

THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE

William D. Barrick
Professor of Old Testament

Scripture is necessary because God willed to provide it and because mankind's condition required it. The image of God in man requires communication between God and human beings. God's incomprehensibility is another reason for the necessity of Scripture. Natural revelation's insufficiency to teach the nature of God makes Scripture indispensable. The complexity of divine truth would have eventually required a written revelation even for Adam had he remained in his unfallen state. The fall of man made comprehension of divine truth in an oral form impossible, because corrupt mankind is always prone to distort what is oral. God's special revelation had to be in written form. The work of God also makes written Scripture a necessity, since Scripture is the means that God has chosen to do His work in human lives. Without Scripture much would be left undone. There can be no question that Scripture is necessary.

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Introduction

Lord Byron (1788-1824), the great British Romantic poet, presented his publisher John Murray with a handsomely bound Bible containing a flattering inscription. Understandably, Murray was favorably impressed and placed it on a table where his guests would see it. Eventually a visitor admired the book enough to pick it up and thumb through it. While doing so, he noted an alteration of the text at John 18:40. In the sentence "Now Barabbas was a robber," Lord Byron had deleted "robber" and substituted the word "publisher." Byron's purpose in giving the Bible had finally come to light. Obviously, Murray no longer displayed Byron's gift on his table.¹ Why did Byron give Murray that Bible? It would appear that he desired to make a statement, but did not want to do so too openly or directly.

God's gift of Scripture to mankind also makes a statement, but it is made openly and directly. Purpose (making a statement) and necessity, however, are two different concepts. Was it necessary that Byron give the Bible to Murray? Was it

¹Clifton Fadiman, ed., *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985) 91-92.

necessary that he reveal his low opinion of his publisher in this fashion? Byron did not act under any necessity. He could have chosen a variety of means at his disposal to fulfill his purpose in letting Murray and others know how he felt.

This study asks the same questions about Scripture: Why did God provide Scripture? Was it a matter of necessity? In order to pursue this latter question theologically one must establish the meaning of *necessity*. What does the theologian mean by *the necessity of Scripture*? What does Scripture itself say about necessity?

Necessity Defined

By dictionary definition, *necessity* is that which is dictated by constraining circumstances.² Jude wrote, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity [ἀνάγκη] to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).³ Jude claims to have been compelled to write his epistle. Ἀνάγκη refers to some necessity imposed either by circumstances, law, or duty.⁴ Jude’s sense of compulsion related to the inscripturation of divine revelation. From Jude’s perspective, the compulsion to write resulted either from what he observed in the lives of the recipients of his letter or from the Spirit of God impelling him to write. Jude wrote his epistle in order that it might meet a need in the lives of a group of believers. Meeting the need for instruction in godly living is but one purpose for written revelation. In what way might such a purpose be related to the necessity of Scripture? How does the necessity of Scripture compare, for example, to the necessity of gospel preaching concerning Christ⁵ or the necessity of Christ’s death and resurrection?⁶ In the biblical view, such necessity “no longer expresses the

²William Morris, ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1979) 877.

³Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are cited from the New American Standard Bible (La Habra, Calif.: Lockman Foundation, 1977).

⁴“Both in the OT and Josephus ἀνάγκη has the meaning of constraint” (Walter Grundmann, “ἀναγκάζω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964] 1:345). “It expresses a situation of need” or even “a divine constraint which [Paul] cannot escape” (ibid., 1:346). William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 52, define ἀνάγκη as “necessity, compulsion of any kind, outer or inner, brought about by the nature of things, a divine dispensation, some hoped-for advantage, custom, duty, etc.” See also, Robert Morgenthaler, “Necessity, Must, Obligation: ἀνάγκη,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols., ed. by Colin Brown, 2:663-64 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

⁵See Acts 13:46, “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary [ἀναγκαῖος] that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’” The term ἀναγκαῖος has the same range of meaning as ἀνάγκη (see n. 4, above).

⁶See Luke 24:26, “‘Was it not necessary [δεῖ] for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’” Δεῖ “expresses the ‘character of necessity or compulsion’ in an event. . . . In most cases the word bears a weakened sense derived from everyday processes. It thus denotes that which in a given moment seems to be necessary or inevitable to a man or group of men” (Walter Grundmann, “δεῖ,” *TDNT* 2:21). According to Arndt and Gingrich, δεῖ means “it is necessary, one must or has to, denoting

neutral necessity of fate. Instead, it indicates the will of God declared in the message.”⁷

Normally the word “necessary,” when applied to some event, indicates that anything opposed to it is not successful in altering or preventing its occurrence. An event (like the giving of Scripture) is said to be necessary when it comes to pass notwithstanding any possible opposition to it. That which is necessary is something that cannot be frustrated regardless of any attempt or desire to the contrary. In the natural realm, for example, the sun will set no matter what anyone does or prays. It is a natural necessity rather than a moral necessity.⁸ According to Samuel Storms,

[M]oral necessity refers to the cause/effect relationship *within* the will itself, whereas natural necessity refers to the cause/effect relationship *external and prior to* the will. Thus when it is said that a man lied because of a moral necessity to lie, he is to blame, for the cause of such an action was *wholly his, being within the will itself*. If he should lie because of a natural necessity, i.e., if the cause which issues in lying be external to and *compelling upon* the will, his action is then not wholly his and he is thus excused from blame.⁹

In the realm of theology, the topic of necessity is best approached with care lest we limit God’s power and/or wisdom by means of some constraint we might lay upon Him. The necessity of Scripture falls within the category of moral necessity rather than natural necessity. God sovereignly willed the inscripturation of His Word. This means that God was not and is not under any obligation or any compulsion outside Himself to provide revelation (general or special) so that mankind might know Him or experience His saving grace. In other words, “God owes sinners nothing.”¹⁰ Why, then, did God choose to provide Scripture?

When it comes to the necessity of Scripture, the necessity is due more to mankind’s condition than to some form of constraint on God.¹¹ The Creator willingly chose to address human beings, who possessed no power to compel Him to communicate with them.

Necessity Involving the Image of God in Mankind

The necessity of Scripture, as a topic of theological discussion, has received

compulsion of any kind. . . . of divine destiny or unavoidable fate . . . of the compulsion of duty . . . of the compulsion of law or custom . . . of an inner necessity, growing out of a given situation . . . of the compulsion caused by the necessity of attaining a certain result . . . of the compulsion of what is fitting” (δεῖ in *Greek-English Lexicon*, 171). See also, Erich Tiedtke and Hans-Georg Link, “Necessity, Must, Obligation: δεῖ,” *NIDNTT* 2:664-66.

⁷Grundmann, “δεῖ,” *TDNT* 2:22.

⁸I am indebted to C. Samuel Storms, “Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of the Will,” *Trinity Journal* 3/2 (Fall 1982):143, for the concepts expressed in this paragraph.

⁹*Ibid.*, 145 [emphasis in the original].

¹⁰James I. Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word,” in *The Bible—The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968) 38.

¹¹*Ibid.*

little attention in the last century even though, according to J. I. Packer, a “pervasive conviction of the necessity of Scripture lies at the heart of evangelicalism.”¹² It is surprising that so few theologies discuss the topic.¹³ Those few who mention it tend to speak of the necessity of revelation rather than the necessity of Scripture. There is a difference. All Scripture is revelation, but all revelation was not inscripturated. Scripture does not comprise the totality of special revelation. Some of God’s speeches to mankind have not been preserved in Scripture (e.g., instructions to Abel regarding sacrifice).

In his *Systematic Theology*, Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) touched briefly upon the necessity of Scripture. He indicated that we must give due consideration to the image of God in mankind in order to find the reason for the necessity of Scripture:

Having made man in His own image and having endowed man with the capacity to commune with Himself, it is reasonable to expect that this competency in man would be exercised; that in due time God would disclose to man truth concerning Himself and His purposes, also man’s true place in the divine plan of creation—his relation to God, to eternity, to time, to virtue, to sin, to redemption, as well as to all other beings in this universe in which man’s life is cast.¹⁴

René Pache pursues this concept further by declaring that God created mankind in His image “so as to have creatures who could respond to Him, beings who could love and glorify Him.”¹⁵ Proverbs 8:31 describes God’s delight in mankind as follows: “Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And *having* my delight in the sons of men.” This delight was impetus for fellowship, a mutual interpersonal relationship.

Fellowship is the kind of interaction that is characteristic of personhood. It is one of the means by which mankind exhibits the image of God. From “the fact that God blessed human beings and gave them a mandate ([Gen 1:] v. 28), we may infer that humans also resemble God in that they are persons, responsible beings, who can be addressed by God and who are ultimately responsible to God as their Creator and Ruler.”¹⁶ John MacArthur develops this line of reasoning when he writes that “He *wants* us to know Him. Because God is a person, He wants to have fellowship with us.”¹⁷

¹²Ibid., 37.

¹³Theologians as early as John Calvin were discussing this topic. Although Selden claimed that “At the outset of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas argued for the necessity of scripture” (Jonathan Selden, “Aquinas, Luther, Melancthon, and Biblical Apologetics,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5/2 [Fall 1984]:186), I was unable to confirm it by my own reading of *Summa Theologica*, 1.5-6.

¹⁴Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947) 1:48.

¹⁵René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. by Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 12.

¹⁶Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 14.

¹⁷John MacArthur, *How to Get the Most from God's Word* (Dallas: Word, 1997) 13 [emphasis in the original].

In addition, the image of God includes the ability to speak and communicate in that our “gift of speech is an imitation of him who constantly speaks to us, both in this world and in his word.”¹⁸ One aspect of the power of speech displayed by Adam is the ability to name persons and things (Gen 2:19-20, 23). He was replicating the naming activity of his Creator (1:5, 8, 10). The personhoods of both God and man necessitate communication, because God created human beings with the ability to communicate with one another and with their Creator. Unless God speaks to mankind, that interaction is incomplete. The written Word is one means by which the Creator reveals Himself and enables human beings to know Him more fully.

Necessity Involving the Incomprehensibility of God

Mankind’s inability to comprehend God fully is not the result of the Adamic fall. It antedates the fall of man. Inability to understand God fully is related even to the perfect man’s finitude at creation. As Erickson notes, “Because man is finite and God is infinite, if man is to know God it must come about by God’s revelation of himself to man.”¹⁹ Even the unfallen Adam needed divine revelation to begin to perceive the fringe of God’s ways and the edges of His being (cf. Job 26:14).²⁰ Pache concurs with this kind of reasoning. He observes that,

*God is, by definition, inaccessible to the creature. His omnipotence, eternity and absolute perfection are by their very essence inconceivable to our limited minds. . . . It is evident, moreover, that for man to conceive of the Supreme Being in His absolute nature, he would have to be God Himself!*²¹

Through the prophet Isaiah, God explained the situation with these words: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (55:9). The Lord, however, “takes pleasure in revealing Himself.”²² Therefore, God is knowable in spite of His incomprehensibility. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) sought to explain this apparent oxymoron as follows:

[T]hat which God reveals of himself in and through creatures is so rich and so deep that it can never be fully known by any human individual. In many respects we do not even understand the universe of created beings, which again and again confronts us with enigmas and mysteries. How then should we be able to understand the revelation of *God* in all its riches and depth? But by admitting all this we by no means deny God’s knowability. God’s incomprehensibility, instead of abrogating his knowability,

¹⁸Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* 71.

¹⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 153.

²⁰“Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; And how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?”

²¹Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* 11-12 [emphasis in the original].

²²*Ibid.*, 12. Cf. Exod 6:3; Num 12:6; Ezek 38:23.

presupposes and affirms the same. The unsearchable riches of the Divine Being constitute a necessary and important element of our knowledge of God.²³

God is knowable to unbeliever (Rom 1:19-21, 28) and believer alike. Scripture writers employ the word “know” with several different meanings. For example, knowing God in salvation is not the same as knowing God through natural revelation.²⁴ As accurate as knowledge gained from natural revelation can be, it is not the equivalent of a saving or intimate knowledge of God. The following chart maps the semantic range of the words “know” and “knowledge” as employed in Scripture.²⁵

General Knowledge	Intimate Knowledge	Saving Knowledge	Perfect Knowledge
Unbelievers “knew God” (Rom 1:21) and even demons know Christ (Mark 1:34).		“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).	“no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27).
	Christ “never knew” the wicked (Matt 7:23).		But, He “knew all men” (John 2:24) and He knew Judas (John 13:11).
“That disciple was known to the high priest” (John 18:15).	“the world does not know us” (1 John 3:1).		
	“Adam knew his wife again” (Gen 4:25, NKJV).		

Thus it is possible to say of an individual that “he knows God” and, at the same time, “he does not know God”—both statements can be true of the same person (whether believer or unbeliever) at the same time. The believer has saving

²³Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. and ed. by William Hendriksen (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 reprint) 41-42 [emphasis in the original].

²⁴We must keep in mind that natural revelation includes creation and conscience (cf. Rom 2:14-15). “Natural revelation is not confined to the creation which is external. Natural revelation also comes through our conscience. This is internal. . . . People today, because of what they have on the inside, are conscious that God exists. . . . In order for the fool to say the word *God*, however, he must have a concept of God. And if he has a concept of God, that implies that God is. It is impossible to think of something that is not, therefore, he is trying to eliminate something that his very reasoning powers tell him exists” (MacArthur, *How to Get the Most from God's Word* 17). Shedd emphasizes the source of such knowledge: “the idea of God is not man’s product, but that of God. . . . Whatever worth or merit, therefore, there may be in this mental possession, is due to God not to man” (William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. [reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971] 1:208).

²⁵The chart displays the logical and chronological order of the four types of knowledge. The most basic and earliest knowledge is on the left and the most advanced and latest on the right.

knowledge of God, but does not know God fully. An unbeliever may “know” (= know about) the God of the Bible from both natural revelation and special revelation, yet still not have saving knowledge of God.

The point here, however, is that the incomplete nature of the knowledge of God obtained by natural revelation necessitates the addition of special revelation. In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin (1509-1564) devoted Chapter 6 of Book 1 to the necessity of Scripture.²⁶ He entitled it “The need of Scripture, as a guide and teacher, in coming to God as a Creator” (I vi). According to Calvin, the Word is for God “a surer and more direct means of discovering himself” (I vi.1). Natural revelation lacks the efficacy of special revelation: “God, foreseeing the inefficiency of his image imprinted on the fair form of the universe, has given the assistance of his Word to all whom he has ever been pleased to instruct effectually” (I vi.3). Indeed, inscripturated revelation clarifies and supplements natural revelation (I vi.1). Closely related to the incomprehensibility of God and the insufficiency of natural revelation is the complexity of divine truth.²⁷

Necessity Involving the Complexity of Divine Truth

As indicated at the start of the preceding discussion regarding the incomprehensibility of God, unfallen Adam needed revelation beyond what was contained in natural revelation even in a perfect creation. Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) expounded the concept this way:

[T]he revelation of God in Eden was not merely “natural.” Not only does the prohibition of the forbidden fruit involve a positive commandment (Gen. ii. 16), but the whole history implies an immediacy of intercourse with God which cannot easily be set to the credit of the picturesque art of the narrative, or be fully accounted for by the vividness of the perception of God in His works proper to sinless creatures.²⁸

Comparing unfallen mankind with fallen mankind, Chafer concludes, “if unfallen man needed the impartation of knowledge, how much more does fallen man, whose whole being is darkened, need to be taught of God!”²⁹ The fallen condition makes for even greater complexity. Complexity “in its full NT presentation, makes it inconceivable that the Church could retain it intact were not the revealed Word constantly at hand to be pored over and consulted in cases of doubt and uncertainty, and as a safeguard against forgetfulness.”³⁰

Thus, the complexity of divine truth necessitates a fuller revelation than that

²⁶John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1599; online edition, Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 1996-2002). Available online at <http://www.reformed.org/books/institutes/bk1ch06.html>.

²⁷Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 42 [emphasis in the original].

²⁸Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. by Samuel G. Craig (reprint of 1948 ed.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) 76.

²⁹Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 1:48. Cf. Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* 12.

³⁰Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 45.

of creation or conscience and that complexity has only been augmented by the fall. Biblically (and thus theologically), the most significant factor in this discussion of necessity is the fall of mankind.

Necessity Related to the Fall of Mankind

Millard Erickson answers the question about the necessity of inscripturated revelation³¹ by pointing to mankind's fallen condition and the attendant necessity of regaining a fuller knowledge of God in order that they might be restored to fellowship with God:

The problems of sin, guilt, and depravity had to be resolved; means of atonement, redemption, and reconciliation had to be provided. And now sin diminished man's comprehension of general revelation, thus lessening its efficacy. Therefore, special revelation had to become remedial with respect to both man's knowledge of and his relationship to God.³²

The key concept lacking in natural revelation was that of redemption and the Redeemer. That fact propelled Calvin's arguments dealing with the effects of fallen humanity. Packer summarizes Calvin's discourse in two assertions: (1) Scripture is necessary because God has appointed it to be so and (2) the mind of fallen human beings cannot know God apart from Scripture.³³ According to Calvin, inscripturated revelation is necessary due to the tendency of the fallen mind to corrupt divine revelation as a result of forgetfulness, error, fiction, neglect, and presumption.³⁴

These same arguments were developed in greater detail by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) in his discussion of the necessity of Scripture.³⁵ Inscripturated revelation is necessary, first of all, because of the untrustworthiness of memory. Apart from the written page, divinely imparted knowledge cannot be retained with any permanency.³⁶ Thought and speech, without the stability of the written word, can be manipulated in the same way the serpent manipulated Eve.³⁷ As wonderful and efficient as God's gift of language is for mankind, language alone (in thought or speech) is inadequate:

But *language* by itself would only accomplish this task within the bounds of a very limited circle and for a brief period of time, if it had not received the means of

³¹Erickson, *Christian Theology* 176.

³²Ibid., 177.

³³Packer, "The Necessity of the Revealed Word" 36.

³⁴Calvin, *Institutes* I vi.3.

³⁵Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. by J. Hendrik de Vries (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), especially §74 ("The Special Principium and the Written Word"), and *idem.*, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri de Vries (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 60-64.

³⁶Kuyper, *Principles* 84 (§40).

³⁷Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* 61.

perpetuating itself in *writing* and in *printing*. . . [T]he full, rich content of what the human consciousness had grasped, experienced and thought out could only be made œcumenic and perpetual with any degree of accuracy and completeness, when wondrous *writing* provided the means by which to objectify the content of the consciousness outside of self and to fix it.³⁸

Kuyper argues that the necessity of written revelation involves four characteristics of the written word: durability, catholicity, fixedness, and purity.³⁹ For the first two of these characteristics, “it cannot be said that writing is a need which has only come as a consequence of sin; even though . . . the need of writing has been *intensified* by sin.”⁴⁰

Since God intended His Word for all mankind, the written Word would be the best means by which to perpetuate and disperse it even in an unfallen world.⁴¹ For fallen humanity the written revelation is all the more necessary: “The chief virtue of this masterpiece was so to enfold God’s thoughts in our sinful life that out of our language they could form a speech in which to proclaim through the ages, to all nations, the mighty words of God.”⁴²

Fallen human beings are incapable of preserving oral tradition without corruption. Falsehood is one of the causes of such corruption. Falsehood can be a malfunction of memory, observation, or reasoning, as well as suppression (conscious or unconscious). It could even be intentional corruption. However, it is definitely a result of the sinful condition of mankind. In fact, as Kuyper explains, “Since Divine revelation directs itself against the mind and inclination of the sinner, sinful tendency could not be wanting, to represent that revelation differently from what it was given.”⁴³ In other words, there is an innate antagonism in the sinful nature to divine truth about mankind’s lost condition and the divine remedy for sin. In the light of human failings and the antipathy of sinners, Scripture is the most certain safeguard against the corruption of special revelation.⁴⁴

Thus preservation of special revelation without corruption is one of the chief purposes of inscripturation. For example, God commanded Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (Exod 17:14), so that the account concerning the Amalekites would be preserved.

Meditation is another reason for the inscripturation of special revelation. In order to meditate upon God’s instruction privately, the believer needs the inscripturated revelation. Even in OT times God made provision for the copying of

³⁸Kuyper, *Principles* 87 [emphasis in the original].

³⁹Ibid., 405 (§74).

⁴⁰Ibid., 406 [emphasis in the original].

⁴¹Ibid., 408-9.

⁴²Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* 64.

⁴³Kuyper, *Principles* 411.

⁴⁴These paragraphs regarding Kuyper’s theological reasoning can be supplemented by the excellent discussion of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 44/2 (Fall 1982):250-89.

the written Word for private meditation and study: “‘Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests’” (Deut 17:18).

