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FAITH FOR ALL OF LIFE FAITH FOR ALL OF LIFE FAITH FOR ALL OF LIFE



Christian

Continuity:

TRADITIONAL
PROGRESSIVES

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The Use of Scriptures in the Reformed Faith

P. Andrew Sandlin on

Continuity and Change

Mark R. Rushdoony on

Whence Freedom?

John M. Frame on

Traditionalism and Sola Scriptura

Steve M. Schlissel on

Regaining Covenant Consciousness

Paul Berghaus on

The Prayer of Jabez : A Review

and more!



A Monthly Report Dealing with the Relationship of Christian Faith to the World

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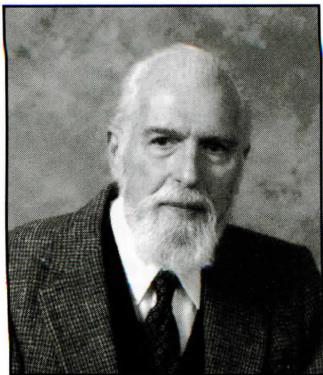
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The Use of Scriptures in the Reformed Faith

By Rev. R. J. Rushdoony

(Originally given as a lecture at Reformation Bible Conference, Sacramento Covenant Reformed Church, March 5, 1983)

Calvinists to a degree resemble other branches of Christianity in that they affirm the Trinity, salvation by Christ's atoning grace, creation by God, and much, much more. The distinctive aspects of the Reformed faith all stem from the doctrine of Scriptures. The Reformed faith is by no means alone in affirming infallibility and inerrancy; such a view is common to other theologies as well. Calvinism, however, gives to Scripture a priority lacking in other theological systems.

In the Westminster Standards, we have the full development of the Reformed faith. In recent years, some have sought to separate those standards from Calvin and to insist on a marked difference. Such contentions were shown to be false by Paul Helen¹. The Westminster Standards give us in summary form the essentials of the Reformed faith, and their view of Scripture is of interest to us.

Because our view of God and our faith is dependent on the Bible, the Bible has a necessary priority. The truth of a faith is governed by and depends upon its foundation. If that foundation is a religious experience, then the faith is a private revelation; moreover, given man's fallen and frail nature, man's experiences are at best a dubious standard. The same

is true of man's reason. Paul in Romans 1:18ff. makes clear that all men know the truth of God, because it is written in all their being. Men, however, "hold" that truth in unrighteousness (*i.e.*, they suppress it because they are unjust and in sin). The redeemed give voice to that truth, but, not being perfectly sanctified in this life, cannot give other than a faulty and sin-conditioned witness to it. The same is true of tradition; there is often more to tradition than some will allow, but tradition is transmitted by and filtered through sinful men, and hence, it reflects man's will all too often. The Bible, however, is God's Word, given by Him, protected by Him, and speaking for Him.

The Westminster Confession of Faith hence begins with a chapter on "The Holy Scripture." It asserts the God-centered nature of Biblical authority in Section IV:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (Who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

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There is an important Biblical premise here. Both truth and authority are identified with God. There is no neutral realm of truth by which God and man are alike to be judged. This is the premise of rationalism and of other perspectives. God and man are alike held to exist in an independent environment which sets the standards for both. Hence, for example, some like Gordon Clark would have an independent law of contradiction govern both God and man. For him, “the logical consistency” of the Bible is its best defense.² The law of contradiction, however, cannot be used as a test or a proof of God or the Bible, because the law of contradiction *presupposes* the God of Scripture and His orderly creation. If the universe is one of brute factuality and chance, then no law of contradiction can exist. There can be no legitimate use of the law of contradiction unless all are agreed that it can only exist in God’s creation. To agree on this, however, means that its use as a test or proof of God is unnecessary. The usual use of this law is to detach it from God, to give it a neutral power and dominion over God, and then to use it as a yardstick to judge God and the Bible. In the process, the law of contradiction is Hellenized and is ascribed to a world of brute factuality, upon which various patterns are imposed. As Van Til noted:

A law of contradiction that is found to be operative in the created world in the sense that man’s intellectual operations require its recognition, but that rests on God’s nature, is something quite different from a law of contradiction that operates independently of God. In the former case the facts of the universe, if they are to be rationally intelligible, are not ultimately dependent upon the law of contradiction as man knows it, but upon God’s internal coherence that lies behind the law of contradiction. Thus the facts of the universe can retain their novelty for man while they have not lost their rationality for God, and therefore also for man. In the latter case the rationality of the world does not depend upon God, but upon the principle of contradiction as an abstraction. In that case facts lose their novelty for man when he sees that they work according to the law of contradiction.³

To use the law of contradiction abstractly and without presupposing the God of Scripture is as logical as asserting the validity of Christ’s atonement in a universe without God. It is an amazing arrogance on the part of men to insist that God must be verified by them and receive their philosophical seal of approval before He shows His face in public! All too many theologians and philosophers of religion, however, hold to such a demand.

For us, however, whatever God says is truth, because God is “truth itself.” Scripture has authority because it comes from the supreme and absolute authority.

The Confession, moreover, declares that God gave the Word and also gives “the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word” by His Holy Spirit (Ch. 1, Sec. VI). The Spirit does not speak in contradiction to the Word. It follows, therefore, that:

X. The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

The Larger Catechism, Q. 2, makes clear, moreover, that, although “the very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God,” both man and nature being fallen, God’s Word and Spirit only, do sufficiently and effectually reveal him unto men for their salvation.” Note the phrase “for their salvation.” All men can read and be learned in the Bible; only those whom the Spirit moves can have “the saving understanding” and read “for their salvation.”

Because of this priority of Scripture, the Reformed faith is catholic in its use of the Bible, *i.e.*, it recognizes its universal jurisdiction and application. God through His law-word governs the totality of life, so that nothing is outside of God and His government. The Bible, thus, is not only a salvationist book but a manual for our total lives, for law, politics, economics, the family, school, church, and more.

If we limit the scope and jurisdiction of God’s Word, we limit God and His dominion. All too many theologies box the Faith with a corner of creation. The vast domain of the universe is seen as divided into a variety of polytheistic realms. Most of the universe belongs to science, and most of the earth to politics and the state. Off in a sterile corner, boxed in from the rest of creation is a private institution called the church, and its private, isolated religion, Christianity. Because of this mutuality, churchmen limit the Faith to the salvation of the soul and to ecclesiastical concerns. The vision of such men is so narrow that for them to fight the wars of the Lord means to fight against other churches. No doubt, on Judgment Day, some Presbyterians in line for sentencing will spend their time passing judgment on the Baptists; the Baptists will tell one and all how bad the Catholics are; while the Catholics will assure the Protestants that they are

heretics. Meanwhile, the Lutherans will tell all others that the salvation of non-Lutherans is questionable. To all such, the Lord will say, “Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition” (*Mt. 15:6*).

In brief, the Bible is not a church book; it is God’s book for all of life, for church, state, school, family, economics, the arts and sciences, and all things else. It is God’s command word, giving marching orders for all of life.

Calvin spoke of the necessity for the Bible to preserve man from twisting God’s revelation to his own devices:

For, if we consider the mutability of the human mind — how easy its lapse into forgetfulness of God; how great its propensity to errors of every kind; how violent its rage for the perpetual fabrication of new and false religions, — it will be easy to perceive the necessity of the heavenly doctrine being thus committed to writing, that it might not be lost in oblivion, or evaporate in error, or be corrupted by the presumption of men.⁴

The offence of Scripture to the unregenerate is that it tells him that he is not a god but a sinner under the judgment of God. To the regenerate, the Bible is the good news of his salvation, but, to the extent that he is unsanctified, to that extent the offense of Scripture remains. This side of heaven, therefore, the believer must contend with an unwillingness in himself to read and to submit to God’s Word. Behind this fact of offense is our reluctance to keep on growing; we tend to be satisfied with a few drops of faith in the ocean of our sin. We are unwilling to change, to see our faults, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to hate only what God hates, and to love as we have been loved. Hence the necessity of Scripture: we need the open and sure Word of God as a corrective, a guide, and as commandment.

This is why reading the Bible, and our submission to its law-word is a moral act. An immoral resistance to holiness keeps us from the Word, whereas the fact is that to read and obey means to grow in grace and holiness. Calvin noted:

[T]hat the mind of man, being full of pride and temerity, dares to conceive of God according to its own standards; and, being stuck in stupidity, and immersed in profound ignorance, imagines a vain and ridiculous phantom instead of God.⁵

Many men use the Bible as a building block in their creation of idols by making partial use of it

together with their various humanistic concepts. One such example is the belief in God as love. Very plainly, the Bible tells us, “God is love” (*1 Jn. 4:8*), but it also tells us that He is a consuming fire of judgment, that He is a jealous God, and much, much more. The Reformed use of the Bible precludes using one aspect of the Bible, and one attribute of God in isolation or in priority above all others. To illustrate, it is a perversion of the Reformed faith to stress the sovereignty of God above all His other attributes. Our human nature lacks balance; some of us are good in certain areas, such as philosophy, music, or mathematics, and weak in other areas, such as carpentry, painting, and selling. Just as there are a variety of human beings, so too there is a variety in their aptitudes. In God, not only is all potentially a full actuality, but all powers and attributes exist in perfection. To single out love, sovereignty, law, justice, grace, or any other attribute of God’s nature and to give it priority is to view God in humanistic terms, as a man. It results in an anthropocentric doctrine of man.

Faithfulness to the Reformed view of Scripture prevents this. We then live by every word of God (*Mt. 4:4*), and we see God in terms of His total Word. To illustrate, if we forget the tabernacle as a part of God’s revelation, we have a limited view of God, because we fail to see how central and important God’s Word is concerning all approaches to Him and the worship He requires. If we dismiss the simple sacrifices as irrelevant now for us because they ended with Christ’s atonement, we underrate the seriousness of sin in God’s eyes and the exactness of His requirements. If we neglect the law, we neglect the justice or unrighteousness of God, and so on. We then wrongly divide the Word of truth and separate moral law, ceremonial law, and civil law. The fact is that all law is moral law; all law tells us what is right or wrong; and all law calls for a separation from certain practices as contrary to God’s covenant requirements. No law of God is immoral or amoral, and no law of man can be so either.

Calvin began his *Institutes* by stating, in the first paragraph, that “[I]t is evident that the talents which we possess are not from ourselves, and that our very existence is nothing but a subsistence in God alone”⁶ If “our very existence is nothing but a subsistence in God alone,” then it follows of necessity that our every word, thought, and act should be governed by God alone. God’s sufficient word for that government is the Bible.

— Continued on page 8 —

Continuity and Change

By Rev. P. Andrew Sandlin

For I am the Lord God, I change not. Malachi 3:6



For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. Psalm 90:4-6

God is the unchanging Creator. Man is the changing creature. These are two fundamental Biblical facts we dare never forget, and we must work to grasp the proper relation between them.

Many ancient Greek philosophers feared and despised the change inherent in the human condition. In fact, one reason Plato reveled in death is that he believed that it emancipated man from the tyranny of change.¹ The “Ideas” or “Forms,” immediately accessible to the human mind just as physical objects are, were defined as the heavenly, eternal, immutable patterns of which earthly phenomena are simply flawed, mutable shadows. The objective was to bring the earthly shadows as closely as possible into conformity to the heavenly ideas, though this could never be accomplished fully in man’s earthly existence.

In bold contrast to this pagan idea, the Bible asserts that God alone is unchanging and that change as an aspect of the human condition is (in many cases) God’s requirement for man. It is clear, for example, that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve would have grown in godly maturity, knowledge, and ethics (*i.e.*, they would have *changed*) had they not sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. They would have been sinless, yet they would have changed and, perhaps, could not have remained sinless had they been *unwilling* to change: unchangeableness would have meant sinfulness.

The Bible declares that Jesus Christ “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (*Heb.* 5:8). Yet Jesus, fully human, was nonetheless sinless. A (potentially) sinless Adam and an (actually) sinless Second Adam, Jesus Christ, prove that change is not incompatible with sinlessness. The notion that change in man is an inherent defect is not a Christian teaching. Change, in fact, is no more incompatible with sinlessness than immutability is

incompatible with sin. Genesis 6 relates that the antediluvians were immutably committed to sin in their imagination (*v.* 5). It was precisely their unwillingness to change that secured their judgment.

