3:1). Hundreds of years later, even as the crowds were shouting His praise, Jesus expressed his feeling for Israel, lamenting the soon destruction of this city that was about to kill Him. Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, was near destruction and he mourned for it:

When he came near, he saw the city and wept over it; saying, I tell you, if you had known in this day, even you, the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For . . . your enemies . . . shall not leave in you one stone upon another, . . . (Lu 19:41-44)

No, the divorce of those who have truly developed this special bond can never fully heal.

What then is the key to a successful, happy marriage, to developing this special bond of one flesh? Merrill and I were married as teenagers, nearly forty years ago, and, as you might expect, we have often been asked this same question. You will have to ask Merrill for her take on the issue to get the full story. In that her part in this relationship has been far more difficult than mine; her thoughts are certainly of great value. As for me, and my analytical approach, I think I am also onto something.

The words of love

The Greek language has different words to express various aspects of what we often simply call love. There are three specific words of interest when speaking of love and marriage. While these words have individual meanings, on some level each seems to cross

paths with another so that their usage is nearly synonymous, but not quite.

The first term, although not used in the New Testament, is nevertheless, very important to our topic, for it is the means by which most relationships begin. It is the Greek ἔρως (*eros*), from which we get the English *erotic*. Eros speaks of physical attraction, infatuation, even physical pleasure. It accounts for love at first sight and that giddy feeling in the gut when you hold hands with the one of your desire.

Proverbs provides an example of how the two of these Greek words cross paths. Although the Greek Septuagint (LXX) uses a different word for love (one we will discuss shortly), the scene described crosses into *eros*.

Let your fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and be ravished always with her love (Pr 5:18-19 LXX).

This physical relationship, of course, is not the sole means to achieve the mystical union of being *one flesh*, but it is an important aspect. However, to be meaningful, a relationship must move on from *eros*. This is not to abandon it by any means, but to grow and move into other forms of love. Nevertheless, this passage reveals how important it is to keep the fire burning. The initial infatuation, or even love at first sight, is fine, and although its intensity may vary throughout the ups and downs of a growing relationship, the flame must not be left to die out.

Another Greek term ἀγαπᾶω (*agapao*) is commonly translated love. Its scope of meaning is, to value, to esteem, to feel or manifest concern, to be faithful toward, to delight in, to set store upon, devotedness, affection, and benevolence. It is often thought of as the sacrificial love and devotion that is not only prevalent in marriage but in other relationships as well: a parent's sacrificial love for the children; a soldier's love for country; a friend's devotion, etc. It was this term Jesus used when he said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another" (Jn 13:35). *Agapao* is the idea behind the oft quoted 1Corinthians 13.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not

love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long, is kind, does not envy, does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And now abide faith, hope, love, . . . the greatest of these is love.

Eros and *agapao*, the burning desire and the devotional aspects of love, are vital to any marriage, but there is another love that must be encountered if a marriage is to work, if it is to reach the mystical state of being *one flesh*. This love is expressed in the Greek φιλέω (*phileo*). It is often translated as friendship. It speaks of affection, to like, to delight in, and to cherish inordinately.

Phileo can be used to express a more personal, intimate love than that of *agapao*. While, in the realm of one's less intimate relationship in society, *agapao* is the greatest love, as for personal relationships, *phileo* transcends and necessarily encompasses *agapao*. So that, it is possible to have *agapao* without having *phileo*; that is, it is possible to be devoted and sacrificially committed without harboring a deep personal affection. On the other hand, *phileo*, by definition, includes all the aspects of *agapao*. In this respect, *phileo* is a higher form of love.

This was exhibited when Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" He used *agapas*. Peter answered, "Yes Lord, you know I love you." Peter used *philo*. Then Jesus asked him a second time, again using *agapas*, and Peter answered, again using *philo*. When Jesus asked Peter the third time, "Do you love me?" he used *phileis*. Of course Peter was grieved because it seemed that Jesus was questioning his affectionate devotion, his *philos*. Then Jesus foretold of Peter's eventual martyrdom, essentially telling him: Yes, you will demonstrate your affection, with your sacrifice (*Jn 21:15-17*). If you recall, earlier Jesus had said, a "man gives his life for a friend (*philos*) you are my friends (*philos*) if you do what I say" (*Jn 15:13-14*)

Other passages use *phileo* as well, to express affection on a more personal level so as to transcend *agapee*. Paul used this term to admonish young women to love their husbands and to love their children (*Ti 2:4*). The Septuagint used it to explain: "He that covers transgression seeks love, but he that repeats a matter separates friends" (*Pr 17:9*), and again to say, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all

transgressions” (Pr 10:12). And Paul used it to express God’s love toward men, “*the kindness and love of God our Savior toward men appeared,*” which He did via *agapee* (Tit 3:4). It is this term used of Jesus’ affection for Lazarus, “*behold how he loved him*” (Jn 11:36), and for John, “*the other disciple whom Jesus loved*” (Jn 20:2). This term was used to tell us how “*the Father loves the son*” (Jn 5:20). Jesus used it to assure the disciples, “*the Father loves you because you love me*” (Jn 16:27). Paul warned that “*if any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema. . . .*” (1Co 16:22). *Phileo* is also the root word for kiss.

In the negative sense *phileo* is used to express a misplaced self serving affection: the love of money, of self, of praying in the open, of having the uppermost seats, a love of one’s life or family more than Jesus, and a love of the world.

In the context of marriage, *phileo* necessarily encompasses and transcends both *agapee* and *eros*. It is this term used by the Septuagint in the aforementioned erotic passage in Proverbs:

Let your fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and be ravished always with her love” (Pr 5:18-19).

The acts of love

Although they were once in love, too many married couples wake up one day to realize they do not particularly like each other, *eros*. Their once steamy relationship had likely started with a strong, mutual physical attraction for each other. As they spent more time together, they were soon making small compromises and sacrifices for each other, *agapao*. This sacrificial devotion grew once they were married. It necessarily became even more widespread as the children entered their lives. But each had their own set of friends, neither really caring for the other’s friends. As time passed, they spent less and less time together. They began spending weekends apart, each involved in their own activities. Then they were taking separate vacations. The initial flame, with which their relationship began, had long since faded; so that now, each continually irritates the other. Slowly, and sadly, they have come to realize they do not really like each other anymore.

The likely truth is that they never did like each other. They never took the necessary time to really get to know each other in an intimate, *phileo* way. The mutual sacrifices and benevolence was

encouraging. Conjugal unions were good . . . for a few years; but a cherished, soul to soul, intimate and deeply devoted friendship was never developed. For, if this all encompassing *phileo* had been present to the degree so that they were as *one flesh*, they would not likely be entertaining their present thoughts of disdain.

Unlike *eros*, *phileo* does not mystically appear at first sight. *Phileo*, at any level is a relationship that takes time and energy. At its heightened level of intimacy within marriage, its development demands even greater effort. It must be nurtured, cuddled, sought after. As Helen Rowland noted, "Marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handsprings or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it."³

More than the love at first sight aspect of *eros*; more than the impersonal devotion of *agapao*; this special *phileo* relationship within a marriage can only be attained by perfect familiarity. Not merely physical intimacy, but an interpersonal growth that requires quality time together, learning of each other's dreams, and fears, and perfections, and imperfections, of life before each other. As one little boy put it, when asked what a friend was: "someone who knows everything there is to know about you but likes you anyway."

Speaking kindly

Seeking to understand what caused marriages to fail; several years ago marital researchers studied couples over the course of decades; retracing the windy path of those who had split up, all the way back to their wedding day. What they discovered was somewhat disturbing. None of the factors they expected seemed to make any difference: not how in love the newlyweds were; not how much affection they showed; not how much they fought or what they fought about. What they did find was that both the marriages that proved successful and those that failed looked surprisingly similar in the early days. Then psychologists Cliff Notarius of Catholic University and Howard Markman of the University of Denver studied newlyweds over the first decade of marriage and found a subtle but telling difference at the beginning of the relationships.

³ Helen Rowland, Reader's Digest, June, 1994, p. 130.

Of those marriages that would ultimately succeed, 5% of the comments made about each other were insults. Of the marriages that would ultimately fail, it was 10%. As the decade passed the gap magnified until the failing couples spoke five times as many cruel and negative comments at each other as did the happy couples. They concluded that “Hostile putdowns act as cancerous cells that, if unchecked, erode the relationship over time, . . . In the end, relentless unremitting negativity takes control and the couple can’t get through a week without major blow ups.”⁴

Such behavior is the exact opposite of love, of *agapao*, of *phileo*. Love is longsuffering, it is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in wrong doing, endures all things (1Co 13). “*Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions*” (Pr 10:12).

Conclusion

This, I believe, is the key to a uncertainly successful, happy marriage. It centers upon creating a bond that is closer even than that of blood. It can only be achieved by pursuing the special intimate friendship of *phileo* at the marital level, which incorporates and transcends both *eros* and *agapee*. The result is an intimate friendship, a love and devotion so tight, so intertwined that the two are as one. But this union must be fostered. It has to be nurtured. It takes time and effort. Beyond the love-at-first-sight nature of *eros*, beyond even the obligatory sacrificial love of *agapee*, this *phileo* is a personal, deeply emotional, gut wrenching attachment from the depths of your soul that creates a bond so strong between the two they are *one flesh*.

Jeremy Taylor has said, “By friendship you mean the greatest love, the greatest usefulness, the most open communication, the noblest sufferings, the severest truth, the heartiest counsel, and the greatest union of minds of which brave men and women are capable.” And George Eliot observed,

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words, but to pour them all out just as they are, chaff and grain together knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift

⁴ Notarius, U.S. News & World Report, February 21, 1994, p. 67.

them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.⁵

Merrill is my best friend. Through the years, we've had several jobs in which we worked together. Many times I have heard the question: "How can you work together? I couldn't stand to be with my husband/wife that much." Always, when I hear this, I cannot help but question (in my own mind) the depth of that particular relationship. For there is literally no one in the world I would rather work with, or be with, than my best friend, my wife. I cannot spend too much time with her. Of course we have our own interests and need our own personal time. We are as one but we don't cease being individuals. Still, we are happiest even to spend our alone time together: she, sowing, tending her gardening or making a special treat for the grandchildren; me, composing a song, writing a paper, playing the guitar or a game of chess against some unknown combatant on the internet. And the idea of taking separate vacations, or having a desire to simply get away from each other, is completely foreign.

Aristotle once said, "Friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies."⁶ This might well be said of marriage.

⁵ George Eliot, quoted in *Today in the Word*, July, 1989, p. 28.

⁶ <http://www.quotesnsayings.net/quotes/67969> (March 2012).

Science, Faith and Logic

I include this chapter among these critiques on modern practical theology because so many Christians unwittingly accept the popular (but maligned and erroneous) meaning of faith which has been popularized by certain members of the scientific community. Having accepted this fallacious definition of faith, many Christians succumb to the cultural pressure to also accept, as if fact, the hypotheses of the big bang and evolution. The blatant misrepresentation of faith, coupled with the dearth of theological training at the local church level, has left many Christians floundering, confused as to how these hypotheses might be reconciled with Creation. Here we shall see there is nothing to reconcile because these hypotheses are just that: untested, unfounded “what ifs,” void of any substantial evidence; whereas, faith in the biblical account of creation has more than enough evidence to substantiate its veracity.

Because of its many great advances, the scientific community has gained considerable clout in recent decades. This coupled with the fact that most people are not equipped to debate scientists at their level of expertise, lead many to simply accept whatever the scientific community tells them without challenge. However, this is exactly wrong. Scientists are not omniscient, nor are they error free. They are merely trained observers who use big words to discuss their particular topics of interest. They ask questions and seek answers. Sometimes they ask the wrong questions and arrive at faulty conclusions. Sometimes their passion gets the best of them, clouding their logic, and they arrive at wrong conclusions. As a result, numerous scientists hold differing opinions on various subjects. One presents a hypothesis and another sets out to disprove it. Discord is always prevalent within the scientific community.

Dishonesty is also something to which the scientific community is not immune. The conscious and constant misrepresentation of faith is a prime example. So too is the

continued misrepresentation of the hypotheses of the big bang and evolution as if they were known facts. Even though hundreds of qualified scientists present very convincing arguments in their particular fields of study to show these hypotheses cannot be accurate, nevertheless (because they present a rallying pole for those who despise the idea of a Creator, to whom they must submit), many scientists passionately cling to these fairy tales and seek to convince others to do so as well.

Faith Misrepresented

At the nurses' station in a local hospital, I recently saw a "Thought for the Day" poem hanging on a cabinet. In part, it read, "*Faith believes the unbelievable, receives the impossible.*" Of course I reacted, and proceeded to take a few minutes to set the record straight. For this is exactly what faith is not. Unfortunately, many people, from atheist to theists alike, consistently misrepresent faith. For some this is a calculated condemnation, for others it is simply innocence.

On the surface, this innocuous yet misguided insight seems quite harmless, even benign; but statements like this encourage the misperception that science is based on cold, hard facts while faith is merely a biased, ambiguous conviction, void of evidence. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Both aspects of this argument are erroneous; for science routinely employs faith and faith, by definition, is always based upon known quantities.

This misrepresentation of both science and faith is further propagated by the notion that the observable universe is our only reality; whereas, intangible issues and metaphysical concepts are nothing more than subjective uncertainty. The concept of a Creator, being intangible, falls into this category. As such, a survey at the National Academy of Sciences revealed that 69% of the biologists and 79% of the physical scientists claimed to be atheists. Most of the other scientists claimed agnosticism; there were very few believers. Commenting on these figures Oxford University scientist, Peter Atkins, argued,

You clearly can be a scientist and have religious beliefs. But I don't think you can be a real scientist in the deepest sense of

the word because they are such alien categories of knowledge.⁷

To substantiate this perceived distinction between science and religious beliefs, many have attempted to redefine the meaning of faith so that it has one meaning when referring to science and quite a different meaning when applied to religion. In an interview as part of the series “Believe it Or Not,” famed biologist Richard Dawkins brazenly, yet feebly, argues this redefined, pseudo, dual definition of faith. The fact that neither biblical theology nor theologians use faith in the way he defines it, is seemingly of no concern to anyone. When asked the question: “Do scientists ever need faith?” Dawkins answered,

Not in the sense of faith as meaning belief in something for which there is no evidence. There are various senses of faith in which we do—scientists do participate. There’s {sic} branches of science which I don’t understand; for example, physics. It could be said, I suppose, that I have faith that physicists understand it better than I do. And so when I say something that physicists tell me, such as that there was nothing before the big bang—they’re not allowed to talk about the word “before” in the context of the big bang—I sort of have faith that physicists understand enough to be allowed to say that, even though I don’t understand why they’re allowed to say that. But it’s not blind faith; it’s not faith in the absence of evidence. It’s faith that’s based upon confidence in the scientific method, in the scientific peer review process, the fact that I know that there are other physicists who can test, verify, criticize the views of any one physicist. So it’s not the same as religious faith, which is based upon no evidence at all.⁸

⁷ Nature © Macmillan Publishers Ltd 1998 Registered No. 785998 England http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v394/n6691/full/394313a0_fs.html (accessed March 20, 2012).

⁸ Dawkins, Richard. Interviewed by Paul Hoffman, Part of the Series Believe it or Not. Recorded on: October 21, 2009. <http://bigthink.com/ideas/17052> (accessed March 22, 2012).

In yet another discussion, Dawkins makes the accusation that this new kind of faith, which he has imagined as being without evidence, “. . . is the principal vice of any religion.”⁹

This, I must say, is the epitome of double-talk: of both exercising a double standard and implementing the adage, “having your cake and eating it too.” Unable to deny that science employs faith, he proceeds to place varying degrees or senses on faith, so that some faith is based on evidence and some is not. Then, even as he claims religious beliefs are without evidence, he makes reference to the big bang and the physicists who, although they are not allowed to discuss the word “before” in the context of the big bang (frankly because there is not evidence), he has faith in their beliefs because . . . well, they are scientists.

So let’s get this straight. Dawkins claims that those who find sufficient evidence for the reality of an unseen intelligent Creator are exercising blind faith. After all the only evidence they have is easily dismissed: a historical account as old as recorded history, a highly ordered, mechanical, complex universe, which is further complicated by all the metaphysical complexities of humanity such as intelligence, reason, emotion and even consciousness itself. Whereas, on the other hand, they have good reason for their faith—those who believe the material universe exploded into existence from nothing, by its own non-existent energy. Although they are very aware that their good reason is void of real evidence (so much so, they are encouraged not to discuss it); still, they have the biased imagination and ambiguous conviction of many scientists who believe the chaotic aftermath of this explosion organized itself into this highly complex, structured, mechanical system, from which organic life eventually sprang forth out of the inorganic material, which had appeared out of nothing, by its own non-existent energy. Then, this organic life somehow sustained itself on non-existent nutrients and finally (after splitting into a myriad of life forms, the most complex and animated life forms developed a new reality, a metaphysical consciousness with a universal morality, a sense of reason, and all the other problematic metaphysical, human

⁹ Dawkins, Richard. “Is Science a Religion?” Published in the Humanist, January/February 1997. <http://www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html> (accessed March 22, 2012).

complexities. I wonder if Dawkins has ever heard of Ockham's Razor?

Series of Logical Fallacies

Those who argue that science is based solely on the evidence presented in the observable universe, whereas religion relies on ambiguous uncertainty, commit at least four errors in logic—three strategic misrepresentations and the fourth, a straw man.

- (1) Claiming some faith is merely based on ambiguous conviction, devoid of evidence.
- (2) Claiming science does not employ faith, or at least not in the sense that religion does.
- (3) Claiming reality exists only in the observable universe.
- (4) Then using these false premises, they conjure up the fallacious straw man argument of blind faith on which to rest their erroneous case.

The blind faith conclusion is indeed valid if the premises were true—that faith is nothing more than a subjective uncertainty, evoked without evidence, and that reality exists only in the observable material universe. Once blind faith is concluded there is nothing left to discuss. It is the final nail in the coffin of religion. The idea of God is relegated to but a romantic notion that gives some folks a fuzzy feeling. However, these premises are erroneous, as is the fallacious straw man argument they support.

To thoroughly sort through these thoughts, we must ask the right questions with clearly defined terms. That which is essentially at issue is a series of three interrelated questions. What is faith? Does science rely on faith? And, what is reality? First, we discuss faith.

Biblical Faith Defined

As pointed out earlier, many scientists, and our culture at large, consistently misrepresent the biblical position on faith. In what debate is it justified for one side to redefine terms to better fit their argument? True debate, indeed communication in general, demands valid, clearly defined terms. In that biblical faith is a topic with which many scientists take issue, it only seems fitting to understand, accept, and base the discussion around the biblical definition of faith rather than the new and maligned version propagated by those

who claim atheism. Scripture sets forth many prime examples of faith and provides a very clear definition: “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen*” (Heb 11:1)

There are four Greek terms that must be dealt with in this passage:

- (1) Faith, πίστις *pistis*: belief, trust, assurance, credence, fidelity, reliance upon.
- (2) Substance, ὑπόστασις *hupostasis*: (concrete) essence, reality; (figurative) assurance, confidence, substance.
- (3) Hope, ἐλπίζομένων *elpizo*: expectation, confidence.
- (4) Evidence, ἐλεγχος *elengchos*: conviction, proof.

So then, “the *substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen*” or, we might also translate it, “*Trust is the assurance of things expected, the proof of things unobserved.*”

Faith Employed Daily

Many examples of faith as “the *substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen*” are routinely employed in our daily lives, both in a physical and an intangible sense. In a physical sense, if I enter a concert hall and sit down at the beautiful Steinway grand piano and reach out to stroke the keys, I expect to make music. This expected reality is not without cause. I have played music on pianos hundreds of times and fully expect that it will happen again. There may be no strings in the piano, perhaps it is a hollow showpiece, but that is not my belief. It is a beautiful, expensive Steinway on stage in a concert hall; I expect it to respond accordingly.

Again in the physical sense, suppose when I leave my house in the morning, it is locked, all the lights are off and no one is there. But when I return at the end of the day, I find the door unlocked with the lights on, and still no one there. I will believe that someone has been there. The unlocked door and the burning lights are sufficient proof of this unseen event. Of course, I could refuse to believe it. I could speculate that perhaps an earthquake rattled the house, unlocked the door, and flipped the light switches. Or perhaps the cat somehow jumped up to unlock the door and flip the light switches. However, the obvious cause, the simplest answer, the Ockham’s Razor, is that someone was in the house.

In the intangible sense, I have complete trust in my wife’s devotion to me. When I awaken tomorrow morning she will be

there. This is my expected reality, my hope, my faith, my confidence. This reality is not based on some unfounded, ambiguous conviction, but on history and the solid relationship we have shared for many years.

Again in the intangible sense, I have faith in my wife's moral behavior. Presented with a situation in which she could steal some valuable object without anyone ever knowing it, I am confident without any doubt that she would not do it. This unseen reality is not based on some ambiguous conviction but on my intimate knowledge of her morals, her past actions, her character.

Faith in a Creator

Scripture speaks of faith based on reason; nothing is ever mentioned of some subjective, ambiguous conviction. If some romantic fancy is the depth of one's trust in God, this so called faith will certainly fail when put to the test. Thus, it is not faith at all. Faith is born of evidence. The passage, "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen*" goes on to explain that, "*through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*" (Heb 11:1, 3). The Psalmist's understood this reasoning, this evidence for belief in a Creator, "*The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament His handiwork*" (Ps 19:1). This beautiful, highly ordered universe is deemed so strong an evidence for the existence of an intelligent Creator that a solemn warning is given to those who disregard it:

The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Ro 1:19-20).

This reasoning, as we shall see shortly, is the same as that employed by modern science. The idea of things that are observed being caused by things that are unseen is so common to science that the laws of physics are based upon this reality. Who has ever seen the forces of gravity or electromagnetism? Who has ever seen a radio wave? We can see their effects and measure outcomes with various devices, but we cannot directly observe them. Just as "*the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,*" so too, scientists often understand the visible by the invisible. This, by definition, is faith. Faith is not some ambiguous romantic ideal born of wishful

thinking. By definition, faith is based on evidence. By definition, there is nothing blind about faith; at least not in the biblical or theological definition.

Nowhere in Scripture is anyone ever asked or encouraged to believe something for which there is no evidence. Therefore, Peter admonished, *“Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you”* (1Pe 3:15). And sufficient reason there is. This highly ordered, complex universe is more than sufficient evidence to trust in the reality of an unseen, intelligent Creator.

If we direct the argument away from the physical we can speak of other realities, the even more complex unseen metaphysical realities of the human condition: consciousness, love, deduction, and the very life force itself that brings animation. It is for these reasons that throughout the whole of recorded history, mankind, from children to some of our greatest intellects, have, and still do, reach the conclusion that God exists.

Science Consistently Relies on Faith

There are no varying degrees or senses of faith. There is but one understanding of faith, it is the same for science as it is for religion. Faith, or trust, or belief (for they are synonyms) is always based on evidence. Science employs it regularly. The statement, “science does not need faith” is made either in ignorance or self-deception. Science has faith in the laws of physics, and for good reason; there is strong evidence. Many theories or expected realities, at both the quantum and the galactic levels, are based on *“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.”* The existence of unseen realities is no stranger to physics; there is ample proof of things that are seen being caused by things that do not appear. As pointed out earlier, we need look no further than electricity, the forces of gravity, radio waves, or the unexplained nuclear forces at the quantum level, none of which have ever been seen, but definitely exist.

In a physical sense, when archaeologists discover a fossil of some unknown organic life form, by faith they know the fossil was formed by some extinct being or organism, as the case may be. While a high school nerd might have carefully crafted and placed it there as a hoax, the obvious cause, the simplest answer, the Ockham’s Razor, is that it was formed from an extinct life form.