Public attestation is yet another reason for the provision of a written revelation. The Lord told Isaiah that the writing of revelation in an accessible form would “serve in the time to come as a witness forever” (Isa 30:8). According to Habakkuk, a legible public record served much the same purpose: “Then the LORD answered me and said, ‘Record the vision And inscribe *it* on tablets, That the one who reads it may run’” (Hab 2:2). Inscripturated revelation proved to be the best means for Jeremiah to insure that Jehoiakim would hear the Word of the Lord when the prophet himself had been restricted in his movements:

And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, “I am restricted; I cannot go into the house of the LORD. So you go and read from the scroll which you have written at my dictation the words of the LORD to the people in the LORD's house on a fast day. And also you shall read them to all *the people of Judah* who come from their cities. Perhaps their supplication will come before the LORD, and everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and the wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people” (Jer 36:5-7).

Thus, written revelation allowed for delivery of the Lord's words even when the prophet himself could not proclaim them personally. This phenomenon is not limited to the OT. In the NT Paul emphasized the need for a public reading of the inscripturated Word at Thessalonica (“I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren,” 1 Thess 5:27), Colosse and Laodicea (“And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea,” Col 4:16). Likewise, on the island of Patmos a voice instructed John to “Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (Rev 1:11; cp. v. 19). Noting this matter of public record and its relationship to the necessity of Scripture, Calvin wrote that it was God's “pleasure that the same oracles which he had deposited with the fathers should be consigned, as it were, to public records”⁴⁵ to insure that God's people would be without excuse in categorizing God with false deities.

The witness provided by written revelation provides a testimony against those who choose to ignore or reject it. That was the intent of the Song of Moses: “Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in order that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel” (Deut 31:19). Again, in the days of Josiah, the written Word testified against Judah's wicked kings (2 Kgs 22:16; 2 Chr 34:24).

Such witness was not borne solely against God's chosen people. In Jer 51:59-64 written revelation bore witness against the pagan nation of Babylon:

The message which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the grandson of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the

⁴⁵Calvin, *Institutes* I vi.2.

fourth year of his reign. . . . So Jeremiah wrote in a single scroll all the calamity which would come upon Babylon, *that is*, all these words which have been written concerning Babylon. Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, “As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, and say, ‘Thou, O LORD, hast promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.’ And it will come about as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, ‘Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again, because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.’”

Does the necessity of Scripture change when a person has been regenerated? No. Regeneration fails to nullify the necessity, since human limitations, deception, forgetfulness, and simple error all continue to occur even after the new birth. Once fallen people have been restored to a right relationship with God, the written Word is still necessary for the periodic renewing of individuals and churches.⁴⁶ Erring believers and erring churches require recovery from their “constant decline.”⁴⁷ Scripture is also necessary in forming the foundation for the life of faith.⁴⁸ Packer explains that it “is evident that both the enjoyment of a restored status and the practice of rational righteousness presuppose knowledge of the will, works, and ways of God.”⁴⁹ Ezra perceived this necessity and made certain that the people heard the Word of God so they might determine the will of God (Neh 8:8; cp. Ps 119:169). The apostle Paul clearly understood the connection between the written Word’s revelation of the divine will and a believer being spiritual: “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Cor 14:37; cp. Eph 5:17).

Divine instruction necessitates written revelation to bring people along in their spiritual journeys. This is as the apostle had declared to Timothy: “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim 3:14-15). For Christians, the knowledge of God’s will comes only through the Scriptures.⁵⁰ Such is the message of 2 Tim 3:16-17: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Equipping involves a good deal of correction, clearing the believer’s mind of erroneous concepts gained while unregenerate. Beyond the corrective is the historical instruction of believers in the history of God’s dealings with mankind. Listen to Packer again:

⁴⁶Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 45 [emphasis in the original].

⁴⁷Ibid., 47.

⁴⁸Ibid. [emphasis in the original].

⁴⁹Ibid., 43.

⁵⁰See Chuck Deveau, “The Sufficiency of Scripture and God’s Will: 2 Timothy 3:13-17,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 1/2 (Summer 1995):3. Deveau observes that there is no necessity for God to give believers extrabiblical revelation to know His will (3-4).

The Bible indicates that to enable men to rise to these thoughts when Jesus came, God spent literally centuries preparing the way by teaching the Jewish people through the instruction of priests and prophets, through typical institutions of ministry, leadership, and worship, and through the revealed Word of the Old Testament writings, the basic concepts that they needed for this task.⁵¹

God provided written revelation to OT believers so they might obey Him: “And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write *it* in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes, and do them” (Ezek 43:11). The identical purpose exists also in the NT: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev 1:3).

Both testaments require the public reading, proclamation, and exposition of written revelation: “when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing” (Deut 31:11) and “Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching” (1 Tim 4:13).

The believer needs the Scriptures in order to replicate the faith of Abraham “which Paul proclaimed as a standard and a model,” that “was essentially an unyielding trust in God’s promise.”⁵² Of course, God’s promise is found only in the Scriptures.

Necessity Related to the Work of God

How does God work in His created world? According to John Behr’s study of second-century theologians, the early church strongly affirmed that

God *is* present and active, and, more specifically, that He is active and present *through His Word*—a Word which entails a breath, His Spirit—and that this is the Word by whom all things were created, who spoke with Abraham and Moses, who spoke through the Prophets, who was embodied in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as preached by the Apostles.⁵³

Although Christianity is often referred to as the religion of the Book, such a description is too general and lacks clarity regarding our faith’s relationship to the Scriptures. If God indeed acts through His Word, “then that Word needs to be heard, to be read, to be understood.”⁵⁴ Without Scripture, human beings are left without the means by which God has chosen to work.

One example of the overlap of God’s Word and God’s work can be seen in the covenant relationship that God chose to establish with His people. In order to

⁵¹Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 44.

⁵²Ibid., 48.

⁵³John Behr, “Scripture, the Gospel, and Orthodoxy,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 43/3-4 (1999):229 [emphasis in the original].

⁵⁴Ibid.

promulgate that covenant relationship, His Word was necessary: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel’” (Exod 34:27).

Related to the use of the Word to promulgate a covenant is the use of the Word to confirm its own truthfulness and trustworthiness. The prophet Isaiah gave special revelation as evidence of the dependability of his prophecies: “Seek from the book of the LORD, and read: Not one of these will be missing; None will lack its mate. For His mouth has commanded, And His Spirit has gathered them” (Isa 34:16). Jesus Himself repeatedly directed the attention of His hearers to the inscripturated Word (e.g., “Have you not/never read?” in Matt 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3). In the Apocalypse the Father commands inscripturation as proof of truth: “And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true’” (Rev 21:5).

Conversion itself is a work of God accomplished by means of His inscripturated Word: “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring⁵⁵ the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps 19:7). The NT counterpart of Psalm 19:7 is 2 Timothy 3:15: “and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” God commanded that His Scriptures be proclaimed to all nations, because they would lead those nations “to obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26; cf. 1 Pet 1:23).

Conclusion

Although God was absolutely free from natural necessity to provide written revelation to mankind, His very nature supplied a moral necessity for inscripturating His Word. Written revelation is in accord with God’s plan to create mankind in His own image. By divine design communication is a prime element in the personhoods of both God and mankind.

Human inability to understand God fully is related to the finitude of human beings even in their perfection at creation. The incomprehensibility of God also necessitates inscripturated revelation. God is knowable in part by natural revelation, but such knowledge is incomplete and insufficient for salvation.

The necessity of Scripture is also related to the complexity of divine truth.

⁵⁵The sense is best taken as “converting.” It is important to note the parallel line (the second half of the verse) and compare this verse with 2 Tim 3:15. In his discussion of Ps 23:3, Kidner provides the following explanation regarding the verb “restore/return”: “It may picture the straying sheep brought back, as in Isaiah 49:5, or perhaps Psalm 60:1 (Heb. 3), which use the same verb, whose intransitive sense is often ‘repent’ or ‘be converted’ (e.g. Ho. 14:1f; Joel 2:12). Psalm 19:7, by its subject (the law) and by the parallel verb (‘making wise’), points to a spiritual renewal of this kind, rather than mere refreshment. On the other hand, *my soul* usually means ‘my life’ or ‘myself’; and ‘restore’ often has a physical or psychological sense, as in Isaiah 58:12, or using another part of the verb, Proverbs 25:13, Lamentations 1:11, 16, 19. In our context the two senses evidently interact, so that the retrieving or reviving of the sheep pictures the deeper renewal of the man of God, spiritually perverse or ailing as he may be” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973] 110).

Inscripturated revelation is necessary because of the inability of sinners to preserve oral tradition without corruption. Malfunctions of memory, observation, or reasoning can impact the integrity of divine revelation given into the care of fallen mankind. A written revelation is in accord with God's determination to work through His Word to accomplish the program of redemption.

Practically speaking, the foremost factor involved in the necessity of Scripture is the fallen condition of the Adamic race. The fall increased human inability to comprehend God fully and amplified the complexity of divine truth. Fallen mankind is incapable of preserving oral tradition without corruption. Inscripturated revelation provides the ultimate witness by means of its durability, catholicity, fixedness, and purity.

Inscripturated revelation serves as a testimony against those who disobey the revealed will of God and as a testimony on behalf of those who obey His Word. More than this testimony, however, the presence of written revelation in its public reading and exposition provides the foundation for knowing and living the will of God. Inscripturated revelation equips the believer for every good work (2 Tim 3:17). It is God's design that Scripture be the instrument to advance people in their spiritual journeys, because obedience to God's Word is the core principle in spiritual maturity (1 Cor 14:37; Rev 1:3).

God acts through His Word. Therefore, His Word needs to be heard, read, and understood. Without Scripture, humans are left without the means by which God has chosen to work. Thus, Scripture is necessary. Inscripturated revelation bears self-witness to the truth and trustworthiness of Scripture. A dependable record of divine truth provides assurance that a person is converted by the Word of God. Therefore, because of the way the sovereign God has chosen to reveal Himself and work out His plan, the Scriptures are necessary.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE*

John MacArthur
President

God's Word is sufficient to meet every need of the human soul as David verifies frequently in his psalms. Psalm 19:7-14 is the most comprehensive statement regarding the sufficiency of Scripture. It is an inspired statement about Scripture as a qualified guide for every situation. Scripture is comprehensive, containing everything necessary for one's spiritual life. Scripture is surer than a human experience that one may look to in proving God's power and presence. Scripture contains divine principles that are the best guide for character and conduct. Scripture is lucid rather than mystifying so that it enlightens the eyes. Scripture is void of any flaws and therefore lasts forever. Scripture is true regarding all things that matter, making it capable of producing comprehensive righteousness. Because it meets every need in life, Scripture is infinitely more precious than anything this world has to offer.

* * * * *

It is significant that one of the biblical names of Christ is Wonderful Counselor (Isa 9:6). He is the highest and ultimate One to whom Christians may turn for counsel, and His Word is the well from which we may draw divine wisdom. What could be more wonderful than that? In fact, one of the most glorious aspects of Christ's perfect sufficiency is the wonderful counsel and great wisdom He supplies in times of despair, confusion, fear, anxiety, and sorrow. He is the quintessential Counselor.

Now that is not to denigrate the importance of Christians counseling each other. There certainly is a crucial need for biblically sound counseling ministries within the body of Christ. There is no dispute over the important role of those who are spiritually gifted to offer encouragement, discernment, comfort, advice, compassion, and help to others. In fact, one of the very great problems that has led to the current plague of bad counsel is that churches have not done as well as they could in enabling people with those kinds of spiritual gifts to minister excellently. The complexities of this modern age make it more difficult than ever to take the time

*From John MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 75-90. Used by permission.

necessary to listen well, serve others through compassionate personal involvement, and otherwise provide the close fellowship necessary for the church body to enjoy health and vitality.

Churches have looked to psychology to fill the gap, but that is not going to work. Professional psychologists are no substitute for spiritually gifted people, and the counsel psychology offers can not replace biblical wisdom and divine power. Moreover, psychology tends to make people dependent on a therapist, whereas those exercising true spiritual gifts always turn people back to an all-sufficient Savior and His all-sufficient Word.

A Psalm on the Sufficiency of God's Word

King David was an example of someone who occasionally sought advice from human counselors, but always turned ultimately to God for answers. As many of the psalms reveal, he was especially dependent on God alone when he struggled with personal problems or emotions. When hit with depression or inner turmoil, he turned to God and wrestled in prayer. When the problem was his own sin, he was repentant, broken, and contrite. He prayed, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; / Test my mind and my heart" (Ps 26:2).¹ The spiritually mature always turn to God for help in times of anxiety, distress, confusion, or unrest in the soul, and they are assured of wise counsel and deliverance.

That happens because every need of the human soul is ultimately spiritual. There is no such thing as a "psychological problem" unrelated to spiritual or physical causes. God supplies divine resources sufficient to meet all those needs completely. David's writings reflect the depth of human experience, emotion, and spiritual insight of one who had fully experienced the extremities of life. He knew the exhilaration of going from shepherd to king. He wrote of everything from absolute triumph to bitter discouragement. He wrestled with pain so deep he could hardly bear to live. His own son Absalom tried to kill him and was then killed. He suffered from horrible guilt because of immorality and murder. His children brought him constant grief. He struggled to understand both the nature of God and his own heart. Of God he said, "Holy and awesome is His name" (Ps 111:9), while of himself he said, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / And cleanse me from my sin" (Ps 51:2). He told God what he felt and cried out for relief—though he admitted God had every right to punish him.

At the end of some of David's psalms he looked out a window of hope, but sometimes he did not. Yet David always went to God because he understood God's sovereignty and his own depravity. He knew that his all-sufficient Savior alone had the answers to his needs and the power to apply those answers (Ps 119:24). And he knew that those answers were to be found in the truth about God revealed in His

¹Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations throughout this article are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

Word, which is itself perfectly sufficient. The sufficient God revealed Himself in His sufficient Word.

On the sufficiency of Scripture, Ps 19:7-14 is the most monumental statement ever made in concise terms. Penned by David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it offers an unwavering testimony from God Himself about the sufficiency of His Word for every situation. It counters the teaching of those who believe that truth gleaned from modern psychology must augment God's Word:

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
 The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
 The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
 The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.
 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
 Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.
 Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned;
 In keeping them there is great reward.
 Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.
 Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins;
 Let them not rule over me;
 Then I shall be blameless,
 And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.
 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
 Be acceptable in Thy sight,
 O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

With an economy of words the Holy Spirit gives us a comprehensive catalog of the characteristics and benefits of Scripture, each of which merits close investigation.

In verses 7-9 David makes six statements about Scripture. Each title for Scripture includes the phrase "of the LORD." In revealing the many-faceted general purpose of God's Word, he calls Scripture "the law of the LORD," "the testimony of the LORD," "the precepts of the LORD," "the commandment of the LORD," "the fear of the LORD," and "the judgments of the LORD." In each case "LORD" translates the Hebrew Tetragrammaton יהוה (*yhwh*), which is the covenant name of God. Clearly David believed that Scripture proceeds from God Himself.

Each of the six statements highlights a characteristic of God's Word and describes its effect in the life of one who embraces it.

Scripture Is Perfect, Restoring the Soul

In the first statement (v. 7), he writes, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." The Hebrew word translated "law" is a form of the word תּוֹרָה (*tôrāh*), which emphasizes the didactic nature of Scripture. Here David uses it to refer to Scripture as the sum of what God has revealed for our instruction, whether it be creed (what we believe), character (what we are), or conduct (what we do).

“Perfect” is the translation of a common Hebrew word meaning “whole,” “complete,” or “sufficient.” It conveys the idea of something that is comprehensive, so as to cover all aspects of an issue. Commentator Albert Barnes wrote,

The meaning [of “perfect”] is that [Scripture] lacks nothing [for] its completeness; nothing in order that it might be what it should be. It is complete as a revelation of Divine truth; it is complete as a rule of conduct. . . . It is absolutely true; it is adapted with consummate wisdom to the [needs] of man; it is an unerring guide of conduct. There is nothing there which would lead men into error or sin; there is nothing essential for man to know which may not be found there.²

Scripture is comprehensive, embodying all that is necessary to one’s spiritual life. David’s implied contrast is with the imperfect, insufficient, flawed reasoning of men.

God’s perfect law, David said, affects people by “restoring the soul” (v. 7). The Hebrew word translated “restoring” can mean “converting,” “reviving,” or “refreshing,” but my favorite synonym is “transforming.” The word “soul” (in Hebrew, נֶפֶשׁ, *nephesh*) refers to one’s person, self, or heart. It is translated all those ways (and many more) in the OT. The essence of it is the inner person, the whole person, the real you. To paraphrase David’s words, Scripture is so powerful and comprehensive that it can convert or transform the entire person, changing someone into precisely the person God wants him to be. God’s Word is sufficient to restore through salvation even the most broken life—a fact to which David himself gave abundant testimony.

Scripture Is Trustworthy, Imparting Wisdom

David, further expanding the sweep of scriptural sufficiency, writes in Ps 19:7, “The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.” “Testimony” speaks of Scripture as a divine witness. Scripture is God’s sure testimony to who He is and what He requires of us. “Sure” means His testimony is unwavering, immovable, unmistakable, reliable, and worthy to be trusted. It provides a foundation on which to build one’s life and eternal destiny.

In 2 Pet 1:16-18 Peter reflects back to his time on the Mount of Transfiguration with all the supernatural events of that marvelous occasion (the majestic glory of Christ, the voice from heaven, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah). But despite all he had experienced, he says in verse 19, “We have more sure—the prophetic word” (literal translation).

In that statement Peter affirmed that the testimony of God’s written Word is a surer and more convincing confirmation of God’s truth than what he had personally seen and heard at the transfiguration of Christ. Unlike many today who cite spurious mystical experiences, Peter had a verifiable real-life encounter with Christ in His full glory on the mount. And in contrast with those today who advocate

²Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974) 171.

miracles as the necessary proof of God's power and presence, Peter looked to Scripture as a higher and more trustworthy authority than even such a dramatic experience. Commentator Samuel Cox has written,

Peter knew a sounder basis for faith than that of signs and wonders. He had seen our Lord Jesus Christ receive honor and glory from God the Father in the holy mount; he had been dazzled and carried out of himself by visions and voices from heaven; but, nevertheless, even when his memory and heart are throbbing with recollections of that sublime scene, he says, "we have something surer still in the prophetic word." . . . It was not the miracles of Christ by which he came to know Jesus, but the word of Christ as interpreted by the spirit of Christ.³

Scripture is the product of God's Spirit moving upon its human authors to produce His Word in written form (2 Pet 1:20-21). As such, it supersedes even apostolic experiences with Jesus Himself. Perhaps that is why Jesus prevented the disciples on the Emmaus Road from recognizing Him as He "explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). He wanted their faith and preaching to be based on Scripture, not merely on their own personal experience—no matter how moving or memorable that experience might be. If that was true of the apostles, how much more should believers today seek to know God's Word rather than seeking supernatural or ecstatic experiences. Experience can be counterfeited easily, but not Scripture. It is once-for-all delivered!

God's sure Word makes the simple wise (v. 7). The Hebrew word translated "simple" comes from an expression meaning "an open door." It evokes the image of a naive person who does not know when to shut his mind to false or impure teaching. He is undiscerning, ignorant, and gullible. But God's Word makes him wise. "Wise" speaks of one who not merely knows some fact, but of one who is skilled in the art of godly living. He submits to Scripture and knows how to apply it to his circumstances. The Word of God thus takes a simple mind with no discernment and makes it skilled in all the issues of life. This, too, is in contrast to the wisdom of men, which in reality is foolishness (1 Cor 1:20).

Scripture Is Right, Causing Joy

David adds a third statement about the Scripture's sufficiency. He writes, "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart." Precepts are divine principles and guidelines for character and conduct. Since God created human beings and knows how they must live to be productive for His glory, He has placed in Scripture every principle they need for godly living.

God's precepts, David said, are "right." Rather than simply indicating what is right as opposed to wrong, that word has the sense of showing someone the true path. The truths of Scripture lay out the proper path through the difficult maze of

³Samuel Cox, cited in Marvin Vincent, *World Studies in the New Testament: II Peter* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 687.

life. That is a wonderful confidence. So many people today are distressed or despondent because they lack direction and purpose. Most seek answers from the wrong sources. God's Word not only provides the light to our path (Ps 119:105), but also sets the route before us.

Because it steers through the right course of life, God's Word brings great joy. If you're depressed, anxious, fearful, or doubting, learn to obey God's counsel and share in the resulting delight. Do not turn to self-indulgent pursuits like self-esteem and self-fulfillment. Focus on divine truth. Therein you will find true and lasting joy. All other sources are shallow and fleeting.