Unholy Change

Yet not all change is godly. Much change is evil. In the Old Testament, the idolatrous change introduced into Israel’s God-given liturgy of worship elicited God’s severe judgment. In the New Testament, Jude warns of ungodly men creeping into the church unawares, who pollute and spoil the pure faith delivered once for all to the saints. Similarly, Paul reprimands the Galatians, who were vexed by false teachers undermining the glorious Old Testament doctrine of justification by faith: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (*Gal.* 1:6). Paul had established those churches in the proper conception of salvation, but they were surrendering to damnable innovations, which seduced them away from the gospel. Change that deviates from godly truth is evil indeed.

Unholy Continuity

On the other hand, we must never presume that all continuity is holy. The Bible as forcefully opposes ungodly continuity as it does ungodly change. Our Lord Himself rebuked the Pharisees and other “conservative” Jews for refusing to abandon traditions which broke with the truth of the Old Testament (*Mt.* 15:2-6; *Mk.* 7:3-13). Jesus was arguing for a *Biblical progressivism*, as opposed to an *unholy conservatism*. In the Old Testament, when his servants rediscovered the law of the Lord, the godly King Josiah ruptured the sinful, idolatrous continuity that had developed in Israel. By this divine law he subsequently reordered the life of God’s people (2

Kin. 22-23:25). Forward into the New Testament era, we learn that Paul chided an early church for refusing to relinquish false traditions, which undermined the Faith (*Col. 2:8*).

Clearly, both change and continuity can be evil.

Holy Continuity

And both can be holy. Pelikan suggests that traditionalism is the dead faith of the living, while tradition is the living faith of the dead.² His point is not merely that traditional Christian faith does — and should — persist over time, but that the fact that it has existed within the church for a long period of time may dispose us to give it the benefit of the doubt as a legitimate dogma. A prime example is early Trinitarian orthodoxy, solidified at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). The formulation and language describing God as one God, yet in three ontologically co-equal Persons, is not, strictly speaking, found in the Bible. However, the teachings that lead to this orthodox language surely *are* found in the Bible; and this is why we Christians embrace them. Now it is conceivable that Christians in the third and fourth centuries could have employed alternative terminology to describe this great Biblical mystery; but, if they wished to remain true to the Bible, they could not have come up with something *substantively* different from what they did in fact devise.³ The orthodox formulation of the Trinity is a tradition, but it is a godly tradition, one summarizing the Biblical teaching concerning the Personhood of God.⁴

Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to “hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (*2 Thes. 2:15*). Obviously, he refers to godly traditions, not ungodly ones. Similarly, we today are to preserve and perpetuate holy traditions like the orthodox Trinitarianism mentioned above, and orthodox Christology (the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 425) that have been delivered to us. This is *holy* continuity.

Holy Change

But there is holy discontinuity, or change, also. In this issue of the *Chalcedon Report*, John Frame, one of the leading Reformed thinkers of our era, criticizes “traditionalism.” He reminds us that as Protestants we are committed to *sola Scriptura* — the Bible alone is our final revelational authority. If we can be shown to have maintained inherited traditions that deviate from the Bible, we are under compulsion to abandon those traditions and embrace Biblical teaching. This argument is easy to

make and accept when we are disputing with Roman Catholics, who traditionally [!] have set the church’s teachings on a par with the Bible itself (the Council of Trent did this quite explicitly). Protestants themselves, however, often become anxious and uncomfortable when Frame and others shine the light of God’s Word on their own traditions which sorely lack Biblical justification. Yet Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy do not own a monopoly on unbiblical traditionalism.

Inescapable Tradition

Tradition of some kind, of course, is inescapable. In fact, anti-traditionalism itself becomes a tradition. Prime examples include some of today’s Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which rose partly in protest over the supposedly cold, traditional, and therefore Spirit-quenching, liturgy of conservative and mainline churches. Yet the anti-traditional liturgy of many of the newer churches seems to repeat itself every Sunday morning during worship! These anti-traditional churches have created their own tradition. This is not of itself a criticism of these churches, simply a suggestion of evidence that tradition of some kind is inescapable.

The issue is not, consequently, whether there will be a tradition. The question is whether it will be a tradition in line with the Bible. If it conforms to the norms of Scripture, that tradition is justified, even if it varies somewhat from other legitimate traditions — in other words, conflicting traditions may not on that ground alone be illegitimate. After all, the Bible at some points gives wide latitude to church traditions (*Acts 15*), demanding not that they be uniform with *each other* in every particular, but only that they not violate God’s standard for man as set forth in the Bible. Every church, every denomination, every Christian organization preserves some traditions, just as every one introduces change into those traditions. Holy tradition, in fact, is not the presence of an absolutely unchanging pattern. If it were, it would not be a holy tradition; it would be God Himself, for He alone is absolutely unchanging. Rather, holy tradition is godly change *within* godly continuity. The objective is to retain what is Biblical and holy while changing and improving on that which is less than Biblical and holy.

Growth, Maturity, and Change

Years ago I heard an aged minister say, “I have not changed one of my beliefs in fifty years.” That man, I believe, was either an ignoramus or a liar. He either did, in fact, change some of his beliefs while refusing

to admit this change, or else he refused to change any beliefs and remained a spiritual and intellectual child. (Then again, perhaps he simply wasn't thinking well when he spoke!) Again and again the Bible exhorts us to spiritual growth (*e.g.*, *2 Pet. 3:18*), a growth analogous to physical growth (*Heb. 5:1; 1 Cor. 3:1-2*). Just as God made Adam fully adult, though not a fully developed man, so when He regenerates us, He does not make us mature Christians. He sanctifies us, and this sanctification is a process.

Precisely because God and His Word are alone unchangeable, man must always be changing — or at least ready to change. The doctrine of perfection, the idea that man can arrive at a state of sinless perfection in this life, is an assault on Biblical truth. So is the notion that the Christian can reach the place of immutable maturity in this life. God's call to Christians is to learn and then progress beyond the basic elements of the Faith (*Heb. 6:1ff.*). We are surely not called to abandon basic, fundamental Christian truth, but rather to build upon it a greater structure. Over time, Christians should know more of God and His Word and holy experience.

What is true of the individual Christian is equally true of the wider church. Not only should an individual church or denomination grow in grace; Christ's church over time should grow and change. This, in fact, is precisely what has happened.⁵ Just as God brings tribulations and difficulties into the life of the individual believer to force him to greater maturity, so He brings controversy into the life of the church to force it to a greater examination of the Word of God in formulating its beliefs and practices. The patristic church, for example, did not enjoy a decisive grasp of the doctrine of original sin and of salvation by grace, but the Pelagian controversy elicited from Augustine an intensive examination and explication of the Word of God on these two themes.⁶ The Western church has far outstripped the Eastern Church in these teachings because the latter wants to glorify in nothing beyond patristic orthodoxy.⁷ That is to say, *it wants to glory in theological immaturity*. It is less accurate to say that the Eastern wing of the church of the first few centuries was evil rather than immature than to say that it is evil *today* because it refuses to recognize the legitimate growth and change within the Western church. We expect children to be children, but we are rightly troubled when we see adults thinking and acting like children (*1 Cor. 13:11*).

A subtle danger often plagues Bible-believing Christians and churches in their creditable conflict with theological liberalism and modernism. The

latter are committed to *ungodly* change: reshaping the Biblical and historic Faith to fit the exigencies and assumptions of the modern world.⁸ For nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberals, it was impossible to expect for man to accept the miracles set forth in the Bible, for example. The orthodox response was surely correct in standing uncompromisingly on the truth of the Bible. Often, however, this stand was an equally uncompromising stand on the immutability of a particular theological situation, for instance, the sixteenth-century Augsburg Confession or English Settlement, the seventeenth-century Westminster Confession of Faith, and so on. It is surely right to enlist confessional standards and creeds (which are, in any case, inescapable) but misguided to suppose that all of the controversies of the present can be met with the instruments of the past. In the case of its *apologia* for the miraculous in the face of modernistic denials, the problem with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century orthodox was their attempt to validate miracles by the same rational "scientific" methodology liberals themselves championed.⁹ In today's postmodern world, this whole debate seems rather embarrassing, since unbelievers today are generally inclined to accept the existence of the miraculous, just not the existence of the God of the miraculous. Fighting today's battles with yesterday's instruments is a chief flaw of defenders of orthodoxy who are not equally defenders of godly change.

Our dispute with theological liberals and other Bible-deniers is not a dispute between those who affirm an unchangeable theology against those who affirm a changeable theology, but between those who believe that theology must change in a more Biblical direction against those who believe it must change in a more worldly direction. The issue is not whether one should be relevant and the other irrelevant, as though only liberals are concerned with relevance. The question is, "What constitutes relevance?" Liberals believe that a relevant theology and practice is one made conformable to the dictates of the contemporary world. The orthodox, on the other hand, believe that a relevant theology and practice is one which the dictates of the contemporary world has forced godly Christians to create by pressing them to greater conformity to the Bible. By its very nature, the human condition (under God's command) demands mutability. The only real issue is whether that mutability will progress toward greater sin or greater godliness.

The fear of change is really the fear of our creaturely condition. One writer shrewdly observes that

there is a tendency on the part of old men to see the world as dying with themselves. They are becoming old, decrepit, and feeble and, thus, the world itself is passing away. This, of course, is simply not true. I am reminded of the truth of the sign in the maternity ward where all five of my children were born: “Babies are proof of God’s intent that life should go on.” A line of thinking, a cause, or progress in general that seems to stumble with the death of a single generation can always be picked up and championed by succeeding generations. This is — or should be — the great confidence of the elderly, particularly the godly elderly — God buries His workers, but not His work.

And this work requires both continuity and discontinuity with the past as we work toward greater conformity to the Bible.

- ¹ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1.
² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 65.
³ J. Burnaby, “Bible and Dogma,” in *On the Authority of the Bible* (London: SPCK, 1960), 43 (no editor).
⁴ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker [1987], 1994), 140-151.
⁵ Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).
⁶ Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust [1937], 1969), 131-139.
⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 8-30.
⁸ Donald E. Miller, *The Case for Liberal Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 33-34.
⁹ W. Neil, “The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible,” ed., S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 3:239-244.

— Continued from page 4 —

If we approach the Bible humanistically, we will either reject it, or else we will see it as a life and fire insurance contract, in terms of what it can offer to use. If we approach the Bible from a faithfully Reformed perspective, we will then see ourselves, our salvation, and our calling from a God-centered perspective. Our Lord tells us plainly therein, “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and his righteousness [or justice]; and all these things shall be added unto you” (*Mt. 6:33*). We will then recognize, when we seek first God’s kingdom, what Van Til sets forth so clearly:

In saving us from sin, Christ saves us unto his service. Through the salvation that is ours in Christ by the Spirit, we take up anew the cultural mandate that was given to man at the outset of history. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we want now to do all to the glory of God. Moreover, we want our fellowmen with us to do all things to the glory of God. We are bound, as we are eager, to inform them of that which we have been told, namely, that we shall continue to abide under the wrath of God and eventually be cast out into utter darkness, unless, by God’s grace, we seek to do all things to the glory of God. Calling upon all men everywhere to join with us in fulfilling the original cultural mandate given to mankind — which we may now undertake because of the redeeming work of Christ — is our joy each day.⁷

As we have seen, there is a perfection and a simplicity in God’s being, so that all His attributes and the totality of His nature makes all things equal and perfect, so that no one aspect of His being can be exalted over another. God is totally God and totally perfect and absolute in all His being. This is not true of man. Man as a creature is God’s creature, and therefore has been created by God to serve Him in various ways, each of us according to the gifts we have received. At one point, however, there is a difference. Of all men everywhere, the same requirement holds: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” Every aspect of our lives must have a single focus, the service, glory, and enjoyment of God. In this, Scripture is our guide and command-word.

- ¹ Paul Helen, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982).
² Gordon H. Clark, *God’s Hammer, The Bible, and Its Critics* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1982), 15ff.
³ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), 37f.
⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. 1, chp. 6, sec. 3, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 83.
⁵ *ibid.*, bk. 1, chp. 11, sec. 8, vol 1, 122f.
⁶ *ibid.*, bk. 1, chp. 1, sec. 1, vol, 1, 14.
⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *The Doctrine of Scripture* (The den Dulk Foundation, 1967), 1.