When astronomers observe a star wobbling in space through their powerful telescope, they conclude there is an unseen orbiting planet. This belief is not based on some unfounded, ambiguous conviction, but on our understanding and faith in the Doppler Effect and Newtonian physics. They cannot see the planet, but they know, they expect, they believe, it is the gravitational pull of a planet causing this wobble.

The Doppler Effect provides yet another example, called a redshift. Wavelengths of light emitted from an object moving away from the observer increase proportionally, thereby shifting to the red end of the spectrum and creating what is called a redshift. Applying this knowledge to certain celestial bodies lead astrophysicists to believe the universe is expanding. At least this is the expected reality.

A nebula is another example. Based on the knowledge of our known world a nebula is believed to be a cloud of gas and dust in outer space. Although no astrophysicist has ever actually collected specimens from a nebula, this is the expected reality.

By analyzing the photosphere and chromosphere of the solar spectrum, scientists have concluded that the sun consists of some 67 elements. They believe this solar spectrum represents the entire sun—except perhaps the solar core, where a certain degree of mixing likely transpires between the layers of the sun's interior. At least this is the expected reality; but, of course, no astrophysicist has ever actually collected and analyzed any material from the sun, nor have they explored its core.

In the intangible sense, every scientist expects the earth to continue on its axis throughout the night so that the sun appears on the horizon in the morning. This reality is not based on some unfounded, ambiguous conviction but on a faith proven by history and the laws of physics. It has happened every day since time began. We cannot see the forces that cause it, but we are sure they exist and we have faith they will continue to work.

If I drop my pen, I expect it to fall to the floor. I believe this because I have seen it happen with many objects time and again. It is the law of gravity in action. But we do not understand gravity . . . what it is, how it works. Nor do we know it will continue to work; but we have faith that it will. Using Newton's statement that $\text{Force} = \text{mass} \times \text{acceleration}$, we can calculate the force a falling object

generates; but we cannot see the force. We must take it on faith that forces even exist, and we must make assumptions as to what these forces are.

No one has ever seen electrons, yet every scientist believes they exist. Or what scientist would ever tell you they do not believe in magnetism? While we cannot see it, we know it exists. We understand how to use it, to manipulate it, to measure it; but ultimately, like gravity, we cannot touch it or directly observe it.

In reality, faith and science have a symbiotic relationship. All these examples in science employ the same faith Scripture speaks of: the assurance of things expected, the proof of things unseen; things that are seen being caused by things that are unseen. The argument that science does not need or utilize faith is a deceptive, logical fallacy. It is a disingenuous, strategic, misrepresentation of the meaning of faith. The premise that science is based solely on the observations of the tangible, material universe must not be accepted.

Nor can it be accepted that faith in the metaphysical world is based merely on some subjective, unfounded, ambiguous conviction. My very consciousness and intellect (meager as it may be) that empowers me to make this argument, and yours, which empowers you to read and understand it, are unseen metaphysical realities. Oh yes, there is ample reason to believe in the unseen. There is ample reason to have faith in a Creator of the universe. For, *“the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps 19:1)*.

This is the application of Ockham’s Razor to the origin of this highly ordered, complex universe and to the even more impressive and problematic metaphysical complexities of humanity. Add to this the historical data of God’s personal interventions with humanity on various levels and the evidence is overwhelming. On the other hand, it hardly fits the Ockham’s Razor test to suppose this wondrous universe (from the quantum to the galactic levels) exploded into existence from nothing by its own non-existent energy, after which this chaotic disarray of inorganic, unintelligent, material organized itself into a highly structured system. Then, organic life sprang forth from the inorganic material and then somehow sustained itself on non-existent nutrients. Then, this

organic life evolved a metaphysical consciousness, a sense of morality, a sense of self and reason.

What is Reality?

We are still faced with the question of reality. What is it? In the aforementioned passage, Doctor Dawkins expressed personal faith in his fellow scientists. He basically said he believed his fellow scientists know their particular subject well enough for him to trust them and the scientific method. Unfortunately for Dawkins science is forever changing, so that what is believed true today may not be so tomorrow. Science has changed its reality many times after proving itself wrong. Strangely enough, science actually prides itself in these changes; at least, that is, in its ability to adapt to them. The bottom line is that we really cannot trust scientists to always be correct regardless of how learned they are in their particular disciplines.

One hundred and fifty years ago science believed light consisted of waves. Since light was a wave it required a medium for its dissemination; they called the medium "ether." Today scientists question the wave nature of light and they no longer believe ether exists.

For centuries, science operated on the principles of Classical Physics, by which Newton discovered and unified the laws of motion. Many discoveries in thermodynamics, chemistry, and electromagnetism were based on this reality. Then Albert Einstein conceived his theory of relativity. Scientific reality suddenly changed. Quantum and modern physics was born. Again new discoveries were made based on these new subatomic realities. Time and space were redefined. The atom was split, and electromagnetic energy was further investigated.

As a credentialed respiratory therapist for nearly forty years, I can tell you first hand that based on the proven evidence of anatomy and medical science thirty years ago, we knew patients in need of mechanical ventilation should receive a volume of 15 cc x wt/kg, along with 4 sigh breaths per minute, equal to 22.5 cc x wt/kg. As the years passed, we began to realize the pressures generated by these volumes were more critical than the actual volumes. We realized these high pressures were causing irreparable damage to the lungs. Gradually this volume decreased to 12 cc,

then 10 cc, until today, we believe we should ventilate at 6 cc to 8 cc x wt/kg, with no sigh breaths at all. If lung injury is present, we will go as low as 4 cc x wt/kg. However, even today in many ICUs, if you find yourself on a mechanical ventilator you might be ventilated at the old volumes, which were once held to be true but are now known to be untrue. What medical science believes to be true sometimes is not; and what is proven in scientific medical studies is sometimes not put into clinical practice, just as what is discovered in other disciplines of the scientific and research community (if it happens to contradict a popular hypothesis), is generally not discussed in the classroom or in popular scientific literature.

Reality is Beyond the Mere Physical

In quantum physics there is no solid matter; everything is emptiness and energy, be it light or dark. Electromagnetic energy flows throughout various systems, from subatomic particles and atoms to molecules and cells, creating forces that internally hold these various systems together, while simultaneously, externally, bonding and yet separating each system from others of like kind, thereby resulting in what we perceive as solid matter.

As knowledge of quantum mechanics grew, it became apparent that nonlocality (in which particles of a given structure could be influenced by something outside their system) might transpire. Because this made it impossible to treat systems spatially separated from one another as independent, Einstein took issue with the concept, ridiculing it as “spooky action from a distance.”¹⁰ However, in recent years scientists have demonstrated that subatomic nonlocality exists. Once two or more particles collide they are immediately linked, entangled. The information each particle contains is smeared over the others, so that, no matter how far apart they are, by measuring the previously uncertain momentum of one, the second will instantaneously gain a clearly defined momentum.¹¹ This is the “spooky action at a distance” that

¹⁰ Overbye, D. 2006. New tests of Einstein’s ‘spooky’ reality. *International Herald Tribune*, January 10, 2006. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/12/28/healthscience/sneinstein.php> (accessed August 15, 2007).

¹¹ Zeilinger, A. 2006. Spooky action and beyond. Interview by *Die Weltwoche*, January 3, 2006. <http://www.signandsight.com/features/614.html> (accessed August 12, 2007).

Einstein could not believe, for it takes place without further physical contact, thereby making it, by definition, metaphysical. This is a huge problem for many modern scientists because for them, metaphysics does not exist.

Scientific knowledge is forever changing. There is still much to learn of quantum physics, and science has yet to unify the forces of quantum mechanics with those of classical physics. To date, however, nothing in science has answered the question as to the nature of reality. But as we look ever deeper into the subatomic world of energy, information, and emptiness, it prompts us to explore the issue of reality even further. For, when at the quantum level, there is no actual solid matter and nonlocal metaphysical events occur, yet, when bonded together, these same systems construct something of a solid, materialized hologram (that is, the observable universe); what is reality?

I submit that the biblical answer is not only very clear on this subject, but very evident as well. Ultimate reality is something other than the mere physical universe; for *“things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”* At the quantum level there is an unseen energy that sustains all things. Scripture tells us it is the Creator who is the source of all things, and it is He who holds the universe together; *“all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:16-17)*. As evidenced by the complex nature of creation, the Creator is intelligent. As evidenced by many historical accounts of man’s interaction with the Creator, the Creator is personable. We call this Creator, God. God is our ultimate reality. God has revealed that He is Spirit. Therefore, ultimate reality is Spirit.

Being Spirit, God is metaphysical; that is, other than physical. As previously pointed out, the concept of such a reality is not without precedent in our world. Gravity and electromagnetism are without physical form. Human consciousness is metaphysical, without physical form. Even the physical things we observe and touch, ultimately, at the quantum level, consist of emptiness, electromagnetism, and information. Therefore, it is predictable that reality is indeed metaphysical. Given enough time, science, in that it is the methodical quest for knowledge, would have to arrive at this conclusion. This illusion of physical matter, our universe, is but a

temporal holographic matrix, constructed and maintained in the mind of the Creator, who Himself is Spirit.

On a personal level, the individual reality for each of us goes beyond our physical body to reach the depths of our soul and spirit. While someday the body will die and the universe pass away, the soul and spirit live on. The soul and spirit transcend this entire temporal holographic matrix which God created, set in motion, and energizes, so man (whom He created in His own image) might be redeemed from his chosen rebellion.

Unlike science, the biblical account of reality never changes. There is one God. God is Spirit and the Creator of all that exists. He spoke and the universe was so. He is the light, the source of energy and all things are held together by Him. God created man in His own image, for His own pleasure, and made Himself known to man immediately upon man's creation. He has interacted with man on many levels since then. Being made in the image of God, man has freewill and thus freedom of choice. Man chose to disobey God. Man suffers the consequences. God Himself provided reconciliation for man through a qualified redeemer: one without sin, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. By simply accepting this gift through faith man is justified, sanctified, and saved from the ultimate punishment, eternal death. This is a constant message throughout Scripture which, unlike science, does not change. Neither does God change; as He said, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord, which is and was and is to come"* (Rev 1:8).

Conclusion

Scientists pride themselves on being rational. In most respects they are; especially when it comes to the hands-on experiments employed as they seek to disprove a theorem. But at the philosophical level, seeking to answer the most asked question of humanity, seeking to understand the origins of the universe, most scientists are as irrational as one can be. It is a visceral irrationality, assumed by default to satiate their pride and emotional opposition to the reality of an intelligent Creator to whom they must answer. Here, they let their emotion get in the way. Here, they refuse to apply Ockham's Razor to the problem.

Scripture tells us we would encounter this mindset in the last days before Christ returned to earth. Like the antediluvians, the

culture will be such that men and women will not glorify or thank God. They will become vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts will be darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they will become fools. They will change the truth of God into a lie, and reverence and serve the creature more than the Creator. They will not retain the knowledge of God in their minds.

For this reason, God will give them over to their shameful lusts. Just as they will not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so too God will give them over to a depraved mind. They will be filled with evil, sexual immorality, greed and depravity. They will be full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They will be gossips, slanderers, and haters of God, violent, arrogant and boastful. They will be inventors of evil things and disobedient to parents; they will have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they will know God's righteous decree—that those who do such things deserve death—they will not only continue to do these things but will take pleasure in others who practice them as well (Ro 1).

This is not a commentary on scientists, but on the cultural mindset that breeds so many aggressive God haters. Offended by the Gospel, they gather together to commiserate and comfort one another under the banner of atheism. But in the end, their support for each other's disbelief will account for nothing, because

That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shown it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Ro 1:19-20).

Man is free to deny his Creator's existence and free to deny his obligation to his Creator; but in the end he will pay the price. Let it be known that it is the duty of all to fear God and keep His commandments. He commands all men everywhere to repent, to receive the forgiveness of sin through a personal faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all men.

As for faith, it holds the same meaning for science as it does for religion; both are based on the evidence. It is unreasonable and unscientific to believe the universe magically appeared from nothing on its own accord, by its own non-existent energy; and that non-existent organic life organized itself to spring forth from inorganic

material; that this simple, vulnerable life form then sustained itself on non-existent nutrients. Then, somehow, this life became animated and moved on to a whole new reality, a complex metaphysical reality of consciousness, a set of common morals and a need to love and be loved. If we want to discuss a belief in something without evidence, this is where we should start. If there is such a thing as blind faith, this is it.

Believers must not shrink from the brash, misguided scientists who misrepresent faith. We must not let our opponents redefine and malign the meaning of faith. Their arguments are filled with logical errors of ad hominem attacks, strategic misrepresentations, and straw man arguments. Although it is without any real support and easily refuted, do not let them take the discussion to the contrived, convoluted hypothesis of evolution, which feebly attempts to answer but one small step in the process from their imagined big bang to the reality of human consciousness. Their hypothetical origin of the species is merely a red herring, a logical fallacy specifically employed to avoid the only real issue, the origin of the universe. The big bang hypothesis is woefully lacking, and they know it. That is why, as Dawkins pointed out in the earlier quotation, physicists are *“not allowed to talk about the word ‘before’ in the context of the big bang.”* Before we discuss the supposed evolution of the species, let us determine the origin of the universe and the origin of life itself.

We have a duty to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason for our hope (1Pe 3:15). This does not mean we have to master every scientific argument in the many scientific disciplines. But neither should we fear them for all truth comes from and leads back to God. We need simply to define and articulate our personal faith and the evidence for it: that is, *“The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament His handiwork”* (Ps 19:1).

Health and Wealth Gospel

Introduction

There is an insidious, subversive, false theology running rampant within the Western Evangelical Orthodoxy. It is not so much a systematic theology as it is a practical theology. Its origins can be traced back to the healing revival meetings of the Charismatic movement in the middle 1900s. Back then, mainstream evangelicals dismissed the teaching for the falsehood that it is. Today this erroneous doctrine is broadcast night and day by slick-looking, energetic, smooth talking televangelists on Christian television and radio networks. Consequently, it has found its way into the pews of many evangelical churches. Even in those churches in which it is not taught from the pulpit, there are very likely practicing parishioners covertly following and supporting at least one of these polished con artists—these thespians playing the role of purveyors of truth.

The poisonous false doctrine of which I speak is the pervasive Prosperity Theology, the Health and Wealth Gospel or, as it is often called, Name-it-and-Claim-it-Theology; it is the idea that living godly will yield financial rewards. Godliness, at least in this arena, is exhibited by giving generous contributions to the ministry; giving with a positive “I shall prosper” attitude, while visualizing positive outcomes: perhaps a BMW and a Lexus filling the two-car garage, and plenty of steaks on the grill. Such material rewards are deemed God’s blessing because Christians are to have dominion and prosper. But it does not stop here. When these godly individuals congregate, God provides them an opulent building with imported stained glass, expensive pews and a preacher in an \$800 Armani suit.

But this seemingly pious ideology is a decidedly anti-Christian theology, contrary to the teachings and experiences of both Jesus and his apostles. Metaphorically, believers often speak of receiving the meat of the Word from a Bible lesson or a particularly

applicable sermon. Using this imagery, what makes this false teaching so insidious is that it is generally served with the Gospel, so that this sweet dessert is placed alongside the meat of salvation and good works, thereby making it appear as if they were all prepared by the same chef, or at least in the same kitchen. But they were not. As pleasing as this dish might be to the eyes and the palate, this sweet, intoxicating dessert is pure poison, and once it hits the bloodstream, recovery is most difficult.

The Manipulation of Scripture

This erroneous teaching stems from the poor exegesis of a few passages taken completely out of context. Malachi 3:10 is a prime example. The book of Malachi begins with God's assurance to Israel that He loves and cares for them. The Lord's wrath, which Israel had been experiencing due to their disobedience, had caused them to doubt His love. His anger had been kindled because the priesthood had been despising His name, offering imperfect sacrifices, making judgments with partiality, and violating the covenant with Levi, thereby causing many to stumble. The people had been withholding tithes and, in their faithlessness, divorcing their wives to marry idolatrous women. For this, they received punishment rather than blessing.

When at last, they charged the Lord with being unjust, He promised to send a messenger to prepare the way before Him. But His presence will require judgment and change. In their sin they had lost trust in the Lord; they doubted that He would provide for their needs even if they were to keep His commandments. So He challenged them to put Him to the test. If they did so, the nations about them would understand that they have been blessed. Thus,

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Mal 3:10).

To somehow derive from this specific reprimand and challenge to Israel the idea or conclusion that God will heap financial and material rewards on Christians who give heartily and envision a blessing is to twist the text in the manner of our enemy. At best, it is a prime display of ignorance, the epitome of a poorly executed exegesis leading to false doctrine. Certainly, it highlights the need

for properly trained teachers—teachers who understand biblical theology and logical, historical, sound, hermeneutical and exegetical practices.

A couple of other passages aptly maligned to fit the purposes of these false teachers are Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents, and John 10:10, in which Jesus explains that he has come to give life and to give it more abundantly. While the false teachers take the Malachi passage out of context and give application to those to whom it does not belong, they attempt to apply these passages from the Gospels to something to which they do not reference: namely the material world. Each of these passages speaks to spiritual life: one, the multiplication of eternal rewards upon the correct use of spiritual gifts; the other, the absolute, eternal fulfillment and contentment attained in the new birth. Again, the misapplication of these simple passages underscores the need for a sound theological education.

“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19), is yet another favorite passage among these treasure seekers. Here the issue is, what exactly is *“all your need”*? Do we need the BMW and Lexus? Must we have the grilled steaks? Just because the passage explains the means by which our Lord will supply our need, that is *“His riches in glory”* does not translate into our being lavished with riches in our temporal, non-glorious environment.

As for needs and the desire for financial rewards, I believe the Apostle Paul’s words speak for themselves: *“godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” (1Ti 6:6-8 NIV)*.

Jesus also addressed this concept of God’s supplying our needs. In the same context, he warned against the desire for wealth and material possessions, for those with a heart toward such things cannot have a heart toward God. As we read our Lord’s sermon, let’s pay special attention to what he identifies as our needs. Somehow he overlooked the finer things of life: a golden chariot with a stable of fine horses, fancy, colorful togas, a spacious home with an atrium, courtyard, and garden. Instead, He pointed out that all these finer things possessed by King Solomon were no match for

the beauty and fulfilled needs of even a wild flower. Like Paul, Jesus' words speak for themselves.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Mt 6:24).

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (Mt 6:19-27 NIV).

Yet another favored passage for these teachers of wealth is 3 John 2, "Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prosper." This does not even deserve a rebuttal. One can grow weary of such misapplication of Scripture. It is an embarrassment to the faith that those calling themselves Bible teachers would contort Holy Scriptures in such a manner, thereby giving credence to the naysayers who discount the Bible as something that says anything you want it to say. I say woe unto you thespians of theology, you manipulative preachers who entice the naïve to give you their hard earned money for the promise of more.

The reader might wonder how it is that I, the author of this treatise, can speak so condemnably of the teachers of this seemingly innocuous Prosperity Theology, calling them con artists, thespians and energetic smooth talkers. If you have this concern, I direct you to Paul's words to Timothy concerning an issue not dissimilar to this: that of wealth, and godliness, and financial gain. Speaking to slaves and masters, fellow believers in Christ, he admonished them to treat each other with respect and to have each

other's welfare in mind. Very harsh words are given to those who have come to think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain (1Ti 6:3-5).

An Exhibition of Satan's Subtlety

While this seductive theology ostensibly promotes godliness, in reality, it advances a lie of Satan. These misapplications and distortions of Scripture are crafted with the same subtlety as Satan's plea to Eve, "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" Yea, hath not God said He will fill your storehouses? Lavish you with riches? Build you a city with streets of gold? Give you all the desires of your heart? Yea, hath not God told you this?

Did not Jesus warn that we cannot serve God and money (Mt 6:24), that the deceitfulness of riches chokes the Word (Mt 13:22), and that it is very hard for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom (Mk. 10:23)? And did not Paul warn against those who would pursue these lies and distortions?

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1Ti 6:9-10 NIV).

Our Father will Provide

Unlike Israel (which had lost faith in God's willingness to provide) in the time of Malachi, we must trust in our Father's ability and desire to provide for us. Continuing his sermon, Jesus exhorted:

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not

worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Mt 6:28-34 NIV).

This unfounded inappropriate expectation of financial gain, hidden under the guise of righteousness, positive thinking and an ill-motivated generosity toward the ministry (reminiscent of Ananias and Sapphira, Ac 5) is nothing short of false teaching and erroneous behavior. Not only is such a desire for earthly wealth warned against time and again, it runs completely contrary to what we should truly expect as believers living in the last days. Rather than being showered with financial gain, Paul's counsel to Timothy was that those who would *"live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2Ti 3:12 NIV).

Do not be deceived

It is worth reading a passage of 2 Timothy 3, with a view toward these false teachers of Prosperity Theology. Is it not they of whom Paul is speaking? Certainly a good case could be made for it. The similarities are striking. We are in the last days. In many respects, these profit seekers seem to fit the bill. On the surface they appear to be godly but the true power of godliness, that is, sanctification, they deny. They weasel their way into homes and lead astray the gullible who, in their ignorance, are always looking for their ship to come in, always looking for the answer to comfort and happiness. While the righteous suffer persecution these deceivers advance their evil ploy, stubbornly denying the truth.

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a

knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone (2Ti 3:1-9 NIV).

In his first letter to Timothy, having described and warned of those who viewed godliness as a means to gain, Paul strongly warned him to get as far away from such teaching and practice as possible. Go in the exact opposite direction, and rather, pursue true godliness.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1Ti 6:11-12 NIV).

The same charge holds true today. True believers must dissociate themselves from these imposters. We must not let our names be associated with them. We must not give them credence.

Wealth itself is not the issue

In closing this, the first letter, Paul makes it clear that riches themselves are not at issue. Nor is it that he expects everyone to be without wealth. He has simply said that the pursuit of riches, as a goal of life, is an issue. Viewing godliness as a means to riches is an issue.

Those who have been blessed with wealth have several responsibilities. This wealth must not go to their heads. They must remain humble. They must not assume their riches are a sure thing, something in which they can safely place their future. God alone is their hope. The good works and generosity of the rich must abound without expectation. By this, their future rewards, their real treasures, and life abundant, are assured.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life (1Ti 6:17-18 NIV).

A final admonition

So urgent is this warning, against viewing godliness as a means to riches, that Paul repeats himself, giving Timothy yet another admonition to distance himself from these false teachings, these vendors of insight to understanding.

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith (1Ti 6:20-21 NIV).

How many times have I been asked through the years, by fellow believers, if I watch, like, support, a certain slick-looking, fast talking, money seeking, radio or televangelist? My answer is always the same. No! Even as a young man and new believer several decades ago I could not abide them. In retrospect, I do not know if this was because of intuition, a God-given discernment, or of the sound teaching I received under the late and beloved, Pastor Wilmer Bruner (though he never addressed these charlatans by name). Perhaps it was a combination of all. Whatever the reason, these slick talkers held no appeal for me. They did, however, elicit a visceral reaction that caused me to turn away even at the mention of their name. This has not changed to this day.

Woe unto you, deceivers, thespians, teachers of false doctrine, teachers of Prosperity Theology!

Judeo-Christian Theology versus World Religions

Introduction

People worldwide hate Israel and Christianity with equal vehemence. This is nothing new. The world has harbored contempt for the Jews since their slavery in Egypt. They have been maligned and persecuted for thousands of years by several nations. Once Christianity was introduced, the world quickly turned its disgust toward it as well. For hundreds of years, successive Roman Emperors sought to exterminate this pesky, offensive offshoot of Judaism. But Christianity continued to grow, spreading farther and farther throughout the known world. As it spread from one kingdom to another, various social and political leaders would fuel this same hatred ignited by the Roman Empire.