David himself went to Scripture for help when he was discouraged or depressed. In Ps 119:50 he wrote, "This is my comfort in my affliction, / That Thy word has revived me." Again, David speaks against the futility of the joyless paths men follow, pursuing happiness but never finding it to last.

Even the "weeping prophet" Jeremiah experienced joy amid tremendous human stress because God's Word was his joy and the delight of his heart (Jer 15:16).

Scripture Is Pure, Enlightening the Eyes

Psalm 19:8 gives a fourth characteristic of Scripture's utter sufficiency: "The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." "Commandment" stresses the Bible's non-optional nature. It is not a book of suggestions. Its divine mandates are authoritative and binding. Those who treat it lightly place themselves in eternal peril. Those who take it seriously find eternal blessing.

"Pure" could better be translated "lucid"—Scripture is not mystifying, confusing, or puzzling. The synonym "clear" is best. God's Word is a revelation—a revealing of truth to make the dark things light, bringing eternity into bright focus. Granted, some things in Scripture are hard to understand (2 Pet 3:16). But taken as a whole, the Bible is not a bewildering book.

Scripture, because of its absolute clarity, brings understanding in place of ignorance, order in place of confusion, and light in place of spiritual and moral darkness. It stands in stark contrast to the muddled musings of unredeemed men, who themselves are blind and unable to discern truth or live righteously. God's Word clearly reveals the blessed, hopeful truths they can never see.

Scripture Is Clean, Enduring Forever

In Ps 19:9 David uses the term "fear" as a synonym for God's Word: "The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever." "Fear" speaks of the reverential awe for God that compels us to worship Him. Scripture, in this sense, is God's manual on how to worship Him.

The Hebrew word translated "clean" speaks of the absence of impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection. Scripture is without sin, evil, corruption, or error. The truth it conveys is therefore absolutely undefiled and without blemish. That truth is pictured in Ps 12:6, where David calls the Word "flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times" (NIV).

Because it is flawless, Scripture endures forever (Ps 19:9). Any change or modification could only introduce imperfection. Scripture is eternally and unalterably perfect. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mark 13:31). That guarantees that the Bible is permanent, unchanging, and therefore relevant to everyone in every age of history. It has always been and will always be sufficient.

I once agreed to debate a man who led an “evangelical” homosexual denomination. I asked, “What do you do with the Bible’s condemnations of homosexuality as sin?”

“Oh, come on!” he said. “Everybody knows that the Bible is psychologically unsophisticated, reflecting the views of primitive thinking. The Bible is antiquated in its sociological theory. You cannot go to an ancient document like this and expect to deal with twentieth-century social problems. The Bible ought to stay in its own environment. It needs to be updated with a contemporary understanding of psychological and sociological phenomena.”

It must grieve God when people slander Him by claiming that the Bible is outdated or is not sophisticated enough for our educated society. Scripture needs no updating, editing, or refining. Whatever time or culture you live in, it is eternally relevant. It needs no help in that regard. It is pure, sinless, inerrant truth; it is enduring. It is God’s revelation for every generation. It was written by the omniscient Spirit of God, who is infinitely more sophisticated than anyone who dares stand in judgment on Scripture’s relevancy for today’s society, and infinitely wiser than all the best philosophers, analysts, and psychologists who pass like a childhood parade into irrelevancy.

Scripture Is True, Altogether Righteous

Verse 9 gives the final characteristic and effect of God’s all-sufficient Word: “The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.” “Judgments” in that context means ordinances or divine verdicts from the bench of the Supreme Judge of the earth. The Bible is God’s standard for judging the life and eternal destiny of every person.

Unbelievers can’t know what is true because they are blind to God’s Word. Being deceived by Satan, they search vainly for spiritual truth. But aside from God’s Word they cannot discover ultimate truth about the things that really matter: origins, the purpose of life, morality, values, life, death, destiny, eternity, heaven, hell, true love, hope, security, and every other fundamental spiritual issue.

Recently I received a book on how to deal with depression, which was written by a contemporary psychiatrist. A section entitled “Reprogramming Your Conscious Mind” particularly caught my attention. The doctor’s first suggestion was to shout, “Cancel!” every time you have a negative thought. She also recommended sleep programming—playing a tape recording all night that contains lots of positive feedback. During the day she said you should listen to positive music.

The doctor also thought it would be helpful to cultivate a meaningful spiritual philosophy. She said to find a belief system that works for you—any will

do—but be sure to avoid people who talk about sin and guilt. Her final point was that you are to find the light in yourself. Unfortunately, that is the best human wisdom can do.⁴

Jesus illustrated the desperate, hopeless search for truth in human wisdom when He said to a group of unbelievers:

Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. . . . He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God (John 8:43-47).

By way of contrast, believers have the truth about everything that really matters. What an enormous privilege to possess the Word of truth!

Because Scripture is true, it is “righteous altogether” (Ps 19:9). The implication of that phrase is that its truthfulness produces a comprehensive righteousness in those who accept it. And because it is a complete and exhaustive source of truth and righteousness, we are forbidden to add to it, take from it, or distort it in any way (Deut 4:2; 2 Pet 3:15-16; Rev 22:18-19).

In Psalm 119 David gives further testimony to the righteous sufficiency of Scripture:

Forever, O LORD,
Thy word is settled in heaven.

I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything,
I hate every false way.

Righteous art Thou, O LORD,
And upright are Thy judgments.
Thou hast commanded Thy testimonies in righteousness
And exceeding faithfulness.

Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
And Thy law is truth.

The sum of Thy word is truth,
And every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting
(vv. 89, 128, 137-38, 142, 160).

Contrary to what many are teaching today, there is no need for additional

⁴Priscilla Slagle, *The Way Up from Down* (New York: Random House, 1987) 218–27.

revelations, visions, or words of prophecy. In contrast to the theories of men, God's Word is true and absolutely comprehensive. Rather than seeking something more than God's glorious revelation, Christians need only to study and obey what they already have!

More Than Much Fine Gold

David concludes that God's Word is "more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold" (Ps 19:10). Scripture is infinitely more precious than anything this world has to offer, perfectly sufficient for every need of life. Thus Scripture assesses its own immense value. As for its ability to satisfy spiritual appetites, David notes that it is "sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." To David, meditating on God's Word was a source of great pleasure and enrichment. It meant more to him than the sweetest things in life.

Nothing this world has to offer is more precious than God's Word. I have a friend who collects rare Bibles. He owns a wonderful collection, with one Bible dating back to the fourth century. But my favorite is a Bible from sixteenth-century England, one of the earliest printed copies of God's Word. The top third of this Bible is covered with the blood of its original owner. My friend let me hold it in my hands, and tears came to my eyes as I leafed through it.

How did blood get on the pages of that Bible? When Bloody Mary ruled England, she terrorized Protestants, murdering as many as she could. Her soldiers would spill the person's blood, then take his Bible and dip it deep into the blood. A few of those Bibles have been preserved and are known as Martyrs' Bibles. Scientists have tested the paper and confirmed that the dark stains on every page of my friend's Bible are human blood.

I examined that Bible carefully, page by page. I could see where it was well worn from being studied. There are water stains, as if from tears, and places where a thumb had frayed favorite pages. This was someone's most valuable possession, and his or her blood is there to prove it.

In sad contrast, however, contemporary Christians tend to take their Bibles for granted, forgetting that many have given their lives just to own one copy. If the church today placed as high a value on God's Word as those martyrs did, perhaps there would not be so many people running off to experts in human theory and seeking counsel other than the perfect wisdom God gives us in His Word.

I am convinced that many who submit to various kinds of extrabiblical therapy do so precisely because they are looking for a way of solving their problems without surrendering to what they know God's Word requires of them.

Scripture has not failed them—they have failed Scripture. Many have never learned to let the Word of Christ richly dwell within them, as Paul instructs in Col 3:16. They have treated Scripture in a cursory way and never plumbed its depths. Their sinful neglect inevitably bears the fruit of doctrinal confusion and spiritual impotence. Because they never disciplined themselves to live according to biblical principles, they are now abandoning Scripture for worldly alternatives. They turn to

psychoanalysis to solve their problems, to science to explain the origin of life, to philosophy to explain the meaning of life, and to sociology to explain why they sin. Churches, schools, and seminaries have thus made themselves vulnerable to the influence of such teachings.

In Ps 19:11 David concludes his hymn on the sufficiency of Scripture: "Moreover, by [Thy judgments] Thy servant is warned; / In keeping them there is great reward." The warnings of Scripture help to protect against temptation, sin, error, foolishness, false teachers, and every other threat to our spiritual well-being. And to heed those warnings brings great reward. It is not a material prize; the Hebrew word for "reward" speaks of a spiritual blessing, not temporal riches. It is the settled joy and rest that come to those who live by God's Word.

There is no substitute for submission to Scripture. Your spiritual health depends on placing the utmost value on the Word of God and obeying it with an eager heart. If you think you can find answers to your spiritual problems through human counsel or worldly wisdom, you are forfeiting the most valuable and only reliable source of answers to the human dilemma. Do not relinquish the sweet, satisfying riches of God's Word for the bitter gall of this world's folly.

David ended this psalm by praying, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart / Be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer" (v. 14). How can we be assured of having such acceptable thoughts and meditations? Joshua 1:8 gives us the answer and the results: "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

THE RATIONALITY, MEANINGFULNESS, AND PRECISION OF SCRIPTURE

Robert L. Thomas
Professor of New Testament

The purity of Scripture includes, among other things, a freedom from irrationality. Biblical logic is rational and is distinguishable from secular logic. Examples of evangelical abuses of biblical rationality include charismatic irrationality and apocalyptic irrationality. Secular reasoning would call biblical logic irrational because it allows no room for God's plan and omnipotence. Scripture is connected with sin only when sinful man imposes his own opinions on the text instead of allowing the Bible to express its own meaning. Common practice among contemporary evangelicals imposes an interpreter's preunderstanding on a text at the beginning of the interpretive process, thus depriving the text of its own meaning. Each text is meaningful in its own right and deserves to be heard through an objective hermeneutical approach. Scripture is reliable because of its precision, evidenced frequently throughout Scripture itself. Its precision requires an appropriately precise response from those who submit themselves to it (see 2 Tim 2:14-26). Unfortunately, recent evangelical scholarship has not acknowledged the Bible's precision, which extends to the very words that Jesus spoke. Earlier evangelicals, however, did specifically support the verbal inspiration of Scripture.

* * * * *

The title for this article deserves an explanation. After mulling over the ground to be covered, I realized the necessity to clarify some definitions. That is where we begin.

The Purity and Rationality of Scripture

Denotations

The purity of Scripture touches on some very significant trends in contemporary evangelical use of the Bible. By definition, purity of a written work entails at least the following qualities:

- undiluted or unmixed with extraneous material
- perspicuity or clarity
- plain-spokenness

- no nonsense
- straightforward communication
- right-to-the-point exchange of words
- no hidden meanings unless clearly specified
- no double-talk
- no gobbledegook (no informal pompous or unintelligible jargon)
- no double entendres unless clearly necessitated
- no foolishness unless clear from the context
- freedom from irrationality.

The last of these, “freedom from irrationality,” means that the Scriptures make sense. They are reasonable. Their Author is a reasonable person who seeks to communicate with those whom He created in His own image. The fall of man (Genesis 3) damaged the reasoning powers of created humans, but in spite of human fallenness, God through inspiration has provided the books of the Bible whose reasoning is flawless. Through Spirit-guided use of sensible interpretive criteria, human beings can recover the message of the Bible, thereby also recovering to a large degree an original ability to think rationally.

Rationality and Logic

Two kinds of logic prevail in the world. Secular logic is to be expected among humans who are outside the body of Christ, but that logic is inevitably self-centered because of the blindness that fell on the whole race when Adam disobeyed God’s command. The other kind of logic is biblical logic, the logic of reality because it is God’s logic, a logic that appeals to man’s rational faculties enlightened by the new birth and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Scripture appeals to this latter kind of mind.

“Come now, and let us reason together,”
 Says the LORD,
 “Though your sins be as scarlet,
 They will be as white as snow;
 Though they are red like crimson,
 They will be like wool” (Isa 1:18).

To the obedient child of God, those words make perfect sense, but to the disobedient unbeliever they are utterly irrational.

To point out the blindness and irrationality of the unbeliever in the realm of biblical logic is hardly necessary. The apostle Paul wrote, “[A] natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14). The absence of the Spirit’s illumination in such a person’s life renders the natural man helpless when it comes to comprehending “the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10b) as found in His Word. That fact is regrettable, but it is explainable. What is not explainable, however, is how those who profess to be God’s children can attribute irrationality to the Scriptures. Yet such is commonplace among today’s evangelicals.

Contemporary Examples of Irrationality

The psamist has written, “Your Word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it” (Ps 119:140; cf. Ps 19:8b). Yet irresponsible interpretive methods can defile that purity on the receiving end, when the Word of God is taught or preached. That is certainly the case when evangelicals using nonevangelical hermeneutical principles interpret and expound the Scriptures. We can appreciate the purity of the Word more fully by contrasting its correct interpretation with the abuses it has suffered from recent evangelicals, particularly those who treat the Word as irrational.

Charismatic irrationality. Two types of such abuses illustrate a widespread practice. The first comes from charismatic circles. Timothy B. Cargal in his article, “Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age,” sees postmodernist provisions for multiple meanings of a single Bible text in a very positive light.¹ He criticizes both Fundamentalists and Modernists for their “philosophical presupposition that only what is historically and objectively true is meaningful.”² He agrees with postmodernism that “meaning is not limited by positivistic constraints”³ such as single meaning. He notes that “the Holy Spirit may ‘illumine’ the words of the text so as to ‘make them speak’ to any number of situations unforeseen by the human author of the text.”⁴ He justifies this position by erasing a distinction between “inspiration” and “illumination,” i.e., by saying that interpreters of the text are as fully inspired as were writers of the original text.⁵ On that basis he contends,

I would say that indeed Pentecostalism does have something to contribute to postmodern discourse about the Bible—particularly within the church. Its emphasis upon the role of the Spirit in interpreting/appropriating the multiple meanings of the biblical texts is an important contribution as the Western church seeks to reclaim its sense of mysticism and immanence of the transcendent which was diminished by rationalism.⁶

He says that one’s interpretations of a text cannot be limited by rationalism to an objectivist view of one meaning of the text and its authority—that meaning

¹Timothy B. Cargal, “Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society of Pentecostal Studies* 15/2 (Fall 1993):175. Professor Cargal is University Lecturer in Philosophy and Religion at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

²Ibid., 168.

³Ibid., 171.

⁴Ibid., 175.

⁵Ibid., 175-76. Pinnock is another who advocates the erasure of a distinction between inspiration and illumination (Clark H. Pinnock, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology [JPT]* 2 [April 1993]:3-5). Specifically, he calls “both operations of the Spirit, not just the original inspiration which produced the Bible but also the contemporary breathing of the Spirit in the hearts of readers, inspiration” (ibid., 4).

⁶Cargal, “Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy” 186.

determined by authorial intent—but rather must make room for additional meanings provided by mystical experiences of the interpreter. If those additional meanings proposed by Cargal are beyond rationalism, they of necessity must be irrational and therefore introduce extraneous material, i.e., impurity, to an understanding of the biblical text.

Fee also exemplifies the charismatic abuse of the Bible's purity by discouraging a rationalistic approach to interpretation when he writes the following regarding τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*, “the perfect” or “mature”) in 1 Cor 13:10:

It is perhaps an indictment of Western Christianity that we should consider ‘mature’ our rather totally cerebral and domesticated—but bland—brand of faith, with the concomitant absence of the Spirit in terms of his supernatural gifts! The Spirit, not Western rationalism, marks the turning of the ages, after all; and to deny the Spirit's manifestations is to deny our present existence to be eschatological, as belonging to the beginning of the time of the End.⁷

His disparaging word about Western rationalism negates a view of the Bible as a rational book.

Also, Pinnock has a negative word to say about rationalism when he contrasts rationalism with the work of the Spirit in illumining the text:

[T]here is the strong influence of rationalism in Western culture which fosters a neglect of the Spirit. There is a mystery when it comes to the Spirit which rationalism does not favour. It does not feel comfortable talking about God's invisible wind. It prefers to draw up rules for interpretation which will deliver the meaning of any text by human effort. It does not want to drag mysticism into hermeneutics. Therefore, the only thing we leave for the Spirit to do in interpretation is to rubber-stamp what our scholarly exegesis concludes. This is an obstruction to effective biblical interpretation which grieves the Spirit of God.⁸

He goes so far as to call rational exegesis “an obstruction to effective biblical interpretation which grieves the Spirit of God.” He takes strong exception to the use of human reason in understanding the Scriptures.

Charismatic Archer follows the same path:

This concern [i.e., a focus upon what the original inspired author meant and/or intended first readers to understand is inadequate as a Pentecostal hermeneutic] has led some scholars to articulate a hermeneutic that is more representative of the early tradition and ethos of Pentecostalism. These scholars desire to move away from a hermeneutical system that is heavily slanted toward rationalism which tends to downplay experience and/or the role of the Holy Spirit.⁹

Archer advocates a moving away from a hermeneutic that is slanted toward

⁷Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 644-45 n. 23.

⁸Pinnock, “Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics” 8.

⁹Kenneth J. Archer, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect,” *JPT* 8 [April 1996]:75.

rationalism. One can hardly contend that these scholars are free from irrationality in their handling of Scripture. They are thus among those who are imposing human impurity on the purity of Scriptures. A rational approach to the Bible must admit the importance of the Holy Spirit's guidance in using rational principles of interpretation, but admission of the Spirit's role is not equivalent to moving outside the realm of biblical reason.

Apocalyptic irrationality. A second group of abusers who spoil the Scriptures' rationality come from among those who have difficulty making the book of Revelation fit their preunderstanding of what the book should say. The difficulty results in a variety of "eclectic" hermeneutical approaches to the book, approaches which are void of rationality. Typically, hermeneutical eclecticism combines preterism which limits the book to speaking of the historical context in which it was written, idealism which has the book speaking to new situations of later generations time after time, and futurism which sees the book as having one final reference to real end-time tribulation and the second coming of Christ. G. K. Beale typifies this hybrid approach to the book:

A more viable, modified version of the idealist perspective would acknowledge a final consummation in salvation and judgment. Perhaps it would be best to call this . . . view "eclecticism." Accordingly, no specific prophesied historical events are discerned in the book, except for the final coming of Christ to deliver and judge and to establish the final form of the kingdom in a consummated new creation—though there are a few exceptions to this rule.¹⁰

A repeated vacillation between literalism and nonliteralism resulting from Beale's amillennial preunderstanding of Revelation easily fits into the category of irrationality.

G. R. Beasley-Murray finds glaring inconsistencies in the account of the locust plague in Revelation 9, but the inconsistencies are of no concern to him because he considers the details of the account of no consequence.¹¹ Such a stance raises questions about the rationality of Scripture. Robert H. Mounce describes that same fifth-trumpet description as the language of ecstatic experience, which eliminates any possibility of a consistent pattern.¹² In other words, the language is irrational. Leon Morris and George Ladd join the chorus of those who find the language of Revelation unscientific and rationally and logically inconsistent.¹³ Both Ryken and Mulholland point out the necessity of what psychologists call "right-brain" activity (i.e., the ability to think by means of images and intuition) as opposed to "left-brain" activity (i.e., the ability to think logically) when dealing with

¹⁰G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 48.

¹¹G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 157.

¹²Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 184.

¹³Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, TNTC (1969) 123; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 124.

Revelation.¹⁴ Ryken is explicit in his eclectic approach to Revelation. After naming and describing the preterist, the continuous historical, the futurist, and the idealist as the four major approaches to the book, he writes, "I think that the book is a combination of all of these."¹⁵ Progressive dispensationalist Pate resembles Ryken in combining preterism, idealism, and futurism when dealing with the Apocalypse.¹⁶

The above-named individuals practice eclecticism in interpreting Revelation and are classic examples of people who attribute irrationality to the Word of God. In so doing, they are contaminating the purity of the Scriptures. Certainly, irrationality is an extraneous quality that defiles.

Biblical Rationality and Secular Irrationality

To point out how such irrationality differs from what secular logic would call irrationality, a further word about biblical logic is in order. For a virgin to give birth to a son would be irrational from the viewpoint of secular logic, but not so from a biblically logical perspective. It is perfectly logical because of God's plan and omnipotence. The secularist would contend that Sarah's giving birth to a son when she and Abraham were beyond the age of childbearing is not rational, but the Christian would not view it so because of his faith in the God of the supernatural. God promised it and Abraham believed His promise. The result was that it happened. That God could be the absolute sovereign of a universe in which all people still have freedom to make their own choices in life does not make sense to one who has no confidence in God's Word. Those who believe God's Word do not consider that irrational, however, because the Word teaches it. In this life, Christians may not be able to harmonize those two facts with complete satisfaction, but they accept them as perfectly rational because that is what the Scriptures teach. In this life, "we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13:12a), but our failure to grasp the whole picture is not an adverse reflection on the rationality of the Bible, because in spite of our finitude, we recognize the Bible's reasonableness.