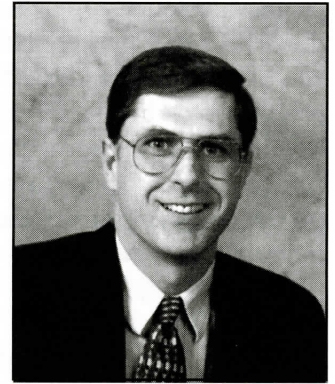


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Whence Freedom?

By Rev. Mark R. Rushdoony



From where does freedom come? Though we can rightly acknowledge the individuals and historic events and milestones which won freedom from tyranny, historical accomplishments and status do not constitute moral legitimacy. If we are to assume liberty is morally superior to enslavement of any form, we must be prepared not only to note the benefits of liberty, but also the inherent moral inferiority of any status or system that denies men freedom.

If we begin with naturalistic presuppositions, our logic and conclusion will be subjective and pragmatically self-serving (*i.e.*, “freedom is good because it allows us and our society to be happy and productive”). But many naturalistic ideologies see freedom as a mere stage of social development that will be superseded by a higher moral state characterized by collectivism and control.

God-Given Responsibility

The Christian must see the morality of freedom as the necessary consequence of God-given responsibility. God has given us moral laws and specific duties in all aspects of life. The only way in which we can begin to fulfill the responsibilities God has given us as individuals is to have the liberty to do so. When Paul told the churches of Galatia to “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (5:1), he was speaking of spiritual liberty in Christ’s justification and the spiritual bondage to sin from which it frees us. Still, the analogy is true of political liberty and every other advantage we have that serves us in our service to Jesus Christ. A slave cannot as readily serve Christ in any capacity as can a free man. A slave cannot give of wealth which is not his own. A slave cannot be free to take dominion while in bondage. Freedom allows man the latitude to serve God with all of his heart and soul. It is not necessary to the service of God, for as Paul said from prison, “The word of God is not bound.” Still, freedom is a prerequisite to fully exploring areas of service to God.

Men have been trying to “be as gods” since Adam and Eve first believed Satan. We live in an age of statism

that seeks to move from a national to an international scope. In this regard we are closer to ancient Babylon and Rome than early America. Men must be made subservient to the liberty of the state for the state to play god. Under true liberty, the state cannot play god. Of course, liberty does not make individuals moral or keep them from *playing gods*; it only reduces the size of their *playing field* from the national or international level to the personal. The Puritan John Cotton emphasized that no more earthly power should be given any man than we would care for him to use, and Cotton also compared restrictions on a magistrate’s power to the rope which tethered a beast.

The Tyranny of War

We are increasingly becoming statist and politically centralized in our thinking. The U.S. Civil War was a great political victory for centralism. The oaths of loyalty to the national government demanded of the defeated Southerners were viewed with horror by those who rightly saw them as an unprecedented claim of preeminence by Washington antithetical to federal government. What socialism has not done under the banner of reform has been done in the name of the exigencies of war. Much of what we have lost in times of war has never been reclaimed. Wars are political and legal revolutions in which individual rights and liberties as well as social structures are sure to suffer grievous and permanent harm. In recent years Americans have been oblivious to this fact, and the tendency to cheer all military activity by our government as gloriously patriotic and beyond public criticism is evidence of growing statist thinking. “Knee-jerk” flag-waving is not patriotism, at least not for a nation with such a noble constitutional history as our own.

In education, we lost our personal concept of freedom to a statist concept through the public schools. A *liberal arts* education is education in the *arts of liberty*, the skills needed by free people. Education was once about preserving liberty. For the state to teach the skills of liberty is for the state to define the liberties of the

people and its exercise. Horace Mann saw the state as the definer and teacher of liberty. He believed that with education in the hands of the state, crime, poverty, and prisons would be obsolete within a century. Few social reformers have been so wrong yet so strongly defended. It is not really Mann who is defended, however, but the power which educators believe they alone have the right to wield over education.

Taxation

Taxation and money are also areas of statist centralization of power. Taxation for the “common good” has led us to a welfare mentality and confiscatory taxation. Statist regulations control what taxes do not confiscate. The estate or “death” tax is a particularly sinister form of confiscation. The state that claimed to be our parent, teacher, and benefactor claims at our death to be our rightful heir. It thus robs our widows and orphans. The state now creates money out of thin air and manipulates the debt-based economy it created by controlling interest rates.

Abraham Lincoln, who in no small way aided the centralist trend to the detriment of federalism, is famous for describing our government as one “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” What few remember is that these words were borrowed verbatim from John Wyclif, who wrote that the English Bible he published was “for the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Lincoln took a designation for the self-government of individuals under God and applied it to the civil government of the United States. As history has demonstrated since Lincoln’s day, government *of* the people and *by* the people has progressively been lost to government *for* the people. It is characteristic of statist as a whole and

liberals in general that they truly believe they have a right to rule “for the people.” To the extent that individuals themselves rule, external government is not necessary, for we have self-government. This will not be a liberty easily reclaimed. Limiting government, as John Cotton noted, was like limiting a beast.

Freedom will exist in any society. Will it be freedom to be a responsible individual under God, or to be a dutiful citizen of the state, which then alone has true freedom? Will we have freedom to serve God or freedom only to serve the state? Either citizens must limit the freedom of their state or the state will limit the freedom of its citizens. The state’s abuse of its freedom is tyranny; the individual’s abuse is lawlessness or anarchy. The state is often willing to live with moral lawlessness or anarchy. They do not threaten the power of the state and, in fact, allow the state to justify an enlarged role in society. Such behavior only dictates more legislation, more police powers, more social programs, and more oversight. Collectively, these are all “controls.” The state will not allow legal or political lawlessness or anarchy, as they threaten the state and its authority directly. Thus the state will tolerate (and under the guise of “art” promote) vulgarity, pornography, and other moral and social evils, but will not countenance political or economic threats to itself.

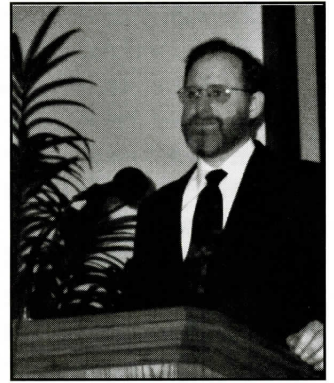
Freedom to the Christian is about having the right to serve God in our own home, work, school, church, and elsewhere as free men. Being a “free nation” is a collectivist designation that is not the same as being a “free people.” If freedom is in the state, then only the state is truly free; if the state is free then any freedom we enjoy is at best tenuous. John Cotton was right; we need to tether the beast.

Chalcedon itinerary

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Oct. 14 | P. Andrew Sandlin at Reformed Heritage Church, Modesto, CA (10:00 a.m.). For more information, contact Dave Turnbaugh at (209) 578-5362. |
| Oct. 21 | P. Andrew Sandlin at Church of the King, Santa Cruz, CA (10:00 a.m.). For more information, contact Bill Garaway at (831) 476-48777. Also at Reformed Heritage Church, San Jose, CA (2:00 p.m.). For more information, contact Gary Wagner at (408) 866-5607. |
| October 26 | Steve Schlissel at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario. For more information, contact Pastor John Bouwers at (905) 688-3546. |
| Nov. 11 | P. Andrew Sandlin at Reformed Heritage Church in Bend, OR. For more information, contact Dave Souther at (541) 383-0642. |
| Nov. 18 | P. Andrew Sandlin at Church of the King, Santa Cruz, CA (10:00 a.m.). For more information, contact Bill Garaway at (831) 476-48777. Also at Reformed Heritage Church, San Jose, CA (2:00 p.m.). For more information, contact Gary Wagner at (408) 866-5607. |
| Dec. 16 | P. Andrew Sandlin at Church of the King, Santa Cruz, CA (10:00 a.m.). For more information, contact Bill Garaway at (831) 476-48777. Also at Reformed Heritage Church, San Jose, CA (2:00 p.m.). For more information, contact Gary Wagner at (408) 866-5607. |
| Dec. 30 | P. Andrew Sandlin at Reformed Heritage Church, Modesto, CA (10:00 a.m.). For more information, contact Dave Turnbaugh at (209) 578-5362. |

The Authority of God's Law

By Rev. William O. Einwechter



When we speak of authority, we refer to the power or right to give commands, and require obedience to those commands. A command is the imposition of the will of one person upon another by telling him what he is to do. As Creator, God has complete authority over all His creatures. Thus, He has the power and right to command them and require obedience to His commands. The law of God is the disclosure of the will of God for man that instructs him in how to live and act in a way that is pleasing to God. The law of God is the revelation of the divine imperative for man's conduct and possesses supreme authority.

The Nature of God's Law

What is the essential character of God's law? Is it really His law, or is it derived from eternal moral ideals that are ultimate; laws to which God Himself must conform and by which He Himself is judged? In other words, is the moral law part of an independently existing Good that stands over God and man, or is the moral law an expression of the nature and being of God?

The Biblical answer is unmistakable. The Scripture reveals that God is ultimate. As Creator He is the source of *all things*, both the visible and the invisible. Hence, the moral law that sets the standard for the conduct of man is derived from the moral character of God Himself. God is holy, and therefore His law is holy. When the Lord commands men to "be ye holy; for I am holy" (*Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 5:16*), He is commanding them to obey His law. Thus, the law is a transcript of His holiness. God made man in His image, and, ethically speaking, man manifests the image of God when he keeps God's law (*Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:10*). Having taught men to obey God's law (*Mt. 5:17-47*), Jesus Christ summed up His teaching by calling men to emulate the character of God the Father: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (*Mt. 5:48; cf. Eph. 5:1*).

The Old Testament term for "law," *torah*, is essential for understanding another aspect of the nature of God's law. When people hear the word "law" today, they

usually think of it in narrow juridical terms. However, this is not the primary sense of *torah*. This Hebrew word denotes the ideas of teaching, instruction, giving moral guidance or direction. *Torah* is the means whereby God teaches men their duty and leads them into the pleasant paths of righteousness. The law of God is not legalism, but instruction in living. The law of God is the revelation of God's will so that men might glorify Him and live productive, prosperous lives.

The Revelation of God's Law

God makes His law known to men through both natural¹ and special revelation. God has written the principles of His moral law on the hearts of all men (*Rom. 2:14-15*). By the divinely bestowed capacities of his mind and conscience, man is able to discern the rudimentary content of God's moral standards for him. This enables man to function as a responsible moral agent and makes him accountable to God for his actions (*Rom. 1:20, 32*). But natural revelation was never intended to function as the all-sufficient disclosure of God's law. From the very beginning, God has divulged His law to men by special revelation, that is, by His Word (*Gen. 1:28-29; 2:16-17*). While natural revelation may give to man a general sense of his moral obligations, it is the Word of God that provides the explicit commands to direct this moral consciousness into the path of righteousness. This was true before the Fall; how much more now that man's mind and conscience have been corrupted by sin!

There is no contradiction between the law of God as revealed in nature and that which is revealed in Scripture. But there is a vital difference between these channels of revelation as to their *manner* of revelation and their *specificity* of revelation, and that is what makes the scriptural revelation so superior. As Turretin states:

The same duties (both toward God and toward our neighbor) prescribed by the moral law [Biblical law] are also contained in the natural law. The difference is with regard to the mode of

delivery. In the moral law, these duties are clearly, distinctly, and fully declared; while in the natural law they are obscurely and imperfectly declared both because many intimations have been lost and obliterated by sin and because it has been variously corrupted by the vanity and wickedness of men (Rom. 1:20-22).²

If men would know the law of God infallibly, then let them look unto the perfect, written revelation of God's law given in the Bible (*Ps. 19:7-10*).

The Biblical revelation of God's moral law is, therefore, of preeminent authority. However, it is important to remember that the Biblical revelation of God's law is not limited to the body of law contained in such portions of Scripture as the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, or the book of Deuteronomy, but extends to the entire Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, in historical narrative and epistles, through prophecy, psalms, and proverbs, God reveals His *torah*. The Ten Commandments summarize the moral law, but the rest of Scripture develops, explains, illustrates, and applies the moral law. *All Scripture* is profitable for instruction in righteousness (*2 Tim. 3:16-17*).