The world's loathing of Israel and Christianity continues with equal passion to this day. In our modern, global society it is deemed politically incorrect to express prejudice toward various minorities: women, races, the aged, handicaps, even sexual pervert get a pass. It is unacceptable to make prejudicial remarks toward followers of any of the many world religions. It is, however, deemed perfectly acceptable to denigrate Jews and Christians. It is a common theme among comedians, protest groups concerning almost any subject matter, media personalities, and Hollywood.

On the whole, the world not only tolerates, but takes great pleasure in the numerous world religions; but there is something about Judeo-Christian theology that offends them. Of course, from the biblical perspective this is not surprising. It was predicted to be so. Jesus said the world would hate us just as it hated him, and just as it hated the prophets before him. But what is the impetus for this hatred? What drives the world, from one generation to the next, to hate Jews and Christians with such venom?

It is not so much the answer to this question but our response to the hatred we receive that prompts the inclusion of this chapter

among these critiques of modern practical theology. The answer to the question of their hatred is a matter of biblical theology, but our response to this hatred is a matter of practical theology, and our response is inappropriate. Largely, the Western Church has responded to the world's intolerance by attempting to pass legislation that would prevent it. Chapter 2 of this work, *The Church and Socio-political Activism*, addresses this issue more fully, arguing that it is not the role of the Church to affect socio-political reformation. With that understanding, we now digress slightly from the theme of practical theology to discuss the underlying biblical theology associated with the practical. To fully understand this hatred and our appropriate response to it, we must understand its source.

Very few, who harbor this hatred, fully understand their motivation, and therefore cannot provide a clear explanation. If we took a survey, asking the question: "Why does the world, at large, hate Judaism and Christianity?" We might expect some unfounded, biased answers. Various ostensible reasons can be conjured up, but there is no sound logic behind them. We might hear: "They are hypocrites" (as if other belief systems harbor no hypocrites). "They are legalistic" (as if other belief systems have no behavioral guidelines). "They are narrow-minded, too intolerant of others" (as if those passing this judgment themselves are not being narrow minded).

Ask this same question to believers and they may reason that because man is at enmity with God, and because the Jews are God's chosen people, with whom He has a special covenant, the world therefore is at enmity with Israel. Christians, likewise, are chosen by God, the recipients of God's mercy; thereby making them the world's enemies as well. All of this is true, but it is not the impetus for the world's hatred of Judeo-Christian theology.

There is something more personal, more immediate, and more insidious driving this hatred. It is a doctrine vital to both Judaism and Christianity, and it separates Judeo-Christian theology from every other religion in the world. By the same token, it is the glaring absence of this doctrine that allows for, and even encourages, the world to tolerate and embrace any, or all, of the many other world religions. It is the doctrine of total depravity: "*There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God*" (Ro 3:10-11).

Offensive nature of Judeo-Christian theology

Other than Judeo-Christian theology, without exception, every world religion provides for personal improvement, the ability to pull oneself up by the bootstraps, as it were. Every world religion believes man can achieve his particular desired outcome (holiness, a higher plane of spirituality, closeness to his chosen deity, nirvana, paradise, or some other mystical ecstasy); and most importantly, man can do this on his own, by his own effort through one means or another, which is specific to a particular religion. Specific tasks or rituals differ, as do the desired, blissful outcomes; but the common thread is that, one way or another, man has within himself the ability to achieve his idyllic, spiritual contentment.

In truth, every religion of the world is based on Satan's lie—the lie that placed the seed of doubt in Eve's mind:

Ye shall not surely die: For God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:4-5).

You will be immortal. You will be powerful. Your eyes will be opened to the wonderful world found in the pleasures of both good and evil. Certainly, as a powerful, all-knowing god you will be above such a thing as death.

At their core, this is the basic mantra of all religions. “You are able. You have the power within you.” This belief in self-empowerment (which is absolutely contrary to the doctrine of total depravity), necessarily negates the biblical doctrine that logically follows total depravity, the doctrine of redemption. A powerful, all-knowing, immortal god does not need salvation. While not all the world religions overtly claim deity for their followers, all of their theologies coincide with the implications of Satan's lie: “You shall not surely die,” you shall be empowered to make your own destiny. It is here, their common belief in man's ability to achieve spiritual contentment, at which the seemingly subtle, menacing doctrine of total depravity disturbs the purpose of every world religion.

It offends the non-religious populous as well. For they too believe in man's ability to achieve his desired happiness and fulfillment; even if their desire is not the mystical pursuits of the religious. The doctrine of total depravity contradicts this belief in self empowerment, common to both the religious and nonreligious alike. The doctrine of total depravity makes it clear that man's sinful

nature has completely severed his relationship with the Creator, the eternal Spirit, and that man has no ability to repair it. As such, try as he may, man is prohibited from accessing the paradise, the happiness, the spiritual fulfillment or the God he feigns to desire. The doctrine of total depravity predicts the need of a savior, the need for someone to redeem this sorry lot of fallen humanity. Thus, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (Isa 53:6). This is utterly offensive to those who fancy themselves above such a mean existence. After all, are they not as gods?

You might have taken note that I said, “the God he feigns to desire.” Pay close attention to *Romans 3:11*: *“There is none that seeks after God.”* The outward show of pious religious rituals may appear to be valid efforts at seeking the Creator, but in truth they are little more than self-centered, repetitive actions; quixotic, ceremonial activities designed to evoke an emotional response and to make participants feel secure. In this respect, they are not dissimilar to the actions of one with an obsessive compulsive disorder. Even the various inward quests for a higher spiritual plane and self awareness are mere, self-serving, mystical journeys, rather than true quests for the Creator, for if these practitioners truly sought the Creator they would find Him: *“I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me”* (Pr 8:17). Therefore, it stands to reason that if one appears to be seeking God and yet never comes to the knowledge of God, regardless of the pious rituals employed, the seeker was never really seeking in the first place, at least not diligently.

Elsewhere, we are told more of this search. *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6). This passage defines both the God being sought and the seeker. Concerning God, first of all, He is. He is the self existent eternal Spirit, the Creator of all things. Creation itself makes this self-evident:

Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Ro 1:19-20).

Secondly, God is the rewarder. Thus, by definition, He is a personable God intimately involved with His creation. Concerning these seekers, we see they must trust completely in the reality of both details about God: that He is self-existent and an intimately involved gift-giver. Furthermore, the seeker must be truly seeking. The Greek term, ἐκζητοῦσιν (*ekzetousin*), means to investigate, to search out, to inquire, to crave, to demand, to seek after carefully, diligently.

The explanations in this verse are very clear. The definitions of both the seeker and the sought after are very narrow. The God being sought must be the self-existent, personable God who rewards His seekers. The seeker must have complete confidence in God's existence and be a serious, diligent seeker. Casually calling upon "the Man" or the higher power, or any other god that might suit one's fancy, is not enough. Such an exercise in futility does nothing more than appease one's self-serving quest for mystical adventure.

The world has no problem with man's quest for spirituality, or with man's self-fashioned holiness, or his religious ceremonies, or even his quest for a deity. There is nothing offensive to the world in either the outward display of rituals or the inward quest for a self-serving spiritual journey; but introduce this doctrine in which man does not have the ability to help himself, does not have the ability to find his own happiness, and the offense is made. Then, complete the argument with the idea of a necessary redeemer and the fight is on, for it strikes at the very heart of man's pride. This doctrine of the miserable human condition is the impetus for the world's hatred of Judeo-Christian theology: it wounds their self-image. Then, as if this is not enough, we rub salt in the wound. Telling people they must humble themselves before the Creator is just too much for them. Surely, *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Pr 16:18).

The world loves its own

The doctrine of total depravity shines light on man's darkness. Darkness does not like the light and runs from it. The-man-can-pull-himself-up-by-his-bootstraps philosophy, common to all world religions, does not shed light on man's darkness. Using senses other than sight, these religions cuddle and soothe the darkened human condition, assuring us that all is well, shaping fictional images of

happiness in their mind's eye. As such, the world has no reason to hate these religions and every reason to embrace them. Indeed, the world loves them, for "*the world loves its own*" (1n 15:19).

As mentioned earlier, and evidenced in the following pages, every world religion (other than Judeo-Christian theology) provides for man's personal improvement in one fashion or another: a higher plane of spirituality, the ability to achieve holiness, the ability to reach its deity or deities, etc. What follows are brief synopses of the major world religions, their basic beliefs, and their aspirations.

Hinduism

Dating back to before 2000 BC, Hinduism believes in the unity of everything, which is called Brahman. Man's purpose is to achieve enlightenment. This is realized by leaving this plane of existence and reuniting with god, and thus, coming to the realization that we are all part of god. Enlightenment is accomplished through Samsara. Samsara is the reincarnation process in which individuals pass from one body to another in the cycle of birth, life, and death, through all life forms.

One's personal progress towards enlightenment is measured by karma, which is the sum of one's good and bad deeds. The level of one's next reincarnation is determined by karma. Devotion to god, personal sacrifice, and selfless thoughts promote rebirth at higher levels. Bad deeds and bad thoughts demote one's rebirth to lower levels. It is for this reason that Hindus follow an austere caste system to identify each person's standing. The caste into which a person is born is the direct result of the karma from his/her previous life. Those of the highest caste, the Brahmin, are the only Hindus allowed to perform religious rituals or to hold positions of authority within the temples.

Buddhism

Buddhism dates back to 560 to 490 BC. Siddhartha Gautama assumed the title Buddha after reaching enlightenment in 535 BC. He promoted the path to enlightenment in a set of teachings called The Middle Way, which represents the medium between two extremes: self mortification and hedonism. Buddhists also believe in reincarnation. After several rebirths, once a person releases the attachment to desire and to self, Nirvana is attained. Buddhists do not necessarily believe in god.

Zoroastrianism

A Persian, named Zoroaster founded Zoroastrianism between 600 and 1000 BC. Zoroaster taught an elaborate religion of monotheistic/dualism. He taught that a good supreme god, Ahura Mazda, is in conflict with his evil nemesis, Angra Mainyu—a spirit of violence and death that originated from a different source. The battle between good and evil takes place between these deities at both the cosmic level and within the human consciousness.

Their holy book, the Avesta, advocates social justice, the understanding of righteousness and the cosmic order, and the worship of Ahura Mazda. Prayers and ritualistic ceremonies are conducted before a sacred fire which serves as a symbol of their god. The Zoroastrian life is dedicated to a three-fold path reflected in their motto, “Good thoughts, good words, good deeds.”

Confucianism

The teachings of Confucius (K'ung Fu Tzu or Master Kong) originated about 500 BC. They deal with morality, ethics, and socio-political power. Confucians perform various rituals at different times of life: birth, reaching maturity, marriage, and death. It also stresses several virtues: propriety, etiquette, love among family members, righteousness, honesty, trustworthiness, benevolence towards others, and the highest virtue, loyalty to the state. Although ancestral worship is practiced, the concept of an afterlife is deemed beyond human comprehension and, therefore, is not to be of concern in this life.

Taoism

Taoism was founded in China by Lao-Tse, a contemporary of Confucius, about 440 BC. This philosophy and religious tradition describes the nature of life and the way to peace by living in harmony with the Tao. Roughly translated, the Tao means the Way, the Path, or even the Principle. The Tao is believed to be the source of everything and an essential force flowing through all life. The objective is to become one with the Tao. Practitioners seek virtue, compassion, moderation, and humility. They believe that people, by nature, are good.

All actions are to be planned in advance and accomplished with minimal effort. As such, Tai Chi, a slow deliberate form of martial art movements, is practiced to balance the flow of energy, or chi, throughout the body.

Taoism sees the universe divided into opposing pairs. Yin (the dark side) and Yang (the light side) symbolize these opposing pairs: good and evil, light and dark, male and female, etc. The adverse actions of humanity upset the harmonious balance of Yin and Yang. As a religion, Taoism has reverence for ancestors and immortals, as well as for various magical divinations.

Shinto

Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion dating back to about 500 BC. Originally a nebulous combination of nature worship, fertility cults, divination techniques, hero worship, and shamanism, it has no known founder and only a loosely ordered priesthood. It has no sacred writings or body of religious laws. Shinto recognizes several deities, or Kami, that are deemed neither good nor bad, and bear little to no resemblance to the Holy God of monotheism, or even the powerful gods of Western and Middle Eastern polytheism.

Their numerous deities are conceptualized in many forms associated with various objects, creatures, places, foods, rivers, rocks, animals, geographical areas, clans, abstract forces, exceptional people and Emperors, etc. The deity, Amaterasu (Sun Goddess), the ancestress of the Imperial family, is regarded as the chief deity. After death people become spirit-deities and return to the ancestral spirit.

Shinto followers admire creativity and harmonious influences. While they seek peace, sincerity, and truth, and teach that all human life is sacred, at the same time, they believe morality is based on that which is beneficial to the group. They hold to the Four Affirmations: tradition and family; the love and worship of nature as sacred spirits; personal, physical cleanliness; and Matsuri, a festival to honor the spirits.

Sikhism

Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji founded Sikhism about 1500, in the Punjab region of modern Pakistan after receiving a vision of the path to enlightenment and god. He is believed to have been reincarnated in a series of nine Gurus until 1708. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, completed the holy text, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib. This holy text contains the hymns and writings of each of these Gurus, as well as texts from various Muslim and Hindu saints. The text is considered the 11th and final Guru.

Sikhism believes in a single, formless god with many names. This god, before whom everyone has equal status, can be reached through meditation. The worship of idols or icons is prohibited. Followers of Sikhism pray several times a day. They adhere to karma and a similar samsara type reincarnation as the Hindus; but they reject the caste system.

Bahá'í

Bahá'í, based on the teachings of Baha'u'llah, emerged in the 1800's. Its followers believe the major religions of the world were originated by a series of nine divine messengers (Moses, Abraham, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, etc., and finally Bahá'u'lláh). Their messages all came from the one eternal God, the Creator of all things. Each divine messenger established a religion suited for its time and the society in which he lived; thus, they taught different truths. Bahá'í centers around three core principles: the unity of God, the unity of religion, and the unity of humankind. After death, one's immortal soul travels through the spirit world. Through the messages of these prophets, the character of mankind has continued to transform and develop from age to age. The current need of humanity is to establish world peace, socio-economic equity, justice, and the unity of all religions and science. The world will culminate in a single world government practicing Bahá'í.

Islam

Founded in Mecca by Muhammad, Islam dates back to the year 622. Practitioners are called Muslims. Muslims teach there is one God, Allah. Islam is believed to be a continuation of the biblical prophets Abraham, David, Moses and Jesus. However, Islam rejects Jesus' claim to deity. Muhammad was the last great prophet. It was his task to formalize, clarify, and purify the faith by removing erroneous teachings. It is Satan that causes people to sin. Those Muslims who repent and humble themselves before Allah will return to a state of sinlessness and, subsequently, go to paradise after death.

Muslims have five duties, known as the Five Pillars of Islam: reciting the Shahadah—a profession of belief in monotheism and Muhammad; Salat—five daily prayers prayed while facing the Kaaba in Mecca. Zadat—paying alms of 2.5% of one's total wealth to charity, as well as giving to additional charities for the needy if so desired. Sawm of Ramadan—fasting during the month of

Ramadan; and Hajj—a pilgrimage made to Mecca at least once in life if it is a financial and physically possibility.

Hearing they will not hear

Regardless of its show of piety, its ostensible quest for God, or its desire for spiritual enlightenment, what every world religion fails to acknowledge is the basic, yet pertinent, doctrine established in the book of Genesis and upon which Judeo-Christian theology revolves: that humanity has inherited a sinful nature which separates us from God and places us in need of redemption.

While this distinction makes perfect sense to Bible students, the world, and practitioners of the world's religions, struggle with the concept at some level. Reluctant to admit just how offensive this doctrine of total depravity is, they generally fail to acknowledge that this offense is the impetus for their disgust of Judeo-Christian theology. Even those who seem sympathetic toward Israel and Christianity cannot clearly understand it. Cognitively, they can follow the argument, but in their spiritual darkness they cannot fully understand its significance; nor can they fully understand the depths of the world's bias and hatred.

Beyond not fully appreciating the doctrine of total depravity and the related doctrine of redemption via a qualified savior who has the ability to rectify the situation, there is further reason (albeit unwittingly) for the world to plug its ears like a child refusing to listen. Once they have learned the truth of the human condition, and of the Redeemer sent from God to restore their status, they are accountable for the information. So that, these truths bring "*life unto life and death unto death*" (2Co 2:15-17). For those who accept this Gospel, it means eternal life; for the others it is eternal death. Therefore, they are loath to hear these offensive doctrines, and they loathe those who proclaim them. No act of legislation or court-ordered mandates can change this.

Conclusion

Do not be dismayed when the world hates you and your Judeo-Christian theology. Do not be puzzled when the world finds great pleasure in its religions, even when these religions are wreaking worldwide havoc; for the world loves its own (Jn 15:19). It is expected. It is predicted. It is useless to try to fight this hatred in

the courts, in the halls of Congress, in the media, in the street with picket signs and protests. Jesus told us the world would hate us just as it hated him.

As for Israelites, pray for them. They are the chosen people of God, the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with whom God made a special covenant. Although they have temporarily rejected their Messiah, one day soon, Israel will accept Jesus. This too is predicted.

Modern Laodicea

Introduction

I have included this chapter among these critiques on the practical theology of 21st Century Western Christendom that we might better understand our present state, that we might better understand why we are in the pitiful condition we are in. While the condition of the Church in the last days is detailed in various Bible passages, a prophetic, synoptic view of the entire Church Age is briefly chronicled in Jesus' messages to the seven historical churches of Asia-Minor (present day Turkey): Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Other, more prominent congregations than some of these could have been addressed; certainly they had issues as well. So too, the letters could have appeared in a different sequence. But neither their choice nor the order in which they appear is random. Collectively, they depict a pre-written history of the Church dispensation from Pentecost to our future gathering to meet the Lord in the air.

Before discussing the end of the age, it is important to review its history, both as prophesied in these letters and as it subsequently unfolded through the centuries. Herein we will see what it is that led us to where we are today. In hindsight, we now understand just how precise and detailed these predictions were. We must also review the cultural environment in which each historical church resided. Only then can we fully appreciate the significance of these most telling letters. This, too, will allow us to better appreciate the passage pertaining to our current period of Church history, the last days.

Illumination

Being born anew of the Spirit of God, believers live in the light; illumination radiates about us and through us, from God and toward His Word. Here is where understanding divine communication, God's written Word, takes place. In their darkness,

unbelievers can have but a limited understanding of Scripture. Therefore, although it paints a very clear picture of many topics, to the unbeliever these portraits are but blurry hues, subjective abstracts left to the viewer's interpretation. The issue for them is illumination; the unbeliever simply does not have it.

A prime example of the unbeliever's inability to appreciate scriptural portraits is the prophetic picture of the world's condition at the end of the age prior to Christ's return. It is not that they are uninformed; popular books are written about it, major motion pictures depict the foretold scenario, and preachers warn of the impending doom. Not only is society well informed on the issue, it is a widespread topic of ridicule for comedians, popular media personnel and naysayers in general. They scoff at the idea of a one-world government, its evil leader, the antichrist and his mark. Even as it unfolds right before them they dismiss, as nonsense, the ancient prophecies of the Jews' returning to establish themselves in their Holy Land, all to the consternation of the surrounding nations. They scoff at the prophetic picture that depicts a society similar to that of the antediluvians: the rise of atheists who, professing themselves wise become fools, preferring to reverence the creation rather than the Creator, the general approval of homosexuality; a covetous malignant society with a seared conscience; proud, disobedient boasters, argumentative, murderous, haters of God; and inventors of evil things, in a world where knowledge would be increased.

Neither can the unbeliever fully comprehend the predictions concerning the condition of the Church in the last days. Although clearly articulated, to the unbeliever these prophecies are nothing but subjective abstracts. However, for the believer, the gift of illumination brings these portraits into focus, so that we, as believers in the 21st Century, can clearly see that the last days are upon us. In this chapter we review the foretold, historic journey of the Church from Pentecost to Christ's return, and the condition in which we should expect it to be in these last days.

His character & His promises

As we read these letters, take note of two specific details concerning our Lord: the characterizations by which he identifies himself and the promises he makes to the victorious. He describes

himself differently and makes different promises to each church. His self-described characteristics are specifically chosen to identify with the particular, historic and prophetic environment of each church. Furthermore, there exists an interesting progression in the promises as they symbolically restore the victors, in each church, to the original intention God had in store for humanity before the fall. We will also note that of the seven, only Smyrna and Philadelphia receive praise without rebuke, while Sardis and Laodicea are almost entirely censured. Ephesus, Pergmum and Thyatira are praised for some things and condemned for others.

To the church in Ephesus

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things says he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands; I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you can not bear them who are evil: and you have tried them who say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars: And have endured, and have patience, and for my name's sake have labored, and have not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your lampstand out of its place, except you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev 2:1-7).

To this assembly in Ephesus, who had lost their first love He is “*he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks,*” an obvious indication of his devotion to them and their security in Him, despite their lack of fervor toward him. The victorious are promised, “*to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*” After Adam’s disobedience, God placed the cherubim to guard this tree; here, symbolically, the original intention is restored.

Ephesus, the historic city

Just as numbers are important to biblical interpretation, so too are names. This is especially true when the name is chosen or singled out by God, such as Abraham, Sarah, John the Baptist and,

of course, Jesus himself (*e.g. Gen 17:5, 15; Lu 1:13; Mt 1:25*). Each was chosen for a specific meaning, a specific connotation it set forth. Ephesus means “the Desirable One.” At the time of The Revelation, Ephesus was the wealthiest and greatest city in the province. Often referred to as the Light of Asia, it was a flourishing commercial seaport, the home of famed annual gaming events, and the geographical center of the Roman Empire.

The famous geographer Strabo, referred to Ephesus as the Market of Asia. Although Pergamum was the official seat of government for the province, Ephesus was the unofficial capital. Located on the banks of the Cayster River along the Aegean Sea, Roman governors often held court at Ephesus and, by statute; a new proconsul had to enter his new domain through this, the Gateway to Asia. As such, Ephesus held the political distinction of being a self-governing, free city, thereby excused from the usual oppressive garrison of troops. For all travelers, Ephesus was the highway to Rome. Years later, when Christians were being taken from Asia to serve as lion fodder in the coliseums, Ignatius called Ephesus the Highway of the Martyrs.

Ephesus was also the center for magic arts and the worship of Artemis, or Diana.¹² Although it was home to several famous temples, erected in honor of various Roman Emperors, the Temple of Diana was its pride. Nearly 10,000 square feet, with 120 elaborate columns climbing 60 feet to the ceiling, it was one of the most sacred shrines of the ancient world and considered one of its seven wonders. Curiously, this goddess of the moon, fertility, life, and the outdoors (who they believed had fallen from heaven), was represented by an unattractive, squat, black, many-breasted figure that, nevertheless, was revered, and held precious throughout this stronghold of pagan superstition. This pagan religion played a vital part in the local economy. Travelers came from all over the world to buy Ephesian letters, amulets, and charms, which they believed could cure sickness, make fruitless wombs give birth, and generally bring success to any venture.

It was this economy that Paul had disrupted with his preaching (*Ac 19:23-41*).¹³ He had so many converts that local merchants,

¹² Artemis is the Greek name and Diana the Roman name for the same deity.

¹³ Although the city no longer exists, archaeologists have discovered the ruins of the great theater that housed the riot in Ac 19.

sellers of religious trinkets, realized they might be in danger of losing considerable income. Thus, a ruckus erupted.