Our recognition of such a limitation is not a contradiction of biblical rationality as are the direct abuses cited earlier. Those abuses flatly accuse the Bible of illogical statements, but an admission of finite limitations in understanding the whole of divine truth respects the rationality of the Bible.

As long as one remains within the boundaries of biblical logic, he cannot impugn the purity of Scripture as have those who through convoluted hermeneutical procedures attribute irrationality to the Scriptures.

The Impeccability and Meaningfulness of Scripture

"Impeccability" means not liable to or capable of sin. When I first saw this

¹⁴Leland Ryken, *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 143-44; M. R. Mulholland, *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 18.

¹⁵Ryken, *Words of Life* 144.

¹⁶C. M. Pate, "A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. by C. M. Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 173-75.

word applied to the Bible, I immediately thought of the classic blunder made by the scribe of Codex Bezae when he copied John 5:39. The verse should read, *aiJ marturou'sai* (*hai martyrou'sai*, “those [Scriptures] are *the ones which are bearing witness* concerning Me”), but the scribe of Bezae wrote, *aJmartavnousai* (*hamartanousai*, “those [Scriptures] are *the ones which are sinning* concerning Me.”) instead.¹⁷ The reading is so ridiculous that even the Nestle-Aland 27th edition Greek text with its multiplied textual variants does not cite it.

Of course, the Scripture cannot sin, but those who interpret it can impose sinful interpretations on the text. Fallen man is prone to impose his own subjective opinions in explaining what the Bible means, and is therefore the source of whatever sin may appear to arise from Scripture. Several times the psalmist wrote about the positive effects of Scripture in promoting holy living: “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps 119:11); “The law of his God is in his [the righteous person’s] heart; his steps do not slip” (Ps 37:31); “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart” (Ps 40:8).¹⁸ But the growing role of subjectivism among contemporary evangelicals distorts Scripture in such a way that it facilitates human sin by imposing human fallibility on the Bible.

I recently attended a lecture by a well-known British scholar who proposed a new direction in Pauline studies. His preunderstanding of the Judaism of which Paul had been a part was so strongly colored by his arbitrarily subjective opinion about first-century conditions that he chose to differ with traditional Protestant understanding of justification by faith alone.¹⁹ The respondent to his lecture commended him for stating his preunderstanding and gave his opinion that the days of interpreting the Bible objectively belong to the past,²⁰ a profound claim with devastating implications.

Scott A. Ellington, a Pentecostal scholar, acknowledges the dangers of subjectivism when writing, “A question with which Pentecostal scholars must wrestle is ‘how can the Pentecostal approach to theology remain relational, while avoiding the distortions which are possible in subjective involvement?’”²¹ His proposed solution is a dynamic balance between the individual, the Holy Spirit, the Scripture, and the community of faith. He notes the self-centeredness of subjectivism that

¹⁷Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University, 1992) 193.

¹⁸Other passages that speak of the Bible’s role in avoiding sin are the following: “For all His ordinances were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me. I was also blameless with Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity” (Ps 18:22-23); “Establish my footsteps in Your word, and do not let any iniquity have dominion over me” (Ps 119:133); “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps 119:165).

¹⁹N. T. Wright, “Paul and Jesus” (lecture at 55th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, Nov. 21, 2003).

²⁰Douglas Moo, response to “Paul and Jesus” (response at 55th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, Nov. 21, 2003).

²¹Scott A. Ellington, “Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture,” *JPT* 9 (1996):28.

seeks the good of the believer over and against God's will, the proclivity to create God in man's own image.²² Yet three-fourths of his proposed solution—the individual, human sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, and the community of faith—rely on subjectivity, and therefore compound the problem of self-seeking. Objective reflection on Scripture in formulating Christian doctrine occupies only a minority role.²³

Subjectivity in evangelical interpretation is widespread. In their work on hermeneutics, McCartney and Clayton point out that the method of interpretation does not determine the meaning extracted from a text.²⁴ They contend that hermeneutical goal is more important than and antecedent to method.²⁵ One's systematic theology constitutes the grid for a person's interpretation of biblical texts, they say, and "a crucial part of this interpretive grid is the particular methodology by which a reader expects to obtain an understanding of what is read."²⁶ Thus, systematic theology, a product of one's conscious or unconscious experience and what he already knows about special revelation, determines one's method of interpretation and ultimately the meaning he derives from the text.²⁷

In other words, whatever goal a reader wants to achieve—i.e., whatever theological position he wants to support—determines what meaning he will glean from Scripture. That approach to Scripture is purely subjective and typifies many contemporary evangelicals in their handling of the Bible.

Rare today is a biblical scholar who advocates letting the text speak for itself, in other words, one who strives for the goal of objectivity in interpretation, an objectivity that recognizes that the Scripture itself is meaningful and does not depend on meanings attributed to it by humans. Few strive for objectivity, but objectivity is the major guiding principle in traditional grammatical-historical interpretation. Ramm expressed it this way:

The true philological spirit, or critical spirit, or scholarly spirit, in Biblical interpretation has as its goal to discover the original meaning and intention of the text. Its goal is *exegesis*—to lead the meaning out of the text and shuns *eisogesis*—bringing a meaning to the text. . . .

It is very difficult for any person to approach the Holy Scriptures free from prejudices and assumptions which distort the text. The danger of having a set theological system is that in the interpretation of Scripture the system tends to govern the interpretation rather than the interpretation correcting the system. . . .

Calvin said that the Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 30, 38.

²⁴Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1994) 65.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 66.

²⁷Ibid.

will. Rather it is the Word of God whose teachings must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text.²⁸

Milton Terry in the nineteenth century advocated the same principle:

The objectionable feature of these methods [i.e., the Apologetic and Dogmatic methods] is that they virtually set out with the ostensible purpose of maintaining a preconceived hypothesis. The hypothesis may be right, but the procedure is always liable to mislead. It presents the constant temptation to *find* desired meanings in words and ignore the scope and general purpose of the writer. . . . The true apology defends the sacred books against an unreasonable and captious criticism, and presents their claims to be regarded as the revelation of God. But this can be done only by pursuing rational methods, and by the use of a convincing logic. So also the Scriptures are profitable for dogma, but the dogma must be shown to be a legitimate teaching of the Scripture, not a traditional idea attached to the Scripture. . . .

.....
 The systematic expounder of Scripture doctrine . . . must not import into the text of Scripture the ideas of later times, or build upon any words or passages a dogma which they do not legitimately teach. The apologetic and dogmatic methods of interpretation which proceed from the standpoint of a formulated creed, and appeal to all words and sentiments scattered here and there in the Scriptures, which may by any possibility lend support to a foregone conclusion, have been condemned already. . . . By such methods many false notions have been urged upon men as matters of faith. But no man has a right to foist into his expositions of Scripture his own dogmatic conceptions, or those of others, and then insist that these are an essential part of divine revelation. Only that which is clearly read therein, or legitimately proved thereby, can be properly held as scriptural doctrine.²⁹

Once the goal of defending a particular theological position replaces that goal of objectivity, biblical interpretation becomes a matter of pitting my theological prejudice against yours. Such an approach is sinful in denying Scripture a right to speak for itself in expressing its own meaning.

Following the subjective route of investigation, one may come up with as many meanings as there are preunderstandings. It is no wonder that a well-known evangelical scholar has in the last several years left his prestigious position at a prominent evangelical seminary and turned in his ministerial credentials, because he lost his faith.³⁰ I respect his honesty and perception that the direction his subjectivism was taking him would keep Scripture from yielding propositional truth, including the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity. He realized far sooner than many other evangelicals that incorporation of subjectivism into a hermeneutical system starts one on the road to deconstructionism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and reader-response hermeneutics, movements that are quite common already

²⁸Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 115-16.

²⁹Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, 2nd ed. (reprint; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, n.d.) 171-72, 583-84.

³⁰Confidentiality forbids the divulging of this scholar's name.

among nonevangelicals. I do not respect this scholar for leaving the traditional goal in interpreting Scripture, however, which is the goal of objectivity.

In a discussion of the need for objectivity, the rejoinder always comes, "Who can attain perfect objectivity? Every interpreter has his own biases."³¹ That type of response dodges the issue, however. Having objectivity as a goal does not equate to a claim of achieving absolutely neutral objectivity. It is simply a recognition that objectivity in interpretation of Scripture is the only way to let the text speak for itself without injecting subjectivism into the process. When an interpreter begins his investigation with a preconceived idea of what a passage should say, he is committing the sin of depriving that passage of the meaning the Holy Spirit and the human author intended it to have. One does not surrender the goal of objectivity because perfect achievement is impossible. He keeps pursuing that goal through use of time-tested principles of hermeneutics in his exegesis.

The Holy Spirit through Peter commanded the readers of 1 Peter, "Be holy for I am holy." Who among living persons has in this life achieved the perfect holiness of God Himself? The fact that such a goal in this life is impossible to attain does not, however, relieve Christians of the responsibility of continuing to pursue that goal. Hopefully, through continued effort they draw closer to that goal as time passes.

So it is with a quest for objectivity in interpreting Scripture. Though one never reaches a state that he is completely free of bias, through careful use of sound principles of traditional, grammatical-historical exegesis, he may draw closer to that goal each time he engages in the challenging task of discerning the meaning of Scripture. Only such a goal as that will do justice to the impeccability and meaningfulness of Scripture.

The Reliability and Precision of Scripture

What does the precision of Scripture on which is based its reliability or dependability entail, and how are followers of Christ to respond to that precision? Answers to such questions come from observing the pattern of Scripture itself, the response that Scripture expects, the contrasting contemporary response, and the example of heroes from the past.

The Pattern of Scripture

About fifteen years ago, I exchanged letters with a well-known evangelical NT scholar whose written work I had critiqued in a journal article.³² He wrote first and questioned, point-by-point, the accuracy of some of my criticisms of his work.

³¹E.g., Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, coauthored by W. C. Kaiser, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 230-31, 244; W. W. Klein, C. L. Blomberg, and R. L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 115; McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader* 99; G. R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991) 290, 295, 334; B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972) 157.

³²This was personal correspondence. Without permission to cite his side of the interaction, his name must be withheld.

I responded with point-by-point answers to his questions. His next response was to suggest that we not pursue the matter further, because it was to him obvious that we differed regarding the degree of precision we could expect when interpreting the Bible. Different views of precision created a wide gulf between his errantist view and my inerrantist view of the Bible.

In a November 20, 2003 parallel session of the Annual Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Atlanta, presenter Samuel Lamerson categorized one of my works inaccurately, forcing me to suggest a correction during the discussion of his paper. The discussion progressed to the point that I stated that every recent evangelical author in dealing with the Synoptic Gospels has at one point or another dehistoricized the Gospel accounts. At this point the moderator of the session, Leslie R. Keylock, entered the discussion on the side of the presenter and suggested that in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had spoken of the wise man who had built his house upon a rock and of the house's being founded upon the rock (Matt 7:24-25), but that Luke in his account of the same Sermon had altered the Lord's words to speak of digging deep to lay a foundation on the rock and of the house's standing because it had been "well built" (Luke 6:48). Keylock's reasoning was that in Greece, the Gospel of Luke's destination, people knew nothing about building a house on a rock as they do in Israel and that Luke had made the change to accommodate his reader(s). Keylock saw nothing wrong with such a change, but I replied, "You have just introduced a historical error into Luke's account of the Sermon." His hesitant answer, "It all depends on what you call a historical error." In other words, just how precise is Scripture in what it reports?

How precise is the history recorded in the NT? How much can we depend on it? Is it absolutely reliable, or do the writers "round off" certain aspects of that history to present a *generally* accurate picture? The answer comes in examining Scripture itself.

- In Matt 5:18 Jesus said, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter (i.e., *yodh*) or stroke (i.e., *serif*) shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished." In other words, neither the smallest letter nor the smallest part of any letter will pass away from the OT until all is accomplished, i.e., until heaven and earth pass away.
- In Matt 22:31-32 Jesus said, "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." The Lord's proof of a future resurrection resides in the present tense versus the past tense of the verb: "I am" rather than "I was."
- In Matt 24:35 Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Jesus assigned a permanence to the words that He spoke just as He did to the words of the OT.³³

³³It is rarely if ever noted that if Jesus spoke primarily in Aramaic during His incarnate ministry, Jesus words *have* indeed passed away. All that remains are approximations of His words reported in the Greek language if Aramaic was His main language.

- In Gal 3:16 Paul recalls, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ.” That Paul advocates a precise handling of the OT is unquestionable. By inspiration of the Spirit the author cites the explicit significance between a singular and a plural.
- In Jas 2:10 the author wrote, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” Our God is a God of precision. He is interested in details. Showing respect of persons is in the eyes of the inspired writer the one point that condemns a person as a breaker of the whole law.

Without question, the Bible itself insists on the ultimate in precision for its contents.

Without referring to further biblical examples,³⁴ one would think that this electronic age would teach greater expectations of precision in handling the Bible, as did the Scriptures themselves in their use of other Scriptures. One and only one wrong pushbutton on a telephone or one and only one wrong letter in an e-mail address will condemn an effort to reach the desired party. Certainly the God whose providence provided for the discovery of all the electronic advantages of modern times is familiar with that kind of precision and has provided for such precision in His Word.

The Response to Precision That Scripture Expects

The Epistle of 2 Timothy is quite appropriate in a study of the Scriptures, particularly in considering the precision of the Scriptures. The epistle divides into four parts:

1:1–2:13 — Paul tells Timothy to *Replenish the Earth* with people like himself. To do this Timothy must implement particularly the instruction 2 Tim 2:2: “The things that you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, the kind who will be competent to teach others also.”

2:14–26 — Paul tells Timothy to *Rescue the Drifters*. This he is to do through personal diligence in interpreting the Word correctly, as directed in 2 Tim 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, [as] an unashamed workman, cutting straight the Word of truth.”

3:1–17 — Paul tells Timothy to *Resist the Times*. He can accomplish this by letting the Word guide his own life as prescribed in 2 Tim 3:14–15: “But you, abide in the things that you have learned and have been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from a child you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

4:1–22 — Paul tells Timothy to *Report the Scriptures* as Paul’s replacement

³⁴Among other Scriptures that could be cited to demonstrate the precision and reliability of Scripture are the following: “Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth’” (1 Kgs 17:24); “The sum of Your word is truth” (Ps 119:160a); “Your word is truth” (John 17:17b); “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching” (Titus 1:9a); “And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true’” (Rev 21:5b); “And he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true’” (Rev 22:6b).

on the front lines of gospel warfare. He can do so by being ready for every opportunity to preach the Word, as 2 Tim 4:2 indicates: “Preach the Word; stand by [for duty] in season and out of season.”

Notice how in one way or another each section of the epistle builds upon the Scriptures. For present concerns, however, the section of “Rescuing the Drifters” (2:14-26) is most appropriate in learning the right response to the precision of the Scriptures. First of all, 2:14-18 speaks about the drifters:

Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some.

The Cause of Drifting. This part of the study might be entitled “How to Become a Heretic.” Those in Ephesus who were causing trouble for the church and for Timothy as Paul’s apostolic representative to the church did not become heretics all at once. In fact, some were not yet heretics, but they had launched on a voyage that would eventually lead them to shipwreck and heresy if someone did not head them off. That was what Timothy was supposed to do, head them off.

From what is known about this church, one can detect several steps these people must have taken on their way to heretical status. The steps are not necessarily sequential.

(1) **A hunger for something new.** First Tim 1:3 refers to their activity as “teaching other [things].” They became teachers of *other* doctrines before they became teachers of *false* doctrine.³⁵ They taught strange doctrines that did not exactly coincide with the true doctrine. They had a craving to be different. They did not begin by teaching radical error, but they put a wrong emphasis on a correct doctrine. A craving for something new is all it takes to launch oneself on the road to heresy. Many times it will be a quest for a shortcut or an easier way to explain Scripture. In this the novelty teachers differed from the Judaizers in the churches of Galatia, who taught a false gospel (Gal 1:6-7). Teaching novelty is the first step toward the teaching of error.

(2) **A wrong understanding of knowledge.** First Tim 6:20 tells Timothy to turn away from “profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.” Without going into all the details in 1 and 2 Timothy, one can simply summarize the problem at Ephesus as a combination of incipient Gnosticism and a

³⁵Cf. 1 Tim 1:3; and W. A. Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924) 8; J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, CGT (Cambridge: University Press, 1899) 23; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903) 3:301-2.

wrong view of the law.³⁶ There were some inroads of Platonic dualism that these people had latched onto. Historically, an attempt at integrating that dualism with biblical teaching resulted in the second-century heresy of Gnosticism. But the dominant part of their system was a misguided emphasis on the OT. In current terminology, they had not properly worked out the issues of continuity and discontinuity between the two testaments.

(3) **A failure to guard against heretical influences.** In Acts 20:29-30 Paul warned the elders at Ephesus where Timothy was now serving, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” Paul’s warning to the church’s elders came only about ten years before he wrote 2 Timothy. Such a rapid decline in the church’s orthodox standards must have been a great disappointment to the apostle. The elders had failed to heed his warning.

(4) **Carelessness, shoddiness, and laziness in handling the Word of truth.** Second Tim 2:14 tells Timothy to remember the words about courage he has just read in 2:1-13. From there he turns to urge him to diligence. By their lack of diligence Hymenaeus and Philetus had come up short. They did not pass the test because of careless work. Paul wants Timothy to avoid “word fights” and to devote all his energy to mastering the Word of truth. In 2:16-17 he tells him to shun profane and empty words that will lead to further ungodliness and will spread like gangrene. Replace diligence in handling the Word of truth with disrespectful and empty words, and you are on the same path as Hymenaeus and Philetus, who provided case studies in the drifting about which Paul spoke.

The word sometimes translated “lead to” in 2:16 is προσκόπτω (*proskoptō*). It also has the meaning of “to progress.” The men to whom Paul was referring apparently viewed themselves as “progressives” and claimed to lead their followers to a more advanced type of Christian thinking.³⁷ All the while, though, they were going in a backward direction. Instead of moving forward, they were in reverse.

Preterism today is another example of doctrinal slippage to the point of heresy. Like Hymenaeus and Philetus, full preterism says the resurrection is purely spiritual and therefore has already passed.³⁸ Can’t you hear their reasoning? “Never mind a gospel to die by. The only thing that matters is a gospel to live by. My present relationship with Christ is all that matters. I died and was raised with Him when I became a Christian. That’s all that’s relevant. The historical basis of

³⁶Lock, *Pastoral Epistles* 76; H. A. Moellering, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Concordia (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970) 121; Newport J. D. White, “The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and The Epistle to Titus,” vol. 4 of *Expositor’s Greek Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 150-51.

³⁷A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 87; W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965) 264; Lock, *Pastoral Epistles* 99; E. F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Moffatt New Testament (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936) 110; Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 137.

³⁸Dennis M. Swanson, “International Preterist Association: Reformation or Retrogression?” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 15/1 (Spring 2004):39-58.

the teaching —i.e., Christ’s own resurrection—doesn’t matter as long as the idea helps me in my present spiritual life.” That kind of reasoning evidences the inroads of pagan dualism that taught that everything spiritual is good and everything material is evil, so evil human bodies will not be raised from the dead. That kind of teaching became one of the bedrocks of second-century Gnosticism. Already in that day men were integrating the Bible with then-contemporary philosophy. They would say, “After all, ‘all truth is God’s truth,’ isn’t it?” Full preterism has already reached the point of heresy; moderate or partial preterism has begun drifting along the path of full preterism and is not far behind.

All it takes to start down the road to heresy is a craving for something new and different, a flashy new idea or something to gain attention, the urge to latch on to a new fad. Forget what true knowledge is all about and the warnings to guard against heresy. Combine such forgetfulness with a little carelessness, slothfulness, or laziness in handling the Word of truth, and before you know it, you have a full-blown heresy. Imprecision in handling the Scripture is the root of most heresy.

The challenge for Timothy’s leadership in Ephesus was halting the slide that had already ended in heresy for Hymenaeus and Philetus. Others were beginning to drift in the direction of these two men as 2:18 indicates. The two were upsetting “the faith of some.” According to 2:14 their war-words were turning people upside down (the Greek word *καταστροφῆ* [*katastrophē*] transliterated is our English word “catastrophe”).³⁹ Just shave the edge off the truth slightly, just put a wrong emphasis on a correct teaching, and you will find yourself on the road to doctrinal waywardness. Imprecision if nurtured will, increment by increment, ultimately lead to heresy.