The Continuity of God's Law

Do the standards of God's moral law vary from time to time or from place to place? Does the New Testament abrogate the moral precepts of the Old Testament and establish new principles for regulating man's conduct? The answer to both of these questions is no. God's moral law remains constant from creation to consummation (and forever after), and governs all men, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. How could it be otherwise?

First, since the law of God is the reflection of the holy nature of the God of creation, it must be universal and unchanging, because God Himself cannot change (*Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17*), and as Creator He rules over all men and nations (*Ps. 47:2*).

Second, as there is one covenant of grace (the one revealed to Abraham and confirmed by Christ, *cf. Gal. 3:7ff*), so there is one covenantal standard of morality. The Old and New Covenants are administrative covenants that govern the application of the terms of one eternal covenant to two separate dispensations. Thus, the differences between the covenants have to do with those matters relating to promise and fulfillment, type and antitype, shadows and reality, not with the essential components of the covenant of grace (*e.g.*, salvation by grace through faith, sanctification by the Word and Spirit). The Scripture specifically states that the difference between the administration of the Old and New Covenants with regard to God's law will not

be the *content* of the moral law, but the *means* employed by God to enable His people to obey it (*Jer. 31:31-34*).

Third, Jesus and the Apostles confirmed the continuing authority of the Old Testament revelation of God's law for the New Testament church. Jesus emphatically stated to His contemporaries that they must not think that the purpose of His ministry or His teaching was to loosen the authority of the Old Testament law or prophets! No, He had come to confirm and establish the law. Therefore, it was the duty of *His disciples* to do and to teach even the least of the commandments revealed by the Old Testament Scripture (*Mt. 5:17-19*). The apostles taught there is one Lawgiver for all of God's people, and that that Lawgiver is Christ (*cf. Jas. 4:3; Isa. 33:22; Gen. 49:10*). The book of Hebrews shows how there has been a change in the law in regard to the priesthood, the sacrifices for sin, and the Temple because of Christ's superior ministry and sacrifice. But Hebrews never says, or implies, that this change in the law has set aside any of the moral law of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ and His apostles teach the church to obey the whole counsel of God's law-word (*Mt. 22:36-40; Acts 20:27; Rom. 13:8-10; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 8:10; Jas. 2:8-12; 1 Jn. 5:2-3*).

The Comprehensive Scope of God's Law

As Creator and King over all the earth, the sovereignty of God extends over all creation and over all aspects of man's being and works. Thus, there cannot be any area of man's life that is not governed by the law of God. To limit the authority of God's law to determine the ethical responsibilities for men in any action, association, or domain, is to deny the absoluteness of God's rule over men. And as God's rule is comprehensive, so is the revelation of His law to His subjects. The law revealed in Scripture addresses every area of life: it instructs in personal ethics; it teaches the way of righteousness for the family, church, and state; it gives authoritative guidance for the conduct of education, business, the arts, and the sciences. Berkof states, "The law lays claim, and justly so, on the entire life of man in all its aspects."³

God's law is "perfect" and able to keep man from all presumptuous sins (*Ps. 19:7, 13*), and it is able to instruct man in righteousness so that he will be prepared for *every* good work (*2 Tim. 3:16-17*). These things could only be said of a comprehensive law that addresses, in precept or in principle, every area of life. And, it is only on the basis of an exhaustive moral law that God could bring every thought, word, and action of men under judgment (*Ecc. 12:13-14*).

The Proper Use of God's Law

Whenever men speak or focus on the law of God, someone will raise the cry of "legalism." But was David a legalist when he cried, "O how love I thy law!" (*Ps. 119:97*)? Was Jesus a legalist when He taught men to keep God's law (*Mt. 5:19; 7:12*)? Was Paul a legalist when he said that the law of God was holy, just, and good, and that he delighted in and served God's law (*Rom. 7:12, 22, 25*)? No! The love of God's law, the teaching of God's law, the use of God's law is not legalism. It is the *wrong use* of God's law that constitutes legalism! Legalism is keeping the law with the wrong motive (*Mt. 6:2*); it is teaching the law without understanding (*1 Tim. 1:7*); it is adding human traditions to the law (*Mt. 15:1-9*); it is seeking justification through the works of the law (*Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10-11*). Paul states that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, that is, uses it as God has prescribed (*1 Tim. 1:8*).

God has ordained the use of His law in preaching the gospel. The law convicts men of their sin, and drives them to Christ as their sin-bearer and only hope of salvation. The law of God also serves as the standard and guide for sanctification for the believer. The law reveals the sins of the old man, and teaches the new man how to walk in holiness and true righteousness. Additionally, God's law should be employed in society to restrain the wickedness of men, and to serve as the standard of justice that teaches magistrates what sins are civil crimes and what punishment these civil crimes deserve.

The Classifications of God's Law

The common practice of expositors and theologians has been to divide Old Testament law into three compartments: moral, ceremonial, and civil. Although it is true that there is a category of Biblical law that deals with civil matters, this division is a curious phenomenon. Is it not also true that Biblical law speaks specifically to family matters that are distinct from the church and civil realms? Why not, then, add "familial" as a fourth division of the law? Is it because the laws relating to the family are considered moral laws? If so, then are proponents of the three-fold division of the law suggesting that matters of crime and punishment and the exercise of power in the civil sphere are *not* moral issues governed by moral law?

The law of God can be categorized by content (personal, familial, civil, ecclesiastical, *etc.*), or it can be classified by function (declarative or restorative/typological). Biblical law functions to declare the will of God (man's moral duty), and to set forth the means of restoring sinners to favor with God (God's merciful provision

of sacrifice). Using the common terminology, these functions are called moral and ceremonial. This two-fold division of the law is the one that is prominent in Scripture (*cf. Ps. 40:6-8; Pr. 21:3; Hos. 6:6; Jer. 7:22-23; Mt. 9:13; 12:7*). What then of the division commonly called "civil"? These laws come under the classification of "moral." The civil laws of the Bible are an application of the moral law to the civil sphere. They function as a subset of the moral law, just as the laws pertaining to the family are also a subset of the moral law.

The Interpretation of God's Law

The understanding and application of the righteous standards of God's law requires the use of sound principles of interpretation. First, and most fundamentally, it needs to be recognized that only God can alter, modify, or abolish any of His commandments (*Dt. 4:2; 12:32*). Therefore, we ought to assume the continuing authority of each and every law of God unless God Himself indicates otherwise in subsequent Scripture. It is presumption for man to set aside any of God's commandments without express authorization from the divine Lawgiver. Thus, the laws of the Old Testament should be considered binding today if they are not abrogated or altered by the New Testament Scriptures (as, for example, the ceremonial — restorative/typological — laws of the Old Testament). This principle of interpretation is based on the understanding that the Bible is its own best interpreter.

Second, each law should be examined according to the pattern of grammatical-historical exegesis. This method requires a careful consideration of the words of the Biblical text in their theological and historical context, so that the meaning intended by the original author can be ascertained. Third, the abiding theological truth and/or moral principle that informs (underlies) the Biblical text needs to be discerned. This is essential, because it is not necessarily the precise cultural or historical expression of the law that is authoritative, but, rather, it is the abiding theological or moral principle that forms the basis for the law that carries over to all cultures and times.

The Challenge to God's Law

The challenge to the truth and authority of God's law began in the Garden of Eden when man succumbed to Satan's temptation to set aside God's commandment and determine good and evil for himself (*Gen. 3:5*). This assertion of the moral prerogative to decide for oneself what is good and evil is best described as "autonomy." The word "autonomy" means "self-law," that is, man being a law unto himself. Autonomous man claims the right to govern himself according to the moral standards that *he* sees

fit to establish. This rebellious claim is based on the belief that man's own independent reason is the final authority for interpreting the moral sphere of life. Autonomy is every man's doing that which is right in his own eyes (*Jud. 17:6*). Human autonomy expresses itself through natural law ethics, false religions, human traditions, vain philosophies, and the deceptive teaching of antinomianism.⁴

In the end, there are only two alternatives for determining good and evil: God's law or man as a law unto himself. What choice will you make? Hear the Word of the Lord:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecc. 12:13-14)

¹ This is often referred to as "general revelation."

² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George M. Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, 1994), 2:6-7.

³ L. Berkoff, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1941), 614.

⁴ The word "antinomian" means "against the law," and refers to the treasonous doctrine that grace releases the Christian from the obligation to keep God's law. But as Rushdoony states: "Lawless Christianity is a contradiction in terms: it is anti-Christian. The purpose of grace is not to set aside the law but to fulfil the law and enable man to keep the law. If the law was so serious in the sight of God that it would require the death of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God to make atonement for man's sin, it seems strange for God to then proceed to abandon the law!" (*The Institutes of Biblical Law* [1973], 4).

William O. Einwechter is the editor of The Christian Statesman, vice president of the National Reform Association, and vice moderator of the Association of Free Reformed Churches. He serves as a pastor at Immanuel Free Reformed Church in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Linda, have been blessed with ten children. He can be contacted at weinwechter@dejazzd.com.

She's Moved

Please note that our Executive Assistant/Managing Editor has moved! Below is new contact information:

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Correspondence on Covenantal Catholicity

Editor:

In his column "Covenantal Catholicity" Rev. Schlissel says that Charles Hodge "argued forcefully (and correctly) that the Roman Catholic Church is a church." And he says that "in this he followed Calvin." Well, now. What did Hodge and Calvin say that Schlissel leaves out? Quite a bit. For example, here's some of what Hodge says in his *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1982):

— That the assumption by the Romanists that they are "the only Christians" is "gratuitous" and "monstrous," and it is "a historical fact that all the peculiar doctrines of Romanism were not received in the early Church as matters of faith" (p. 123, Vol. 1).

— That the Romanist "believes because the Church believes. This is the ultimate reason. The Church believes, not because she can historically prove that her doctrines have been received from the Apostles, but because she is supernaturally guided to know the truth." This means that "tradition resolves itself into the present faith of the Church" (p.127, Vol. 1).

— That the Romanist assumption that the church is an external, visible organization, organized in one definite, prescribed form, "is not only unreasonable, it is unscriptural ... contrary to the whole spirit and character of the gospel ..." (p.131, Vol. 1).

— That "the assumption that subjection to the Pope, as the vicar of Christ, is necessary to the existence of the Church, is utterly unreasonable. This is the climax. There is not the slightest evidence in the New Testament or in the apostolic age, that Peter had any such primacy among the Apostles as Romanists claim" (p.131, Vol. 1).

— That Romanists "have transferred the whole Jewish theory to the Christian Church; while Protestants adhere to the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles" (p.134, Vol. 1).

— "Almost all the points of difference between Protestants and Romanists depend on the decision of the question, 'What is the Church?'" (p.135, Vol. 1).

— "Romanists falsely assume the perpetuity of The Apostleship" (p.139, Vol. 1).

— "The world has never seen or suffered a greater imposture than that weak, ignorant, and often

— Continued on page 20 —

Traditionalism

Part 1 of 2: "Traditionalism and Sola Scriptura"

First published in vol. 1, no. 13, May 24 to May 30, 1999,
IIIM Magazine Online (www.thirdmill.org).

By Rev. John M. Frame



One of the largest problems today in evangelical and Reformed theology is the tendency toward traditionalism. I hope in this article to take some steps toward analyzing this danger and commending its antidote, the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.¹

Traditionalism and *Sola Scriptura*

Traditionalism is hard to define. It is right and proper to revere tradition, since God has raised up many teachers for His church over the years who, through their writings, continue to speak to us. A teacher in the church does not lose his authority after he dies. So God does intend for us to learn from teachers of the past, or, in other words, from tradition. On the other hand, the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* teaches us to emulate the Reformers in testing every human tradition, even the teachings of the church's most respected teachers, by the Word of God.

"Traditionalism" exists where *sola Scriptura* is violated, either by adding to or subtracting from God's Word (*Dt. 4:2*). To subtract from the Word is to contradict or neglect its teaching. To add to it is to give to human teaching the kind of authority which belongs to God's Word alone (*Isa. 29:13-14; Mt. 15:8-9*). Too great a reverence for tradition can lead to both errors.

In this article, I will focus on one way in which evangelical and Reformed theologians are tempted to add to the Word of God: by seeking to resolve substantive theological issues by reference to historical traditions, without searching the Scriptures.