Similar to the cities of refuge for accused or guilty Israelites, the Temple of Diana was considered a safe haven for all criminals. Once a criminal reached the temple compound he could claim the right of asylum. Also housed within the temple were hundreds of prostitutes, considered sacred temple priestesses. As one can imagine, being the center of this pagan cult, as well as a haven for criminals and prostitutes, Ephesus was a notoriously evil place known for its crime and immorality. Later generations would think of Ephesus as the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

Many have pointed out that Ephesus was a most unpromising soil for sowing the seed of Christianity. Yet it was here that Christianity had some of its greatest triumphs. Paul had founded the local church. Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos had labored here (*Ac 18:18ff; 26:19*); Timothy had served as a bishop, and later, even John himself, after returning from exile, spent the last years of his life as its bishop. Ephesus had become a popular center of Christianity, as well as Diana worship.

An old ploy of Satan is to infiltrate and seduce. He tried it time and again with Israel and has continued to utilize this strategy with the Church. This tactic was exercised in Ephesus as well. However, doubtless due to their strong theological foundation, the church remained unscathed. Thus, Jesus commends them for having *“tested those calling themselves apostles, but they are not and you found them liars.”*

Paul had warned these same Ephesians that after he departed grievous wolves would enter among them, not sparing the flock (*Ac.20:29*). Centuries later, Tertullian and Jerome spoke of a work, written by a presbyter of Ephesus, which claimed to be a canonical history of the acts of Paul. John had condemned this work and accused its author of heresy. Other wolves came as well, and in various sorts. Some were envoys of the Jews who had followed Paul about, hoping to entangle Christians in the Law. Some taught that Christians could turn their liberty into a license for licentious behavior. Some were professional beggars, taking advantage of Christian charity. Located in the center of crime and immorality, the Church at Ephesus was especially prone to such deceivers.

Jesus praised them for their discernment and condemnation of the Nicolaitans: “*But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*” Some believe the Nicolaitans¹⁴ were followers of Nichas, whom Hippolytus identified as Nicolaus who had been one of the seven deacons to serve tables in Jerusalem, but had departed from correct doctrine. Others believe this sect merely took his name to associate themselves with apostolic authority. Irenaeus described them as living lives of unrestrained indulgence. Others spoke of them as shameless, in uncleanness. Clement said they “abandon themselves to pleasure like goats . . . leading a life of self-indulgence.” However, he defended Nicolaus, arguing that his followers had perverted his teaching that “the flesh must be abused.” By this Nicolaus meant the body must be kept under control; but the heretics, Clement explained, had distorted this to mean the flesh can be used as shamelessly as a man wishes. Regardless of their origin, the Nicolaitans were an early sect of licentious heretics who claimed to be Christians, yet led ungodly, immoral lives.

The Ephesian believers condemned the Nicolaitans, as well as all other false teachings. However, despite their sound doctrine, the Ephesians had a significant problem. They had lost their fervor for the Lord. They were well versed in the Scriptures, doctrinally sound, and had all the appearance of holiness. They hated immorality, and fought against the heresy of seditious teachers, diligently scrutinizing every one of them. But their hearts had grown cold. It had been a long time since they had earnestly thanked the Lord for His blessings. It had been even longer since they had fallen prostrate before Him, broken from the awesome reality of their own sinful nature in the face of His righteousness. Therefore, to them Jesus said, “*Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen and repent and do the first works. Otherwise, I am coming to you and I will move your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.*” Evidently, the historical Ephesus failed to heed this warning, for neither the city nor the church continues to exist. Perhaps the ancient proverb of the hard hearted is applicable: “*He that, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*” (Pr 29:1).

The prophetic portrait of the church in Ephesus

¹⁴ See comments on the church of Pergamum.

As for the prophetic view of Church history, as the years passed, Ephesus proved to represent the Church during the first and early second centuries. Even after the death of the apostles the pristine 1st Century Church continued to preserve the sound doctrine they had learned from them. But throughout the empire, the Church had slowly lost its enthusiasm, had grown lackluster, had simply lost its zeal. In time, this doctrinally pure, but evangelistically complacent, early Church transformed into the persecuted and martyred Church of the next few centuries, which is represented by the church at Smyrna.

To the church in Smyrna

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things says the first and the last, who was dead, and is alive; I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and I know the blasphemy of them who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which you will suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches; He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death (Rev 2:8-11).

To Smyrna, once an important ancient city that had virtually died out but had returned to life, and was now the home of martyrs, He is the one “*which was dead, and is alive.*” But that is not all, Smyrna proudly supported municipal rivalries and its citizens aspired to be in the “*who’s who*” of local society. To them, the Lord proclaimed, He is “*the first and the last.*” He is the ultimate “*who’s who,*” all others pale in comparison. The victors of Smyrna are promised they “*shall not be hurt of the second death.*” Due to Adam’s disobedience, death has passed upon all men; here, symbolically, the originally intended eternal life is restored.

Smyrna, the historic city

Also a city of distinction, even rivaling Ephesus in politics, religion, and culture, Smyrna was a famed seaport located north of Ephesus on a gulf of the Aegean Sea. While Ephesus may have been the Market of Asia, Smyrna was considered the Ornament, the Flower of Asia. Ramsay called it the City of Life and Lucian said it

was the fairest of the cities of Ionia. This city of culture, boasting a large public library, a theater, and a stadium for games, it prided itself as the birthplace of Homer.

The heart of the city cuddled the end of a long, narrow bay providing a naturally safe harbor for war and merchant ships alike. Thus, Smyrna was the primary site of trade for the Hermus Valley. The broad, paved streets of the beautiful metropolis sprawled through the foothills to the Pagos—a summit sporting several temples, each dedicated to a different god: Cybele, Zeus, Apollo, Nemesis, Tiberius, Aphrodite and Asclepius. Leading across the Pagos, from the Temple of Zeus to the Temple of Cybele, like a necklace around the crown, was the celebrated street of gold, which inspired many to call Smyrna, the Crown of Asia.

Like Ephesus, Smyrna was a free city-state. In 195 BC, it became the first city in the world to build a temple to the goddess Roma. This had led to a longstanding friendship with Rome, so that, in AD 26, the city was granted the honor of erecting a temple to the Roman deity, Caesar Tiberius. Although the Temple of Tiberius made this a chief location for emperor worship, as long as citizens paid homage to the emperor, they were allowed to worship their own particular deity, something every group and working class had and each of which the city honored with a different holiday and feast.

If only the Christians had simply participated, even nominally, in emperor worship they would have been free to build a temple to their own god and would have easily blended in with the rest of the activities. No one in the city would have paid them any mind. However, and to their glory, this was not the case. The church at Smyrna refused to compromise. They would not participate in any of the feast days. They would not burn incense and they would not bow their knee to the emperor as a deity. Thus, they were persecuted.

The Jewish society of Smyrna was hostile toward the Christians as well. In AD 155, the Jews willfully participated in the martyrdom of Polycarp—the bishop of Smyrna, John’s former student, and the angel, or messenger, to whom Jesus addressed this letter. One early account of the event explains that during the public games, a cry went up from the crowd, “Away with the atheists” (for this is what

they called Christians who refused to worship the Roman deity), “let Polycarp be searched for.”

The troops found him in the upper room of a building from which he could have easily escaped. But having already told his disciples of a dream in which he was burned alive, he calmly went with his captors. Before leaving, he requested an hour alone for prayer. His captors gave him two, marveling at the composure, piety, and the obvious innocence of this gray haired old man. Tradition tells us that some of these guards evidently converted to the faith.

On the way back to the city, the captain of the guard pleaded with Polycarp, asking him what harm there could be to say Caesar is lord, and to offer a sacrifice to save his own life? Polycarp responded that for him, only Jesus Christ was Lord. Tradition also has it that upon entering the stadium, Polycarp heard a voice from heaven telling him to “be strong and play the man.” The governor offered him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar, or death, to which Polycarp answered, “I have served him eighty-six years and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” When the governor threatened to burn him, Polycarp replied,

You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.
As they tied him to the stake he said,

Leave me as I am, for he who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails.

At this the crowd pressed in, tossing their sticks into the flame. It is then that Polycarp offered his now famous prayer.

O Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of you; God of angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before you, I bless you that you have granted unto me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of your Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the

Holy Spirit. And may I today be received among them before you, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you, the God without falsehood and of truth, have prepared beforehand and shown forth and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise you for all things. I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Child, through whom be glory to You with Him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come. Amen.

The flames rose, but as they gathered intensity they began to flare out, arching about him so that he was not harmed. Seeing that he would not burn, at last the executioner reached up and stabbed him with his spear. In this account of the event, the volume of blood spewing from the wound quenched the fire, causing the crowd to marvel at the difference between them and the Christians.

Polycarp was not alone in his refusal to bow to Caesar as lord. The entire church of Smyrna denied his deity. Their failure to worship Caesar made it difficult for them to acquire even the small supply of daily necessities, for they were unable to find work with the idolatrous employers (each of whom demanded participation in pagan rituals). They were also subject to sudden and unprovoked attacks by the pagan mobs. During such attacks it was not unusual for believers to lose their possessions, their homes, and their businesses. It is for this reason the Lord encouraged them,

I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

The term Smyrna is the equivalent of myrrh, a bitter sap used as an anesthetic, a holy ointment, an embalming element, and a perfume. When crushed, its aroma becomes stronger and even more pungent. As a desirable aroma its typical significance is referenced three times in connection with our Lord: at his birth (Mt 2:11); at the cross (Mk 15:23); and at his burial (Jn 19:39). This, no doubt, speaks of the pleasing aroma of the entire body of our Lord's work and his suffering to complete it (Eph 5:2; Ps 45:8). Here, also it has typological significance, speaking to the pleasing aroma of this suffering church, toward which the Lord has not one complaint.

The prophetic portrait of the church in Smyrna

Having comforted them with His knowledge of their plight, He then warned them of an even greater trouble they were about to incur,

Fear none of those things which you shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days.

Prophetically, this message to Smyrna represents the Church Age from the turn of the 1st century through the early part of the 4th century. During this time the Church suffered ten great persecutions at the hands of ten deviant Roman Emperors.¹⁵ To justify these persecutions, six different charges were typically brought against the Christians.

Cannibalism, because the sacrament of communion referred to the body and blood of Christ.

Orgies of lust, because the common meal was called the love feast.

Tampering with family relationships, because conversions often caused families to split.

Atheism, because they would not worship the images of the gods.

Politically unpatriotic, because they would not say Caesar was lord.

Incendiaries, because they foretold of the end of the world in flames.

To the church in Pergamum

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write; These things says he who has the sharp sword with two edges; I know your works and where you dwell, even where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast my name, and have not denied my faith, even in those days when Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells. But I

¹⁵ In AD 64 the Church suffered severe persecution at the hand of Nero. But by the time of this writing, 95 - 100, Nero's reign had ended. Ten other Roman Emperors followed with similar practices: #1, 96 Domitian; #2, 98-117; Trajan; #3, 117-138 Hadrian; #4, 138-161 Antoninus Pius; #5, 161-180 Marcus Aurelius; #6 193-211 Septimis Severus; #7 235-238 Maximin; #8, 249-251 Decius; #9, 253-260 Valerian; and #10, 284-305 Diocletian.

have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows except him who receives it (Rev 2:12-17).

To the church of Pergamum, who tolerated an immoral heresy, He is “*he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.*” Because the church would not separate truth from error, he would do it for them, and it would be painful. The victorious believers in Pergamum are promised “*to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows saving he that receives it.*” The judgment passed upon man after the fall was that “*by the sweat of his face shall he eat bread, for the land would be accursed for him with thorns and thistles.*” Here, life without labor is restored. Also, perhaps it is a reference to the Jewish tradition, which taught that during the siege of Solomon’s temple, Jeremiah had hidden the ark and the golden pot of manna kept in it. The ark was to remain hidden until Israel was restored (2Macc 2:5ff.). The “*white stone*” is a clear symbol of victory, and it implies justification. To the Greeks it was a symbol of acquittal just as a black stone was a symbol of guilt.

Pergamum, the historic city

Pergamum, the northernmost of the seven cities, sat overlooking the valley of the River Caicus. Although not located on any major trade route; still it was a great and flourishing metropolis. Strabo described it as the most illustrious of the Asian cities. Pliny said it was the most famous; and it certainly was, at least historically speaking, the greatest of them all. In 282 BC, Pergamum became the capital of the Seleucid kingdom—a portion of the fractured empire of Alexander the Great. During 197 to 159 BC, Pergamum had grown under the rule of Eumenes II, who built a number of large buildings, including a library boasting some 200,000 volumes,

second only to the library in Alexandria.¹⁶ Upon his death in 133 BC, Attalus III willed this territory to Rome, from which Rome formed the Asian province of Pergamum with this, the city Pergamum, remaining as its capital.

Its rich history, the voluminous library, and its many temples made Pergamum another important cultural center. Its citizens regarded themselves as the custodians of the Greek way of life and worship. Somewhere around 240 BC, Pergamum had been victorious over the savage invasion of the Gauls. To commemorate the victory, they had built an altar to Zeus in front of the Temple of Athena. Like Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was littered with temples to their favored gods.

Not far from the great grove of Nicephorium was the grove and Temple of Asklepios—the god of healing, who was also called the god of Pergamum. Here, was a school for medical studies in honor of this, their favorite god. The symbol of Asklepios, a serpent, the emblem of paganism, was etched into the rock alongside the great throne and altar to Zeus. This is a symbol with which we are still familiar today. Galen—second only to Hippocrates in the medical history of the ancient world—was born in Pergamum. Speaking of his favorite oaths, he observed that people often swore by Artemis of Ephesus, or by Apollo of Delphi, or by Asklepios of Pergamum.

Appropriately, the Lord said of Pergamum that this is, “*where Satan’s seat is.*” It was to this city that the Babylonian priests had nested after the destruction of Babylon (Isa 13:17-22). Although they assimilated to, and adapted their practices for, the local culture, Pergamum had become the center for the old Babylonian Mysteries, and for the imperial cult. It was the headquarters for emperor worship. In 29 BC, the city built a temple in honor of Augustus Caesar Octavian, and by the end of the 1st century AD, all Roman

¹⁶ The word parchment comes from the name Pergamum (*pergamene charta*, the pergamene sheet). For many centuries scribes had used papyrus, made of the pith of a very large bulrush that grows beside the Nile. In the 3rd Century BC, the Pergamene king, Eumenes, persuaded Aristophanes, the librarian at Alexandria, to come to Pergamum. Ptolemy, of Egypt, was enraged, imprisoned Aristophanes and put an embargo on the export of papyrus to Pergamum. Thus, the scholars of Pergamum invented parchment or vellum, made from the polished skins of animals—a superior medium, in time it overtook papyrus as the preferred writing material.

subjects were required to offer prayers and sacrifices in the name of the emperor, who was regarded as divine.

Some, within the church of Pergamum, had refused to comply with the idolatry. For Antipas and others, like Agathonice, Attalus, Carpus and Polybus, who kept the faith even to the point of death, there is praise, *“you hold fast my name and did not deny my faith.”* But for others, those who had tolerated the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans, there was condemnation. The doctrine of Balaam goes back to the Midianites, who worshiped Baal with the practice of fertility rites (Num 25:1-17). They believed their god died and arose each year in conjunction with the changing season, which resulted in the cycle of fertility for their crops and their flocks. Balaam’s doctrine was to corrupt the people of the Lord. He told Balac to have their young women infiltrate and seduce the Israelites. Their specific mission was to persuade the Israelites to disobey God’s command for separation, so that ultimately, they could cause Israel to forsake the Lord. Quite fittingly, the name Pergamum means the “objectionable marriage.”

The *Nicolaitans* brought great shame to the Church.¹⁷ Although they professed Christianity, they lived lives steeped in immorality and vice. Nicolaitans abused the doctrine of grace by exercising Christian liberty as a license to partake in sensual pleasures, while yet professing the faith. Unlike the believers in Smyrna, they were willing to compromise with the Imperial religion by permitting Christians to participate in worship at the pagan temples.¹⁸ It is also believed that the Nicolaitans were the first to divide the clergy from the laity. Jesus warned them, *“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Rev 2:16).”*¹⁹

¹⁷ See comments of the church of Ephesus.

¹⁸ This practice seems quite similar to the present day confessional of Roman Catholicism. It also seems similar to the popular Armenian “saved and lost” doctrine, held by many Protestants. Herein, church members are permitted to openly partake in a licentious lifestyle as long as they show up at the temple from time to time to confess their sins and be absolved of all wrongdoing, or in the case of the modern Armenian Protestants, to be saved again.

¹⁹ Roman governors were divided into two classes—those who had the right of the sword, and those who did not. Those who had the right of the sword had the power of life and death. On their word a man could be executed on the spot. The proconsul headquartered at Pergamum had the right of the sword and at any moment he could use it against the Christian.

The prophetic portrait of the church in Pergamum

Prophetically, the message to Pergamum represents the early part of the 4th Century through the 5th and into the 6th Century. It is during this era that the Church is befriended by the empire. After the great persecutions of ten successive emperors, the Church increasingly assumed a role as a ward of the state, until at last, the table was turned and the Church took control of the Empire. The Empire's embrace of the Church began with Constantine the Great, who openly expressed his favor for the Christian faith. Whether he did so to achieve political unity or out of personal commitment has always been debated. Ultimately, the outcome is undeniable—immediately, the empire became overtly tolerant and encouraging toward the Church.²⁰

Although Constantine seemingly accepted Christianity,²¹ he continued to placate the pagans by retaining the title and performing the duties of the Pontifex Maximus—the High Priest of the pagan religion.²² This had a significant effect upon the Church. With the

²⁰ By an imperial edict in 311, Christians were granted a limited tolerance. Another edict in 313, by the emperors Licinius and Constantine, granted Christians full liberty to follow their faith as desired. Many have called these the Magna Carta of Christianity.

²¹ Constantine's professed conversion was the result of a supposed vision just prior to the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. He claimed to have seen a cross, with the words written above it, "In This Sign Conquer." The reality of his conversion has always been questioned. Because he simultaneously appeased the pagans by retaining the title and performing the duties of the Pontifex Maximus (the High Priest of the pagan religion), continued to serve the pagan idols, and refused Christian baptism until just prior to his death, many consider his conversion merely a brilliant political ploy that sought, and succeeded, to unite the empire religiously, as it was politically, and thereby extend his influence. Whether his conversion was real or not, we don't know, but one thing is certain, it changed the course of history. From that day forward the Church and the empire were united. It was also a change in the adversary's strategy that cannot be overlooked. This was a ploy Satan had used before, when persecution failed to do the job. His plan is so predictable there is nothing new under the sun—infiltration and seduction from within is always the next step after persecution fails.

²² Once Constantine became the sole emperor he strongly encouraged his subjects to become followers of the Christian faith. In 313, he declared the Christian clergy exempt from taxation. In 314, he assembled the Council of Arles to settle the Donatist controversy. In 315, he did away with certain ordinances offensive to the Church. In 321, he issued a decree for the

chief of the pagan priests, so strongly patronizing and favoring the Church, it was only natural that other pagan priests would embrace it as well; or rather infiltrate it, for their ostensible conversion was motivated by political gain. Instantly, yesterday's pagan priests became Christian priests. These new leaders, naturally—like their supreme leader, the High Priest, the Pontifex Maximus—also retained their priestly titles.

This infiltration (although not a new tactic) was an obvious change in Satan's heretofore strategy of Imperial persecution. It is here that the harlot of the seventeenth chapter (the symbol of the false prophetess who has plagued the people of God from days of old), gains her first real foothold in the Church.²³

To the church in Thyatira

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things says the Son of God, who has his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine bronze; I know your works, and love, and service, and faith, and your patience, and your works; and the last to be more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her time to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am

observance of Sunday as a day of worship. In 325, he assembled the Nicean Council—the first General Council of the Church. In 330, he transferred the seat of government to Byzantium, largely to escape the heathen influence of Rome. Constantine also gave large sums of money for the support of Christian clergy, the circulation of Christian Scriptures, and to the building of Christian cathedrals, which was a new thing for the hitherto persecuted believers. He made certain that his son was given a Christian education and he sought Christians to fill his chief advisory posts.

²³ Except for Julian the Apostate (361-363), all subsequent emperors embraced the Church. In 392, Theodosius the Great decreed that all heathen sacrifices were to be considered treason; and in 529, Justinian the First demanded the school of philosophy, in Athens, be closed. Outwardly, it looked as though Christianity had vanquished paganism, but in truth the Imperial Church had merely absorbed it, tradition-by-tradition and rite-by-rite, it had bedded down with Jezebel.

he who searches the minds and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say; I will put upon you no other burden. But that which you have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to pieces: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches (Rev 2:18-29).

To the assembly in Thyatira, which allowed itself to be seduced by Jezebel (the same immoral heresy that Pergamum merely tolerated), He is the one “*who has his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like polished brass.*” Judgment is soon coming. To the victors of Thyatira is given, “*authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as the pottery vessels are broken to pieces*”—again a restoration, in that Adam was to subdue and have dominion over God’s creation.

Thyatira, the historic city

Located inland on the banks of the Lycus river (northeast of Smyrna and about forty miles southeast of Pergamum), of the seven historical cities Thyatira was the least significant. Although it did not have a commanding presence, it was still a prospering industrial city, known especially for its booming trade guilds and the production of royal purple. Lydia, who was converted at Philippi (Ac 16:14), and her family, have long been considered the likely founders of this local church.

Jesus leveled very serious charges against the Christians of Thyatira. They had permitted “*that woman Jezebel*” to seduce them. Although she called herself a prophetess, she had taught, and seduced, his servants “*to commit fornication*”—a clear reference to both physical and spiritual infidelity.

Apollo was the primary deity of Thyatira, a center of activity for the idolatrous and licentious Nicolaitans who had also been seduced by the prophetess Jezebel—an advocate of pagan worship. Like Balaam, she persuaded believers to compromise their faith by co-mingling with hers. She taught that promiscuity and physical

infidelity was acceptable, even necessary. It was a profane treatment of the spiritual teaching of Christian liberty.

But there was another offense. She also taught them *“to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”* Meats sacrificed at the pagan temples were seldom consumed on the altar. Only a very small portion of the meat was actually burned, sometimes only a few hairs from the animal’s head. After the priest took what portion he wanted, the worshiper who had brought the sacrifice took the rest. Worshipers then served these meats at special feasts for friends and coworkers, either in the temple compound or at their homes.

These feasts, when served at the homes of friends and coworkers, presented a problem for the Christians. Should they or should they not eat of it, in that it had been offered to an idol? An additional problem was that even the butcher’s meat had very likely been offered to an idol as well, and then sold to the butcher from the priest’s excess. This issue of sacrificial meats had been a controversy since the beginning of the Church. The Apostles addressed it at the council in Jerusalem (Ac 15:29), and Paul spoke of it to the Corinthians (1Cor 8). Each had come to similar but slightly different conclusions: the Jerusalem Council instructing new Gentile believers to simply abstain, and Paul admonishing the Corinthians to abstain if it was going to cause those with weaker conscience to stumble. The overriding principle was that one should not offend either his own, or another’s conscience in this or other such matters.

In Thyatira, abstinence from these meats seriously limited the Christians’ social lives. It also made it impossible for them to join any of the trade guilds, all of which held common meals served with meats offered to the idols. Paul explained to the Corinthians that both an idol and the meat offered to it are nothing, for in and of themselves, they are insignificant. However, not everyone had this understanding, and many ate the meat with consciousness toward the idol as if giving regard to the sacrifice; thereby offending their conscience. It is for this reason that abstinence is best, lest one offends the conscience of the weak.

The religious significance placed on these sacrificial meats in Thyatira compounded the issue. Participation in the ritual of these religious feasts was expected; no one got along in society without it. If one did not attend the feasts and eat the meats, he did not take

part in a guild and, ultimately, he found no work, or his business received no patronage. Thus, no doubt Jezebel used an argument of situational ethics to convince believers that it was acceptable for them to partake in these banquets. After all, their very livelihood was at stake.