The remedy for drifting. Second Tim 2:15 provides the remedy that would halt the doctrinal slippage in Ephesus. That verse and its context bring out several key elements of such a remedy.

(1) **The goal.** Notice Paul does not tell Timothy to attack the problem directly. He tells him to use indirect means. Don’t limit yourself to confronting these men directly, though that sometimes may be necessary as 2 Tim 4:2b indicates (“reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering”). Rather the goal is to gain the approval of God by making oneself an unashamed workman. Concentrate on the positive side of teaching the Word of truth. The man of God is to be a God-pleaser, not a man-pleaser. He is not to be distracted by merely human considerations. He is to have an eye that is single toward God’s will and glory. He is looking for His seal of approval. He strives to maintain His standards so that he has nothing to be ashamed of before Him.

Dokimon, the word translated “approved,” includes two ideas, that of being

³⁹Bernard, *Pastoral Epistles* 122; Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Boston: Draper and Halliday, 1861; reprint; Minneapolis: James Family, 1978) 141; D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 147; A. Plummer, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1891) 367; Scott, *Pastoral Epistles* 108; M. R. Vincent, *New Testament Word Studies* (reprint of 1887 ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 1059; Wuest, *Pastoral Epistles* 134.

tested and that of being approved.⁴⁰ Sometimes the most challenging tests come while one is diligently training for vocational Christian service. It is a great privilege to be tested, but it is even more important to achieve the goal of passing the test.

An approved workman should also have as his goal not to be ashamed because of doing a shoddy job. Nor should he be ashamed of his work before men. Note Paul's elaboration on this theme at 1:8, 12, 16. Hold your head up, Timothy. Do the right kind of job and you will not have to apologize to anyone.

(2) **The means to reach the goal.** The instrumental participle ὀρθοτομοῦντα (*orthotomounta*) in 2:15 tells how Timothy can satisfy the standard set earlier in the same verse: "by cutting straight the Word of truth" or "by handling the Word of truth accurately." What figure Paul had in mind with this participle is uncertain. Sometimes in secular Greek writings it referred to a mason squaring and cutting a stone to fit exactly into a predetermined opening. Other times it referred to a farmer's ploughing a straight furrow in his field or to a tentmaker cutting a piece of canvass to exactly the right size. Still other times it referred to a road-maker constructing a straight road.⁴¹ Whatever figure Paul had in mind entailed precision.

Because of the word's use in Prov 3:6 and 11:5 ("In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make your paths straight"; "The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight") and the use of similar terminology in Heb 12:13 ("make straight paths for your feet"), Paul probably had in mind the figure of road construction. The specifications for the construction have to be exactly right. The same must be true in constructing the road of truth.

Some have objected to trying to figure out just what figure Paul had in mind. They say that all we need is the general idea Paul expressed. They claim that knowing the broad sense of the word is sufficient, and pressing to figure out the specific meaning is an example of λογομαχία (*logomachia*, "striving with words," "hair splitting") that Paul forbids in the 2:14 just before his use of the word.⁴² That is not what Paul meant by λογομαχεῖν (*logomachein*), however. In 1 Tim 6:4 the noun form of the word refers to quibbling over what is empty and profitless while playing philosophical word games. So here he probably refers to verbal disputes over peripheral issues that distract from the close attention that should be given the Word of truth (cf. 2 Tim 2:16).⁴³ "Truth" highlights the contrast between God's unshakable special revelation and the worthless chatter of the novelty seekers. There is a direct correlation between the high quality of a *detailed* analysis of Scripture and maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy.

In 2:15 the command impresses Timothy's mind with the importance of precision. Learning the general idea of what Scripture teaches is not sufficient,

⁴⁰J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Harper's New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper, 1963) 182; Hendriksen, *Pastoral Epistles* 262; H. Haarbeck, "dokimos," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. By Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971) 3:809.

⁴¹Lock, *Pastoral Epistles* 99; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1933) 4:619.

⁴²E.g., Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles* 183.

⁴³Ibid., 182; Ellicott, *Pastoral Epistles* 228.

because it gives the novelty teachers too much room to roam in search of their innovations. It allows them to shade the truth a little bit this way or that way in order to integrate the Bible with psychology, science, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, mathematics, modern linguistics, or some other secular discipline that allegedly has discovered additional truth from God's general revelation, truth not found in the Bible. Proper handling of Scripture has to be specific and right. It has to be accurate. It has to be right on target.

If Scripture is not interpreted very carefully, who will hold the fort for truth? Being able to develop the tools to understand the details of Scripture is a privilege, but it is also a great responsibility in a time when so much subtle error emanates from reputedly trustworthy leaders.

(3) **The work ethic in reaching the goal.** Paul commands Timothy, "Be diligent," and uses a verb form that emphasizes urgency. The word carries the notion of self-exertion. Paul is recommending strenuous moral effort, a ceaseless, serious, earnest zeal to obtain God's approval through a right handling of the Word of truth. Perhaps "do your utmost" captures the degree of effort to be expended. The absence of a conjunction to introduce v. 15 adds further emphasis to Paul's command. After you have reached your limit and gone beyond, Paul tells Timothy, push a little more so as to gain a better mastery of the text.

That kind of expenditure of one's energy and resources is a lifelong quest. Only by thus taking himself in hand can Timothy fulfil his responsibility toward others, that of solemnly charging others not to wrangle about words (2:14).

Exegesis of the Word of truth is hard work. The expression "Word of truth" refers to the gospel in general, the Christian message as a whole,⁴⁴ but in practical reality it is the same as "the things which you have heard" in 2 Tim 2:2, the same as the God-breathed Scripture that the writer refers to in 2 Tim 3:16, and the same word Timothy is commanded to preach in 2 Tim 4:2. "Truth" contrasts God's unshakable, inerrant revelation with the worthless chatter of the novelty teachers. The only way one can salvage the drifters is to gain a thorough hold on God's truth. Timothy dare not cut his efforts short.

That means learning the biblical languages, correct rules of interpretation, historical backgrounds, correct doctrines and how to state them, and all other data pertinent to reaching precise conclusions regarding God's truth. It means making only those applications that align with the correct interpretation. This is a mountainous task, but it is worth every bit of effort expended to accomplish it. It is part of the discipline in becoming an unashamed workman.

(4) **The pressure in attaining the goal.** Second Tim 2:22-26 recalls the manner for retrieving the drifters and at the same time points out that the process will not be easy. Verse 25 speaks of those who "are in opposition" to Timothy.

Pressure will come any time a person aims for accuracy in understanding and applying God's Word. He will encounter opposition. He will get a lot of heat. Not everyone will agree that such strenuous effort is necessary. They will not think precision is that important. Some in today's world are satisfied with rough estimates, particularly when it comes to theological matters. It will take a lot of "thick skin"

⁴⁴Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles* 183.

to put up with the criticism and outright opposition that will come to God's servant who insists on detailed accuracy.

In 2 Tim 2:9 Paul pointed to himself as an example of suffering hardship, hardship that will come from outside and even from some within the professing church. He urged Timothy not to bend under the pressure that was inevitable (see also 2 Tim 1:8; 2:3; 4:5).

Timothy faced it in his then-current ministry in Ephesus, and Paul told him to respond with kindness and gentleness. There is a wrong way and a right way to respond to the pressure. To approach the task as belligerent warriors, looking for a fight, is wrong. The "take no prisoners" approach in this spiritual battle is self-defeating. "Flee youthful lusts" in 2:22 probably refers to a tendency to fly off the handle, lose one's temper, blow one's stack, have a short fuse. Any such reaction would typify a lack of maturity. It's okay to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, but it has to be done with patience (see 2:24-25a).

Gentleness and patience should prevail. If one's manner is belligerent, his efforts to recover the drifters will fail. He must patiently instruct them, demonstrating righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2:22). Apparently the Ephesian church as a whole failed to fulfil this responsibility in its rescue efforts. About thirty years later, through the apostle John in Revelation, Jesus had nothing to say against the church doctrinally, but He criticized them severely for leaving their first love, love for God and for one another (Rev 2:1-7). Love must temper every rebuke of the drifters.

The Contrasting Contemporary Response

If Scripture expects the same response to its precision as it expected from Timothy, how has contemporary evangelicalism measured up. Unfortunately, not too well. Exegetical and consequent theological slippage—i.e., drifting—is the rule of the day as the twenty-first century begins. If anyone takes a stand against it, he must be ready to accept the flack that will come his way. Often twenty-first-century drifters have spoken against precisionists with such remarks as, "You have cast your net too wide," or "You have painted with too broad a brush." "You are expecting too much precision from the text." In other words, "Your view of truth is too narrow. You are too detailed." Three examples of twenty-first-century drifting will suffice to illustrate the seriousness of the problem.

Vacillation between precision and imprecision. Quite interesting is the way that some evangelical writers treat the precision of Scripture. Poythress and Grudem furnish an example. A chapter entitled "Generic 'He'" appears in a work on Bible translations co-authored by the two.⁴⁵ At one point they express their viewpoint about gender-neutral translations:

Because generic singular is a convenient and frequent usage in the Bible, gender-neutral translations end up using 'they' and 'you' in a large number of passages where earlier translations had generic singular 'he/his/him.' In still other instances the new

⁴⁵Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000) 111-33.

translations adopt passive rather than active constructions or substitute descriptive nouns for pronouns in order to avoid using “he.” The total number of verses affected numbers in the thousands.

Now let us be clear: The gender-neutral translations still achieve a rough approximation of the meaning of the original when they change the pronouns. But it is an approximation. When we look at finer nuances, shifts from singular to plural and from third person to first or second person result in subtle alterations.⁴⁶

Their insistence on precision in handling the “generic ‘he’” properly is gratifying, because it aligns with the precision that Jesus and Paul exemplified and that Paul sought to instill in Timothy and those under his influence. They rightly note the damage done when a translation settles for an approximation rather than a precise rendering of the text.

Yet elsewhere in the same volume, in a chapter called “The Bible: The Word of God,” a section entitled “The inerrancy of Scripture,” the co-authors write,

2. The Bible can be inerrant and still include loose or free quotations

The method by which one person quotes the words of another person is a procedure that in large part varies from culture to culture. While in contemporary American and British culture, we are used to quoting a person’s exact words when we enclose the statement in quotation marks, written Greek at the time of the New Testament had no quotation marks or equivalent kinds of punctuation, and an accurate citation of another person needed to include only a correct representation of the *content* of what the person said (rather like our use of indirect quotations): it was not expected to cite each word exactly. Thus, inerrancy is consistent with loose or free quotations of the Old Testament or of the words of Jesus, for example, so long as the *content* is not false to what was originally stated. The original writer did not ordinarily imply that he was using the exact words of the speaker and only those, nor did the original hearers expect verbatim quotation in such reporting.⁴⁷

Poythress and Grudem reverse their position on precision when it comes to the Gospels’ reporting the words of Jesus, perhaps failing to realize that if the Gospels have only the *general content* of what Jesus said, who can say whether Jesus used a generic “he,” a plural “they,” or a passive voice in instances they cite. For example, they cite the difference in renderings of Matt 16:24:

NIV: Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

NIVI (New International Version Inclusive Language Edition): “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “*Those* who would come after me must deny *themselves* and take up *their* cross and follow me.”⁴⁸

In the NIVI rendering, they point out the possible meaning of a cross belonging to a whole group of people jointly rather than a single individual. However, if one has

⁴⁶Ibid., 112.

⁴⁷Ibid., 49 [emphasis in the original].

⁴⁸Ibid., 117 [emphasis in the original].

only the gist of what Jesus said, who is to say whether He used the singular or the plural.

Another instance cited is John 14:23:

NIV: If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

NRSV (New Revised Standard Version): *Those* who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love *them*, and we will come to *them*, and make our home with *them*.⁴⁹

Here Poythress and Grudem note the probability that the NRSV means that the Father and the Son make a home with a plurality of people *together*—i.e., with the church corporately—whereas the singular in the original text shows clearly the meaning of making a home with each person. Again, however, if the text has only the general idea of what Jesus said rather than His exact words, who is to say that He did not express the corporate idea.

By relaxing their standard of precision in regard to the words of Jesus, these two have fallen into the pattern of the drifters whom Timothy was instructed to rescue. Their inconsistency is lamentable in that it does serious injustice to the precision that is inevitably a major component of biblical inerrancy.

All-out support for imprecision. Approximation rather than precision best describes the way a goodly number of evangelical scholars handle the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

Guelich, for example, represents several who refer to the Gospels as "portraits" rather than "snapshots" of Jesus' life.⁵⁰ He contrasts a critical approach to the Gospels, which is equated to abstract paintings, with an uncritical approach, which to him is the same as snapshots. For this author, the Gospels were close approximations but not precise representations of the historical Jesus. Hagner and Blomberg follow closely the pattern set by Guelich, where that author sees the Gospels as portraits contrasted with snapshots—i.e., an uncritical approach—and abstract paintings—i.e., a critical approach. They take the Gospels as close approximations but not precise representations of the historical Jesus.⁵¹

Bock fits the same pattern of consistently labeling the Gospel descriptions of Jesus' words and actions as approximations. He repeatedly refers to their reporting of the "gist" of Jesus words and actions.⁵² "Gist" is the substance or essence of a speech, but not the very words spoken. In his category of "gist," Bock includes not only the substance or essence of a speech, but also what the Gospel

⁴⁹Ibid [emphasis in the original].

⁵⁰R. A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount, A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1982) 24-25.

⁵¹D. A. Hagner, "Interpreting the Gospels: The Landscape and the Quest," *JETS* 24/2 (1981):24; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1987) 8-12.

⁵²Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in *Jesus under Fire*, ed. By Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 78, 86, 88, 94.

writers' later reflections on the significance Jesus' teaching came to mean.⁵³ This means that the writers consciously changed His words and actions later to accomplish the purposes of their reports. As Stein explains,

[T]hey [namely, the Evangelists] felt free to paraphrase, modify certain terms, and add comments, in order to help their readers understanding the "significance" of what Jesus taught. The Evangelists had no obsession with the *ipsissima verba* [i.e., the very words], for they believed that they had authority to interpret these words for their audience.⁵⁴

Bock even argues for imprecision in the recording of the gist of the events in Jesus life,⁵⁵ by which he apparently means that differing details of parallel accounts activities need not be historically harmonized. That is a far cry from the precision that Jesus demonstrated in His use of the OT.

Following in the train of others, Keener advocates the same imprecision when writing,

Because ancient biography normally included some level of historical intention, historical questions are relevant in evaluating the degree to which Matthew was able to achieve the intention his genre implies. This does not require us to demand a narrow precision regarding details, a precision foreign to ancient literature, but to evaluate the *general* fidelity of substance. . . . My most striking discovery while writing this commentary was how often Matthew 're-Judaizes' his sources, probably mostly on the basis of concrete Palestinian, Jewish-Christian oral traditions.⁵⁶

He later adds, "The Gospel writers' contemporaries, such as Josephus, noticeably exercised a degree of both freedom and fidelity in their handling of *biblical* history . . . and one would expect the Gospels to represent the same mixture, albeit not necessarily in the same degree of each."⁵⁷ To justify further his case for imprecision in Matthew's Gospel, he notes, "[G]iven Matthew's proximity to Jesus' situation, his guesses are more apt to be correct than ours."⁵⁸ If the best Matthew could do was guess about Jesus' situation, one can hardly entertain any thought of historical precision in that Gospel. Keener puts Matthew into a category with other ancient writers: "Of course, students regularly paraphrased sayings of teachers; paraphrase was in fact a standard school exercise in Greco-Roman education . . . , and it was the 'gist' rather than the verbatim precision that ancients valued. . . . Scholars from across the theological spectrum thus acknowledge that Jewish and Christian sources

⁵³Ibid., 77.

⁵⁴Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 156.

⁵⁵Bock, "Words of Jesus" 85-86.

⁵⁶Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 2 [emphasis added].

⁵⁷Ibid., 12-13 [emphasis in the original].

⁵⁸Ibid., 13.

alike both preserved and adapted earlier tradition. . . .”⁵⁹ Regarding the genealogy in Matthew 1, Keener attributes further imprecision to Matthew: “The best alternative to harmonizing the lists is to suggest that Matthew emphasizes the nature of Jesus’ lineage as royalty rather than trying to formulate a biologically precise list (contrast possibly Luke), to which he did not have access.”⁶⁰

In commenting on the inherent difficulties of genre identification, Green observes,

As interesting and consequential as greater precision in genre identification might be, though in terms of our task of ‘reading the Gospel of Luke,’ this area has become problematized in recent years by the growing recognition that, *from the standpoint of our reading of narrative*, the line separating historical narrative and nonhistorical cannot be sustained. This is not because historical narrative makes no historical claims (or has no historical referent outside of the text), but because the narrative representation of history is always inherently ‘partial’—both in the sense of its selectivity and in the sense of its orientation to a hermeneutical vantage point. Historiography—in terms of temporal and causal relations—inevitably provides more, and less, than ‘what actually happened.’⁶¹

In his words, “the line separating historical narrative and nonhistorical cannot be sustained,” a blurring that he blames on a lack of precision in genre identification. Genre has only come to be a factor to be reckoned with in evangelical interpretation since the late twentieth century. Among scholars it has as yet to find a consensus definition, particularly in the Gospels. Green acknowledges this fact and admits that sorting out the mixture of historical and nonhistorical in the Gospels and Acts remains an unsolved problem. Narrative claims to precise historicity are unjustified in his eyes. In other words, imprecision is the rule of the day in dealing with the NT historical books.

He speaks of “varying levels of precision the sort of history-writing Luke-Acts most approximates,”⁶² which, of course, makes wide allowance for various levels of imprecision in those books.

With his words, “Against the backdrop of the last two centuries of biblical studies, the approach to the Lukan narrative we have sketched may seem ahistorical to some, or at least impoverished with reference to historical concerns,”⁶³ Green evidences his realization that his case for imprecision in Luke-Acts differs from past historical interests in these works. Yet he continues to press his case that historical accuracy is not that important: “Nevertheless, the veracity of Jesus’ healing ministry is neither for Luke, nor apparently for his contemporaries, the point at issue. . . . Luke’s compulsion is to provide meaning for the events he recounts, not to argue for

⁵⁹Ibid., 29.

⁶⁰Ibid., 75-76.

⁶¹Joel B Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 2 [emphasis in the original].

⁶²Ibid., 2-3.

⁶³Ibid., 14-15.

or demonstrate their veracity.”⁶⁴

A recent work by France also imbibes of this spirit of imprecisionism in the Gospels, this time the Gospel of Mark. Regarding the forty days of Jesus’ temptation, France writes, “[Τ]εσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας ([T]essarakonta hēmeras, ‘Forty days’) need be no more than a [*sic*] idiomatic expression for a long but limited period, and is so used elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Gn. 7:4 etc; Nu. 13:25; 1 Sa. 17:16; Jon. 3:4; Acts 1:3).”⁶⁵ Elsewhere he questions historicity: “So when Mark emphasises [*sic*] the wilderness location in 1:2-13, it is not only to signal that this part of the gospel operates on a different level from the story of real-life involvement which will follow, but also that the wilderness is itself a symbol of hope and fulfilment.”⁶⁶

The above examples of recent scholarship that insist on at least a few, and in some cases many, aspects of historical imprecision in the NT historical books demonstrate an utter disregard for the precision of Scripture.

Imprecision and uncertainty. Advocates of a modern linguistics approach to Scripture typify an unavoidable by-product of imprecision. That byproduct is uncertainty about the meaning of a text being interpreted. Cotterell and Turner express this uncertainty:

In fact, the criticism goes, the Cartesian or Baconian ideal of ‘objective’ exegesis, an exegesis that is unaffected by the world of the analyst, is unattainable. . . . The original meaning is hidden from us, and we have no way of resurrecting it. . . . All that we can do is to infer the meaning, and that will in some measure be affected by our present understanding of our world. . . . We need fully to recognize that *our* reading of the letter to Philemon (or whatever), however certain we may feel it is what Paul meant, *is actually only a hypothesis—our hypothesis—* about the discourse meaning.⁶⁷

They correctly blame such widespread uncertainty about biblical meaning on what they call an unjustified expectation of “a precision in the use of words”:

It is, perhaps, a danger of exegesis that we tend to demand a precision in the use of words which our everyday experience should tell us is not to be expected, and to find differences in meaning where none is demonstrably intended. A case in point is John 21 and the alternation between two Greek words for ‘love’ in Jesus’ questioning of Peter. It is probable that we are right in seeing significance in the three-fold question in vv. 15-17, less probable, however, that the change in *word* is significant.⁶⁸

⁶⁴Ibid., 18.