This error in theological method has, of course, been characteristic of Roman Catholic theology since long before the Reformation, and it was one of the Reformers' chief complaints against the Roman magisterium. It has also been characteristic of the liberal theology of the last several centuries. For liberal theology is, almost by definition, the attempt to present the Christian message on some basis other than that of the infallible authority of Scripture.² Liberals use Scripture in their theological work, to be sure. But they reserve the right to disagree with it. So, in the final analysis they are on their own, basing their thought on human wisdom, human tradition.

How do liberals reach theological conclusions without appealing to the ultimate authority of Scripture? It isn't easy. But essentially, the liberal appeals to Christian tradition. With some exceptions, liberals do not like to present their work as mere speculation. They want to be recognized as Christian teachers, as members of the historic theological community. So they seek to position themselves within the church's theological tradition. I shall mention three ways in which they do this, using my own nomenclature:

- *Identification*: Choosing a historical or contemporary movement and endorsing it, allowing it to set standards of truth.
- *Antithesis*: Choosing a historical movement and opposing it, making it into a paradigm case of error. (Thus the main stream of liberal theology has typically demonized especially modern "fundamentalism" and the post-Reformation Protestant theologians.)
- *Triangulation*: Identifying two or more historical movements thought to be of some value, identifying weaknesses in these movements, and defining a new position which supposedly overcomes these weaknesses.³

When I studied at Yale in the mid-1960s, the courses labeled "systematic theology" were actually courses in the history of liberal theology since Schleiermacher. (Theology before Schleiermacher was called "history of doctrine.") Whatever movement the professor espoused (process theology, narrative theology, Kierkegaardian individualism, etc.) provided the "identification." Fundamentalism or Protestant orthodoxy provided the "antithesis." Triangulation was the method urged upon the students for developing their own theological perspectives. Barth had too much transcendence, Bultmann too much immanence; so the students were encouraged to go "beyond" both, to a position which did justice to the insights of Barth and Bultmann, without going to such indefensible extremes. Doing their own triangulating, some professors pointed us to the "futuristic" theologies of Moltmann, Gutierrez, and Pannenberg, in which the future provides transcendence and the concrete movement of history provides

immanence. But more importantly, students were urged to go their own way, triangulating on whatever movements inspired them, to develop their own distinctive brands of theology.

Evangelical Traditionalism

Evangelical scholars often study in liberal institutions, so it is not surprising that the methods of identification, antithesis, and triangulation have also entered evangelical theology, sometimes alongside a genuine concern for *sola Scriptura*. There is, of course, nothing wrong with the three methods themselves as long as Scripture supplies the norms for evaluation. But using them without Biblical norms (as in the examples of my Yale experience) amounts to theological autonomy and the loss of *sola Scriptura*.

Most theologians in the evangelical tradition do confess *sola Scriptura*. But alongside that confession has arisen an increasing emphasis on tradition.

Thirty years ago, the best-known evangelical scholars were apologists, Biblical scholars, and systematic theologians (Clark, Henry, Carnell, Van Til, Bruce, Packer⁴). Today, evangelical academic leaders are largely in the field of historical theology, or they are systematic theologians who greatly emphasize church history: Armstrong, Bloesch, Godfrey, Grenz, Hart, Horton, Marsden, McGrath, Muller, Noll, Oden, Wells, et al.⁵

In addition, we should note (1) the movement toward a renewed confessionalism led by the Association of Confessing Evangelicals, and (2) recent “conversions” of people of evangelical background to communions giving more stress to the historic traditions of the church: Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy.

What lies behind these trends? An adequate answer to that question would probably require historians of the caliber of the men listed above. But here are a few suggestions that make some sense to me.⁶

Evangelical Exposure to Liberal Theological Methods

The academic stars of evangelicalism are chosen, to a great extent, by the secularist-liberal academic establishment. Those whose scholarship is most admired among evangelicals are those who have earned degrees and/or obtained appointments at outstanding secular universities. The secular academic establishment does not, of course, reward theologians who derive their conclusions from the divine, infallible authority of Scripture. But gifted evangelicals can do well in the secular environment if they write their dissertations and phrase their conclusions in *historical* terms. One could not, for example, expect Oxford University to grant a Ph.D. to a dissertation defending Biblical inerrancy. But it is not too hard to imagine such a degree being given for a thesis on the *history* of

the doctrine of inerrancy, in which the writer’s own evaluations are couched in the modes of identification,⁷ antithesis, and triangulation.

If an evangelical doctoral candidate has a bias in favor of sixteenth-century theology instead of nineteenth or twentieth, the secular establishment will not normally consider that attitude any sort of challenge, as long as in other respects the candidate respects the methods and standards approved by the establishment. Indeed, the candidate’s advisors and readers may regard his bias as a quaint sort of antiquarianism, a charming affectation appropriate to the academic vocation.

So it has been natural for evangelicals to focus on historical studies and methods, even when seeking to give some normative support to evangelical distinctives.

That is not wrong, in my estimation. It does not necessarily entail compromise. One does what one can do in such a situation. It has been going on a long time. I recall that when the Reformed scholar John H. Gerstner taught at the liberal Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, he held the title Professor of Church History, though in my estimation most of his interests were better classified as systematic theology. Holding his conservative beliefs, he was not invited to teach systematic theology, but he regularly taught courses in the “history of” various doctrines: Biblical authority, justification, and so on. Gerstner had a tremendous influence; R. C. Sproul attributes his Ligonier Ministries to Gerstner’s theological inspiration.

Though the emphasis on history can certainly be justified by the inherent value of historical studies and by the pragmatics of evangelicalism’s marginal position in the academic world, there is a downside. Scholars can⁸ get into the habit of using the methods of identification, antithesis, and triangulation, without taking adequate care to find Biblical standards of evaluation.⁹

Identification: They may sometimes attach themselves to some movement in the past or present that they come to regard virtually as a standard of truth.¹⁰ In Reformed circles, this tendency leads to a fervent traditionalism, in which, not only the Confessions, but also the extra-confessional practices of the Reformed tradition, in areas such as worship, evangelism, pastoral care, are placed beyond question. In an atmosphere of such traditionalism, it is not possible to consider further reform, beyond that accomplished in the Reformation period itself. There is no continuing reformation of the church’s standards and practices by comparing them with Scripture. Thus there is no way in which new practices, addressing needs of the present time, can be considered or evaluated theologically. This is ironic, because one of the most basic convictions of the Reformed tradition itself is *sola Scriptura*, which mandates continuing reformation, *semper reformanda*. At this point, Reformed traditionalism is profoundly anti-traditional.

In other circles influenced by evangelicalism, there is an identification with evangelical feminism. Paul K. Jewett's *The Ordination of Women*¹¹ is so strongly governed by feminist assumptions that even the authority of the Apostle Paul comes under question.

Antithesis: Such scholars tend also to focus on other movements which serve as paradigms of error. In Reformed circles, these movements usually include Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, the charismatic movement, dispensationalism, and such contemporary movements as liberalism, Marxism, feminism, and "pop culture." I am not an advocate of any of these movements, and I see them as deeply flawed. But I think it is wrong to make them *paradigms* of error, so that nothing true or good can ever be found in any of them. Our world is fallen, but it is also the object of God's common and special grace. Therefore, both good and bad are to be found in all people and social institutions.¹²

But one sometimes gets the impression in reading evangelical theology that it is wrong to find any good in such movements, or even to formulate our own positions in ways that "blunt our testimony" against these movements. It is almost as though a theology cannot be genuinely Reformed unless it is "set over against" these other movements in the sharpest way.

At its worst, this method becomes a *via negativa*: we attempt to define the truth by looking at a movement we don't like and defining our own position to be the opposite of that. Thus, ironically, the false movement becomes, by logical inversion, a standard of Christian truth. Antithesis becomes a perverse form of natural theology. But surely this is wrong. We should define the Christian message positively, from the clear revelation of God's Word. I consider the *via negativa* to be fatal to the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.

Triangulation: Or, evangelical scholars trained in the methods of liberal theology may seek to develop new and fresh forms of evangelicalism by the method of triangulation. I see some evidence of this in Stanley Grenz's and Roger Olson's *Twentieth-Century Theology*¹³ in which everything turns on the concepts of transcendence and immanence, and the challenge to evangelicals is to seek a "balance" that Kant, Barth, Tillich and others have failed to achieve. My response: don't seek to balance the profoundly false notions of transcendence and immanence found in liberal theology, but go back to the Bible.

I also believe that the "open theism" of Pinnock, Rice, Basinger, and others is essentially a triangulation between traditional Arminianism and process theology. Arminianism doesn't adequately safeguard its own concept of free will, because of its affirmation of divine foreknowledge. Process theology overcomes this problem by denying foreknowledge; but its god is so immanent that it is not clearly distinct from the world.

Ergo, open theism: God is transcendent, but does not have complete knowledge of the future. It would have been better, in my view, for Pinnock and the others to have looked harder at Scripture.¹⁴ A more careful look at the Bible would have led them to question the heart of their system: the libertarian view of human free will.

Evangelical Weariness Over the Inerrancy Debate

The "battle for the Bible" has virtually defined American evangelicalism from the time of B. B. Warfield until very recently. In the early days of that period, the battle was against the liberals who defined themselves, in effect, as being opposed to Biblical inerrancy. In the mid-1960s, however, it became evident that some within the evangelical tradition also found it difficult to affirm Biblical inerrancy, and the battle raged within the evangelical movement as well as with those outside. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy held conferences and published a great many writings on the subject before it disbanded. It remains to be seen where this discussion has led the evangelical movement.

Since inerrancy was often mentioned as the doctrine that defined evangelicalism over against its Protestant liberal rivals, the questioning of inerrancy within evangelicalism led to a profound identity crisis. The "limited" or "partial" inerrantists were not liberals; they were supernaturalists who held to the traditional "fundamentals" (virgin birth, miracles, blood atonement, physical Resurrection, second coming) *except for* Biblical inerrancy. But with such a deep rift on a central matter, how was the evangelical family to stay together?

There were different answers to this question among evangelicals. Some inerrantists simply read their opponents out of the movement. Others tried to recognize the remaining common ground, along with the differences. Questions of inerrancy sometimes, at least, resolved into questions of interpretation (*e.g.*, the question of whether Genesis 1 teaches a temporal sequence of divine creation in 24-hour days), and increasing realization of that fact led some on either side to see the issue as something other than black-and-white. And there was a *rapprochement* from the far side as well: scholars from the liberal tradition were taking the Bible more seriously and coming to more conservative conclusions on historical and dogmatic questions. Thus the gap between Evangelicals and liberals narrowed, appearing in some cases to be a continuum rather than an antithesis.

With these developments came a weariness with the inerrancy debate. Today there is far less interest, even among those committed to a strong view of inerrancy, in proving the Bible right about every matter of history, geography, science, than there was

twenty years ago. Further, some have sensed a need for a common-ground methodology that will enable inerrantists, limited-inerrancy evangelicals, and liberals to work together without constantly arguing the detailed accuracy of the Biblical texts.

That methodology is essentially the methodology of historical scholarship. When Wolfhart Pannenberg, coming from the liberal tradition, declared the necessity of verifying all theological statements by (religiously neutral) historical scholarship, many evangelicals applauded.¹⁵ They perceived this dictum as vindicating their evidential apologetic. And in effect, many evangelicals of different convictions about inerrancy, and many liberals of different stripes, are now working together to develop theology on this model.

But a theology based on religiously neutral historical scholarship must find its standards of truth elsewhere than Scripture. And so the methods of this kind of theology tend to be the methods of identity, antithesis, and triangulation discussed earlier in this paper, rather than any direct and detailed appeal to Biblical texts.

Evangelical Shame Over Past Parochialism

Evangelicals have in this century often been called to re-examine themselves. Carl Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of American Fundamentalism*¹⁶ chastised evangelicals for their poor scholarship and their withdrawal from issues of social justice. The "new" evangelicalism of the postwar period tried to reconstruct fundamentalism along the lines suggested by Henry and others. In the debate over inerrancy around 1967-1990, again the very nature of evangelicalism was up for discussion.

Meanwhile, other evangelicals found their tradition wanting in its lack of any sense of the great traditions of the church. Evangelicalism, it seemed, was not well-connected to the roots of Christendom: the church fathers, Augustine, the fathers of the Eastern church, the great liturgical traditions of Catholicism and Protestantism. This was connected with the feeling that evangelicalism was liturgically inadequate: too simplistic, without a sense of transcendence or depth, aesthetically inane, culturally parochial. Some evangelicals studied carefully the traditions of the broader church, and some of them defected to church bodies that are not generally considered evangelical: Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy.