The prophetic portrait of the church in Thyatira

Prophetically speaking, the Thyatiran Church Age brings us into the dark ages. During the Pergamum period, the Church was tolerated and controlled by the state. By the Thyatiran era, the tables had turned; the Church now controlled the empire. Soon, this Imperial Church was littered with the atrocities of the same Babylonian Mysteries that Pergamum had merely tolerated. Beyond mere toleration, now the Mysteries were being practiced by some as holy necessities of the Christian faith.

Years earlier, attempting to escape the oppression of paganism, Constantine had moved the center of the Church to Byzantium, granting equal status to both the bishops of Constantinople and Rome. But in the centuries to follow, the bishop of Rome would become the clear leader of the state Church. By the time the last Emperor was dethroned in 476, the Roman Bishop was already the real power of the empire and, subsequently, the real power over the new territorial kingdoms established after the barbarian conquest.

One by one, the new territorial kings professed their conversion to the Imperial Church and bowed their knee to the Pontiff, the Bishop of Rome. To this day, the Bishop of Rome (now known as the Pope), wields power over the fractured, sleeping, Roman Empire. To this day the Pope claims the title, Pontifex Maximus (the title held by the chief pagan priest of the Babylonian Mysteries). The rituals of Babylonianism (introduced by pagan priests who had migrated from Babylon to Pergamum, and then on to Rome), are the hallmark of the Imperial Roman Church. They are also the hallmark of the harlot in Revelation chapter seventeen. The names of the gods and the rituals were altered to seduce the unwary, but the essence of Babylonia remained unscathed.

Thus, many of these ex-pagan priests, now the leaders of this new Imperial Church, decided at the council of Ephesus in 431, that Mary was born without original sin, that she was the mother of God, the mediator between man and Christ, and that four feasts

should be established in her honor: annunciation, purification, assumption and nativity. Herein is the essence of Babylonianism—Satan’s counterpart to God’s revealed truth. In ancient Babylonianism, Nimrod was worshiped as the savior and his mother, Semiramis, whom he eventually married, was worshiped as the Queen of Heaven, the mother of god. This comparison is by no means meant to bring any dishonor on Mary, who was indeed “blessed among women,” but Mary must be viewed with proper perspective. To worship her as some sort of demigod is not fitting.

As in Israel’s time, with Jezebel and King Ahab, this Thyatiran period (in which the Imperial Church champions the Mysteries of Babylon),²⁴ is the darkest period in Church history. And just as Jezebel promoted false worship and claimed to be a prophetess of God, so too, the ruling Imperial Church took upon herself the prestige of self-proclaimed infallibility. It was during this period that the Church became completely compromised by the pagan doctrines and rituals of Jezebel. As a result, we now have such “Christian rituals” as the Christmas tree, the Easter egg and bunny, hot cross buns, the sign of the cross, holy water, prayers to the saints and even prayers to the mother of god. These same pagan affiliations gave us prayer beads, various icons, sanctuaries, altars, holy church buildings, convents, chants, monasteries, priesthoods, holy orders and the vast divide between the laity and the clergy.

Once again, the name is nothing less than fitting. Thyatira means “continual sacrifice.” What could better depict the Imperial Roman Church than the Eucharist, wherein transubstantiation is said to occur. Here, the bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ, so that He is continually sacrificed,²⁵ a doctrine that blatantly ignores the truth that, “*Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many*” (Heb 9:28).

²⁴ The darkest period in Israel’s history was under the rule of King Ahab, and his wife Jezebel. She, a worshiper of Baal, had infiltrated Israel, seducing them with her devilish doctrine. The blackest, most sinister action of this Imperial Church was its outright murder of the true saints of God—those precious souls who refused to participate in its heathen rituals and doctrines.

²⁵ The doctrine of transubstantiation—in which it is believed that Jesus dies at each Eucharist, was a key issue with the reformers: Luther, taught consubstantiation—that Jesus was nearby during the communion; Calvin taught symbolism—that communion was simply a symbolic gesture by which we remember Christ.

Although the period of Thyatira eventually relinquished its prominence to the era of Sardis, the corruption remains to this day; like Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, remnants of Thyatira will linger until the end of the age. Jesus warned Thyatira that she would be cast *“into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”*

There are few words of encouragement for the Thyatirans, but Jesus does commend them for some things; He said, *“I know your works, and charity, and service, and faith, and your patience, and your works; and the last to be more than the first.”* This statement that the last works are greater than the first leads us to believe that Thyatira (the remnants of which extends unto the end of the age) will experience some reform near the end of the Church Age. It does not take much consideration to equate these last works with those of the Vatican Council in 1962-65, from which, a gentler Imperial Church emerged. Here, the Roman Church determined to seek reunion with the reformation denominations, increase laity participation, and use vernacular languages rather than the ancient, cryptic Latin. Of note also, is the genuine concern Pope Benedict XVI seems to have had for the faith (as did the late Pope John Paul II), taking a stand for fundamental doctrines, even against great opposition. Certainly, as the Church Age is coming to a close, these last works of the Imperial Church outnumber her historic failures, which reached their zenith during the Dark Ages.

Another encouraging word is given to those devout souls who, although having a heart toward God, have unwittingly found themselves members of this Thyatiran Church. To them he says,

As many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you no other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

Jesus telling them to *hold fast till I come* seems to be a reference to the transfiguration of the faithful, the rapture, just prior to the Great Tribulation.²⁶ During His ministry, Jesus warned His listeners to watch and pray that they be counted worthy to escape the Great Tribulation (Lu 21:36).

²⁶ (see 1 Thess. 4:15-18)

To the church in Sardis

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things says he that has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white clothing; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches. (Rev 3:1-6).

To the church at Sardis, which had a name and is dead, He is the one who holds “*the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars.*” Although they fall short in their work, the Lord does not. The work of the Spirit is complete. Those few in Sardis who overcome are promised to be “*clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*” Only those so clothed in the righteousness of Christ will escape having their names blotted out of the Book of Life—a gain, another symbol of restoration, in that blotting out names from the book of life began in the Garden of Eden.

Sardis, the historic city

Located east of Smyrna and Ephesus, some thirty miles southeast of Thyatira, once the capital of the great kingdom of Lydia and home to the rich king Croesus, Sardis was an old city by the time of this writing, with an illustrious history of financial wealth dating back to the 6th Century BC.

Its strategic location on the northern slope of mount Tmolus, with the river Pactolus flowing at its base, made it practically impregnable. However, Cyrus was able to conquer Sardis in 549 BC when a Median soldier paved the way to victory by successfully scaling the acropolis. In 214 BC, Alexander the Great conquered the city again. Then years later it suffered yet another defeat at the hands of Antiochus the Great, so that now, when John addressed it,

it was a city of contrast—that of its past splendor coupled with its present unrest and decline. Although it had lost its greatness, it was still a considerable city in the 1st Century. Pliny said it was here that the dyeing of wool was discovered. Ramsay called it the City of Death, while others have said it was a city of softness, luxury, apathy, and immorality. This was also the seat of the licentious Cybele worship.

Along with Laodicea, Sardis is the most condemned of the seven churches. The church of Sardis is admonished for its failure, *“I know your works, that you hast a name that you livest, and art dead.”* Melito, a 2nd Century bishop of Sardis, was known for his piety and learning. After visiting Palestine to assure himself and his flock as to the Old Testament canon, he wrote an epistle on the subject and a commentary on The Revelation. But things had changed in Sardis. This church was like the city itself; though it once had a wonderful reputation it was now morbid and decaying. Jesus cautioned them to,

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore you shall not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon thee.

These believers had let their faith deteriorate to the point of mere nominal Christianity. Their experience and their deeds were all but non-existent. Thus, Jesus warned them, *“I will come as a thief in the night.”* This would have special meaning to them, for they lived under the constant threat of a notorious band of vicious thieves residing unchallenged in the mountains surrounding the city. Led by a man called Chakirijali, they would swoop down, ravish and plunder a community, then quickly return to the high country before capture.

The prophetic portrait of the church in Sardis

Sardis means “that which was left” or “remnant.” In the prophetic view this church speaks of the Reformation Age. The Reformation—and its subsequent Protestant movements—began with much glory, founded by heroic theologians and their faithful followers who sought, and managed to some degree, the return to godly principles and biblical doctrine. Many of these saints gave their lives defending God’s Word and attempting to rid the Church

of the Babylonian influences introduced by the Pergamum and Thyatiran periods. Their labors led the world out of the cruel inequities of the Dark Ages, into an era that produced many great theologians and evangelists.

But from the beginning, they were hindered by traditions and practices which they had brought with them from the previous period. Each reformer withdrew from the Imperial Church by differing degrees. The variations, although relatively minor, prevented them from uniting in their quest for purity. The divisions were immediate and sometimes very harsh. The end result was our many Protestant denominations.

Like Sardis of old, these Protestant denominations, which once stood boldly for Christ, are now, largely, Christian in name only, so that today, much of organized Protestantism no longer even accepts the basic doctrines of Christendom (the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, etc.). For them, Christianity is a tradition, a philosophy that molds itself to the times. Recently, at the 2012 national legislative meeting of the United Methodist Church (the largest Protestant body in America), the council voted 60% to 40% to uphold the denomination's policy that homosexuality, is incompatible with Christian teaching. That it was even on the docket for discussion is most distressing; that 40% of the council voted to modify the stance is abysmal.

Even more appalling is that the United Methodist Church is the only mainline Protestant body that has not, as yet, relaxed its stance on homosexuality. The Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ have all moved toward winking at this lifestyle that is clearly forbidden in Scripture. Within a week of the United Methodist's vote, the president of the United States of America announced that he, too, approves of the homosexual lifestyle. Thus, Jesus warned the believers in Sardis: "*You be watching and establish the remaining things that are ready to die.*" The New International Version translates this "*You be watching*" as "*Wake Up!*"

Jesus does commend them for having a "*few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.*" Others have mentioned that out of Sardis flow two streams. Of the one there is nothing to rebuke, and of the other there is nothing to praise.

To the church in Philadelphia

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things says he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens; I know your works: behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown. He that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches (Rev 3:7-13).

To Philadelphia, those who were faithful even though having little strength, he is “*he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens*”—a pleasant reminder that their strength is in him and that without Him they can do nothing. He promised the Philadelphian victor that he would be made

a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

Here is another restoration, for Adam was expelled from the garden and given the task of tilling the ground from which he was taken.

Philadelphia, the historic City

The city of Philadelphia, “brotherly love,” is located about twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis in a valley leading to the Aegean Sea. Its economy was based on agriculture, industry, and commerce. The Emperor Tiberius had rebuilt the city after it was badly damaged in the earthquake of AD 17. Sardis had been struck even harder by the quake, but subsequent frequent tremors had so

plagued the Philadelphians that for many years some residents had been living in tents, in fear, outside of the city.

Although not a large city, it was frequently visited by travelers. Situated on the trade routes leading to Lydia and Phrygia, Ramsay called it the Missionary City, for it was a prime avenue to promote the spread of the Greco-Roman civilization, and later, Christianity—whose primary opposition in this region was Judaism. During the Byzantine and medieval periods, Philadelphia was perhaps the busiest trade route in the old world.

Although important to the empire, Philadelphia was not as gifted as the other six cities to which these letters are written. Neither was the church corrupt. The pagan authorities often tested the Philadelphian believers, demanding them to blaspheme the name of Christ or be killed. But they remained true with what strength they possessed. In this Jesus commended them, for although they had *“little strength”* they had kept his word and had not denied his name. Not even the slightest hint of judgment or condemnation is found in this message to the Philadelphians. There is only praise, encouragement and promise. Only Smyrna and Philadelphia escape censure. They are also the only churches of the seven historical sites still in operation.

The prophetic portrait of the church in Philadelphia

Prophetically, Philadelphia depicts the Church of the 19th and early 20th Century, a time of great revival and missionary outreach. Avenues for evangelism, which had been closed for centuries, were suddenly and miraculously opened. Jesus said, *“Behold, I have set before you an opened door.”* These champions of the faith were quite different from those leaders of the Dark Ages, who used the sword to force Christianity upon the vanquished.

The Philadelphians were promised deliverance: *“Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”*²⁷ In the prophetic sense, this is a reference to the Great Tribulation from which the Church will be saved via the rapture. This is not a time for the Church, but it is a time for Israel and for the whole

²⁷ The Church is always promised escape or deliverance from the tribulation while Israel is merely promised to be preserved through it (see Lu 21:36; 1Th 5:4, 9, 10; Jer 30:7; Zec 13:7-9).

world, so that none, but the faithful shall escape it. Speaking of the last days, Jesus warned, *“then shall be Great Tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world . . .”* (Mt 24:21). Paul, too, warned that it would come *“as a thief in the night, for when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them . . . and they shall not escape.”* He then encouraged his readers, saying, *“but you, brothers, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you like a thief”* (1Th 5:2-4).

Differing views exist among the futurist, or pre-millennialist, as to when the resurrection of the Church takes place. Pre-millennialism understands that the Great Tribulation will occur just prior to the Lord’s return to earth, at which time he will establish his 1,000 year kingdom, thereby fulfilling the Davidic covenant.

I will raise up your offspring after you, who will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2Sa 7:12-13).

Pre-tribulational, pre-millennialism provides the most plausible chronology.²⁸ Herein, the Great Tribulation is viewed as period belonging to the Jews. It is not a time for the Church. It is the 70th week of Daniel (Dan 9:24-27). Daniel was told that from the command to rebuild Jerusalem, his people had seventy weeks to make reconciliation of iniquity and to bring in everlasting righteousness. The Messiah, he was told, would be cut off after the 69th week.²⁹ This was fulfilled with the death of Christ, but the 70th week is yet to occur. Daniel was also told that the 70th week would

²⁸ Some hold to a Mid or Post Tribulational viewpoint. Mid-Tribulationalists believe the translation of the Church will occur in the middle of the 70th week, while Post-Tribulationalists believe it will occur at the end of the 70th week, immediately prior to the return of the Lord. However, both of these views have serious trouble reconciling such chronologies with very important passages. For example, upon the dividing of the just and unjust at the return of Christ, in the Post-Tribulational view there is no one left to populate the kingdom, for everyone is either in hell or in a glorified, resurrected state. The Mid-Tribulational view fails to consider Paul’s comment that the restraining power must be removed before the man of sin, the one who is to make the seven year covenant, is revealed.

²⁹ This is a reference to weeks of years. It was a common and important measurement of sabbatical time in the Jewish calendar (see Gen 29:26-28). Failure to keep these sabbatical weeks played a large part in the Babylonian captivity of the Jewish nation; and it determined the 70-year period (Lev 25-26).

span a seven year covenant made by the evil prince who would also orchestrate the abomination of desolation. Jesus made it clear that this abomination of desolation is yet to occur and that when it did occur, it would be a sign of His soon return (Mt 24:15).

Furthermore, it is also understood that the last half of this 70th week is the time of Jacob's trouble—a time of punishment, specifically targeting the Jewish nation for having rejected their Messiah. “*Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it. It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he will be saved out of it*” (Jer 30:7). As such, this period is not designed for the Church, which is a separate redeemed body. Therefore, it is believed that the Church will be caught away, translated into its heavenly state immediately prior to the tribulation. This is what we commonly refer to as the rapture.³⁰ Thus the encouragement to the Thessalonians,

But we do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are sleeping, that you grieve not, even as the rest—those having no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so those having slept in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we—those living, those remaining unto the arrival of the Lord—by no means shall precede those having slept. For the Lord himself, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, shall descend from heaven and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we—those living, those remaining—together, shall be caught up with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1Th 4:13-18).

Paul had discussed these things with the Thessalonians, but false teachers had crept into the congregation and contradicted his instructions, telling them they had missed the gathering and that they were actually in the Day of the Lord, the seventieth Week.

³⁰ In the Greek term in the text, 1Th 4:17, ἀρπαγησόμεθα *harpagesmetha*, literally means “shall be seized, shall be taken away” in a physical sense. Although our popular term “rapture,” which we use to describe this event, is not found in our popular versions, the term is not exactly amiss. Our modern term rapture has a meaning of “a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things.” Thus, because when we are caught away physically into the heavens to be with the Lord, we will see Him as He is, “rapture” is a justifiable figurative term (in a dynamic equivalence sense) to express this event: see 1Th 4:13-5:10; 1Co 15:51; Js 5:7-9; Lu 21:36.

Therefore Paul wrote to them again, carefully explaining the chronology of these future events. First the apostasy; then He that restrains the evil (the Holy Spirit) will allow the son of perdition (the antichrist) to be revealed; then is the Day of the Lord.

Now we beseech you, brothers, touching the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, so that you be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor disturbed, neither by spirit, nor by speech, nor by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is come. Let no one deceive in any way, because [that day shall not come] except the apostasy come first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, the one opposing and exalting himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Don't you remember that when I was yet with you, I used to tell you these things? And now you know the thing restraining, so that he be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness already works—only there is one that restrains now, until he be taken out of the midst, and then shall be revealed the lawless one (whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by his glorious appearance), of whom whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And, therefore, God sends to them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged—those who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2Th. 2:1-12).

The promise and prophetic statement that those of the Philadelphian Church Age would be kept from the hour of trial about to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth, cannot, in itself, be considered conclusive evidence as to the pre-tribulational taking away of the Church—indeed, no single passage can be used in such a manner for any subject or doctrine—but this passage certainly lends strong evidence to this view. In a context speaking to this coming time of judgment, Paul told the Thessalonians that they were, “not appointed unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Th 5:9); and speaking of this time, Jesus instructed believers “Be watchful, always, praying that you might be able to escape” the Great Tribulation (Lu 21:36).

To the church in Laodicea

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would that you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothing, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will eat with him, and he with me. To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches. (Rev 3:14-21).

To the church at Laodicea, those who had fallen into a lukewarm testimony of the faith, Jesus is “*the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.*” A statement designed both to convict them and to portray Himself as the example in service and life. To the victors of this seventh and final church, He promised they would be granted “*to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne;*” once again a restoration. Adam had been a co-ruler and shared a deep intimate fellowship with the Lord.

Laodicea, the historic city

Not far from Phrygia, Colosse, and Hierapolis, Laodicea was located in the Lycus valley, about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia and forty miles east of Ephesus. Settled along the bustling eastern trade route from Ephesus, it was home to many trading banks and manufacturers of wool carpets and clothing. It was a city very proud of its wealth and affluence, Ramsay called it the City of Compromise. Here too, was another seat of Asklepios worship and thus, another medical school. Centuries later, Cicero would live here and write several of his letters.

Jesus describes the historic church of Laodicea as nothing less than apostate in both word and deed.³¹ It is a church no longer concerned with sound theology. Their concern was for the luxuries of material life. Appropriately, the name Laodicea means “laity rules,” which in the historic context means “people rule.” This is a rebellious church that has little regard for its elders, its pastors. It is a renegade church in pursuit of personal satisfaction.

As with each of the seven churches, the Lord’s comments are tailored to their peculiarities. Here, he gives not one word of praise; nothing good is said about them. Rather, he indicts their faith for being “lukewarm . . . neither cold nor hot.” Certainly the Laodiceans would have understood the meaning of this statement. Not far from town were a number of extraordinary hot springs; by the time their waters reached town they were lukewarm, tepid, not fit to drink. Thus, he said “*I will spew you out of my mouth.*” His words are strong; the Greek term for spew ἐμέσαι (*emesai*) is the term from which we get the word emesis. It meant to vomit or reject with disgust. Who enjoys a lukewarm beverage? Aside from the unsavory taste, it breeds bacteria.

Laodicea was the exact opposite of Smyrna. Christians in Laodicea took glory in, and bragged of, their material wealth. The persecuted saints in Smyrna lost their worldly possessions; many lost their lives for their faith. The believers in Smyrna served as role models for the faith; not so the Laodiceans. They were very pleased with their personal financial success; the Lord was not impressed. His words were stern. Thus, it is worth noting the special rebuke He has for each of their prized possessions.

As for their material wealth, being rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, He told them to “*buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you mayest be rich.*” The Laodiceans produced very rare and expensive black wool which was used for making fine garments. To this he said, buy from me “*white raiment, that you mayest be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear.*” They manufactured a special powder as well, which, when mixed with a certain medium served as a medicinal eye salve. He said, “*anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*”

³¹ Apostasy (see 1Ti 4:1-3; 2Ti 3:1-8, 4:1-4; 2Pe 2 & 3; 1Jn 2:18-19; 2Jn 7-11).

Someone has paraphrased this message as such: “All that you have, all that is so precious to you, that which is the center of your life, means nothing to me. It has no value toward your future state. Buy from me, without price, that which is needed. Put to use the very medicine for which you are famous.” As we might recall, the Lord gave a similar message to Israel: “*Everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money, come, buy and eat. Yes. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price*” (Isa 55:1). Eventually these lukewarm, non-committed Christians of Laodicea were exterminated in a great massacre. In the end, their wealth was of no value.

The prophetic portrait of the church in Laodicea

Now we arrive at the purpose for including this chapter among these critiques in the practical theology of 21st Century Western Christendom. Laodicea is the prophetic picture of the Church in the last days. We are in the last days. We are Laodicea. Any honest look at the modern Western Church and Western culture will see the Laodicean state of mind.

The Western culture is wealthy beyond belief. We are the world leaders in luxurious items and medical supplies. Our churches are wealth as well. When compared to other cultures, even the majority of those living on government assistance in our culture are rich. They have plenty to eat, a closet full of clothes, a roof over their heads and indoor plumbing. They have a cell phone, a big, flat screen TV and cable, air conditioning, and a nice car in the driveway. All this and they don't even have to work.

Truly, we are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. In our culture, even in many churches, one's success is measured by his financial statement. It is quite telling that the greatest health issue among our “poor” is obesity. We are the modern embodiment of Laodicea. We are the fulfillment of this prophetic passage.

This is especially true of American culture where, although we comprise a mere 5% of the world's population, we are among the largest consumers of manufactured goods, the niceties of life, and advanced healthcare. Of course, we appease ourselves with the idea that God has blessed us because of our righteous heritage and commitment to Christian ethics. Because we are the product of

God's blessing, we take great national and personal pride in our material possessions, which, after all, we have earned. Slick looking, fast talking, Bible toting, preachers and televangelists, on the airwaves 24/7, affirm our God-given right to these blessings. They sell books and sermons, seminars explaining just how Christians can, and are meant to, receive financial rewards.

But I submit that this is a facade. It is the prosperity theology of Laodicea. Outwardly, most followers of evangelical orthodoxy reject this health and wealth gospel as fallacious; but inwardly, and behind closed doors, they likely admire it, practice it, and rely upon it as truth. Like Laodicea, this self-deception is nothing more than a mask covering the ugly face of misplaced trust, which, like that of the Laodiceans, is placed in self, wealth, materialism, and a medical system promising impossible cures.

A prime example of this opulence within the Church can be clearly observed by simply comparing the yearly missionary budget (of nearly any local church in America) with the total sums spent on worldly excesses by its parishioners. Then, to further make the point, divide the total of these worldly excesses into separate categories; it is likely that even the individual categories will top the missionary expenditures. It is just as likely that certain families alone, within the church, will have personal excessive expenditure that top the entire church's missionary fund. Some topics that might fit well into these categories of excess could be extravagant vacations, expensive dinners, ball games, expensive jewelry, elegant clothing, luxurious motor vehicles, recreational flying, mansion-like houses, luxurious church buildings, ad nauseam.

In general, the average church member in America finds more pleasure in, and gets more excited about, sporting events than evangelism. And no doubt, he finds a greater sense of fulfillment in his patriotic fervor than in discipleship. Frankly, he is more concerned with his IRA, stock options, 401K, and retirement plan, than with his spiritual life or missionary work.