⁶⁵R. T. France. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. by I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 85 [transliteration added].

⁶⁶Ibid., 58.

⁶⁷P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1989) 59, 68, 70 [emphasis in the original].

⁶⁸Ibid., 159 [emphasis in the original].

Their rationale is that since no human communication is completely unambiguous, the same must be true of God's attempts at communication with humanity through the Bible. Such a rationale vastly underestimates God's ability in conveying His direct revelation to man.

The above three illustrative categories, far from following the pattern of Scripture itself and Scripture's expected response from believers, demonstrate an utter disregard for the precision and hence the reliability of Scripture.

Precision and Jesus' Words

Much attention has centered on the rival perspectives of *ipsissima vox* ("Jesus' exact voice") and *ipsissima verba* ("Jesus' very words"). In discussions of the precision of Scripture, a consideration of the scriptural accounts of the words of Jesus and others is inevitable. Based on merely human estimates, a dogmatic choice between the two possible views is impossible, but by looking at the evidence on each side of the issue, one can with a high degree of probability establish whether Scripture has "the very words of Jesus" or only "the exact voice of Jesus."

Ipsissima Vox. One position is that the Gospels have only the "voice" of Jesus—i.e., the essence of what He said, but not His very words. Several reasons support the *ipsissima vox* position.

(1) The strongest support contends that Jesus probably gave most of His teaching in Aramaic, because that was the dominant public language of first-century Israel.⁶⁹ The Gospel writers wrote in Greek, meaning that most, if not all, of Jesus' teaching recorded there is a translation, not His very words.

In response to such reasoning, the flat assertion must be that no one in modern times knows with certainty what language Jesus spoke most of the time. That information is not available in modern times, but archeological and other types of studies make a strong case to support His extensive use of Greek.⁷⁰ The area where Jesus taught was actually trilingual, with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages sharing equally in usage. In NT times the influence of Hellenism on Israel was profound. The Jewish institution of the Sanhedrin had a Greek name (derived from the Greek noun *συνέδριον*, *synedrion*). Some scholars now hold that Greek was the primary language spoken in Israel by Jesus. They point to such things as "the role of Greek as the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire, the linguistic and cultural character of lower Galilee during the first century, the linguistic fact that the NT has been transmitted in Greek from its earliest documents, a diversity of epigraphic evidence, significant literary evidence, and several significant contexts

⁶⁹Bock, "Words of Jesus" 77.

⁷⁰Robert H. Gundry, "The Language Milieu of First-Century Palestine," *JBL* 83 (1964):404-8; Phillip Edgcumbe, "The Languages Spoken by Jesus," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. by Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 125-43.

in the Gospels.”⁷¹

The exclusive use of the Greek OT in Scripture citations found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, a document either originating from or addressed to Hebrew Christians in Israel, is another indication of Greek’s widespread use in first-century Palestine. The use by Jesus Himself of mostly LXX sources in His quoting of the OT furnishes further evidence to this effect. Andrew and Philip, two of Jesus’ twelve apostles, had Greek names.⁷² Their encounter with a certain Greek person in John 12:20-22 is clear indication of their use of Greek. Peter, leader of the Twelve, had Hebrew and Aramaic names (“Simon” and “Cephas”), but he also had a Greek name, Peter. Most probably he spoke Greek in preaching the sermon in Acts 2 and ministering to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10). He also wrote two epistles in Greek. In the Greek text of Matt 16:18, Jesus plays on the difference between two Greek words, πέτρος (*petros*) and πέτρα (*petra*), a distinction that Hebrew or Aramaic is unable to make. Jesus must have used Greek in speaking with the Syrophenician woman who was a Greek (Mark 7:26), the Roman centurion (Matt 8:13), and Pilate (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18). Also, Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 15) quote from the Greek OT. Furthermore, Jesus’ extensive use of synonyms in John 21 is additional validation for His use of Greek. He has two words for “love,” two words for “know,” three words for “sheep,” and two words for “feed.”⁷³ Distinctions between such synonyms is impossible to make in either Hebrew or Aramaic.

Thus, the argument that the Greek Gospels’ quotations are a translation from the Aramaic that Jesus spoke is without merit.

(2) Another reason given to support the *ipsissima vox* position is the supposition that many of Jesus’ statements and sermons are abbreviated accounts of all that He actually said on a given occasion.⁷⁴ The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) has elements that the parallel Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6) does not have, and vice versa. The two probably represent Jesus’ ministry on the same occasion. If so, certain parts are omitted in each account. This means that the Gospels do not contain every word that Jesus spoke.

Such reasoning is not a valid support for the “voice” position, however. The omitted portions could very well have been and probably were parenthetical-type portions of His speech, portions that did not add to, subtract from, or change what He said in the recorded portions of His messages. The Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew, for example, makes very good sense and has an even flow of continuity whose literary worthiness has been recognized through the centuries. The same is true of Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. Both the Sermon on the Mount and

⁷¹Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44 (1993):204; cf. F. David Farnell, “The Case for the Independence View of Gospel Origins,” in *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, ed. by Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) 288-89.

⁷²Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., “The Languages Jesus Spoke,” in *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels with Explanations and Essays* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) 301-2.

⁷³Cf. M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 200-201.

⁷⁴Bock, “Words of Jesus” 77-78.

the Sermon on the Plain could very well be portions of a much longer discourse that Matthew and Luke under the Spirit's inspiration extracted and preserved word-for-word in writing for the profit of subsequent generations.

(3) A third consideration offered to support the *ipsissima vox* position is the way the NT writers cite the OT. If they felt freedom to vary the wording of the OT in their citations, they must have felt the same freedom in citing the teachings of Jesus.⁷⁵ The thrust of the argument is that if they loosely quoted the OT, they must have loosely quoted the words of Jesus also.

Those who follow that line of reasoning, however, seldom if ever take into account that the readers of the NT had access to various versions of the OT. They had opportunity to compare those Gospels with the OT to learn how the NT writers had used the OT. By comparing the NT with the OT, they could tell whether the Gospels had cited a passage word-for-word and given it a literal interpretation, or whether they had cited a passage word-for-word or with word changes in order to apply a non-literal sense of the passage to a new situation. In the latter case, they made an "inspired *sensus plenior* application" of the passage, which they were authorized to do because the NT writers themselves were inspired to write what they wrote and could assign such a fuller meaning.⁷⁶

Those readers could not do the same with Jesus' sayings. In knowing what Jesus actually said, they were strictly limited to what was written in the inspired Gospels. They had no second source to compare. Therefore, to compare how the Gospel writers quoted the sayings of Jesus with how they used the OT is illegitimate. In comparing with the OT, one is comparing familiar words with familiar words. But one cannot compare the use of familiar words with a use of unknown words.

Thus, a reader learns nothing about how the Gospel writers quoted the words of Jesus through considering how they quoted the words of the OT.

(4) Bock says that, by examining the Gospels themselves, one can learn that the Gospel writers gave only the gist of the words and activities of Jesus.⁷⁷ Consistently, his reasoning says, they took a summarizing approach to reporting on the teachings and events of Jesus' life, furnishing another evidence that the biblical text itself clearly evidences a distinction between the Lord's words and His voice.

Bock's assertion regarding this aspect of the biblical text is simply not true. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to refute his handling of various passages, but Green has shown clearly that Bock has failed to prove this point.⁷⁸ Bock's biased preunderstanding of what he wants to find by way of proof forces him into a distorted handling of the various parallel passages that he cites.

Here, then, is another alleged evidence of *ipsissima vox* that falters for the lack of cohesive reasoning.

⁷⁵Ibid., 78.

⁷⁶For more details on how the NT writers used the OT, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) 141-64, 241-69.

⁷⁷Bock, "Words of Jesus" 78, 84-88.

⁷⁸Donald E. Green, "Evangelicals and *Ipsissima Vox*," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 12/1 (Spring 2001):59-66.

(5) Bock draws a fifth support for the *vox* position as he compares the Gospels with the Greco-Roman tradition and the Jewish culture.⁷⁹ From such comparisons he concludes, “[O]ne can see that oral culture of that society did not mean the kind of loose approach to the teaching of divine wisdom that the ‘jive’ approach suggests, even though one cannot guarantee from the cultural practice that such writers would have always quoted material as if on a ‘memorex’ tape.”⁸⁰ By “jive” approach, he refers to the conclusions of The Jesus Seminar; by “memorex” approach, he refers to the *ipsissima verba* position. His view is that the degree of accuracy of the Gospels is somewhere between the two extremes.

Green has also shown Bock’s use of Greco-Roman sources to be faulty.⁸¹ Bock favors the Greco-Roman sources rather than Jewish historiography as a pattern for Gospel literature, but after a careful scrutinizing of Greco-Roman and Jewish sources, Green concludes,

The comparison to secular historians for which the *ipsissima vox* proponents so valiantly argue is invalid, poorly conceived, and lacking evidence—and cannot stand against the clear testimony of Josephus on this point. The Gospel writers’ pattern for transmission of the words of Jesus does not lie in ancient Greek historiography, but in the Jewish pattern that paid close attention to the actual words used.⁸²

So here again, a supposed support for *ipsissima vox* falls to the ground empty because the best parallels to the Gospels are literature “that paid close attention to the actual words used.”

Ipsissima Verba. Of course, the precision that has been so evident thus far in this present study of Scripture itself strongly favors the *ipsissima verba* position, i.e., that the Gospels contain the actual words spoken by Jesus. If Jesus could insist on the retention of even the smallest letter of the Hebrew OT and even the smallest part of a letter of the Hebrew OT, one should expect that the Holy Spirit would preside over the inspiration of the NT with the same degree of accuracy. If Paul could insist on Timothy’s close attention to details of Scripture, one of those details would be the very words spoken by Jesus.

Bock insists that the “memorex” approach is unrealistic, however:

In the beginning there were no tape recorders. In our twentieth-century high-tech world it is difficult to appreciate how communication took place in the first century. There were no printing presses, no cassette players, no newspapers, no printed page, no faxes, no dozen other devices by which we send and record information today. Two thousand years ago there were only individually produced, handwritten copies either on pieces of parchment or on reed paper known as papyri.⁸³

⁷⁹Bock, “Words of Jesus” 78-81.

⁸⁰Ibid., 81.

⁸¹Green, “Evangelicals and *Ipsissima Vox*” 51-59.

⁸²Ibid., 59.

⁸³Bock, “Words of Jesus” 74.

What Bock fails to take into account, however, is the fact that the same God whose providence allowed humans to invent all the electronic marvels of modern times presided over the inspiration of the Scriptures, including the Gospel accounts of Jesus' words and activities. If He has provided for contemporary times a means of preserving factual material precisely, He certainly was capable of guiding human writers of Scripture with the same precise information in communicating His revelation to the human race.

The strongest argument against the *verba* position is that Jesus used Aramaic most of the time, but Jesus' extensive use of the Greek language in His teaching and preaching is a well-founded probability. He did occasionally incorporate transliterated Aramaic and Hebrew into His speech as evidenced in a few instances. The fact that the Gospels at times supply an interpretation for such Aramaic or Hebrew expressions shows such uses to be only occasional, however. Jesus' use of "*Talitha kum!*" in Mark 5:41, along with its translation, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" evidences His occasional use of Aramaic as does Mark 15:34 and His words $\text{Ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι}$; [*Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani?*] with the translation "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Another non-Greek language appears in the parallel Matt 27:46: $\text{Ηλι ηλι λεμα σαβαχθανι}$; [*Ēli, ēli, lama sabachthani?*] which Matthew translates "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Mark 5:41 and Mark 15:34 evidence Jesus' use of Aramaic, and Matt 27:46 shows that He knew Hebrew as well.⁸⁴ In Matt 23:7, 8, Jesus used the Aramaic Ραββι (*Rabbi*)⁸⁵ instead of its Greek equivalent Διδασκαλος (*Didaskalos*, "Teacher"). These occasional transliterations in languages other than Greek further support Jesus' customary use of the Greek language in His ministry.

The Gospel writers were also careful to pick up instances when Jesus' disciples and others used Aramaic instead of Greek. They used *Rabbi* and *Rabboni*⁸⁶ fifteen times in the Gospels⁸⁷ as compared with the corresponding Greek title *Didaskalos*, which the disciples and others used more than thirty-five times. In John 20:16, John is careful to note that Mary "said to Him in Hebrew" in her use of *Rabboni*. This was one of those exceptional cases when someone addressing Christ or speaking about Him did so in Hebrew (or Aramaic) rather than Greek. Note several other instances when the writer John specifically designates a name in Hebrew: John 5:2; 19:13, 17. Here is further evidence from the Gospels themselves that Jesus and His contemporaries ordinarily communicated among themselves in the Greek language. The writers made a point of identifying the exceptional cases that were not in Greek.

⁸⁴Textual variants in all three passages confuse the issue of which language Jesus used, but the evidence is sufficient to show His familiarity with all three languages. The inscription on the cross was in three languages, Hebrew (or Aramaic), Latin, and Greek. The addition of Latin, the language of Rome, does not necessarily mean that Jesus knew Latin in addition to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

⁸⁵Greek transliteration: *Hrabbi*.

⁸⁶Greek transliteration: *Hrabbi*.

⁸⁷Matt 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:48, 49; 3:2, 26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8; 20:16.

The major obstacle erected to combat an *ipsissima verba* position has been an assumption that Jesus and His contemporaries communicated with each other exclusively or almost exclusively in Aramaic. If Aramaic had been the principal or exclusive language in Israel at that time, each Gospel writer would in some cases have needed to translate independently from Aramaic to Greek in quoting speakers. Since in such cases the writers often agree with each other, word-for-word, their translations from one language to another would have to have been identical or nearly identical. That could hardly have been the case. A short example illustrates this phenomenon. In a section of the Synoptic Gospels dealing with the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt 3:1-12 = Mark 1:1-8 = Luke 3:1-20), there occur three word groups of John's teaching in which Matthew and Luke agree verbatim on 169 out of the 178 words in the groups. If the two authors had translated from Aramaic independently of each other, their translations could not have matched each other with such precision. Advocates of Markan priority cannot say that they copied from Mark, because Mark does not have those words. If, however, they were independent verbatim reports of John's teaching in Greek, the near-identity of the two series is easily explainable through eyewitness memories enabled by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In His Upper Room Discourse, Jesus promised His disciples an enabling for such verbatim reporting: "[T]he Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). He provided in advance for the writing of the Gospels as a divine-human undertaking: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me, and you *will* bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:26-27). Of course, the divine side prevailed to overcome any human weaknesses, thereby providing readers of the Gospels with the very words spoken by Jesus while on earth. As He said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt 24:35).

In concert with Hodge and Warfield,⁸⁸ a few years ago I wrote,

No one has an airtight case for concluding whether they are Jesus' very words or they are only the gist of what Jesus said. For one whose predisposition is toward evangelical HC [i.e., Historical Criticism] and its primary focus on the human element in the inspiration of Scripture, he will incline toward the *ipsissima vox* position. For one whose inclination leads him to place highest premium on the Spirit's part in inspiring Scripture, he will certainly lean toward the *ipsissima verba* view. In some mysterious way known only to God, the natural merged with the supernatural when the Spirit inspired the Gospels. Whatever way that happened, however, the supernatural must have prevailed. Otherwise, the Gospels could not be inerrant. The Bible is more than just a humanly generated book.⁸⁹

⁸⁸A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration," *Presbyterian Review* 2/6 (April 1881):230-32.

⁸⁹Robert L. Thomas, "Impact of Historical Criticism on Theology and Apologetics," in *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship*, ed. by Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 373.

All that has transpired since I wrote those words has served to confirm the position expressed there even more.

Example of Heroes from the Past

A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield. At the end of the nineteenth century, two well-known theologians ably defended the verbal inspiration of Scripture. They were A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield:

It is evident, therefore, that it is not clearness of thought which inclines any of the advocates of a real inspiration of the Holy Scriptures to deny that it extends to the words. Whatever discrepancies or other human limitations may attach to the sacred record, *the line* (of inspired or not inspired, of infallible or fallible) *can never rationally be drawn between the thoughts and the words of Scripture.*⁹⁰

Hodge and Warfield insisted on the inspiration of the very words of Scripture in spite of human limitations that may have played a part in producing the Bible. Suggestions that Scripture contains only the *thoughts*, i.e., the *gist*, of what actually happened was to them preposterous. As they so pointedly note, one cannot draw a line between “the thoughts and the words of Scripture,” because once someone changes a word, he has also changed the thought. Hence, a belief in the *verbal* inspiration of Scripture is an endorsement of the *ipsissima verba* position. Only since the inroads of historical criticism of the Synoptic Gospels into evangelicalism have evangelicals begun to differ from Hodge and Warfield.

C. H. Spurgeon. Spurgeon’s final annual address to his Pastors’ College in 1891 has been published under the title *The Greatest Fight in the World*. He was at that point engulfed in a theological battle with those of his own association who were attempting to befriend the findings of secular philosophy and science by shaving away certain teachings of Scripture. Here is part of his instructions to his students on that occasion:

But we are told that we ought to give up a part of our old-fashioned theology to save the rest. We are in a carriage travelling [*sic*] over the steppes of Russia. The horses are being driven furiously, but the wolves are close upon us! There they are! Can you not see their eyes of fire? The danger is pressing. What must we do? It is proposed that we throw out a child or two. By the time they have eaten the baby, we shall have a little headway; but should they again overtake us, what then? Why, brave man, *throw out your wife!* “All that a man hath will he give for his life”; give up nearly every truth in the hope of saving one. Throw out inspiration, and let the critics devour it. Throw out election, and all the old Calvinism; here will be a dainty feast for the wolves, and the gentlemen who give us the sage advice will be glad to see the doctrines of grace torn limb from limb. Throw out natural depravity, eternal punishment, and the efficacy of prayer. We have lightened the carriage wonderfully. Now for another drop. *Sacrifice the great sacrifice!* Have done with the atonement! Brethren, this advice is villainous, and murderous: we will escape these wolves with everything, or we will be lost with everything. It shall be “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”, or none

⁹⁰Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration” 235 [emphasis in the original].

at all. We will never attempt to save half the truth by casting any part of it away. The sage advice which has been given us involved treason to God, and disappointment to ourselves. We will stand by all or none. We will have the whole Bible or no Bible. We are told that if we give up something the adversaries will also give up something; but we care not what they will do, for we are not the least afraid of them. . . . We shall with the sword of the Spirit maintain the whole truth as ours, and shall not accept a part of it as a grant from the enemies of God. . . . God being with us we shall not cease from this glorying, but will hold the whole of revealed truth, even to the end.⁹¹

Spurgeon was unwilling to surrender even the smallest detail of the Bible to the criticisms of science and philosophy, because he appreciated the precision of Scripture and knew that such precision would triumph in the end.

J. Gresham Machen. Other defenders of biblical inspiration in past years have set an example worth following by people of the present generation. J. Gresham Machen was one of those heroes. In the following 1930 excerpt, his example of firmness yet gentleness in defending Scripture against the drifters of his day closely adheres to instructions that Paul gave Timothy in 2 Tim 2:14-26:

The book [i.e., Machen's book on *The Virgin Birth of Christ*] has been criticized by a number of writers (for example, in *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, for April 10, 1930) on the ground that it weakens its case by attempting to prove too much—by attempting to establish a thoroughgoing trustworthiness for the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke, instead of admitting the presence of a “midrashic” element as does G. H. Box.

In reply to this criticism, the author [i.e., Machen] desires to say how very highly he values the work of Canon Box (whose important book on the virgin birth has recently been supplemented, in a very interesting way, by two articles entitled “The Virgin Birth, A Survey of Some Recent Literature,” in *Laudate*, ix, 1931, pp. 77-88, 147-155); and he [i.e., Machen] also desires to say how sharply he distinguishes the view of this scholar, who accepts as historical the central miracle in the birth narratives and rejects details, from the views of those who accept only details and reject the central miracle. The author [i.e., Machen] has taken occasion, moreover, to say (in *British Weekly*, for August 21, 1930), in reply to a very sympathetic review by H. R. Mackintosh (in the same journal, for July 17, 1930), that he does not adopt the apologetic principle of “all or nothing,” and that he rejoices in the large measure of agreement regarding the birth narratives that unites him with scholars like Canon Box and the late Bishop Gore, who reject many things in the Bible that he [i.e., Machen] regards as true. Nevertheless, the author [i.e., Machen] still believes that a thoroughgoing apologetic is the strongest apologetic in the end; and, in particular, he thinks that when the objections to the supernatural have once been overcome, there are removed with them, in a much more far-reaching way than is sometimes supposed, the objections to the birth narratives as a whole.⁹²

⁹¹C. H. Spurgeon, *The Greatest Fight in the World* (reprint; Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1990) 33-34.