Others have remained within evangelical churches, but have urged upon their denominations a greater respect for broader Christian traditions. I applaud this development as a symptom of a reawakening of Biblical ecumenism.¹⁷ But insofar as this movement represents a weakening of the *sola*

Scriptura principle, I fear that its ultimate thrust will be anti-ecumenical, for it will forfeit the only firm basis for a reunion of the church.

These developments have come, of course, through historical study, and they have both presupposed and confirmed a higher evaluation of the importance of tradition than has been common in evangelicalism. Indeed, conversations with former evangelicals who have crossed the wall into these other movements often turn on the subject of *sola Scriptura*. Converts from evangelicalism often report that their turning point came with a radical questioning of *sola Scriptura*, leading to an identification of tradition (of course including Scripture) as the fundamental source of revelation.

(Part 2 will appear next month.)

¹ I have previously addressed these issues in my books *Evangelical Reunion* (Grand Rapids, 1991) and *Contemporary Worship Music* (Phillipsburg, 1997), especially Appendix 2 of the latter, "In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism," published also in longer form in *Westminster Theological Journal* 59:2 (Fall, 1997), 269-318, with responses by Richard Muller and David Wells. I also participated in an e-mail debate on this and other subjects with Darryl Hart in early 1998. A ZIP-format file of that debate may still be available from Andy Webb at <ajwebb@erols.com>.

² By "liberal" I refer to the whole tradition from enlightenment rationalism to the present which currently dominates mainstream theological discussion and ministerial training in the large denominations. It includes, not only the "older liberalism" of Ritschl and Harnack, but also neo-orthodoxy, existential theology, secular theology, liberation theology, post-liberalism, and other movements.

³ These three methods form a Hegelian triad of sorts.

⁴ Bruce and Packer were, of course, historians too. But during the 1960s they were better known for Biblical scholarship and systematic theology, respectively.

⁵ Let me make clear my profound respect for these men and the quality of scholarship they have maintained. My criticisms of evangelical historicism, which may in part apply to some of these brothers, is not intended in the least to dishonor them or to belittle their achievements.

⁶ For those familiar with my "perspectives," the following three suggestions can be classified as situational, normative, and existential, respectively.

⁷ Of course, in such a context one must identify with a movement that has the approval of the liberal establishment.

⁸ I am not saying, of course, that study in liberal institutions leads *necessarily* to these distortions. Some students have resisted these influences successfully, J. Gresham Machen being a conspicuous example. But fallen human nature being what it is, it is not surprising that some have succumbed to these temptations.

⁹ I have used the example of David Wells in my "In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism," cited above. See also my comments on Richard Muller, "Muller on Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56:1 (Spring, 1994), 133-51. See also comments on Hart, Marva Dawn, and others in my *Contemporary Worship Music*.

¹⁰ Hart, in the debate cited earlier, describes Reformed tradition as a kind of "presupposition," in the Van Tilian sense of that term. Elsewhere in the debate, he does claim belief in *sola Scriptura*, but not very credibly in view of his enormous reverence for tradition. He expresses terror of ever departing from Reformed tradition in any respect, comparing that to the terror Luther experienced at the prospect of breaking fellowship with the Roman Church.

¹¹ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. His later systematic theological work, *God, Creation, and Revelation* (Grand Rapids, 1991) also affirms the feminist movement and adopts sexual egalitarianism as one of its main structural motives. See pp. 13-14, 322-325, and the sermons included in the book of the Rev. Dr. Marguerite Schuster.

¹² I do hold a Van Tilian view of antithesis between the church and the world, between truth and error. But Van Til himself recognized the importance of common grace, and he spoke of a "mixture of truth and error" in the thought of unbelievers. He also recognized that antithesis in the proper Biblical sense requires definition on Biblical

standards, not on the basis of our autonomous evaluations of historical movements. See my *Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, 1995), especially chapter 15.

¹³ Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992.

¹⁴ I realize that their writings do include exegetical arguments, but I find these quite implausible. Ironically, it seems to me that their exegesis falls into the error that they regularly attribute to Calvinists: their exegetical conclusions are governed by their dogmatics.

¹⁵ For reasons *not* to applaud religious neutrality in apologetics, history, and theology, see my *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, 1994) and *Cornelius Van Til*, cited above. See also the above mentioned articles "Muller on Theology" and "In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism." By "religiously neutral" I mean scholarship in which the ultimate standards of truth are found somewhere other than Scripture.

¹⁶ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947.

¹⁷ See my *Evangelical Reunion*.

For thirty-one years, John Frame served on the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary. He was a founding faculty member of WTS, California. He has written many books and articles, including Van Til, the Theologian. He is now a Professor at RTS, Orlando. He can be reached at jframe@rts.edu.

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immoral men, should claim the authority to teach and rule that belonged to men [the Apostles] to whom the truth was supernaturally revealed, who were confessedly infallible in their communication, and to whose divine mission God Himself bore witness in signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost” (p.140, Vol.1).

— The Romanist teaching that “the salvation of men should be suspended on their acknowledging the Pope to be the head of the Church in the world, or the vicar of Christ,” is “a monstrous error, contrary to the Bible, to its letter and spirit, and shocking to the commonsense of mankind” (p.147, Vol. 1).

— That the Romanist “doctrine of the merit of good works ... is another most prolific error” (p.148, Vol. 1).

— That these errors, and more, taught by the Roman Church, “prove that the Church instead of being infallible, is so corrupt that it is the duty of the people of God to come out of it and to renounce its fellowship” (p.149, Vol. 1):

— That the Reformers, “with one voice,” pronounced the Roman Church to be “the Babylon of the Apocalypse which was to be overthrown and rendered desolate.” And the Reformers “held up the Papacy as the antichristian power predicted by Daniel, by St. Paul, and by St. John ...” (p. 832, Vol. 3, Part 4).

Now, Brother Calvin. Among other things, he says the following regarding the Roman Church, as quoted in Graham Miller’s book *Calvin’s Wisdom: An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically* (Banner Of Truth, 1992):

— “We are ever now and then enforced to show and testify how much Papistry differeth from Christianity, and what a hurtful plague it is to be yoked with the unfaithful enemies of Christ.”

— “Their whole doctrine contains nothing else than big words and bombast, because it is inconsistent with the majesty of Scripture, the efficacy of the Spirit, the gravity of the prophets, and the sincerity of the apostles ... It is ... an absolute profanation of real theology.”

— “It is better a hundred times to separate from [the Papists] than to be united together, and thus form an ungodly and wicked union against God.”

— “[The Papacy] brought feigned washings from the lake of hell, to make dry the blood of the Son of God ... Instead of the Holy Ghost; he ... erected man’s free will ... the true Christ is banished far from the Papistry.”

— “The whole of Popery ... is built on ignorance of Christ.”

— “Under Popery ... every person had a different method of washing away his sins.”

— “What is the worship of God in the papacy these days but a confused jumble, which they have

thrown together from numberless fictions? ... fabricated by the will of man.”

— “In the whole body of worship which has been established, there was scarcely a single observance which had an authoritative sanction from the Word of God.”

— “Roman antichrist invites us to himself, under the pretence of unity, and pronounces all to be schismatics who do not spontaneously submit to ... the yoke of his tyranny.”

— “The Popish hierarchy I execrate as a diabolical confusion, established for the very purpose of making God Himself to be despised, and of exposing the Christian religion to mockery and scorn.”

— “Papists ... have a diabolical synagogue.”

— “We know well that under the Pope there is a bastard sort of Christianity, and that God will disavow it at the last day, seeing that He now condemns it in his Word.”

For more on this important subject, I recommend a new book *The Reformation’s Conflict With Rome — Why It Must Continue* (Christian Focus Publications, 2001) by Robert L. Reymond, with a Foreword by R.C. Sproul.

John Lofton
Laurel, Maryland

Dear John:

Here is the explanation you seek, John, from the best of the Reformed (in distinction from — but not as opposed to — the Presbyterian) tradition. From Van Dellen and Monsma’s commentary on the Church Order, 1951 edition, pp. 47-48:

Our fathers looked upon the Roman Church as being fearfully corrupt, deformed, teaching and practicing God-dishonoring and un-Biblical doctrine, but they did not deny at heart it was a manifestation and representation of the body of Christ. Consequently, they acknowledged the baptism administered by those duly appointed by the Church of Rome.

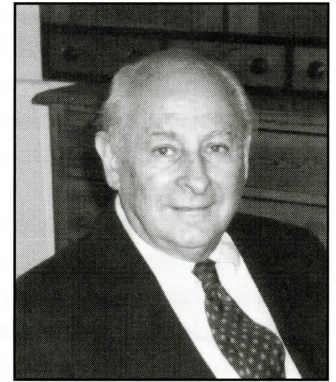
This is really simple: If Rome was not in covenant, their baptism could not be recognized. It has been and is recognized by Reformed (and by far most) Presbyterian churches. This is THE Reformed position. It was not Thornwell’s, of course, but it certainly was Calvin’s and Hodge’s and that of Continental Reformed denominations.

You may in time find that you are caught in a uniquely American (read “Fundamentalist Baptist”) dilemma, but this has been and is standard fare for Reformed churches. Like it or not, those are the facts.

Love from NYC,
Steve

How to Teach History to Children

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld



Several months ago, a mother brought her 12-year-old son, Daniel, to me to be tutored. I had taught the child to read at the age of four with *Alpha-Phonics*, after which he could read the *New York Times* with ease. He's an intelligent child with great intellectual curiosity. But in public school he is considered a bit of a troublemaker, uncooperative, and a poor student who does sloppy homework. His mother brought him back to me because she wants him to be educated. She had been in constant conflict with Daniel's teachers concerning his intellectual needs, but the school is incapable of providing what she wants. That's why she decided to come back to me.

Since I hadn't seen Daniel in years, I didn't know what his academic deficiencies were. So I began asking him questions. I asked him to name America's wars in chronological order. He couldn't do it. He knew about the American Revolution and the Civil War, but he had no idea when the Civil War took place. In fact, he knew very little U.S. history, and what facts he knew were isolated events that had no connection with one another. His chronological knowledge was zero. In public school he was being taught social studies in which he was learning a lot about Ancient Egypt and how mummies were embalmed.

Creation vs. History

So I knew what had to be done if Daniel were ever to be educated. He had to be taught history. He had to be taught the proper chronological sequence of events. He had to be taught cause and effect. But how does one start? The reason why the public schools no longer teach history is because they start with evolution and the primordial ooze. Human beings are animals and therefore theoretically have no more history than other animals. Have you ever asked a cat about cat history? Have you ever asked a dog to tell you of the great events in dog history?

But of course, even the evolutionists know that human beings are different from their animal cousins. But being intellectually dishonest, they can claim with a

straight face that history has nothing to do with a chronological sequence of events. The notion of history must therefore be perverted so that it illustrates social arrangements on the evolutionary road to socialist utopia. That's what "social" studies are all about. Therefore, children are to be taught about the Eskimos and how they send their elderly grandparents on ice floes to die — a humane sort of euthanasia. Or they are taught about ancient Egypt and the climate that influenced that civilization. Mummification is studied at length because it's spooky and fits in nicely with death education. Why would you want to teach a child about a dry piece of parchment called the U.S. Constitution? What good would that do, if life is essentially meaningless and traditional history has no social value?

When William Spady, the tireless promoter of Outcome-Based Education, was asked if history was going to be taught in OBE, he said that there should not be a separate course called history "that starts at some ancient time and moves forward to the present." The students should "thoroughly examine current problems, issues, and phenomena in depth and ask why, why, why, about their origins and relationships." But how will the students be able to get an answer to their "whys" unless they know history? Easy. They will use psychology to analyze why something happened. Current problems will be understood in terms of behavioral psychology — with a little Freudian psychoanalysis thrown in to spice things up. And their solutions will also be spelled out in terms of psychology.

God and History

But if you believe that man was created by God, in His image, then you require an approach to history that takes that into account. And so, when Daniel came for his first session, we started by reading Genesis and discussing what God had in mind when He created the universe and man. Daniel had never read the Bible before, and therefore it was a revelation to him. It was important for him to know that there was a Creator with the power to create the universe, to

create the earth, and to create man. We read that God gave man dominion over the natural world, and we discussed the difference between this understanding of man's responsibility as a steward of the natural world, and the environmentalist view that man is a polluter of the natural world.