Am I saying that all luxuries, material goods, wealth and entertainment are wrong or sinful? Of course not; but I am saying they are clearly out of perspective. When as much, or more, concern is given to such trivial activities and luxuries and sports than is given to spiritual matters, it is a good indication that we do

not know how *“wretched . . . and miserable and poor and blind and naked”* we are.

Furthermore, to counterbalance this lust for wealth (perhaps for no other reason than merely to placate our consciences), we have developed a legalistic mindset that, at least outwardly, seeks the ethical reformation of society. Laying aside true efforts of evangelism, achieved by the testimony of personal examples, we exert vast amounts of energy on socio-political reform. It is echoed from our pulpits, on Christian television and radio programs, books are written about it; we have demonstrations and protests. We even form alliances with Christian heretics that we might further pursue this self-serving, temporal agenda. We are so dogmatically bent on, and content with, the mere socio-political reform of our society that we pursue it even at the expense of those whom we actually would seek to convert. Sadly, I fear it is not society’s conversion, or even reform, that we truly seek with our pharisaical legalism; but we seek, merely, to placate our consciences.

Basking in the luxury of material wealth, the historic Laodicean Christian community was content and proud of its success. They were fat and sassy and without conviction. But this temporal, pseudo-happiness, coupled with their spiritual ignorance, resulted in spiritual lethargy and indifference. They are we. We are them. We are delusional and do not know just how *“wretched . . . and miserable and poor and blind and naked”* we were.

Scripture warns of the apostasy that will prevail in the last days. Jesus asked, *“when the Son of man returns, shall he find faith be on the earth?”* (Lu 18:7-9). The entire letter of Jude is given to this subject. Paul, Peter, and John refer to it in their epistles. At the beginning of these seven letters, and thus prophetically, at the beginning of the Church Age, Jesus is standing in the midst of the churches (Rev 1:13); now in Laodicea, at the end of the Church Age, he is standing outside, knocking on the door, seeking entrance. *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”* (Rev 3:20).

Conclusion

What a mixture, this Church in the last days—with remnants of the Thyatiran, Sardis, Philadelphian and Laodicean ages co-mingled, representing Christ to the world. One is entangled in ancient pagan mysteries. Another bears no vestige of Christ, other than the

“Christ” in Christianity, a title to which it clings even though it denies the fundamental doctrines that define the faith. In yet another (the dominant body of the times), is opulence and gaudy self-reliance. Aside from the relatively few faithful souls within these apostate bodies, only those of the Philadelphian remnant are upholding the Word of the Lord; and they, Jesus said, are of but little strength. May every reader of this work seek to be among the remnant of the Philadelphian believers.

Reality, What Is It?

Although they are loath to admit it, the more scientists learn about our universe, the more this knowledge seems to necessitate intelligent design. That is, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This critique argues that point, then concludes with the answer to perhaps the most asked question of all time: What is the meaning of life?

Societal and peer pressures, exerted by the modern academic and scientific communities, cause many to shy away from the creation account as set forth in Genesis. This interferes with evangelism. Therefore, this chapter (concerning ontological issues, which are actually matters of Theology Proper) is included among these critiques on Practical Theology to show there is no scientific reason to retire the Genesis account. The knowledge gained in the following pages should strengthen our faith as it further clarifies the answer to the hope that lies within us.

The intention for my original publication (which largely makes up this chapter), was to produce an evangelical tool for science nerds. As such, I ascribed a fancy title for publication: “*An Apology and Unification Theory for the Reconciliation of Physical Matter and Metaphysical Cognizance*,” which was published in *Answers Research Journal* 1 (2008): 27-42. Translated into everyday terms, this title could be, “*A theory, and defense thereof, to reconcile non-physical realities with physical realities.*” Ultimately, the discussion is directed toward the necessity of God’s Spirit (the non-physical) involved in, and communicating with, the physical creation, and the non-physical human spirit communicating with its corporeal human body.

The first several pages show that our universe, at the quantum or subatomic level, is merely emptiness, electromagnetic energy, and information. Therefore, what we perceive as solid matter is the product of electromagnetic force fields between various systems found at both the subatomic level of electrons, protons, neutrons, etc, as well as the visible world of molecules, cells, and physical structures. This is the basic theme of the first few pages, so don’t

let any unfamiliar terms (purposefully employed for the scientifically minded) dissuade you. Once you get through these first pages, the terminology eases up. Stick with the logic of the argument, and the meaning of any unfamiliar terms should become self-evident.

Outline

Because one is tangible and the other intangible the physical and metaphysical are generally treated separately. But this dichotomy is illogical; at the very least it is inconsistent with reality, for the two are inseparable. A basic introduction to the principle issues in quantum physics is provided to stress to this point.

I. First we discuss:

- A. Our physical reality which consists largely of empty space, electromagnetic energy, and information.
- B. The metaphysical activities and implications of subatomic particles as evidenced by studies in entanglement, quantum teleportation, and zero-point energy.

II. Then the impossibility of several critical issues:

- A. The spontaneous ex nihilo appearance of a theretofore non-existent exploding mass, via its own non-existent energy.
- B. The spontaneous and complex self-organization of this chaotic array of inorganic material.
- C. The spontaneous generation of organic life from inorganic non-life.
- D. The spontaneous generation of reproductive ant intelligent life from simple life forms.
- E. The formation of our complex metaphysical reality from physical matter.

III. This then leads to an apology for the necessity of a Creator.

IV. A theory is set forth that reconciles inorganic, organic, and animated matter with the metaphysical realities of both the Creator and the created.

- A. By coupling the metaphysical implications of quantum physics with the biblical understanding of God's attributes, the thesis is set forth that our immediate physical reality—consisting of empty space, electromagnetic energy and

information—is basically a holographic depiction of God’s intent. God spoke and it was so.

- B. Since creation, God’s Spirit has continued to energize and interact with the universe in an entangled nature at the quantum level.
- C. Similarly, the individual metaphysical reality of each animated being interacts with its individual corporeal body via this same entangled nature at the subatomic level.
- D. Key theological issues are also addressed:
 - 1. Man’s having been created in the image of God.
 - 2. Freewill.
 - 3. The existence of evil.
 - 4. Redemption.
 - 5. And finally, because man is a special creature created in God’s image it follows that man, merely by his intent, has within himself the ability, at least in a limited capacity, to cause change to his environment, this holographic reality; thus biblical healings and miracles occur. This concept could also provide an explanation for certain other human generated phenomena.

Introduction

I have been contemplating this issue of ontology for more than 40 years: the conformity of non-physical realities with that of physical matter. Of special interest has been the reconciliation of our metaphysical cognizance and our corporeal existence. Of course I did not know these big words back then and would have stated it differently, but the concepts were there. Back then it was: How do the non-material and the material interact? And how do the mind and the body work together?

Both realities (the metaphysical and the material) are undeniable, yet neither is easily understood. Because one is tangible and the other intangible, they are generally treated separately and seldom treated as a unit. But this dichotomy is illogical; at the very

least it is inconsistent with reality, for the two are inseparable, at least in this life.

From the very beginning of my muse (when my thoughts were still in their infant stage) until this present day, the resultant inferences of this union have profoundly affected me; not in a mere philosophical sense alone, but in an immediate practical sense, having considerable influence on many issues and decisions in my life and even, to some degree, shaping my personality.

That our physical universe exists is denied by no one; but of equal reality are the multi-faceted metaphysical aspects of our daily existence. Beyond animation and consciousness, we think complex thoughts, communicate, create, find humor, make music, make inferences, and (perhaps except for the sociopath) experience emotion and direct our lives by a basic universal set of morals—intuitively knowing right from wrong: That we should not kill, lie or steal; and when we do so our conscience is highly offended. These metaphysical realities are as much a part of our makeup as is our physical world.

But where and how do these worlds meet: the physical and metaphysical? Any discipline focused on one to the exclusion of the other is incomplete and ultimately dishonest with its data. Nevertheless, these exclusions exist, with extreme views held by proponents on both sides. On the one hand are those who advocate a purely material universe in which everything follows predictable laws of physics. In this closed system with its finite number of forces, theoretically everything in the known universe could be predicted and analyzed. Therefore, even the notion of metaphysical realities (which necessarily lie outside the basic laws of physics) is not subject to consideration, thereby effectively excluding such concepts as spirituality, supernatural intervention, and even life after death. On the other hand are various pseudo-spiritual orders that dismiss the significance of the material world, so much so that some even hold the physical body in contempt.

Both extremes are mistaken; each adhering to a worldview that necessarily obstructs its vision of reality. With this as the premise it is the objective of this paper to reconcile these two worlds: the material and the metaphysical.

The amazing universe

The wonders of the universe are untold. To this day science is mystified by the underlying forces and natural phenomena that are so basic to our existence: gravity, electromagnetism, nuclear forces, and even light. Although certain observed laws of classical Newtonian physics are able to accurately predict various characteristics of each, still physicists do not fully understand any of them.

As quantum physicists attempt to answer fundamental questions at the subatomic level where Newtonian physics fails, they have discovered new realities, which have brought them to terms with concepts that challenge specific features of classical thought. For example, if atoms were governed by the classic laws of electromagnetism the positively charged protons would repel each other even as the negatively charged orbiting electrons would be drawn toward and collide with the protons. Instead the protons hold their place in the nucleus and the electrons stay in their distant orbital paths. Thus, one of the most startling discoveries of quantum mechanics was that here, at the subatomic level of energy, the rules have changed.³²

This enigma sparked the initial studies in quantum mechanics as scientists sought diligently to explain the atom. The spectra of light emitted from different atomic species were of special interest to the physicists. Indeed, the nature of light itself has always been a primary concern for physicists. In spite of the rigorous debate being waged since the 1600's, as to whether it is a particle or wave, the issue is still not settled to everyone's satisfaction. However, because recent studies show that light simultaneously maintains certain properties of both waves and particles, while simultaneously failing to display other certain properties of both, some quantum physicists have concluded that light is intrinsically neither a wave nor a particle. For these reasons quantum field theory currently holds to a wave-particle duality definition of light in which photons (considered the smallest particles in classical physics) are now thought of "only at their instant of creation or destruction, and to consider light to be a probability wave in between these times;"

³² Ford, Kenneth W. 2005. *The Quantum World: Quantum Physics for Everyone*. Cambridge, MA: First Harvard University Press, 1.

except for the geometrical limit where light continues to act like a particle with an assigned trajectory.³³

Is that confusing enough? Trust me, it is confusing to the scientists as well; and I have merely presented an extremely simplified, amateurish version. But this is significant because Newtonian physics taught that the universe consists solely of solid particle-based matter, where everything is the sum total of its parts; a closed system with a finite number of forces that theoretically could be totaled, and by understanding the basic laws that govern these particle-based interactions everything in the known universe could be predicted and analyzed. However, and to the surprise of many, studies in quantum mechanics revealed the atom to be something more complex than mere solid particles;³⁴ and neither the universe nor the atom, as we shall see, is it the closed system of classical thought.

The subatomic world

Atoms of course are unimaginably small with some having diameters something in the order of 1×10^{-10} meters.³⁵ A few illustrations may help put this in perspective. An atom is about a million times smaller than the diameter of a human hair.³⁶ It would take a million atoms, edge to edge, to equal the thickness of a page of paper or 100 million atoms side by side to stretch 1 centimeter.³⁷

³³ Carlson, E. H. "Wave-Particle Duality: Light." *Physnet*. Peter Signell for Project Physnet, Physics-Astronomy Building, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI. (ID Sheet MISN-0-246: Version 2/1/2000):8. E. Lansing, MI.: Michigan State University, 8.

³⁴ Cottingham, W.N. and Greenwood, D.A. 2007. *An Introduction to the Standard Model of Particle Physics*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1.

³⁵ Glenn Ebert, ed. 2007. "Diameter of an Atom." *The Physics Factbook: An Encyclopedia of Scientific Essays*. Written by his students (Michael P.); an educational, Fair Use website. [http://www. hyper textbook.com/facts](http://www.hyper textbook.com/facts) (accessed July 18, 2007).

³⁶ Glenn Ebert.

³⁷ Oklahoma State Chemistry Department. Concepts/Skills Development.[http://intro.chem.okstate.edu/ ChemSource/Atomic/concpt2.htm](http://intro.chem.okstate.edu/ChemSource/Atomic/concpt2.htm) (accessed July 18, 2007; no longer posted).

With every breath you take “you inhale a million billion billion” atoms of oxygen.³⁸

Atoms consist of a nucleus, orbiting electrons, and mostly empty space. The very tiny nucleus is comprised of positively charged protons and neutral neutrons. But the phrase “very tiny” does not adequately depict the size of the nucleus, which is smaller than its perspective atom in varying degrees from a factor of 23,000 for uranium to a factor of 145,000 for hydrogen. And electrons are even smaller—almost 2,000 times smaller than a single proton.³⁹

To put this in perspective look at the period (or dot) at the end of this sentence. If you are reading paper pages, versus a digital display, the period contains about 100 billion carbon atoms. To see one of these atoms with the naked eye we would have to magnify the dot to a diameter of 100 meters (a little larger than a football field).⁴⁰ Then to see the nucleus of one of these carbon atoms the dot would have to be enlarged to about 10,000 kilometers, which is roughly the size of the earth from pole to pole.⁴¹ In yet another perspective, if the nucleus were the size of a baseball, the atomic diameter, which is established by the orbiting electrons, would be about 4 kilometers. That is nearly 2 ½ miles across; and the electrons would each be smaller than a period (.).⁴² Between the nucleus and the electrons is empty space.

But things get even smaller. While classical Newtonian physics considered these subatomic features to be particle-based mass with the nucleus accounting for virtually all of the atomic mass, quantum physicists theorize that particle-based mass, even in the nucleus, is all but non-existent. Some believe the very tiny nucleus consists almost exclusively of strong interaction energies and the gluon field—a mass-less mediator of the strong interaction between certain “fundamental particles” called quarks, which they surmise account for slightly less than 1% of its fundamental particle mass. In our aforementioned analogy, that is 1% of the baseball. Neither are electrons any longer considered a particle-based mass. They are

³⁸ Close, 1.

³⁹ Ford, 2.

⁴⁰ Close, 2.

⁴¹ Close, 2-4.

⁴² Oklahoma State Chemistry Department.

structureless point particles⁴³ or non-particle based clouds of negative electromagnetic energy.

For many, even the concept of the discrete 1% zero-dimensional fundamental nucleonic particle is now brought into question, replaced by the idea of wave-packets of uncertain boundary, with mysterious properties known only as probabilities interacting with other particles. For those quantum physicists who promote superstring theory in their diligent effort to harmonize general relativity with quantum mechanics,⁴⁴ the notion of discrete zero-dimensional particles is completely discarded in favor of very tiny one-dimensional supersymmetric strings of energy, each having unique resonant vibrations—like that of a guitar string—characterized by the particular fundamental force in question. In this view, “specific particles correspond to specific oscillation modes (or quantum states) of the string.”⁴⁵

Not only does superstring theory do away with the traditional idea of particle-based mass, it also opens the door to, and even requires, multiple dimensions beyond those with which we are accustomed. While we are familiar with the three spatial dimensions of length, width and height, and with the generally considered fourth dimension, time, superstring theory mandates additional spatial dimensions that are too small for our direct observation.

It is also interesting to note that physicists believe these strings of energy are either closed (forming a loop) or open (forming a line interval). I cannot help but to think of the binary numeric system as used in electronic circuitry and computer programming. I can imagine a subatomic world in which there are various vibrating strings of electromagnetic energy, some circular like a “0,” some linear like a “1,” interlocked in various multidimensional mathematical computations to form complex structures in multidimensional binary code.

If the speculations of superstring theory are correct there is no such thing as particle-based atomic mass. If the concepts of general quantum physics are correct the atom is less than 1% particle-based

⁴³ Cottingham and Greenwood.

⁴⁴ Katrin Becker, Melanie Becker, John H Schwarz. 2007. *String Theory and M-Theory: A Modern Introduction*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1.

⁴⁵ Becker, Becker and Schwarz, 2.

mass. And even if we hold to the original and now discredited notion of subatomic particle-based mass, still the atom is mostly empty space. The nature of the subatomic structure compels us to address the fundamental question of matter; for the only things we can identify with certainty are infinitesimal charges of electricity and a vast amount of empty space. We know these tiny electric charges create electromagnetic force fields that cause atoms, and the various molecular chemical compounds they form, to present as solid matter;⁴⁶ but in the end we are still dealing with the infinitesimal charges of electromagnetic energy and empty space. This is the core of what we perceive as our physical reality.

Zero-point energy field

Another subject of special concern to our topic is the zero-point energy field. Newtonian physics postulates that if we were to cool the sea of virtual particles underlying every point in the universe to absolute zero it would retain no energy. However, once again many physicists were amazed to find an enormous amount of energy residing in this zero-point energy field; consequently, its intricate nature has become a principal feature of quantum physics. Quantum physicists believe the zero-point energy field inextricably and inexplicably connects everything in the universe, so that some have dubbed it the Mind of God. Not that physicists are being converted to Christianity (or to any world religion) by the droves; but they have reached a dilemma in their unified field theory in which subatomic systems mysteriously defy the known laws of physics so that events some might consider miraculous (that is, in defiance of the laws of classical physics) are not only accounted for but expected. For example, quantum physicists postulate that even as the expansion of the universe accelerates, “zero-point energy is assumed to be constant: no matter how much the universe expands it does not become diluted, but instead more zero-point energy is assumed to be created out of nothing.” Furthermore, they believe “the zero-point exerts a negative pressure which, counter-intuitively, leads to an expansion of space-time.”⁴⁷ To the consternation of many, this is not the closed system of Newtonian physics.

⁴⁶ Close, 3.

⁴⁷ Bernard Haisch, Director. “Zero Point Energy and Zero Point Field.”

The issue of “locality versus non-locality” is of special interest to our topic. Recent studies have provided quantum physicists with what they believe is empirical evidence against local realism. Local realism speaks of the intuitive notion that particles within a specific subatomic structure are not influenced by systems that are not present within that local structure, and that these particles have a physical reality of definitive values that are not influenced by an observer.⁴⁸ Simply stated, this speaks of a closed system. However, many studies have demonstrated that predictions of quantum mechanics at the subatomic level are not intuitive; that is, they are not subject to the expectations of local realism.^{49,50,51} To the contrary, effects at the quantum level exhibit characteristics of non-locality, hence making it not possible to treat spatially separated systems as independent. This “open system” implication of non-locality was Einstein’s primary objection to quantum mechanics because the notion of non-locality makes possible what he ridiculed as, “spooky action at a distance.”⁵²

However, it has been shown that at the subatomic level the very act of observing will cause the phenomenon being observed to change; thus the term, observer effect. For example, before an electron could be observed a photon would necessarily have to interact with it which then changes the path of the electron. And physicists believe that even less direct means of measurement whereby direct observation is absent will still, theoretically, modify

Calphysics Institute. <http://www.calphysics.org/zpe.html> (accessed July 10, 2007), 4.

⁴⁸ Yoav Ben-Dov. 1994. “Conference Talk published in: *Frontiers of Fundamental Physics*.” *Cohn Institute for the History of Science, Tel-Aviv University*. (Ed. F. Selleri, London: Plenum Publications. <http://bendov.info/eng/crucial.htm> (accessed August 11, 2007).

⁴⁹ Simon Gröblacher, et al. 2007. “An Experimental Test of Non-locality Realism.” *Nature* 446: 871-875.

⁵⁰ Paul G Kwiat, et al. 2001. “Experimental Entanglement Distillation and ‘Hidden’ Non-Locality.” *Nature* 409: 1014-1017.

⁵¹ Jian-Wei Pan, et al. 2000. “Experimental Test of Quantum Nonlocality in Three-photon Greenberger-Horne-Zeilinger Entanglement.” *Nature* 403: 515-519.

⁵² Dennis Overbye. 2006. “New Tests of Einstein’s ‘Spooky’ Reality.” *International Herald Tribune on the Web*, 10 January 2006, www.ihf.com/articles/2005/12/28/healthscience/sneinstein.php (accessed August 15, 2007).

the photon's position. Even at the level of macroscopic life the physics necessary to observe or measure a particular phenomenon causes change. For instance, to measure the temperature of a particular solution we place a thermometer into the solution, which then interacts with the solution thereby absorbing some of the energy and consequently, changing the temperature of the solution. Therefore it is concluded that one cannot observe a system without entering into that system and thereby causing change to that system.

Of equal importance to the issue of non-locality is the phenomenon of entanglement. The noted philosophizing physicist and professor of physics at Vienna University, Dr. Anton Zeilinger, explained that at the quantum level, once two or more particles connect by colliding like billiard balls, they are immediately linked or entangled, and the information each particle contained is "smeared over both particles," so that no matter how far apart they are, by measuring the previously uncertain momentum of one, the second will instantaneously gain a clearly-defined momentum. This information, he contends, "is the basic building block of our world." It is "at the basis of everything we call 'nature' . . . because we can't talk about anything without de facto speaking about the information we have of these things."⁵³

Amazingly, with this knowledge physicists have successfully realized Einstein's concern of "spooky action at a distance" by using methods of entanglement to teleport particle properties up to 600 meters under the Danube River; and they believe, theoretically, the distance is limitless.⁵⁴

The significance of quantum physics

By now I suspect the reader is asking: Why all this discussion about physics? My objective is not to explain or even introduce classical or quantum physics. Indeed, if it were I have failed miserably, for I have but scratched the surface of a topic about which admittedly I have limited knowledge. I will leave technical introductions and explanations to the physicists. My interest is

⁵³ Anton Zeilinger. "Spooky Action and Beyond." An interview by Die Weltwoche. Original interview in German on January 3, 2006. English version sited from <http://www.signandsight.com/features/614.html> (accessed August 12, 2007).

⁵⁴ Zeilinger.

geared more toward the practical than the technical; the implications for the driver of the car if you will, versus the painstaking analysis of the design engineer. So I have merely pointed out that the car has certain features; I have not addressed in detail, nor do I wish to address, the intricate mechanical engineering of these features.

Nor is it my intent to set one branch of physics against the other, nor even necessarily to side with one or the other. That being said, my objective is twofold. First, to show that atoms, and thus the universe, consists of empty space and mysterious infinitesimal interactions of electromagnetic energy and information. Depending upon one's scientific view of subatomic fundamental particles, the universe is exclusively (or almost exclusively) empty space and very tiny charges of electromagnetic energy and information. This necessarily causes us to contemplate our perception of the material universe.

The second purpose for addressing these issues is to point out that at the subatomic level of energy the universe is not the closed system that many have supposed. The zero-point energy field and non-locality as evidenced by the observer effect, entanglement, and teleportation dismiss this notion. The significance is that because electromagnetic energy at the level of the photon is entangled and exhibits the effects of non-locality (so that it can be influenced by remote systems) phenomena are not only possible, they are expected.

These discoveries continue to amaze the physicists who seek to understand this subatomic world. It is so different from what we know as reality that Dr. Zeilinger said, "It's all pretty crazy." And taking it yet a step further, he explained, "The spooky effect at a distance is a process outside time and space that even I can't really imagine. But I believe that quantum physics tells us something very profound about the world. And that is that the world is not the way it is independently of us. That the characteristics of the world are to a certain extent dependent on us."⁵⁵ For example, as we measure a particle, its previously uncertain location and velocity becomes a reality at that moment. In so doing, he observed, "we've had a major impact on reality."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Zeilinger.

⁵⁶ Zeilinger.

So then, from quantum physics we learn that our physical universe consists largely of empty space and infinitesimal charges of electromagnetic energy and information, and that subatomic systems are not only subject to influence from distant systems, they are to a certain extent conditioned by us. All of this becomes extremely important to our ultimate understanding of the union between the physical and the metaphysical.