⁹²J. Gresham Machen, “Preface to the Second Edition,” *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930) ix-x.

Machen wrote these words at a time when scholars of nonevangelical persuasion were questioning the historicity of the birth narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Machen stood his ground against extreme liberalism and also, in a much gentler tone, against a middle-of-the-road position between fundamentalism and liberalism, such as represented by Canon Box in the quotation above. In distinction from both groups, Machen accepted “as historical the central miracle in the birth narratives” and the “details” contained therein. He was accused of “attempting to prove too much” by the “middle-of-the-roaders” who accepted the “gist” of the virgin birth accounts and rejected the details, but he stood his ground.

This hero of the faith set the pattern for conservative evangelicals of the present who have likewise been accused of “attempting to prove too much” from the Gospels. Osborne has criticized *The Jesus Crisis*⁹³ with the following: “[T]o say that virtually all the sayings in the Gospels are *ipsissima verba* is a dangerous overstatement, for inerrancy itself is at stake. Thomas demands more precision from the Gospel accounts than they can give. Such precision is virtually impossible to demonstrate.”⁹⁴ The observation in response to Osborne is that *imprecision* is “virtually impossible to demonstrate,” and the strongest probability is on the side of precision because of the divine role in inspiration.

Regarding the same book, Bock has written, “[S]ome warnings in this book have merit. But it casts its net far too widely.”⁹⁵ He adds, “Such a book should carefully describe and distinguish differences in how views are held. It should be careful about how the details of Scripture are treated, details which the Spirit of God did give us with accuracy. These details do not support the book’s claim for a specific kind of historical precision in Scripture.”⁹⁶ Earlier he writes, “So a historically based distinction between Jesus’ exact words (*ipsissima verba*, historically accurate direct citations) and His voice (*ipsissima vox*, a historically accurate summary or paraphrase of His utterances) remains necessary in some cases, despite the book’s claim that this distinction is bibliologically dangerous.”⁹⁷

Some middle-of-the-road contemporary reviewers of *The Jesus Crisis* look at the book as “attempting to prove too much,” the same charges as Machen’s adversaries leveled against him. Machen’s adversaries have long since passed from the memories of orthodox Christians, but Machen’s name has etched itself in the annals of orthodoxy for generations to come, because he chose to interpret the text with precision.

J. I. Packer. Though not a voice from the distant past, J. I. Packer in 1958 published a work that won wide positive acclamation among evangelicals. In that book he wrote,

⁹³Thomas and Famell, eds., *The Jesus Crisis*.

⁹⁴Grant R. Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” *JETS* 42/2 (June 1999):203.

⁹⁵Darrell L. Bock, Review of *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (April-June 2000):236.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., 233.

Our point here is simply that the Church must receive all teaching that proves to be biblical, whether on matters of historical or theological fact, as truly part of God's Word.

This shows the importance of insisting, that the inspiration of Scripture is *verbal*. Words signify and safeguard meaning; the wrong word distorts the intended sense. Since God inspired the biblical text in order to communicate His Word, it was necessary for him to ensure that the words written were such as did in fact convey it. We do not stress the verbal character of inspiration from a superstitious regard for the original Hebrew and Greek words . . . ; we do so from a reverent concern for the sense of Scripture. If the words were not wholly God's, then their teaching would not be wholly God's.⁹⁸

As late as the sixth decade of the twentieth century, evangelicals overwhelmingly endorsed the verbal inspiration about which Packer wrote. The only position compatible with that verbal inspiration is that of *ipsissima verba*, but that is a far cry from the evangelicals who today speak only in terms of the Scripture's retaining the *gist* of what Jesus said.

Evangelicals need to retrace their steps of the last fifty years if they are to regain their appreciation for the reliability and precision of the Bible.

Scripture in Light of Its Rationalism, Meaningfulness, and Precision

The inerrancy of the Scriptures places heavy responsibilities on the shoulders of those who interpret them.

- They must interpret them rationally, making allowance for the difference between biblical logic and secular logic. To do otherwise would be to attribute irrationality to the Scripture.
- By aiming for a goal of eliminating all subjective input by the interpreter, they must interpret them objectively in recognition of the Scripture's own meaningfulness. To do otherwise would be to view the Scripture as meaningless.
- They must interpret them precisely, recognizing the overruling activity of the Holy Spirit in guarding them against even the slightest error. To do otherwise would be to attribute imprecision to the Scripture.

⁹⁸J. I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 89-90.

THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE

Larry D. Pettegrew
Professor of Theology

The perspicuity or clarity of Scripture in its relation to almost all areas of systematic theology is affected by postmodern hermeneutics that fail to respect the authority of Scripture. The doctrine raises a number of questions difficult to answer in a brief span, but two very basic issues are the meaning of the doctrine of perspicuity and the long-range historical context in which the doctrine has arisen. The basic doctrine means that the Bible can be understood by people through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and that people need to search the Scripture and judge for themselves what it means. Scripture itself attests its own perspicuity, but not to the point that it cannot be misunderstood or is in every point equally simple and clear. The doctrine does not rule out the need for interpretation, explanation, and exposition of the Bible by qualified leaders. The doctrine does mean that Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person, deep enough for highly qualified readers, clear in its essential matters, obscure in some places to people because of their sinfulness, understandable through ordinary means, understandable by an unsaved person on an external level, understandable in its significance by a saved person through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and available to every believer whose faith must rest on the Scriptures. Historically, debates about perspicuity have related to Marcion's attack on the OT, the fathers' denial of OT perspicuity, covenant theology's subordination of the OT to the NT, and the medieval church's attack on biblical perspicuity. The Reformers, the Protestant scholastics, and the German pietists supported the doctrine which is of primary importance for the practice of contemporary Christians.

* * * * *

It is not difficult to define perspicuity even though, as some wag remarked, the term is not very perspicuous anymore. The perspicuity of Scripture means simply "the Bible is a plain book."¹ But the study of the perspicuity, or clarity, of Scripture is complicated by at least three matters.

In the first place, almost all of the doctrines of the theological encyclopedia are intertwined with the doctrine of perspicuity. In the doctrine of God, for example,

¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d) 1:183.

is God incomprehensible, as most evangelical theologies teach? And if so, how does He accommodate Himself to mankind in order to make Himself and His revelation clear? Concerning the doctrine of man, how does man's creation in the likeness of God relate to the clarity of Scripture? In the doctrine of sin, how did man's fall into sin and his subsequent condition of depravity keep him from understanding clearly God's communication to him in the holy writ? As to pneumatology, how does the Holy Spirit's illumination make Scripture clear?² Or in the doctrine of the Bible, what is the relationship of translation theory to Scripture's clarity?

Second, the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture is complicated by the vociferous antagonism of the postmodern critics of biblical authority. This antagonism is especially noticeable in the field of postmodern hermeneutics. A defender of the clarity of Scripture, James Patrick Callahan, writes, "There is a sincere distrust of perspicuity, and a praise of obscurity, afoot in modern [i.e., contemporary] hermeneutics. . . . Perspicuity is quickly and easily missed as nothing more than an illusion, a fideistic commitment to a religious fallacy. . . ."³ Standing on the philosophical shoulders of Immanuel Kant, these postmodern philosophers insist that clarity of meaning is only to be found in the reader, not in the text itself.⁴

In the third place, saying that "the Bible is a plain book" raises a number of practical questions. Callahan asks,

In what way is Scripture clear? In its language, its translation, its every word, its expression of the authors' intent, its reference to historical matters, its narration of its story? And what makes one text so easily understood and others so obscure? Isn't all writing intended to be clear, and all communication meant to be understood? And if so, what is special, if anything, about the Bible's clarity? And another important question follows: To whom is Scripture clear? To Christians only, to the critically educated, to church authorities like pastors or bishops, or to anyone at all?⁵

All of these questions cannot be answered in a brief essay. Therefore, this study has a twofold purpose. First the meaning of the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture will be investigated; and second, some key debates over perspicuity will be identified in their historical context.

²The illumination by the Holy Spirit is a major part of the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. This article, however, is focused on other basic biblical and historical issues.

³James Patrick Callahan, "Claritas Scripturae: The Role of Perspicuity in Protestant Hermeneutics," *JETS* 39/3 (September 1996):362.

⁴But Kevin Vanhoozer is correct: "Precisely because they have authors, texts don't mean just anything. The author's will acts as a control on interpretation. Thanks to an author's willing this rather than that, we can say that there is a definite meaning in texts prior to reading and interpretation. As God's will structures the universe, so the author's will structures the universe of discourse" (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998] 47). See further, Robert Thomas' article in this issue.

⁵James Patrick Callahan, *The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2001) 11. Callahan has done the most work on perspicuity in recent years, and his article and book have been of considerable help in the preparation of the first part of this article.

THE MEANING OF THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE

Definition of Perspicuity

What does the assertion, “the Bible is a plain book,” mean? In further explanation, Hodge writes, “Protestants hold that the Bible, being addressed to the people, is sufficiently perspicuous to be understood by them, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and that they are entitled and bound to search the Scripture, and to judge for themselves what is its true meaning.”⁶ His son and successor at Princeton Seminary affirmed, “[T]he Scriptures are in such a sense *perspicuous* that all that is necessary for man to know, in order to his salvation or for his practical guidance in duty, may be learned therefrom, and that they are designed for the personal use and are adapted to the instruction of the unlearned as well as the learned.”⁷ Even more clearly, Callahan explains,

Scripture can be and is read with profit, with appreciation and with transformative results. It is open and transparent to earnest readers; it is intelligible and comprehensible to attentive readers. Scripture itself is coherent and obvious. It is direct and unambiguous as written; what is written is sufficient. Scripture’s concern or focal point is readily presented as the redemptive story of God. It displays a progressively more specific identification of that story, culminating in the gospel of Jesus Christ. All this is to say: Scripture is clear about what it is about.⁸

Biblical Support of Perspicuity

The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture pervades the Bible, as the following chart displays:

Biblical Teaching about the Perspicuity of Scripture

Scripture Is Clear Because:	Scriptural Reference
Scripture is light.	“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105). “And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place . . .” (2 Pet 1:19a).

⁶Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1:183.

⁷A. A. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1926) 63.

⁸Callahan, *Clarity of Scripture* 9.

<p>Scripture is profitable.</p>	<p>“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).</p>
<p>Scripture explains salvation.</p>	<p>“. . . the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15b).</p>
<p>Scripture is addressed to common people, not religious experts.</p>	<p>“Hear, O Israel” (Deut 6:4). “The common people heard Him [Jesus] gladly” (Mark 12:37, NKJV). “to the saints who are in Ephesus” (Eph 1:1). “with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2).</p>
<p>Parents can teach Scripture to their children.</p>	<p>“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut 6:6-7).</p>
<p>Even a child can understand Scripture’s message.</p>	<p>“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings. . . .” (2 Tim 3:14-15a).</p>
<p>Scripture tests the accuracy of religious ideas.</p>	<p>“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11).</p>

What Perspicuity Does Not Mean

In spite of what Scripture teaches about itself, it is still possible to misunderstand this doctrine, of course. So, what does this doctrine not mean, and what does it mean? First, perspicuity does not mean that all of Scripture is equally clear as to its precise meaning. The Second London Confession of Faith of the Baptists (1677, 1688), reflecting the Westminster Confession at this point, begins its

statement on perspicuity: “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all”⁹ The great church father, Chrysostom, compared Scripture to a river: “In one part there are whirlpools; and not in another,” he wrote. And he concludes, “Why then art thou bent on drowning thyself in the depths?”¹⁰

Second, the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture does not mean that the teaching of Scripture is everywhere equally simple. There is a difference between clarity and simplicity. Scripture is clear, not mystical or hidden. But it often takes work to understand what the biblical authors meant in a certain passage. Commenting on Paul’s writings, the apostle Peter admits, “There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16).

Third, perspicuity does not mean that interpretation, explanation, and exposition by a Bible teacher are never necessary. The New Testament speaks of the gift of teaching and the office of pastor-teacher. In Acts 8, Philip heard the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah the prophet and asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (Acts 8:30-31). Our Lord also explained Scripture to his disciples. After His resurrection, for example, He met some of His disciples on the Emmaus road. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

Those heroes in church history who emphasized the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture never implied that the teaching ministry is unnecessary. The Reformers, for example, like Calvin and Luther, “wrote numerous exegetical and expository commentaries on the text, and discussed issues concerning the problem of biblical interpretation.”¹¹ One of the qualifications of a pastor, in fact, is that he be “able to teach” the Scriptures (1 Tim 3:2). Even the change from one culture to another, and one language to another, mandates teachers. Bernard Ramm writes,

Words and sentences occur in the context of a culture. Their meaning depends in a large part to these contexts in which they occur and without that context it is either difficult or impossible to know the meaning of the words or sentences. It is therefore no great thing nor something out of the ordinary that we should have words, concepts, and sentences that puzzle us in Holy Scripture.¹²

Thus, perspicuity does not mean that interpretation, explanation, and exposition by a Bible teacher are never necessary. The Bible teaches that they are.

Fourth, the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture does not mean that even

⁹Second London Confession of Faith (1677, 1688), 1,7, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. by William L. Lumpkin (Philadelphia: Judson, 1959) 251.

¹⁰John Chrysostom, “Homilies on Timothy”, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. by Philip Schaff, 1st series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 13:507.

¹¹Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 179.

¹²Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 99.

essential biblical doctrines are everywhere stated with equal clarity. Correct understanding may involve comparing one passage with another passage. The great church father, Augustine, wrote,

Thus the Holy Spirit has magnificently and wholesomely modulated the Holy Scriptures so that the more open places present themselves to hunger and the more obscure places may deter a disdainful attitude. Hardly anything may be found in these obscure places which is not found plainly said elsewhere.¹³

What Perspicuity Does Mean

So what does the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scriptures mean? First it means that **Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by**. Scripture says, “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (Ps 119:130). Wayne Grudem comments, “Here the ‘simple’ person (Heb. *peti*) is not merely one who lacks intellectual ability, but one who lacks sound judgment, who is prone to making mistakes, and who is easily led astray. God’s Word is so understandable, so clear, that even this kind of person is made wise by it.”¹⁴ Robert Reymond explains,

For example, one does not need to be ‘learned,’ when reading the Gospels or hearing them read or proclaimed, to discover that they intend to teach that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, performed mighty miracles, died on the cross ‘as a ransom for many,’ and rose from the dead on the third day after death. These things are plain, lying on the very face of the Gospels.¹⁵

On the other hand, perspicuity also means that **Scripture is deep enough for readers of the highest intellectual ability**. Augustine, one of the great minds of the ancient world admitted that certain passages of Scripture seem to be covered with “a most dense mist,” which he believed “was provided by God to conquer pride by work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless.”¹⁶

Third, perspicuity means that **Scripture is clear in its essential matters**. Scripture, “in any faithful translation, is sufficiently perspicuous (clear) to show us our sinfulness, the basic facts of the gospel, what we must do if we are to be part of the family of God, and how to live.”¹⁷ The late R. V. Clearwaters, president of Central Baptist Seminary in Minneapolis, when confronted by the old argument that “Scripture is obscure and has many different interpretations,” would read Rom 3:23 to that person: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” “Now,” he

¹³Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. by D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958) 38.

¹⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 106.

¹⁵Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 88.

¹⁶Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 37.

¹⁷Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. by Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 128.

would say, “you give me your interpretation of that verse, and I’ll give you mine.” His point was, of course, that it is almost impossible to misinterpret “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”? This verse and all other essential matters in Scripture are clear.

Fourth, the perspicuity of Scripture means that **the obscurity that a reader of the Bible may find in some parts of Scripture is the fault of finite and sinful mankind.** Grudem explains,

In a day when it is common for people to tell us how hard it is to interpret Scripture rightly, we would do well to remember that not once in the Gospels do we ever hear Jesus saying anything like this: “I see how your problem arose—the Scriptures are not very clear on that subject.” Instead, whether he is speaking to scholars or untrained common people, his responses always assume that the blame for misunderstanding any teaching of Scripture is not to be placed on the Scriptures themselves, but on those who misunderstand or fail to accept what is written. Again and again he answers questions with statements like, “Have you not read . . .” (Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:14; 22:31), “Have you never read in the scriptures . . .” (Matt. 21:42), or even, “You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29; cf. Matt. 9:13; 12:7; 15:3; 21:13; John 3:10; et al.).¹⁸

The blame must not be placed on the Scriptures themselves, but upon finite and sinful man.

Fifth, perspicuity means that **interpreters of Scripture must use ordinary means.** The writing of Scripture, though completed under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, was accomplished by ordinary men using normal means of grammar and syntax. So, “if an interpreter properly follows what has been called ‘the laws of language,’ or ‘the rights of language,’ he can know what the Scriptures specifically mean.”¹⁹

Sixth, the perspicuity of Scripture means that **even an unsaved person can understand the plain teachings of Scripture on an external level.** Some might think of 1 Cor 2:14 that says that the things of the Spirit are foolish to the man without the Spirit, and he cannot understand them. But the point is not that an unsaved person cannot understand what the Scripture is saying or teaching. The point is that he cannot have a spiritual understanding. At best, Scripture is insignificant to him; at worst, it is incredible.

In other words, there are two levels of knowing and understanding. At the first level, it is possible to see and hear with the senses—one could even say, to see or hear with the mind—while on the other hand not seeing or hearing with the Spirit of God (Matt 13:13-15). Joseph Bayly recounts an interesting story:

I remember studying under C. T. Craig, New Testament scholar and Revised Standard Version translator at Union Seminary the summer of 1942. The course was “The Pauline Interpretation of the Gospel.” For the first few weeks Dr. Craig could not have been more clear in his understanding of the Pauline teaching if he had been teaching at Dallas

¹⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 106.

¹⁹Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 98.

or Wheaton. Then, at a critical point in the course, he said, "Up to this time we've been studying what Paul actually said. Now we shall proceed to reinterpret his writings in the light of the twentieth century." From then on he cut down what he had previously built. St. Paul was "a child of his times"; culture changes necessitated a drastic revision of his ideas.²⁰

So, Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 2:14 does not mean that unsaved people cannot understand any part of the Bible. Unsaved man, as a matter of fact, "will be judged for rejecting that which Scripture itself declares should be abundantly clear to them, because they refuse to receive it."²¹ Reymond writes,

One does not need to be instructed by a preacher to learn that he must believe on Jesus in order to be saved from the penalty his sins deserve. (This includes the unbeliever, who is certainly capable of following an argument.) All one needs to do in order to discover these things, to put it plainly, is to sit down in a fairly comfortable chair, open the Gospels, and with a good reading lamp, read the Gospels like he would read any other book.²²

Seventh, perspicuity means that **the Holy Spirit must illumine the mind of the reader or hearer of Scripture if he is to understand the significance of Scripture.** This is the correct meaning of 1 Cor 2:14.

Finally, the perspicuity of Scripture means that **in accordance with the priesthood of the believer, every Christian has the right and is bound to read and interpret it for himself, so that his "faith may rest on the testimony of the Scriptures, and not on that of the Church."**²³ There are no church officers, class of officers, or Bible expositors to whose interpretation of the Scriptures the people are required to submit as a final authority.

To summarize,

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for Salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.²⁴

HISTORICAL DEBATES OVER THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE

Having surveyed the basic features of the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture, the question to be pursued is, How has this doctrine been treated in church history? Perspicuity became a major issue in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras. Before then, however, the church wrestled with the clarity of the Old

²⁰Joseph Bayly, "Out of My Mind," *Eternity* (November 1982):59.

²¹Kaiser, "Legitimate Hermeneutics" 123.

²²Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology* 88.

²³Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 183.

²⁴Second London Confession of Faith, 1,7.

Testament, and eventually even the clarity of the New Testament.

The Attack on the Perspicuity of Scripture

One of the first issues to confront the church as it came out of the apostolic era dealt with the clarity of the Old Testament. The fathers asked and answered such questions as, Should the Old Testament be totally replaced by the New Testament? Should the church even keep the Old Testament in its canon?

Marcion's Attack on the Old Testament

At least one well-known theologian, Marcion by name, denied that the Old Testament (and some of the New Testament books) deserved the dignity of being included in the Christian canon of inspired books. Marcion did not deny that the Old Testament deserved to be read or that it had any teachings for Christians. But to Marcion, new wine must not be poured into old bottles, and the Old Testament was an old bottle.