We then read how God brought the animals "after their kind" before Adam and told him to name them. What did this mean? It meant that God had made man into a scientist, an objective observer of the natural world, and a lexicographer, an inventor of names and words. God had given man the power of speech, but it was up to man to create his language.

Daniel liked the word "lexicographer" and had to repeat it twice before pronouncing it correctly. I began to realize that the Bible should really be the first book in history, if one is to teach history as the story of man on earth and his relationship with his Creator. It is that relationship that not only gives meaning to one's life, but gives meaning to history itself.

We then read further into Genesis, God's creation of Eve, the temptation of Eve by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the eating of the forbidden fruit, and its consequences, not only for Adam and Eve, but for all mankind. In God's words, "In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life." That's powerful stuff. But if you want to instill a deep sense of morality in a child, is there a better way to do it? Is it too difficult for a 12-year-old to understand the reason for man's fall — disobedience to God — and realize that he will be morally tested every day of his life? The old primers used to teach, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." That was the source of early America's moral backbone.

Deuteronomy tells us that is what we must teach our children, if they are to begin to understand the power and goodness of God and why they must obey His commandments. And is not history the story of man's struggle with good and evil and of his long sorrowful trail of disobedience?

How much of the Bible should be read before getting into historical narrative? That's a subject for any parent or educator to deal with. My plan, at present, is to have Daniel read well into the Bible, covering the major stories, before getting into traditional history. Over the years, I have collected a number of old history textbooks written at a time when historians believed in God. They are the books that educated early generations of Americans, and they are the ones we shall use. They are limited, of course, in that they usually end before the Civil War. We then shall have to find historians who have written books taking us at least to the turn of the last

century. Ridpath comes to mind as a good historian with a readable, dramatic narrative style. Robert Welch, at the age of seven, read all nine huge volumes of Ridpath's *History of the World*, which kindled his lifelong love of history.

I have no idea how long Daniel's mother will want me to tutor him. He may go off to a private school away from home. But this business of teaching history to children is one that is very much worth thinking about.

Recently I had dinner at a friend's house and was chatting with his 12-year-old daughter who attends a local public school. I asked her how she was doing, and she told me that she hated school — not merely disliked school, but hated it. I had hoped that her parents would home school her. But they just couldn't do it. I told her I thought I knew why she hated school — because it was boring. Yes, she replied. It was boring. I thought, education without God is inevitably boring.

And then I said, "And you're probably not learning much also." She wanted to know what I meant by that. So I asked her to name the first three wars that the United States was involved with. She got the first one all right, the Revolutionary War. But the only other war she could think of was the Civil War, and, like Daniel, she had no idea when that took place.

The second war, I told her, was the one fought against the Barbary pirates of North Africa who kidnapped Americans for ransom. An American invasion of Tripolitania brought that war to a victorious end. My friend's daughter had never heard of that war. The fact is that most Americans have never heard of it. But the anthem of the U.S. Marine Corps should remind us: "From the halls of Montezuma, to the Shores to Tripoli..."

The third war was the War of 1812. She had never heard of that one either. She had never heard of the Battle of New Orleans, or the burning of Washington by the British, or Andrew Jackson, the hero of that war, who later became our seventh President.

"But I know all about the Industrial Revolution," she volunteered. It turned out that her class had been studying the cotton mills of New England and how young girls were being exploited by the mill owners who were rich and mean. So, at the age of 12, she was already being indoctrinated to believe that the Industrial Revolution consisted mainly of factory owners exploiting poor young girls.

She had heard of Eli Whitney and the cotton gin. But she had never heard of Robert Fulton and the steamboat. In other words, the public schools were teaching "social studies," not history. Their aim was

to indoctrinate children in a pro-socialist view of our history by emphasizing the meanness of capitalism.

I have no doubt that this young girl will go through life associating the Industrial Revolution with those poor girls working in the mills. She accepted the views of her teacher as truth, and they are imbedded in her head unless somewhere down the road of life she realizes that she was indoctrinated by a pro-socialist teacher — as many conservatives learn when they get rid of the socialist notions their public schools inflicted on them.

The Public Schools

What kind of nation are we going to have with its best “educated” people devoid of any sense of history? The educators can’t solve the reading problem. But they don’t even believe that there’s a history problem. History as a subject in the public schools has simply been destroyed, and nations that destroy their history end up destroying themselves.

Perhaps the best way to judge a school curriculum is by the way it treats history. In the federal education reform plan known as School-to-Work, we know that the purpose of the curriculum is to create young adults willing to serve the state and the industries that will hire them. Obviously, a knowledge of history is unnecessary in a such a curriculum in which students are supposed to demonstrate their skills as potential members of the workforce. American history is simply irrelevant to what will be taught in School-to-Work.

As for immigrant children who, at one time, studied American history so that they could become Americans, they will be trained to become the willing workers of tomorrow, without a knowledge of our national history, but with lots of social information about slavery, racism, feminism, homophobia, abortion rights, social injustice, economic injustice, injustice toward native Americans, and whatever else the socialists can pour into “social studies.” Some of these immigrants, with an undefined but palpable love of America, may eventually discover American history for themselves.

But all is not lost. Many young adults discover history for themselves by reading popular books about historical events or watching the History Channel. There are also thousands of biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs that have been written over the centuries that provide important keys to history. Our publishing houses are bringing out new ones all the time.

Then we have the 1997 publication of Paul Johnson’s monumental *History of the American People*, an extraordinary book. Its opening lines create a great sense of anticipation: “The creation of the United States of America is the greatest of all human adventures. No

other national story holds such tremendous lessons, for the American people themselves and for the rest of mankind.” So, despite “social studies” with all of its perversions of the truth, the idea of history is anything but dead. But what percentage of the children coming out of our public schools will ever discover that, particularly those who can’t read or won’t read?

Home Schoolers

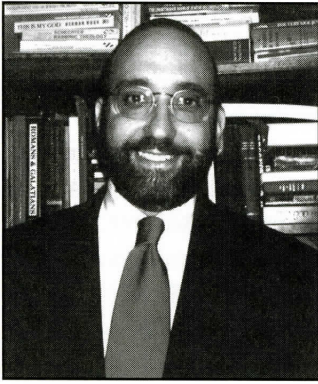
As one would expect, home schoolers are very much interested in history. All you have to do is look at the books being sold at home-school conventions to realize that history is one of the most popular subjects among them. And since most home schoolers are Christian, their keen sense of history comes from their study of the Bible, the greatest history book of them all.

Modern technology has also given us some very effective new tools to bring history to anyone who owns a tape player. Rev. J. Steven Wilkins’ excellent 16-cassette-tape history, *America: The First 350 Years*, can be listened to in one’s car or at home while doing chores. Rev. Rushdoony’s 18-tape cassette course, *American History to 1865*, not only provides the student with an insightful and engrossing view of our early history narrated by one of the great theologians of the twentieth century, but provides a philosophical foundation for understanding what is happening today.

In other words, even those who can’t read or have no time to read can learn history by listening to historians tell it in their own words. Thus, the tutor has the additional valuable tools of cassette tapes made by learned Christian scholars to teach children history. Since families do a lot of automobile travelling these days, rather than have the children play electronic games in the back seat, let them listen to tapes narrating the great historical dramas of the past.

Without history, we are indeed like the cats and the dogs. The story of human existence is the story of human experience, from which there is much to learn. To that effect, George Santayana summed up the problem very nicely when he said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Or as Konrad Adenauer put it: “History is the sum total of the things that could have been avoided.”

Samuel L. Blumenfeld is the leader in U. S. home schooling and phonics, and he has lectured on these subjects from coast to coast and abroad. State school authorities once called him statist educationalist “public enemy number one.” He can be reached at sblu@netway.com.



Regaining Consciousness

(Covenant Consciousness, That Is)

By Rev. Steve M. Schlissel

After a survey of our dreadfully decadent culture, and a peek at further decay ahead, we ask what the Christian response ought to be. At the top of the list we place *recovery of covenant consciousness*. This is a matter of first importance: thinking covenantally is a cornerstone issue. Its absence from Americanity goes a long way in explaining the church's crumbling before humanism. Therefore, it must be restored. We cannot stand before any enemy if we don't know who "we" are.

And "we" must be defined by a common, objective *faith*, not by a common *experience*. We have noted that even some who loudly tout their devotion to "the doctrines of grace" have fallen, sometimes headlong, into the baptistic trap in which the genuineness of Christian identification is measured by interior experience and not by God's gracious covenant. One consequence of this orientation has been the transformation of covenant worship into an occasion for well-meaning but ill-informed ministers to "bind heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders." Far from proclaiming and magnifying the *grace* of God in redeeming us, and then clearly spelling out our covenant obligations, these ministers address the gathered people of God as if they were bereft of true and saving grace. These pastors ascend their pulpits with the assumption that their churches are peopled by antichrists. Amazingly, these same ministers — who turn the sin of doubt into a sure sign of faith — often regard themselves as champions of the doctrine of assurance!

Experiential Religion

One leading proponent of this school writes, "unless our religion is experiential, we will perish," and, "without such (experiential) preaching, we will everlastingly perish." This is foul and mischievous rubbish and it leads to utter frustration and impotence. It leads people into subservience to preachers rather than Christ. Consider: Who gets to define the "experience" everyone must undergo before he may be confident that God has included him in His redemptive program? How intense must the experience be? How sustained or how frequent? Such preaching assumes no real distinction between the people of God

and heathen. It is, in truth, a blasphemous affront to the Triune God Who has saved — and is saving — His people by grace.

These assassins of grace pull out lists of internal virtues and shape them into ladders of self-righteousness by which the initiates imagine themselves to climb above the *am ha'oretz*, i.e., mere common, professing Christians. Lists of vices are also employed, twisted into ropes to bind the people, causing them to cast their eyes ever inward in search of an experience while the Christ of their salvation is kept hidden from view. The effect of such "ministering" is to cause Jehovah's people, on the wholesale level, to doubt His oceanic grace.

Consider the following examples of the kinds of things one hears from these pulpits. These things are routinely set forth not merely as lamentable conditions in need of improvement or strengthening, but as *certain signs that one is bound for hell*.

- "Gross willful ignorance." But what's the measure? Failure to memorize the Larger Catechism? The Apostles' Creed? No attainable standard is indicated, just a general warning that people who remain "ignorant" (of what, they don't say) are doomed.

- "Secret reserves in closing with Christ," that is, holding something back. They actually say that, unless one is "entirely devoted" to Christ, he will be "ruined forever." How this is to be distinguished from salvation by works eludes me. What's worse is that, again, there is no objective standard. How does a person *know* that he is so devoted, especially when, according to them, even "secret exceptions" will undo him, i.e., exceptions he is not aware of?! The simple prayer of the Psalmist to be cleansed from hidden faults won't meet the suprascriptural test of these titans of taunt.

- "Wrong motives in holy duties." But the very best of us find mixture in our motives. If one's motives must be entirely pure to gain a welcome into the kingdom of our Heavenly Father, all hope is gone and Christ died for nothing. Further, while wrong motives are a fault, Scripture indicates that it is better to do the right thing and grow in grace, than to continue in the wrong thing until you bring your motives up to speed.

Believe me when I tell you I could continue this litany of interior works well past the cows' homecoming: misplaced trust, secret hostility to the strictness of religion, resting in just a certain degree of religion, harboring malice against those who've injured you, unmortified pride, love of pleasure, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. I shouldn't need to note, but I fear I must, that I am as far from advocating any of these sins as east is from west. I am only saying that they should be addressed *as sins from which we should turn*, or shortcomings we should seek help from God to overcome, not as the very (unmeasurable!) thing which will leave us beyond God's mercy. Imagine the compounded consequence of being berated with this sort of thing week after week, month after month, year after year. And whenever anyone has the temerity to think he might actually be "saved," he hears the preacher warn, "it is a thousand to one that you will be deceived unless" your self-examination knows no end. And even then, he is told to keep in mind that whatever grace he thinks he might have discovered in himself could very well be a counterfeit of Satan, the master of deceit.