The big question

The significance of these findings must not be overlooked. Despite the extremely complex nature of physics, with concepts and mathematical formulas that only a handful of people in the world can compute, the complexity seems somewhat pedantic in light of the larger question that looms before us. Because all mass, and thus the entire universe and all that is in it, is made from atoms and atoms consist mostly of empty space and infinitesimal interactions of electromagnetic energy and information, the question is necessarily evoked: What then is reality in the physical sense? And because an individual metaphysical entity is the singular force that defines the very state of being human, it stands that our metaphysical existence is a certainty, as elusive as it may be, which necessarily evokes the question: What then is reality in the metaphysical sense? Furthermore, because the quantum world at the subatomic level can be affected by non-local systems, and because the corporeal being is ultimately animated and governed by its individual metaphysical being, the ultimate question must be asked: How do these two extremely divergent worlds interact? What is their common reality?

What is the mystery of physical mass interacting with metaphysical cognizance? Indeed, what is the mystery of life itself? Even beyond the animated being, what of this metaphysical cognizance we generally refer to as soul or spirit? And what of ethics and morals and all the other metaphysical issues that constitute our daily existence? Neither classical nor quantum physics provide answers to these questions; but while classical Newtonian physics necessarily neglects such concepts (for it holds to a closed particle-based system that must follow predictable laws), quantum physics not only invites such questions and concepts, it seems to expect them. For as the University of Chicago, Professor

of Physics, Dr. Bruce A. Schumm, has acknowledged: “As we attempt to understand and codify the rules of existence at this level, we enter the realm of quantum mechanics, with its jarring metaphysical implications.”⁵⁷ So I ask, I am compelled to ask, What is reality? That is: What is the fundamental reality beyond our perceptions, for both the material and the metaphysical? The answer to this question will necessarily reconcile these two worlds.

Childish questions

Today we use the term “tween” to describe those important early adolescent years when hormones are beginning to change but the youngster has yet to attain the defining stature of a teenager. It was during my tween years that I began asking certain defining questions that would ultimately change my life. Of course there were the all important questions of: “Why do we exist; and what is the meaning of life? But I had other questions that few of my peers seemed to be asking. At least I knew of none. I recall my interest in biology and my awe of life, at both the human and the microscopic level. But even then my interests lay more in the marvel of life itself than in its simple biological anatomy; this reality was far more reaching, far more mysterious.

I also spent countless hours staring at the stars in utter amazement. It was not the constellations of ancient imagination that caused me to spend so many nights lying on the rooftop watching the majestic scene pass overhead; it was the consideration of what could lie beyond the heavens and the contemplation of what a truly finite being I was in the face of it all. I debated in my own mind if there could be an end to the universe, to the heavens. What would that end be: a solid wall, empty space? For even the wall or the space is something; and what then is beyond that? This naturally inferred the daunting concept of infinity and its parallel, eternity—something else, and perhaps even more difficult, to comprehend.

Of course it was also about this time I was learning evolution in school: the big bang, the primordial ooze, Darwinism, survival-of-the-fittest and so forth. But as I asked my questions (on the one

⁵⁷ Bruce A Schumm. 2004. *Deep Down Things: The Breaking Beauty of Particle Physics*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2.

hand gazing into the heavens, and on the other, contemplating the wonders of even the simplest life forms; and even considering the unscrupulous dog-eat-dog concept of survival-of-the-fittest versus the very real innate sense of social ethics and personal morals), I knew neither the big bang nor the evolutionary model could be correct. Not only did these hypotheses fail to adequately account for my personal existence as an intelligent ethical being, they failed even to answer the most basic questions about the physical universe.

Indeed, evolution answered nothing. Neither did its mother, the big bang. Both seemed little more than a comic book fairytale. I saw them as absurd, baseless, and fantastical hypotheses mired down by one conjecture upon another while conveniently overlooking the most important questions. Even as a tween I realized this feeble attempt to account for the universe had four glaring gaps: the beginning, the end, the origin of life, and especially the existence of intellectual and moral beings. For these questions begged to be answered: What existed before the universe, before time and space, and from where did the exploding mass come? What is beyond the galaxies in the infinite reaches of space? What comes after it all ends? And what of life, especially intelligent and ethical life? Somehow the primordial ooze and time, no matter how much time one can imagine, simply did not account for even one of these questions. Even before I understood the model of evolution was anything but scientific, I already knew it was not logical. Frankly, I was offended that my teachers expected me to believe such rubbish. And I was extremely disappointed in them for apparently believing it themselves. In time I learned that logic can never convince passion. Irrespective of one's education, without a proposed conscious intervention, one's passion transcends one's logic and reason. Consequently, somewhere along the way I developed a healthy indifference toward achievement awards, peer accolades, and academic credentials—including my own—for generally they are merely bestowed by those sharing similar passions, passions that all too often confuse their logical processes.

Case in point: Although accepted by some of the greatest minds in the world, could there be anything more irrational than the notion that untold billions of years ago—erupting as an enormously powerful fireball—out of nothing, a theretofore non-existent, dense, mass spontaneously emerged by its own theretofore, non-existent

energy, and from this chaos the defined fundamental forces of physics and the subatomic fundamental particles, which eventually organized themselves into a variety of atomic species, were spontaneously and immediately created; then of their own accord molecules formed; then a diverse assortment of inorganic matter which gravitationally assembled itself into this highly structured and precisely ordered universe?

Then, after several billions of years, from this inorganic matter a primitive biological life-form spontaneously emerged. Not only had this organic life-form been spawned from non-living inorganic previously non-existent matter that had sprang into existence from non-existence by its own non-existent energy, this newly formed primitive organism managed to survive on nutrients that, heretofore, were also non-existent.

After another three billion years or so this primitive organism mutated into a more complex multi-cellular life-form, which over the next one billion years grew even more complex spawning a variety of ever increasingly diverse and more complex species; some of which became animated, eventually splitting into two genders and achieving the capacity for selective reproduction. After countless changes the most advanced life-form developed the ability for critical thinking—the ability to reason and make inference. In time, this advanced life-form realized its own metaphysical reality beyond its mere physical existence. And at last the advanced critical-thinking being assumed a common ethic based upon its universal metaphysical sense of morality, singularly common to every family of its highly structured existence.

In the end, and of its own accord, the original state of a non-material reality had come full circle. From the non-existent and non-material reality before the erupting fireball, to the material reality of the universe, and then returning yet again to another non-material, though existent, metaphysical reality in the highly advanced being. Now perhaps I am still naïve, but somehow the very logic of this entire hypothesis seems non-existent; conceived, perhaps, somewhere in the process before the ability for critical thinking developed.

Regardless of the time frame, the statistical probability of such events occurring is absolute zero at every critical step. How can one calculate variables that do not exist? How does one calculate the

first obstacle, the probability of absolute nothing spontaneously generating a dense mass? One does not calculate zero variables; one imagines them as you would a fairytale. Likewise, the probability of lifeless matter spontaneously generating life, no matter the time frame, is zero. There are simply too many conditional demands for even the lowest life-form to emerge. One of many such conditions is the sequencing of amino acids. As the physical chemist, Dr. Johnathan Sarfati, explains: “Life requires catalysts which are specific for a single type of molecule. This requires *specific* amino acid sequences, which have extremely low probabilities (~10⁻⁶⁵⁰ for all the enzymes required).”⁵⁸ And that is but one of many requisite conditions of impossible contradicting scenarios that must be met to generate life from non-life. Another such difficulty is that “The alkaline conditions needed to form sugars are incompatible with acid conditions required to form polypeptides with condensing agents.” So too is the detail that certain requisite ‘building blocks’ are not formed; “ribose and cytosine are hard to form and are very unstable.”⁵⁹ The list of requisite conditions continues, but the point is that the probability of life spontaneously generating from non-life is essentially zero. For these and the many other conflicting conditions to be simultaneously reconciled by their own accord is beyond the realm of probability.

And for those insincere pretentious proponents who recognize these difficulties and wish to avoid them by only invoking the evolution paradigm to explain man’s existence once matter and life are accounted for; their obstacles are no less difficult; in that even if a primitive life-form miraculously emerged, the probability for a sustainable life-form is zero. Again Dr. Sarfati explains: “Biochemicals would react with each other or with inorganic chemicals. Sugars (and other carbonyl ... compounds) react destructively with amino acids (and other amino . . . compounds), but must be present for a cell to form.” Then too, “The atmosphere contained free oxygen, which would destroy organic compounds. . . ;” but “if there was no oxygen there would be no ozone, so ultraviolet light would destroy biochemicals.” Indeed,

⁵⁸ Johnathan Sarfati. 2007. “Loopholes in the Evolutionary Theory of the Origin of Life: Summary.” *Answers*. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4220.asp> (accessed August 11, 2007).

⁵⁹ Johnathan Sarfati, 1-3.

“All energy sources that produce the biochemicals destroy them even faster.”⁶⁰ Once again the list continues so that the sustainability probability of this supposed primitive life-form is essentially zero, thereby making even the notion of upward development a moot issue and relegating all such controversial arguments to the logical fallacy category of red herrings.

Finally, and just as difficult, is the probability of a self-structured purely physical life-form consisting of billions of beings that each possess an identical yet individual metaphysical cognizance, intellect, and conscience which intuitively adheres to a universal moral code. The probability is zero, no matter how many gradual upward mutated changes the physical life-form assumes. Just as non-existent matter spontaneously springing into existence by its own non-existent energy is incalculable due to the absence of viable variables, the probability of even one of these physical beings spontaneously generating these complex non-material metaphysical realities is non-existent, absolute zero; and the probability of billions of them developing and sustaining the same metaphysical realities is beyond absolute zero, no more probable than your favorite pet eventually resolving the issue of world peace.

The logical conclusion

I did not come from a religious home. There was a family Bible, an heirloom, somewhere in the house but the notion of God, especially a personal God, was not a part of our daily lives. Nevertheless, even as a tween, my contemplations concerning life and the heavens lead me to conclude that a Creator must exist. I did not know who, but logically and intuitively I knew it had to be so. The universe was created. Life was created. I was created. The logical order of cause and effect left no alternative. I reasoned that the complex nature of life and the universe was such that the agent of cause had to possess great intelligence. Such an elaborate design even to a fraction of this degree would require a superb imagination and precise engineering. It was too intricate, too exact, too ordered to be the haphazard outcome of a great explosion, no matter how magnificent or ancient we envisioned it. Of course, this realization raises the question of who then created us; but it also inferred there

⁶⁰ Johnathan Sarfati, 1-2.

were answers to those all-consuming questions of purpose: “Why are we here? And what is the meaning of life?”

A few years later I found those answers. I was introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which I accepted and follow to this day. It may sound prosaic, but it is the age-old story of a journey that millions upon millions have taken. I found that the Scriptural account of the universe seamlessly answered these questions. The mechanics are not explained but the concepts are there; everything is accounted for right down to the purpose of life. Years later I discovered whole societies of credentialed scientists who also found the Scriptural account flawless.^{61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66} It was only after reading their works that I learned of the horrendous and seemingly agenda-driven gaps in the fossil record as set forth by proponents of the evolution paradigm; and of the erroneous chronological representation of the geological strata; and the inaccurate interpretations of carbon dating methods; and of the neglect and even unwillingness to address certain paleontological and scientific findings that did not fit into the evolution scenario.^{67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72}

⁶¹ The Creation Research Society. 2007. <http://www.creationresearch.org> (accessed July 10, 2007).

⁶² Answers in Genesis. 2007. www.answersingenesis.org (accessed August 18, 2007).

⁶³ Institute for Creation Research Center. 2007. <http://www.icr.org> (accessed July 11, 2007).

⁶⁴ The Society for the Advancement of Creation Science. 2007. A Mississippi State University student organization. <http://www.msstate.edu/org/sacs> (accessed July 10, 2007).

⁶⁵ Northwest Creation Network. 2007. *The Creation News*. <http://www.nwcreation.net> (accessed July 11, 2007).

⁶⁶ American Scientific Affiliation. 2007. www.asa3.org (accessed July 21, 2007).

⁶⁷ Morris, Henry. 1974. *Scientific Creationism*. San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers.

⁶⁸ Duane Gish. 1980. *Fossils: Key to the Present*. Green Forest, AR: Master Books.

⁶⁹ Duane Gish. 1972. *Speculations and Experiments Related to Theories on the Origin of Life: A Critique*. Santee, CA: Institute for Creation Research.

⁷⁰ John C Whitcomb and Henry M Morris. 1981. *The Genesis Flood: The biblical record and its scientific implication*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

⁷¹ Georgia Purdom. 2007. “Origins of Life: A Simple Approach?” Answers. www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v1/n1/origins-of-life-simple-approach (accessed August 11, 2007), 1-4.

But even so, all of these issues are merely red herrings, specifically designed to remove the attention from the truly critical issues: the self-generated spontaneous *ex nihilo* origin of matter; the spontaneous generation of organic life from inorganic non-life; and the advent of man's intelligent, passionate, and moral metaphysical reality from mere physical matter.

Not only had my questions been answered but a very real interpersonal yet metaphysical relationship ensued with my Creator, a relationship that is beyond mere explanation. It is not something I could or should expect the nonbeliever to understand. Indeed, this personal relationship with God simply is not something the unbeliever can understand anymore than an animal can appreciate a fine gem. As Jesus said, do not cast your pearls before the swine.⁷³ This is not meant to denigrate the unbeliever, but to illustrate the uselessness of presenting certain truths to those without the capacity to receive them. First man must believe in God before a relationship with God is possible.

An apropos statement by the Scottish anthropologist, Sir Arthur Keith, seems to epitomize the unbeliever's mindset and succinctly illustrates the lesson I learned long ago concerning logic versus passion. He confessed: "Evolution is unproved and unprovable. We believe it because the only alternative is special creation, and that is unthinkable."⁷⁴ Similarly, D.M.S. Watson, the famed Professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy at the University College of London from 1921 to 1951, a man who held the prestigious Chair of Evolution and was even awarded the Darwin Medal, conceded that "evolution itself is accepted by zoologists, not because it has been observed to occur or can be proven by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is incredible."⁷⁵ I recall many years

⁷² Johnathan Sarfati, 1-3.

⁷³ Matthew 7:6.

⁷⁴ W.A. Criswell. 1972. *Did Man Just Happen?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p.73. (As quoted by Bert Thompson, Ph.D. *Evolution as a Threat to the Christian Home*. p. 8. Apologetics Press, Inc., Montgomery, AL. <<http://www.apologeticspress.org/rr/reprints/Evolution-as-a-Threat-to-the.pdf>> (July 20, 2007).

⁷⁵ D.M.S. Watson. 1929. "Adaptation." *Nature*, 123:333. (As quoted by Bert Thompson, Ph.D. *Evolution as a Threat to the Christian Home*. Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, Inc., p. 8. .

ago reading a similar statement by one of the famed Huxleys (Julian, Aldous, or their grandfather Thomas). I paraphrase, of course, but his confession read something like: ‘The concept of evolution is convenient; but what else do I have? I refuse to believe in God.’

Apparently fanatical egotists never change. Long ago the psalmist noted, “the fool has said in his heart, there is no God.”⁷⁶ Neither do their foolish actions change. Even before the psalmist, the antediluvians exhibited this same egocentric stupidity by, “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, . . . who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.”⁷⁷

Of course, as a tween I did not know these biblical passages, nor had I read the statements of Keith, Watson or Huxley; but like them I did know the notion of evolution was, at the very least, imprudent. Unlike them I did not close my mind to potentially offensive answers.

Blind faith

Those, like Keith, Watson, and the Huxley dynasty, who are unwilling to submit to an intelligent Creator, opting rather to embrace absurd and unwarranted belief systems are the ultimate examples of utter blind faith. With absolutely no evidence other than one stubborn conjecture or hypothesis built upon another, and in the face of pure logic, and despite finding after finding that disproves even the possibility of such a paradigm, still they cling to the notion of evolution as if it were fact. If anything could ever illustrate the conundrum, blind faith, this is it; for it is an illogical belief fueled by passion. In this case, it is a passionate hatred for even the concept of a Supreme Being, a personal Creator to whom they must answer. And this passion is generally evidenced by their vitriol and ad hominem abuse of those scientists who disagree with their illogical passionate hypothesis.

Actually, there is no such thing as blind faith; it is a euphemism for wishful thinking, or even unrealistic thinking that is contrary to reality. The very concept of faith infers confirmation. By definition

<<http://www.apologeticspress.org/rr/reprints/Evolution-as-a-Threat-to-the.pdf>> (July 20, 2007).

⁷⁶ King James Bible. Pss 14:1.

⁷⁷ King James Bible. Romans 1:22-23.

faith is an evidence-based system that holds to a particular view because it is substantiated by data. We generally use three concepts (trust, belief and faith) to translate the original Greek πίστις (*pistis*)⁷⁸; but the definition is not left to our imaginations. Pistis “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”^{79, 80}

According to this biblical definition, science is a faith-based system. For it is a system often governed by “the evidence of things not seen.” Indeed, this is an essential *modus operandi* in science. Without ever having directly observed them, science believes in many concepts and systems at the subatomic, the super-galactic, and even the macroscopic natural level of life. Black holes, certain astronomical objects, the chemical composition of celestial bodies, the recent evidence that water once existed on the surface of Mars and many other topics are unobserved beliefs that are held due to certain data sets that infer their reality: “the evidence of things not seen.” Even gravity and the earth’s magnetic poles fit the description. We cannot directly observe either nor even thoroughly explain them; but we can see and measure their effect and we believe they exist.

Because predictable outcomes are observed in a particular concept, physical body, or system, scientists believe that particular concept, physical body, or system exists. By definition these are faith-based beliefs; the precise implementation of the biblical concept of faith: “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Although modern scientists clearly come to certain conclusions based solely on “the evidence of things not seen,” I find it curious, if not amusing, that many refuse to address the faith-based aspect of their work even as they pretentiously pride themselves on accepting only those things that can be duplicated and proven in a laboratory setting. It is for this ostensible reason (the inability to reduplicate in a laboratory setting) that many scientist dismiss or even blatantly deny the possibility of metaphysical realities. Yet strangely, they find no problem with their adamant, even passionate, adherence to

⁷⁸ Harold K Moulton. 1978. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan..

⁷⁹ Kurt Alund, et al. 1963. *The Greek New Testament*. 3rd edition. West Germany: United Bible Societies.

⁸⁰ Hebrews 11.1.

the completely un-testable (not to mention illogical) notion of evolution. This is beyond pretentious; it is nothing less than disingenuous.

Using the same sound logic a true scientist uses when trusting the inferences of his data set, those not offended by the inferences of this data set (the universe) have concluded that it is an amazingly imaginative and ordered structure; and given its intricate and precise nature, from the macro super-galactic level down to the subatomic quantum level, and then topping it off with the inexplicable mystery of life itself, an intelligent Creator is the only logical and plausible cause. Therefore an intelligent Creator exists. God exists. The precisely ordered universe and the astounding physical and metaphysical life it contains are the evidence. This is not only the conclusion of the simple observer but of hundreds of well qualified scientists from numerous scientific disciplines.^{81, 82}

Logic versus passion

How intelligent individuals can correctly deduce from a few flint arrowheads or awls, or stone hammers, or shards of pottery that intelligent life was resident, but cannot discern the requisite imagination and intricate precision of the universe as evidence of intelligence is dumbfounding. For them to conclude that it developed by its own accord is beyond puzzling, it is illogical—clearly the result of ideology and passion rather than logic.

This passion was clearly exhibited by the famed Huxley brothers; Julian, the revered scientist and Aldous, a well-known intellect and social commentator. When placed against the backdrop of his brother Julian's comments that, "Darwinism removed the whole idea of God as the creator of organisms from the sphere of rational discussion,"⁸³ Aldous' confession as to why he

⁸¹ Answers in Genesis. www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/bios (accessed July 19, 2007).

⁸² Lee Strobel. 2004. *The Case for the Creator*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 31-32.

⁸³ Julian Huxley. 1960. "At Random: A Television Preview," *Issues in Evolution*, ed. Sol Tax. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 41. (As quoted by Bert Thompson, Ph.D. 2007. *Evolution as a Threat to the Christian Home*. Apologetics Press, Inc., Montgomery, AL: p. 8. <http://www.apologeticspress.org/tr/reprints/Evolution-as-a-Threat-to-the.pdf>

proclaimed atheism and evolution with such enthusiasm is easily understood. For if there is no personal Creator to whom man must answer then there is no such thing as absolute morality. Thus, Aldous explained:

I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning: consequently, assuming it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find reasons for this assumption. . . . The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do. . . . For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economical system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.⁸⁴

Another example of passion versus logic is evidenced by the British biologist, Professor Richard Dawkins, whose ardent promotion of evolution has inspired the title “Darwin’s Rottweiler,” a nickname no doubt spawned from his philosophical predecessor, the famed zealot, Thomas Huxley, who was dubbed “Darwin’s bulldog.” Attempting to refute the notion of complex design, Dr. Dawkins concedes that if creationists are correct about the irreducible complexity of the universe it wrecks Darwin’s theory; and he freely concedes that “Darwin himself said as much.”⁸⁵

Of course, he couches this in terms that shift the burden of proof to the opposition: “if genuinely irreducible complexity could be properly demonstrated, it would wreck Darwin’s theory.”⁸⁶ This is the classical error in logic called the “Appeal to Ignorance,” a fallacy that makes a claim and then challenges the opponent to

(accessed July 20, 2007).

⁸⁴ Aldous Huxley. 1966. “Confessions of a Professed Atheist,” *Report: Perspective on the News*. 3:19. (As quoted by Bert Thompson, Ph.D. 2007. *Evolution as a Threat to the Christian Home*. Apologetics Press, Inc., Montgomery, AL. p. 8. <http://www.apologeticspress.org/rr/reprints/Evolution-as-a-Threat-to-the.pdf> (accessed July 20, 2007).

⁸⁵ Richard Dawkins. 2006. *The God Delusion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 125.

⁸⁶ Dawkins, Richard, 125.

disprove it. There currently exist a number of people who believe the Great Pyramids of Egypt were built by aliens to serve as navigational devices. An outlandish claim to be sure, but actually no more unwarranted than is Darwin's evolution. One could argue their evidence and reasoning is as solid as that of Darwinism. What if a group of archeologists were to take up this hypothesis and say, "Because some ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs seem to speak of bright lights and beings from the sky who taught technology, and because some of the giant stones, perfectly placed hundreds of feet high, weigh as much as twenty tons; we have concluded that the Great Pyramids of Egypt were constructed by aliens; and unless this can be proved incorrect we shall accept it as fact." No one in their right mind would take them seriously. Yet this is exactly what Darwin's proponents have done. From very sparse, selective and controversial evidence at best, they have set forth the argument of a non-complex universe in which simple life-forms slowly evolved into more advanced life-forms; and they expect it to be accepted as fact unless it can be proven wrong.

Logically, it is up to Darwinism to prove its case, which of course it has never done. Indeed, the one million dollar prize still lies unclaimed, which is offered to anyone who can propose even "a highly plausible *mechanism* for the spontaneous rise of *genetic* instructions in nature sufficient to give rise to life." The only stipulations are that "the explanation must be consistent with empirical biochemical, kinetic, and thermodynamic concepts . . . and be published in a well-respected peer-review science journal(s)."⁸⁷ I dare say, shifting the burden of proof to the opponents, especially in this case, is illogical and disingenuous.

But Dr. Dawkins' concession to the inference of irreducible complexity is mere rhetoric; for he salvages Darwinism and himself by simply refusing to accept that genuinely irreducible complexity has been properly demonstrated. Of course he conveniently ignores the hundreds of well qualified scientists from numerous disciplines who accept such complexity and openly acknowledge their disagreement with the non-complex evolution paradigm. Lee Strobel recently referenced some of these scientists in his book *A Case for the Creator*.