Covenant Consciousness

The entire Bible, but most notably the New Testament epistles, provide ample testimony that such an approach to God's own in the world should be reckoned as an intolerable assault. Where, I ask, is Christ in all this self-self-self preaching? Where is God's *gracious* covenant? It is buried under mountains of me-ism. That such people as the above can turn out tomes on "assurance" is either absurd or obscene, I'm not sure which. It's like Pol Pot writing a book on the pursuit of freedom, or like a thief trying to sell you back the goods he stole from your home. Morbid introspectionism is nothing more than the Interior Department of the Republic of the Pharisees.

Compare all this experiential browbeating to the actual approach of the apostles of our Lord: they were positively paternal in tone as they addressed professing Christians. Look at how Paul speaks to the Corinthians, a motley crew if ever there was one: schismatic, boastful, tolerant of vice in their midst, quick to sue each other in pagan courts, confused about marriage, spiritual gifts, the Lord's Supper, and even the resurrection! Yet how does St. Paul address them, at the Spirit's direction?

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind

in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Interesting historical note: Forty years later, in A.D. 95, the Corinthians were still caught up in their old, divisive ways. A coup by young Turks became the occasion for the (non-canonical) First Epistle of Clement to be written to them. How were these Corinthians addressed in that second-generation letter? As those "who are called and sanctified by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

People who are lawfully baptized in the Triune Name and who are members of creedally orthodox churches, endeavoring, albeit imperfectly, to live orderly lives, are to be addressed as *Christian*. Surely there may come a time to count someone *out*. This too is covenantal language. Thus Jesus warns the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3. But notice, until the candlestick is removed, they are addressed as heirs of the promise. The Spirit there, as elsewhere in the New Testament, speaks *to the churches*, and churches are communities of Christians. So long as they are within the pale of orthodoxy, they may be good, bad, or in between, but they are to be addressed — encouraged *and warned* — as Christians.

But didn't Jesus say a man must be born again? Yes, once. But what does it *mean*? Our Lord was speaking to a man who, at that time, apparently regarded Him as just another teacher or prophet (*Jn. 3:2*). Jesus wants Nicodemus to know that the King of the kingdom had come. *Recognition of Jesus as Lord is the issue, the dividing point of Israel* (see *Jn. 7:43*), indeed, of all history. And it is to God we must trace the confession that Jesus is Lord. You must be born again, or, *born from above*, from God. Jesus elaborates on this in His words to Peter in Matthew 16:17. The confession that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God," comes from His "Father in heaven." That is why Paul says, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (*1 Cor 12:3*). The confession of Jesus as Lord and Messiah is *exactly* what separated the church of the New Testament from the "church" which was left behind. Compare Acts 2:36. *Jesus* — and the orthodox confession of Jesus — *is central*, not experience. We are joined to a confessing community by grace. And it is in this community of grace that we are taught to believe everything He taught and to obey everything He commanded.

Steve Schlissel has been pastor of Messiah's Congregation in Brooklyn, NY since 1979. He serves as the Overseer of Urban Nations (a mission to the world in a single city) and is the Director of Meantime Ministries (an outreach to women who were sexually abused as children). Steve lives with his wife of 27 years, Jeanne, and their five children. He can be reached at steve@schlissel.com.



The Prayer of Jabez: A Review

By Paul Berghaus

It is unfortunate in a day when our President wants the federal government to tithe to the institutional church (faith-based programs), because the people of God have failed to do so, that an evangelical pastor would sound a call for millions of American Christians to ask for greater blessing from God, without first sounding a call to repentance for the faithless use of God's blessings already. In his book *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*, Bruce Wilkinson tells his readers that American evangelicals should follow the example of the Hebrew Jabez, and pray for God's blessing. Considering the number of book copies sold, it seems American evangelicals have responded to Wilkinson's exhortation with an overwhelming, "Amen!" In fact, a well-known Christian mail order and internet book distributor contains, as I write this article, 54 reviews of Wilkinson's book on their website, most of them favorable. These reviews include acclamations like:

Get the book and read it every week. Pray the prayer everyday and enjoy the blessings that will come your way.

I especially like the last sentence in Jabez's prayer. "And God granted his request."

It [Prayer of Jabez] provided so much insight into how much God wants to do through us and it also showed me how to allow God to do this.

The Prayer of Jabez really works!

Comments like these reflect the pragmatic and hedonistic view of God's Word held by many professing Christians. Too many of these Christians succumb to the evangelical marketers of God's Word, who sell the truth of Scripture like the latest diet pill, car wax, or carpet cleaner. "Hey, it really works!" However, God gave us His Word to *trust* and *obey*, in its entirety. When we focus on God's blessings, we often forget His warnings. So, when we learn about Jabez, who is a fine example for us, we must heed the same warnings from God's law-word that Jabez would have heeded. By doing so, we may further our training in righteousness far beyond what Bruce Wilkinson offers us in his book.

The God of Jabez

Bruce Wilkinson prefaces his book by saying, "This petition [the prayer of Jabez] has radically changed what I expect from God and what I experience every day by His power."¹ However, I don't believe Jabez viewed his God as One from Whom he expected things, but One Whom he obeyed. The Scriptures say, "Jabez was more honorable than his brothers..." (*1 Chr. 4:9*) The root of "honorable" in this verse is the same root used in the word "honor," which the prophet spoke to confront Eli's disobedience to God. Eli disobeyed the law of God by allowing his sons, who were ministering as priests, to take the fatty portions of the sacrifices, which were to be offered to God as the best portion. The prophet said, speaking for God, "those who honor Me I will honor" (*1 Sam. 2:30*). It is the sense of obedience (or the lack thereof) that the word "honor" conveys regarding Eli's actions. Similarly, it is the sense of obedience that the word "honorable" conveys regarding Jabez. Jabez was a man who obeyed God's law. Therefore, we can presume that Jabez emphasized, contrary to Wilkinson's emphasis, what *God* expected from *him*, rather than what he expected from God. Wilkinson fails to understand that it was Jabez's obedience to the law, which was a gift of God by grace through faith, that set him apart as honorable. Wilkinson says it was the prayer itself that set Jabez apart.² Jabez "earned" his more honorable place because of his prayer.³ Given his Arminian assumptions, Wilkinson is consistent in applying a causal relationship between our words and God's actions. Wilkinson links the effectualness of his own "prayer for salvation" with that of the prayer of Jabez.⁴ In other words, just as God saved Bruce Wilkinson in response to his prayer for salvation, so He blessed Jabez in response to his prayer for blessing.

Following this line of thinking, Wilkinson says that we can expect God's blessings because we pray thus.⁵ Wilkinson's Arminian theology has led him to a legalistic view of prayer. God is obligated to answer our prayers and bless us. The overwhelming tenor of his book is the believer's responsibility to enable God to bless him. He presents God as a frustrated philanthropist who wants to bless His people, but they just won't let Him! Wilkinson confesses:

I don't want to get to heaven and hear God say: "Let's look at your life, Bruce. Let me show you what I wanted to accomplish through you... but you wouldn't let me." What a travesty!

It is a travesty that Wilkinson presents a god that is not the sovereign God of Scripture. His thesis runs contrary to the uniform testimony of the Bible and contradicts the psalmist who said that God "does whatever He pleases" (Ps. 115:3), and Nebuchadnezzar who said that "No one can restrain His hand" (Dan. 4:35).

Furthermore, Wilkinson's exegesis is out of order. Jabez was declared honorable *prior to and regardless* of his prayer. The blessing that followed his prayer was an intensification of God's freely given favor, which already rested upon Jabez. God blessed Jabez according to the good pleasure of His will and ordained Jabez's prayer as the means by which to bless him more. In the same way, Bruce Wilkinson was able to pray his "prayer for salvation" because God had already saved him. God justifies and blesses His people according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:7-12). Therefore, it is more proper to emphasize that which Jabez *obeyed* more than that which Jabez *prayed*. This brings us to God's law and raises an important question that Wilkinson does not address, "As an honorable man, what would Jabez have tithed?"

Clearly, as an honorable man, Jabez would have tithed according to God's law. That tithe, when considered in its totality, consisted of 15%-18% of a person's annual income. This money provided for worship, education, and other social needs.⁶ Now, Jabez tithed to be sure, and at 15%, no less. He asked for God's blessing and was right in so doing. Moreover, it pleased the Lord to bless a faithful servant. It is the *faithfulness* of Jabez that Wilkinson fails to stress in his book, in as much as he overlooks the *faithlessness* of the modern evangelical church in America. We cannot arbitrarily choose a blessing like that which God bestowed to Jabez, and utterly ignore the example of his obedience. In fact, rather than asking God to give us more, we must seriously consider our measure of faithfulness with that which God has given already.

The next time you take home a paycheck, look at how much of it goes to Social Security and Medicare. Moreover, sit down sometime and calculate how much of your tax dollars pay for public education. These considerations alone should tell the people of God in America that we have failed to tithe. These matters: care for the elderly, care for the sick, and the education of our children, are matters which the people of God must provide through means of the tithe. The fact that the state has taken them over demonstrates our failure to tithe properly. So, instead of being faithful servants of our God, we have been wicked servants. Should we then pray for more blessing, from which we can neglect to tithe even greater amounts? Would more of a blessing help to reform our ways, and

cause us to tithe as we should? Not without repentance. Therefore, it is better for the American evangelical church to look away from *The Prayer of Jabez* and **to** the Scripture for its call to action.

The Parable of the Talents

As wicked servants, we must heed the warning of our Lord when He told the parable of the ten talents. The central theme in Jesus' parable of the ten talents is faithfulness with what a master gives his servants. The master gives each of his servants an amount of money, and then travels to a far away land. When the master returns, he settles up with his servants. Two of his servants have used his money well and have made a profit. The master blesses each saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt. 25:21,23). However, the third servant has been foolish, using his master's gift to no profit whatsoever. So the master declares to him, "You wicked and lazy servant" (v. 26). The master also says, "Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30).

When Jesus tells this parable, it is in the context of His teaching regarding His second coming and judgment. Jesus is speaking of Himself as the Master who will return one day to judge how His servants have used His blessings. Later in the same chapter, we see that the profit Jesus has in view is precisely the social needs mentioned above, which our civil government must now provide due to our own failure. Jesus speaks of the Son of Man's return, and His commendation of faithful servants (those on His right hand) in a way that parallels the master's commendation of the two faithful servants in the parable. He says:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me." (vv. 34-36)

The faithful servants will then reply to Jesus,

Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? (vv. 37-39)

To which Jesus will respond, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (v. 40).

The Lord Jesus defines what the profit on our blessings is to be, namely, to provide for the social needs mentioned. (This does not limit our ministry of the Word to the social needs around us. Salvation is not to be found in social well-being by means of social programs. Salvation is by grace through faith, by means of the Spirit-blessed proclamation of God's Word. A Biblical ministry proclaims God's Word and calls people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. The point of the parable is to instruct us in the use of the financial means with which God has entrusted us, not the use of the gospel message *per se*. The proclamation of the gospel, calling people to repentance and faith, is not primarily in view here, although it should be incorporated into any social program.) In light of Jesus' warnings, what is most necessary for the modern American evangelical church? How do we measure up to His standard of judgment expressed in the parable of the ten talents and the verses following? That is the question Bruce Wilkinson does not address in his book. He will not call God's people to repentance for being less than faithful, even wicked, servants. Instead, he calls us to ask for more blessing. In doing so, he leads many to be like the person James warns against, who asks amiss and spends what he receives on his own pleasures. Perhaps many have misunderstood Bruce Wilkinson, or perhaps they've understood him only too well. In today's culture, a book that appeals to the selfishness found in the church and society may sell very well. Whereas, a Biblically faithful book that calls Christians to repent and tithe according to God's law will not likely reach the best-seller list. Bruce Wilkinson's book has been on that list for weeks.

¹ Bruce Wilkinson, Preface to *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000).

² *ibid.*, 10.

³ *ibid.*, 76.

⁴ *ibid.*, 11.

⁵ *ibid.*, 84.

⁶ R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1973), 510.

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Wanted! Chalcedon-friendly Churches, Home Churches, Bible Studies. Chalcedon wants to develop a list of churches, home churches, and Bible studies sympathetic to our position and objectives so that we can share this information with those of you who call asking for groups in your area. If you would like for your group to be included on our list send the name of the contact person, their email, phone number, the town and state of the group to Susan Burns at chalcedon@netscope.net.