⁸⁷ The Origin-of-Life Prize. 2007. www.lifeorigin.info (accessed July 18, 2007).

After spokespersons for the Public Broadcasting System's seven part television series *Evolution* asserted that 'all known scientific evidence supports [Darwinian] evolution' as does 'virtually every reputable scientist in the world,' these professors, laboratory researchers, and other scientists published a two-page advertisement in a national magazine under the banner: 'A Scientific Dissent From Darwinism.' Their statement was direct and defiant. 'We are skeptical of the claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life.'⁸⁸

.....
 There were hundreds of them—biologists, chemists, zoologists, physicists, anthropologists, molecular and cell biologists, bioengineers, organic chemists, geologists, astrophysicists, and other scientists. Their doctorates came from such prestigious universities as Cambridge, Stanford, Cornell, Yale, Rutgers, Chicago, Princeton, Purdue, Duke, Michigan, Syracuse, Temple, and Berkley.

They included professors from Yale Graduate School, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Tulane, Rice, Emory, George Mason, Lehigh, and the Universities of California, Washington, Ohio, Colorado, Nebraska, Mississippi, Iowa, Georgia, New Mexico, Utah, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere.⁸⁹

Dawkins also ignores the conclusions of the hundreds of current scientists who not only adhere to creationism based upon their specific scientific disciplines, but embrace the concepts of a young earth and the six days of creation as recorded in Genesis.⁹⁰

While the evidence of genuinely irreducible complexity may not be sufficient for an impassioned Darwinian zealot, nor even the passive disciple, for those scientists willing to handle the data-set with unbiased and open minds it is more than sufficient, it is undeniable—so much so they are willing to stake their careers and reputations on it. And in the ardent world of academic science

⁸⁸ Lee Strobel, 31-32.

⁸⁹ Lee Strobel, 31.

⁹⁰ Answers in Genesis.

where the iconic ideals of the big bang and evolution rule the roost, this is no small matter.

Dr. Dawkins concludes his comments on irreducible complexity with a nonsensical comment that showcases not only his passion but his illogical thought process. He reasoned; “In any case, even though genuinely irreducible complexity would wreck Darwin’s theory if it were ever found, who is to say that it wouldn’t wreck the intelligent design theory as well? Indeed, it already *has* wrecked the intelligent design theory for, . . . however little we know about God, the one thing we can be sure of is that he would have to be very complex and presumably irreducibly so!”⁹¹

While exposing the “balancing-the-fence” approach of those proponents of intelligent design who are not willing to take the next logical step—that of stating their belief in an intellectual, supreme and personal Creator—the comment does nothing to support Dawkins’ position; for as he makes clear, even he realizes that an incredibly complex Creator is the obvious inference. Rather, this surprising remark simultaneously commits an error in logic and an error in debate. The logical error is a bizarre fallacy of induction in which he draws the conclusion based upon the unstated assumption that creationism is false. The argument intelligent design makes is that the design of this extremely complex and highly structured universe is such that it required extreme intelligence. To which Dawkins counters that if this is correct and the universe is of such complexity, then intelligent design itself is wrong for it would have taken an irreducible complex intelligence, which is exactly the position of the creationists. As best as I can tell his logic is as follows:

Irreducible complexity is not Darwinism.
 Irreducible complexity is intelligent design.
 Intelligent design demands a complex Creator.
 A complex Creator is creationism.
 Therefore, intelligent design is false.

The logical conclusion is not that intelligent design is false but that intelligent design infers creationism. Because some proponents of intelligent design have not openly stated the obvious does not make the argument for intelligent design any less true.

⁹¹ Richard Dawkins, 125.

In the same comment he also commits an error in his debate as he apparently makes a Freudian slip by conceding the very point he is attempting to argue against—that of irreducible complexity. Although he insists that irreducible complexity has not been demonstrated, he argues that if it were demonstrated it is so complex that God “would have to be very complex and presumably irreducibly so!” Again his logic seems thus: Irreducible complexity is not demonstrated.

If irreducible complexity is demonstrated, God would have to be irreducibly complex [presumably implying the extreme complex nature of creation].

I am still scratching my head. In his hypothesis, complexity goes from being non-existent to extremely complex based merely on an observed demonstration; for nothing of the structure has changed, only the observer’s perception. It has occurred to me several times through the year that trying to defend such indefensible positions as the big bang and evolution is like being caught in a web of lies; every time the subject is broached yet another inconsistency is exposed.

Instead of imperiously and arrogantly dismissing their peers who have logically arrived at intelligent design, perhaps popular science would be better served if the prejudiced impassioned zealots who stand for almost anything against the notion of a personal Creator would revisit the issue of logic versus passion as it relates to their “scientific” research. Certainly their personal interests would be better served. Because the universe and the life it contains are such strong witnesses to the reality of a Creator, the Apostle Paul specifically addressed those who reject this evidence.

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shown it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.⁹²

Opening the door to new truths

Once we accept the reality that God created our immediate physical universe, encasing it in time and space by simply saying it

⁹² Ro 1:19-20

was so, certain truths are immediately apparent. The inferences to be drawn from these few concepts are enormous, for God, for man, and for the universe. God created the light and called it day and the darkness He called night. He created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. And God created man, both male and female, in His own image: individual souls, persons with the ability to think, to experience emotion, to make inference, to enjoy humor, to will, and all the other metaphysical mysteries of personhood.⁹³

That God created our physical universe infers that He is other than and superior to our immediate physical reality. Being the Creator of, and thus other than and outside of, our limited time-space continuum necessarily infers God's infinite eternal being, while simultaneously inferring the finite nature of His creation. We can no more fully comprehend God's infinite eternal nature than we can comprehend the notions of eternity or of space as it stretches past more than 100 billion galaxies into a vast infinity. Such concepts boggle the mind; but the idea of their not existing is completely illogical, for how would they end or how could they even have begun? Something would have to be on the other side of the end or beginning.

A substantial difference between the metaphysical concepts of infinity or eternity versus the metaphysical concept of God is that infinity and eternity are merely dimensional, whereas God is living, God is spirit, God is the ultimate personal intellect. By definition, infinity and eternity logically must exist for the very nature of the physical universe demands it. Time demands eternity; space demands infinity. So too, God logically must exist for the very nature of the reality of life demands it; both physical and metaphysical life demand it. And the highly-structured, precisely-ordered material universe demands it. And finally, even the concepts of eternity and infinity demand a Creator, for ultimately, they find their very state of being in God who transcends both and simply is.

Thus, to ask the question, "Where did God come from?" is like asking, "Where did eternity come from?" or "Where did infinity come from?" This is the logical fallacy of begging the question; for it assumes eternity, infinity or even God came from somewhere. God did not come from somewhere. God is.

⁹³ Genesis 1.

That God created our physical universe also infers His omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience—attributes that transcend our limited and immediate four dimensional physical reality. God’s omnipotence is exhibited by His ability to bring all things into existence. His omnipresence is necessary in that all of creation exists merely within His consciousness. Literally, we exist in the mind of God. And His omniscience is understood in that while we are encased in time and space so that events appear linear in nature; He is eternal, not limited to time or space. The linear nature of time is our reality or our limitation if you prefer, not His. To Him all of creation, including time, is but a punctiliar thought to which He knows all. What we perceive as a linear passage of time with the historical versus the future and even the beginning from the eventual end of the universe, is but a punctiliar zero-dimensional event to Him. Similar, perhaps (in a limited way for this analogy cannot be pushed too far), to an author’s book. The author knows the story intimately: the plot, the characters, the ending. To the author it is an event, but to the characters in the book, or to those reading the book for the first time, there is an apparent linear time frame.

If then all of creation, all beings, the entire universe and the laws that it follows exist simply because God, the ultimate reality, spoke it into existence, we then have within our grasp the necessary information to answer the questions of our reality and to reconcile the material with the metaphysical. Jesus testified that “*God is Spirit.*”⁹⁴ Although God is the only eternal Spirit, He is not the only spirit, for Scripture tells us He created other spirits. So then at the metaphysical level, for both the Creator and the created, spirit is reality.

As noted earlier, scientists have concluded that the subatomic level of energy consists mostly of empty space with very tiny interactions of electromagnetic energy and information, all of which is mysteriously held together by an indefinite nuclear force. But Scripture identifies this mysterious binding force. It is the direct action of God Himself. Paul explained, “*by Him all things consist.*”⁹⁵ In the original language this term, συνέστηκεν (*sunesteeken*)

⁹⁴ John 4:24.

⁹⁵ Colossians. 1:17.

“sunstone,”⁹⁶ means “to place together, to stand together, to hold together, to cohere. He is the principle of cohesion in the universe. . . . God Himself is the unifying band which encompasses everything and holds it together. This applies not only to the largest things of the universe, but also to the smallest things of the universe”⁹⁷

So then, God is not only the source of light, and energy, and the very existence of the universe,⁹⁸ He is also the mysterious agent of quantum nuclear forces that bind the subatomic world together. Therefore, and for lack of a better or even more appropriate description, our immediate physical reality is basically the multidimensional hologram of God’s intent, consisting of empty space, electromagnetic energy, and information. God simply said it was so and it was so. Thus, even the reality of our physical universe finds its foundation in spirit . . . the Spirit of God. This hologram concept once again brings to mind the image of open and closed vibrating strings of subatomic electromagnetic energy and information interlocked in various multi-dimensional mathematical computations to form complex structures in binary code, not unlike computer software or complex electric circuitry; but here God is both the programmer and the source of power.

From here we might see how these two worlds (our material and our metaphysical) meet at the subatomic level where electromagnetic energy and information is mysteriously entangled with the reality of spirit. It is this non-local entanglement at the quantum level between the electromagnetic energy and information, and the Spirit of God that gives life to the hologram. And it is a similar entanglement at this quantum level between the electromagnetic energy and information and the spirit of certain created beings that brings animated life to their bodies. With the boundaries set, comprising both the physical and the metaphysical laws of the universe, this hologram becomes the medium in which man interacts with his fellow man, with creation, and with his Creator.

⁹⁶ Alund, Kurt, et al. 1983. *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd edition. West Germany: United Bible Societies, 694.

⁹⁷ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers. 1980. *A Linguistic Key to The Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 768.

⁹⁸ Genesis 1.

For man there is yet another aspect to reality. Created in God's image, like God, man possesses all the mysterious properties of person. This dimension of reality is shared by no other beings but God and man. God breathed into man's nostrils and man became a living soul.⁹⁹ From our temporal perspective a certain entanglement exists between the spirit and soul so that it is difficult to differentiate between the two; there is nevertheless a distinction. While the individual's spirit provides the life giving energy, the individual's soul is who he or she is. The unique nature of the human soul defines us as persons; it is this that makes us like God.

That other lesser souls may exist cannot be ruled out. Certainly other beings possess select aspects of what we generally consider personality. Many animals communicate; some show emotion; others exercise resourcefulness; some have limited reasoning capabilities; and angelic beings have the ability for self-determination. However, none but God and man possess all the complex attributes that define person: to feel emotion, to will, to create, to understand humor, to reason and make inference, to communicate, to love and hate, and all the other mysteries of personhood.

Our material reality is but a holographic concept to the eternal Creator who merely spoke it into existence. He is both the source of its energy and its continued existence as His Spirit interacts with creation in an entangled nature via non-local realism at the subatomic level. Created in God's image, man's individual metaphysical cognizance is the resultant product of his individual spirit and soul which interact with his individual physical body in a similar, but less pervasive, entangled nature at the subatomic level. This entanglement also takes place for other animated beings having lesser degrees of consciousness.

Put succinctly, the unification theory for the reconciliation of corporal physical matter and metaphysical cognizance is as such: Man's individual metaphysical reality, comprised of his spirit and soul, interacts with his corporeal being in an entangled nature via non-local realism at the subatomic level.

⁹⁹ Genesis 2:7.

Further implications for this reality

That God created man in His image and placed him in this environment makes additional inferences. Being created in God's image man, is necessarily endowed with certain, albeit limited, abilities to interact with and manipulate his environment. Both historical-biblical accounts and the concepts of quantum physics make the manipulation of our immediate physical environmental possible, at least to some degree.

In the mysterious world of quantum mechanics this manipulation comes at the subatomic level in the form of both the observer effect and the effects of nonlocality. At the level of daily life, it is evident from both historical-biblical accounts and certain current events, that man has an ability, at least to some degree, to change the physical environment via metaphysical means. By combining what we know about quantum physics and what we know about human ability, such changes to the environment can be easily explained.

There is an intimate relationship between God's intent and creation; God spoke and it was so. Literally, the whole of creation is the thought of God, the electromagnetically charged holographic presentation (so to speak) of his intent. Because man is created in God's image, it follows that man's intent also possess a certain potential, so that an intimate relationship also exists between man's intent and creation. To a lesser degree, of course, in that man is merely in God's likeness not his equal, man has the potential, by his intent, to influence his physical environment as his soul and spirit interface with the subatomic world at the level of energy.

Such potential on man's part is not only logical it is discussed and demonstrated in Scripture. Although all power ultimately finds its source in God, it is clear that man by his very nature (aside from being righteous or unrighteous) has the potential to access this power to cause change in his environment. This generally untapped God-given and God-like ability explains many things. Of course, it explains biblical miracles. To this regard many prophets performed numerous miracles, and Jesus and the disciples healed and fed the people. Jesus informed his disciples that with even the slightest degree of "pistis" (faith, belief or trust) they could tell a mountain to go hence and it would go, or tell a tree to be plucked up and cast into the sea and it would obey. "Nothing," he said, "is

impossible.”¹⁰⁰ In this scenario, man causes change to his environment by an entangled union between his intent to cause change and his belief that it will take place.

This human potential also answers such events as the Egyptian magicians’, Jannes and Jambres, ability to duplicate Moses’ miracle of turning Aaron’s staff into a serpent. Of course, man’s ability is no match for God’s. This was aptly illustrated when Aaron’s serpent quickly consumed those of the magicians’.¹⁰¹ But that man could even duplicate the miracle was quite impressive; that is, as far as giving insight into the human potential. Likewise, it could explain how shaman and other secular healers are able to perform their miracles. It could also explain how certain individuals are telekinetic, or able to levitate objects, or bend spoons, or even remotely view particular events—something for which even our government once devoted an entire department. And such abilities could even answer the mysteries of the great pyramids, Stonehenge, or the Coral Castle.

Although Christians have historically discounted such activities as demon power, this is not necessarily so. Certainly demon power can and does account for various supernatural events such as poltergeists, medium activity, and fortune telling; but it does not necessarily hold true that all supernatural activities (be they good or evil) are resultant to direct intervention from supernatural beings. Indeed, in that man is created in the image of God (while neither Satan, his minions, nor even holy angels are), it follows that man is endowed with certain abilities that neither angelic nor demonic beings possess. Thus we might conclude that demons, and even Satan, are more powerful when their spirits enter into and possess a human body, thereby gaining access to the unique powers that only God and man (albeit to a limited degree) possess. Witchcraft or sorcery would be an example of this bastardization of the human potential. Enlightened as to this human ability and influenced by and empowered with certain other demonic abilities, the sorcerer maliciously manipulates the environment. Such was the case with the Egyptian magicians who accessed their powers via enchantments.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 17:20; Luke. 17:6.

¹⁰¹ Exodus 7:8-12.

The oft-spoken of antichrist will possess such powers. Scripture tells us that Jesus will soon return to earth; but before he returns a world leader will emerge making many promises and swaying the masses with his brilliance and supernatural prowess. He is the antichrist. Drawing upon Satan's power, he will have great knowledge and the ability to perform signs and wonders. But he will be a deceiver and will ultimately wreak havoc. While it is generally assumed that Satan grants all these powers to this antichrist, it might be more accurate to understand that an entanglement of dynamics is occurring in which Satan grants certain aspects, such as riches and the ability to foresee the future, and to perform lying wonders and the power to rule the world (for the world is currently in his control), but Satan merely awakens certain other human abilities within this man that he might use them for evil—abilities that Satan himself does not possess, such as manipulating the environment and generating spontaneous healing.

The question on everyone's mind

Having considered both our physical and metaphysical reality it would be remiss to ignore the all-consuming question as to the meaning of life. Our temporal physical universe is more than a mere playground for God's entertainment, or even a stage for Him to direct the play of the ages. Here, man interacts with both the physical and the spiritual realms, exercising his freewill and his ability for self-determination. And most importantly, the universe with its physical laws and limitations in time and space is the medium in which God placed us with the specific intent of allowing us to participate in His ultimate act of love—His personal sacrifice for those whom He created after His own image.

Creating man in His own image necessitated that man be granted freewill. The very nature of freewill infers the possibility for disobedience and rebellion. Without this option there could never be true freewill. So then, by allowing man (and in another venue, certain angelic beings) to exercise freewill and self-determination God, by definition, allowed the possibility for evil to materialize. This was the objective of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. God gave man one straightforward and undemanding commandment: Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil, for if you do you shall surely die.¹⁰² The tree itself had no natural or supernatural power over man by which it could cause his death; it was man's simple single act of disobedience that brought about the abysmal outcome.

By disobeying this simple commandment Adam acquired first-hand experiential knowledge of sin. There was no retreat, no reversal of this rebellion—this knowledge of evil. He had sold himself and his seed into the bondage of sin. Man and certain rebellious angelic beings in the other venue are therefore the responsible agents of sin and for the misery it breeds. Through it all God not only remains righteous, but shows mercy to those whom He created in His own image.

In the end man's failure highlights God's great love for His creation. In His omniscience, which infers foreknowledge, we must realize that God knew the eventual outcome. He knew man would disobey, thereby severing communication with Himself. And He knew the great price He Himself would have to pay. He knew the only cure for this severed relationship would require a great personal sacrifice on His part.

With God and man's fellowship severed, the age long battle for man's soul began. No effort on our part, no degree of goodness no matter how pious and spiritual it may be, can bridge this great gulf. Sinful man cannot have, nor does he truly desire, honest fellowship with the righteous God. Nor can God fellowship with sin; and in Adam every man and woman is born into sin. Sin is part of our nature. Theologians call it total depravity and every two-year-old is proof of it. Rebellion is in their nature; no one has to teach it to them.

Throughout the ages man has proven time and again that he cannot rectify this great divide between God and man. His effort to do so is the impetus for every world religion. But try as he might, man could not and cannot make himself righteous in the eyes of God. Then a truly amazing event took place. Out of love the Creator entered into His creation to experience it in an intimate way. Born of a human mother by miraculous intervention, the second person of the triune Godhead became a man and dwelt among us. He subjected himself to the laws and limitations of the

¹⁰² Genesis 2:17.

physical universe, and to the moral and ethical trials man faces. Scripture tells us the angels watched in amazement at this, seemingly unable to comprehend how the omnipotent Creator veiled Himself and took on a form lower than themselves. It was a demonstration of love such as even they had never witnessed.

Unlike his fellow man, Jesus remained righteous in the eyes of God. Having a human mother he was truly the son of man, and having God as his father he was truly the son of God, thereby simultaneously possessing two natures, that of God and of man. As such, Jesus was free from the bondage of sin which has passed down from Adam. Having this freedom from the sinful nature he overcame temptation and became the only man to live a sin-free life and thus the only man not exiled from God's fellowship.

Nor was Jesus subject to the death penalty, which is the sentence for all sinners. Nevertheless, out of love for his fellow man, though not being himself subject to death, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice, a propitiation for man's sin. In so doing he voluntarily took upon himself the punishment for the sins of the world. And of even greater consequence, by becoming sin for us He was forsaken by and separated from the Father for a time; all this that we might be saved and restored to God's fellowship. When He resurrected to life three days later, He had conquered sin and death; thereby opening the door for man to enter God's presence and to restore the lost fellowship. It is for this reason that Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life. No man, He said, comes to the Father but through him. All who try to access the Father but through Jesus are robbers, thieves attempting to possess that which is not theirs.¹⁰³

Alas, man's rebellion served yet another purpose. The selfless redemptive act on God's part would never have been possible had man not rebelled, in which case we would have known nothing about certain attributes of God. We would know nothing of God's justice, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and sacrificial love; even the idea of God's being good would have no meaning.

Yet despite God's gracious offer of redemption as a free gift granted merely for the asking, man's sinful nature interferes. With a heart full of pride man prefers to attempt to prove his own self-

¹⁰³ John 14:6; 10:1.

righteousness rather than to admit his failure and submit to his Creator. Thus, secular humanism and the world's religions continue to thrive. For unlike the Judeo-Christian faith, this one thing they all have in common: every world religion and secular belief system believes man, in one way or another, has the capacity for self-improvement, self-superiority, self-salvation. Call it what you may, be it physical, spiritual, or both, the notion is that man has the capacity for self-redemption. It is for this reason that every world religion and secular belief system is so offended by the Judeo-Christian faith. Indeed, this is the only belief system in the history of man to understand that man's only hope lies in the mercy of his Creator, and that (other than receiving God's mercy) man can do nothing of his own volition to improve his standing with God.

What then is the answer to this question that nearly everyone asks at some point in life: What is the meaning of life? It is simple: man is to obey and glorify God his Creator.¹⁰⁴ Scripture tells us it is man's duty to fear God and to keep His commandments; and He has commanded all men everywhere to repent—to receive His mercy as a free gift, which He has made possible through the redemptive work of his son, Jesus Christ.^{105, 106} But this is a daunting, even offensive, concept for the proud of heart who envision this as nothing short of a dismal existence.

Conclusion

God is eternal. God is Spirit. Spirit is life. Spirit is the ultimate reality for both the metaphysical and the physical. God exists aside from our temporal, material paradigm, of which He is the light, the ultimate source of energy. The physical universe and all that is in it, including time, is the manifestation of the thoughts of God. He spoke and it was so, so that our physical universe is essentially an electromagnetically charged holographic image empowered by the Spirit of God. Here there exists a certain entanglement between the quantum state and the Spirit of God. Even beyond His empowerment of the infinitesimal electromagnetic charges and the

¹⁰⁴ 1Corinthians 9:13.

¹⁰⁵ Ecclesiastes 12:13.

¹⁰⁶ Ac 17:30.

nuclear forces that bind all things together, this entanglement brings life in all its forms to the universe.

Similar to the entanglement that exists at the subatomic level whereby the Spirit of God energizes the universe, the spirit of every conscious being brings animation to its physical existence. Man is such a being. Indeed, man is the foremost of these beings, created as a living soul in the image of God Himself with every attribute of personhood. Placed in this temporal, physical paradigm, we, God's greatest and most beloved creation, are being tested even as God demonstrates His unfailing love for us.

Our physical bodies are but temporal vessels in which our individual spirits and souls are currently residing. Because our ultimate reality is spirit in nature, both sin and righteousness are spiritual in nature. The physical manifestation of either is just that: the physical manifestation of the true reality—the reality of spirit and its intent; *“for as a man thinks in his heart, so he is.”*¹⁰⁷ For this reason Jesus explained that it is not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him but what comes out.¹⁰⁸ And He warned that a man who looks on a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.¹⁰⁹ The intent of the heart is at the root of one's actions, be they good or evil. Therefore, it is also for this reason that true worship is done in spirit not by pomp or rituals. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth.¹¹⁰

When this present temporal reality—this holographic medium—comes to an end, time will be no more. The physical universe as we currently know it will be no more; yet we shall live. The spirit and soul of every man and woman will find itself suddenly in the reality of eternity, standing face to face with its Creator. Many will not be there; indeed, only those who submitted to His authority and received the forgiveness He provided through the sacrificial work of His Son. All others will find they are personally required to pay the unspeakable penalty. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

¹⁰⁷ Proverbs 23:7.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 15:11.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 5:27-29.

¹¹⁰ Matthew 5:27-29.

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