In response, the church fathers wrote passionate treatises against Marcion. Tertullian, for example, wrote five books against Marcion. Irenaeus, in his *Adversus Haereses*, Book Four, responded to some of the doctrines of the Marcionites. Justin Martyr, Cyprian, and other fathers took every opportunity to condemn Marcionism. According to one specialist, "No other single man had called forth such a volume of anxious apologetic from the Church. For Marcion was a real danger."²⁵

The Fathers' Denial of the Perspicuity of the Old Testament

Though the church fathers defended the canonicity of the Old Testament, they in effect denied its clarity in a couple of ways. First, they denied perspicuity by employing the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. Augustine, for example, learned the allegorical method from Ambrose. He writes, "This [the defensibility of the Catholic faith] was especially clear after I had heard one or two parts of the Old Testament explained allegorically—whereas before this, when I had interpreted them literally, they had 'killed' me spiritually."²⁶

James Preus, a scholar of the early and medieval hermeneutical developments, says that Augustine believed that

. . . whenever the interpreter encounters a passage which does not literally teach faith or love, his task is to interpret it figuratively: he must raise it to the level of the edifying. For the passage that in its literal meaning does not edify must (according to Augustine's understanding of the divine intention) be a *figura* of something that does edify—a *signum* of something spiritual or theological *res* whose true meaning must be revealed . . . as *doctrina*, *lex*, or *promissio*.²⁷

²⁵E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: SPCK, 1948) ix.

²⁶Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999) 96-97.

²⁷James Preus, *From Shadow to Promise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969) 13. Preus' book is based on his Harvard dissertation. His translations from Latin and analyses of the medieval theologians inform this section of the essay.

Thus, the clear sense of Scripture has two levels of value for Augustine: one level is edifying, and one is not. And that which is not edifying should be allegorized. The Old Testament, in its literal meaning, almost in total, falls under the unedifying classification. The only exceptions to the unedifying classification are the Old Testament law and the direct prophecies about Jesus Christ.

But there is something more significant happening in the fathers' understanding of the Old Testament. Not only did they believe in allegorizing much of the Old Testament, they also subordinated the Old Testament to the New Testament. After all, the key for allegorical interpretation was the New Testament. In other words, the interpreter of the Old Testament believed that he should read the Old Testament through the paradigm of the New Testament. The Old Testament in itself was not perspicuous for faith and practice. As the church moved into the Middle Ages, the theologians (now Roman Catholic) taught "that the OT, spiritually understood, is the same as the NT; or even the NT is the true literal sense of the OT."²⁸

Covenant Theology's Subordination of the Old to the New

When the Reformation came, the Reformers reawakened to the value of the history and ethics of the Old Testament, to be sure. They studied it more and developed their idea of the theological covenant out of Old Testament theology. There was also a renewal of the commitment to literal interpretation and an awareness of the dangers of allegorical interpretation. However, one hermeneutical principle from medieval attitudes toward the clarity of Scripture remained: the subordination of the Old Testament to the New Testament.

This principle continues to this day to be the method of doing theology in covenant theology. Covenant theologian, Hans K. LaRondelle, for example, argues that the Old Testament Scriptures can only be interpreted accurately by studying the New Testament. Historic Christianity, he says, has always tried to understand the Old by the New.

The Christian interpreter of the Old Testament is once and for all obliged to read the Hebrew Scriptures in the light of the New Testament as a whole, because the Old is interpreted authoritatively, under divine inspiration, in the New Testament as God's continuous history of salvation. Historic Christianity has always confessed that the New Testament is the goal and fulfillment of the Old.²⁹

Of course the "historic Christianity" that he is referring to in this case is the medieval method of interpretation.

For covenant theology, doing theology proceeds as follows:³⁰

²⁸Ibid., 16.

²⁹Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1983) 19.

³⁰See the helpful study by Mike Stallard, "Literal Hermeneutics, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism" (unpublished paper, Pre-Trib Research Center, 1995) 13-16.

1. The formulation of a biblical theology from the New Testament;
2. The formulation of a biblical theology from the Old Testament;
3. The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing points 1 and 2.

But there are serious weaknesses in this system of interpretation. By reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament, covenant theologians may in effect minimize the historical-grammatical interpretation of great sections of the Old Testament and produce allegorizers of the Old Testament. Covenant theologians in effect “undo, or replace the results that would have been obtained in performing a true biblical theology of the OT.”³¹ The Old Testament is almost an afterthought in this procedure. The New Testament is used like the “presidential power of veto”³² over legitimate exegetical results in Old Testament passages. So, there is no true Old Testament biblical theology that serves to form the production of systematic theology. The systematic theology is “one-legged.”³³

The proper approach for doing theology would progress as follows:

1. The formulation of a biblical theology from the Old Testament;
2. The formulation of a biblical theology from the New Testament;
3. The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all biblical inputs to theology.

And why is this best? For at least three reasons. First, because this is the nature of progressive revelation. In progressive revelation, revelation builds upon previous revelation. Second, because this process enables the interpreter to read the Old Testament with a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. And third, because in this procedure, there is really no priority of one testament over another except in a chronological order of progressive revelation. In the end, it is superior to be able to insist that an Old Testament text must not be stripped of its original meaning in its context, found through historical-grammatical interpretation and biblical theology. Both the New Testament and the Old Testament should be treated as perspicuous.

The Medieval Church’s Attack on the Perspicuity of the Entire Bible

The situation in the Middle Ages had yet one more turn. In the on-going development of the Roman Church’s doctrine of the interpretation of Scripture, Thomas Aquinas argued that clarity of meaning of a passage of Scripture can only be constituted by later interpretation. All historical material is subject to further interpretation because “things passing through their course signify something else. . . .”³⁴

This means, as already has been pointed out, that the New Testament reinterprets the Old Testament. But what about the New Testament? What clarifies

³¹Ibid., 15.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, VII q. 6 a 3 corp, in *Opera Omnia* IX, 546f., translated and quoted in Preus, *From Shadow to Promise* 56.

it? Since there is no “third testament,” “the obvious answer is . . . his [Christ’s] mystical body, the Church, endowed with the Spirit.”³⁵

Later Roman Church theologians such as Jean Gerson (d. 1429) went so far as to argue that the authority to judge and declare what the literal sense of Scripture rests in the church alone. Instead of the literal sense being the plain sense, or grammar of the Bible as it expressed the intention of the author, the literal sense “has become the private property of the Spirit endowed Church.”³⁶ Instead of a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, Gerson and other medieval theologians argued for an ecclesial-literal understanding. So, “in the last analysis, the Bible itself has no theologically authoritative literal meaning. The possibility of argument from Scripture against the *magisterium* is . . . programmatically and theoretically eliminated.”³⁷ Since the right to say what Scripture means has been given by God to the Roman Church, the problem of the perspicuity of Scripture is solved. Scripture means what the church says that it means.

The Roman Catholic Church officially defended this view at the Council of Trent during the Counter-Reformation:

In order to restrain petulant spirits [the Council] decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall,—in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine,—wrestle the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church,—whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures,—hath held and doth hold. . . .³⁸

To complete the story, Rome in the Counter-Reformation and since has not said that the Bible is completely obscure and inaccessible, written in some secret code. A clear understanding of Scripture is possible, but only through the mediation of the church. The issue ultimately is not so much obscurity of Scripture as much as it is authority over the interpretation of Scripture. And this leads to the response of the Reformers to the position of the Roman Church.

The Protestants’ Proclamation of the Perspicuity of Scripture

One of the major principles of the Protestant Reformation was the priesthood of the believer. Thus the believer is his own priest before God and has the right to interpret Scripture for himself. The corollary principle was that Scripture was clear and every Christian could understand it. Callahan writes,

Yet, while Protestants did not invent the notion, Protestantism certainly linked its own identity with a reinvented version of Scripture’s clarity, making the claim to Scripture’s ‘plain meaning,’ a logically necessary article of the Protestant faith. . . . This has its

³⁵Preus, *From Shadow to Promise* 57.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 79.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 81.

³⁸Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (fourth session, April 8, 1546), in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. by Philip Schaff (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d., reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 2:83.

origins in Zwingli and Luther, and is particularly evident in the Protestant scholastic tradition.³⁹

The Reformers’ Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture

All of the major Reformers spoke and wrote about the clarity of Scripture. Zwingli, in September 1522, published “Of the Clarity and Certainty or Power of the Word of God.” John Calvin argued that the church must not withhold the Bible from Christians because withholding would rob them of necessary armor in the struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil.⁴⁰

The debate between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants over perspicuity climaxed, however, in the interchange between the Roman Catholic humanist, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Martin Luther in their respective works, *The Freedom of the Will* and *The Bondage of the Will*.⁴¹ In his work, Luther laid down several principles that more or less outline the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture for the Reformers. The following chart summarizes Luther’s doctrine of perspicuity.

Martin Luther’s Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture

The Principle	Luther’s Statement in <i>Bondage of the Will</i>
1. Nothing in Scripture is obscure.	“. . . in opposition to you I say with respect to the whole Scripture, I will not have any part of it called obscure. What we have cited from Peter holds good here, that the Word of God is for us ‘a lamp shining in a dark place’ (II Peter 1:19). But if part of this lamp does not shine, it will be a part of the dark place rather than of the lamp itself” (163).
2. Anything that seems to be obscure is so because of the ignorance of man, not the obscurity of Scripture.	“It is true that for many people much remains abstruse; but this is not due to the obscurity of Scripture, but to the blindness of indolence of those who will not take the trouble to look at the very clearest truth” (111).

³⁹Callahan, *Clarity of Scripture* 128.

⁴⁰John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. by T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 221.

⁴¹Martin Luther, “The Bondage of the Will,” in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. by E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 17 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969).

<p>3. Some texts are obscure because the reader does not understand key words and grammar.</p>	<p>“I admit, of course, that there are many texts in the Scriptures that are obscure and abstruse, not because of the majesty of their subject matter, but because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar; but these texts in no way hinder a knowledge of all the subject matter of Scripture” (110).</p>
<p>4. Satan also tries to blind human eyes to the meaning of Scripture.</p>	<p>“It is due to the malice of Satan, who sits enthroned in our weakness, resisting the Word of God. If Satan were not at work, the whole world of men would be converted by a single word of God once heard, and there would be no need of more” (167).</p>
<p>5. If a Scriptural topic seems to be obscure in one place, it will be clear in other places.</p>	<p>“If the words are obscure in one place, yet they are plain in another . . .” (111).</p>
<p>6. There are two kinds of clarity in Scripture.</p>	<p>“To put it briefly, there are two kinds of clarity in Scripture, just as there are also two kinds of obscurity: one external and pertaining to the ministry of the Word, the other located in the understanding of the heart” (112).</p>
<p>7. External clarity extends to the whole world, not just Christians.</p>	<p>“If, on the other hand, you speak of the external clarity, nothing at all is left obscure or ambiguous, but everything there is in Scripture has been brought out by the Word into the most definite light, and published in all the world (112).</p>
<p>8. Internal obscurity comes from depravity.</p>	<p>“All men have a darkened heart, so that even if they can recite everything in Scripture, and know how to quote it, yet they apprehend and truly understand nothing of it” (112).</p>
<p>9. The Holy Spirit brings about internal clarity.</p>	<p>“If you speak of the internal clarity, no man perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he has the Spirit of God” (112).</p>

<p>10. One of the worst results of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Scripture is that it has kept people from reading and studying the Bible.</p>	<p>“Yet with such a phantasmagoria [bizarre illusion] Satan has frightened men away from reading the Sacred Writ, and has made Holy Scripture contemptible . . .” (110).</p>
<p>11. Another result of Roman Catholic doctrine is that it has sometimes set wicked men above Scripture.</p>	<p>“Nothing more pernicious could be said than this, for it has led ungodly men to set themselves above the Scriptures and to fabricate whatever they pleased, until the Scriptures have been completely trampled down and we have been believing and teaching nothing but dreams of madmen” (159).</p>

Protestant Scholastics’ Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture

In the years following the deaths of the first-generation Reformers, Lutheran and Reformed scholastics had the opportunity to state with some precision of words the various doctrinal emphases of the Reformation.⁴² The battle over the perspicuity of Scripture between Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars remained intense during these years. Possibly the best illustration of the scholastics’ statement of the perspicuity of Scripture is found in the work of Reformed scholastic, Francis Turretin (d. 1687). Turretin highlights the perspicuity of Scripture in a chapter in his book, *The Doctrine of Scripture*.

In this chapter, Turretin makes twenty-two points about Scripture’s clarity, most of which simply develop the Reformers’ teaching. In point two, for example, Turretin writes, “No one denies that Scripture is obscure to unbelievers and unregenerate people, to whom the gospel is its own concealment, as Paul says (II Cor. 4). . . . [But] is it so obscure that a believing person cannot comprehend it for salvation without the authority and decision of the church? This we deny.”⁴³ In point six, Turretin writes,

It is not a question of perspicuity that excludes necessary means for interpretation, such as the inner light of the Spirit, the attention of the mind, the voice and ministry of the church, lectures and commentaries, prayers and vigils. We acknowledge such means are not only useful but also normally are necessary, but we want to deny any obscurity that keeps the common people from reading Scripture, as if it were harmful or dangerous, or that leads to a falling back on traditions when one should have taken a stand on Scripture alone.⁴⁴

⁴²See further, Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), for a complete study of the Lutheran scholastics.

⁴³Francis Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, ed. and trans. by John W. Beardslee III (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 185.

⁴⁴Ibid., 187-88.

Point fifteen reads, "It is one thing for there to be in Scripture difficult passages . . . whose difficulties can be mastered, but another for there to be insuperable . . . difficulties, which cannot be understood no matter how painstakingly they are investigated."⁴⁵

German Pietists' Emphasis on the Perspicuity of Scripture

Contemporary with, and sometimes in conflict with, the scholastics were the Pietists.⁴⁶ The Pietists were reformers within the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who believed that the scholastics had overemphasized the fine points of Protestant theology and underemphasized the necessity of the new birth and practical Christian living.⁴⁷ Practical Christian living included the study of the Bible, and this meant an emphasis on the perspicuity of Scripture.

One of the most important of the Lutheran Pietists was Philipp Jakob Spener (d. 1705). In his famous *Pia Desideria*, for example, Spener wrote,

Indeed, it was by a special trick of the cursed devil that things were brought to such a pass in the papacy that all these spiritual functions were assigned solely to the clergy (to whom alone the name "spiritual," which is in actual fact common to all Christians, was therefore arrogantly allotted) and the rest of the Christians were excluded from them, as if it were not proper for laymen diligently to study in the Word of the Lord. . . . This presumptuous monopoly of the clergy, alongside the aforementioned prohibition of Bible reading, is one of the principal means by which papal Rome established its power over poor Christians and still preserves it wherever it has opportunity. . . . Every Christian is bound not only to offer himself and what he has, his prayer, thanksgiving, good works, alms, and so forth, but also industriously to study in the Word of the Lord, with the grace that is given him to teach others, especially those under his own roof.⁴⁸

In a message, "The Necessary and Useful Reading of the Holy Scriptures," Spener refers to Gregory the Great's metaphor:

Scripture is water in which a lamb can touch bottom and walk on it but an elephant must swim. This we can understand in the following sense: A simple person can discover his need in it and come to it even though he can only wade; on the other hand, the person who has greater understanding will meet with so many difficulties in the text that he must swim through them with great struggle, that is, he must turn all his powers toward

⁴⁵Ibid., 191.

⁴⁶The best book-length studies of Pietism in English are still the three works by F. Ernest Stoeffler. See F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); and Stoeffler, ed., *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

A helpful compendium of Pietist writings is in print: Peter C. Erb, ed., *Pietists, Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

⁴⁷Pietist Lutheran groups who honor Scripture and believe in the necessity of the new birth still exist today—the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, for example.

⁴⁸Philipp Jakob Spener, "Pia Desideria," in Erb, ed., *Pietists: Selected Writings* 35.

overcoming those difficulties.⁴⁹

The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture pervades the Pietists' writings, so much so that a major work on the Pietist doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture would, in fact, be helpful.

CONCLUSION

The practical lessons from the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture are many. The first is surely thankfulness to the God of grace who clearly reveals in a book how to have one's sins forgiven, how to have eternal life, and how to live a life pleasing to Him. This doctrine is also one of the important teachings of Scripture for which Jude instructed Christians to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3). Clarity of Scripture is denied by every false theology, usually putting a priesthood, a cult's founder, an inner light, a critical methodology, or a postmodern hermeneutic, between the Scriptures and the Christian.

Finally, pastors may need to be reminded never to give the impression to their people that they cannot understand the Bible without their sermons. On the contrary, pastors must help their people to learn to love to read and study God's Word. The Bible is a precious book, able to make people wise unto salvation, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness—and it is clear.

⁴⁹Philipp Jakob Spener, "The Necessary and Useful Reading of the Holy Scriptures," in Erb, ed., *Pietists: Selected Writings* 72. See also in the same volume Spener's, "The Spiritual Priesthood" 50-64; and "The Necessary and Useful Reading of the Holy Scriptures" 71-75.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Richard L. Mayhue
Senior Vice President and Dean
Professor of Theology and Pastoral Ministries

After a brief look at the general concept of “authority,” this essay continues with an introductory discussion concerning the authority of God. It is developed in terms of (1) the declarations of Scripture; (2) the displays in God’s names, nature, and prerogatives; and (3) Satan’s denial. Then, God’s authority is discussed as it is invested in Scripture in the sense that the Bible is the voice of God and therefore speaks with His full authority. God’s authority in Scripture can thus be described as original, unalterable, exclusive, permanent, ultimate, obligatory, and consequential. Scripture is to be authoritatively preached and submissively obeyed since the Author of and the authority within will reward righteous obedience and condemn those who disregard and disobey His authority in Scripture.

* * * * *

The concept of *authority* is thoroughly woven into the fabric of Scripture. It is unmistakably obvious from Gen 1:1 (“In the beginning God created ...”¹) to Rev 22:20 (“Yes, I am coming quickly.”) and everywhere between. This idea of “ultimate right” is inextricably linked with God’s sovereignty (Rom 11:36).

Just how important is the authority of Scripture? Listen carefully to one of the preeminent Reformers when he spoke to this very question at the Diet of Worms in April, 1521. Martin Luther, under intense pressure to recant regarding “justification by faith” and other recently embraced truths from the Bible, responded to Meister Eck in this fashion:

Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.²

¹Scripture quotations throughout this essay are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

²Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor, 1955) 144.

What is truly known about authority did not originate outside of Scripture, but rather within. Thus, it is not a secular concept that has been co-opted by religion. On the contrary, it is a sacred element of the very Person of God. What Scripture properly teaches about authority has actually been shamefully distorted by this world's system and wrongfully employed by all world religions. This essay intends to explore what Scripture itself teaches about authority, especially its own.

AUTHORITY

The rightful idea of authority has fallen on hard times at the start of the twenty-first century. Illegitimate forms and expressions of authority range from the illegal and abusive exercise of authoritarianism/totalitarianism to individual authority which emerges from a postmodern mindset of selfishness.

The appropriate approach to the discussion commences with a working definition of authority in general, especially legitimate authority exercised in a proper fashion. A representative dictionary definition records that authority is the "Power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; right to command or give a final decision."³

Bernard Ramm suggests,

*Authority itself means that right or power to command action or compliance, or to determine belief or custom, expecting obedience from those under authority, and in turn giving responsible account for the claim to right or power.*⁴

The NT noun (102 times) most commonly translated "authority" is ἐξουσία (*exousia*). A representative lexical definition reads, "The power exercised by rulers or others in high position by virtue of their office."⁵

There are many approaches to authority in a secular worldview, e.g.,

1. oligarchical – authority exercised by a powerful few.
2. democratic – authority exercised by the people.
3. hereditary – authority exercised by those in a particular family.
4. despotic – authority exercised by one or more in an evil fashion.
5. personal – authority exercised by one person.

However, with a biblical worldview, original authority and ultimate authority reside with God and God alone. God did not inherit His authority—there was no one to bequeath it to Him. God did not receive His authority—there was no one to bestow it on Him. God's authority did not come by way of an election—there was no one to vote for Him. God did not seize His authority—there was no one to steal it from. God did not earn His authority—it was already His. God inherently

³*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., "authority."

⁴Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 10 [emphasis in the original].

⁵*BDAG*, 3rd ed. rev., s.v., "ἐξουσία." Cf. *TDNT*, s.v., "ἐξουσία."

embodies authority because He is the great “I AM” (Exod 3:14; John 8:58).

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD

God’s authority becomes obvious and unquestionable when one considers three facts. First, God created the heavens and earth and that which is therein (Genesis 1–2). Second, God owns the earth, all that it contains, and those who dwell in it (Ps 24:1). Third, in the end God consumes it all in that He declared, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). What follows makes the point with flair.

Where did God come from? He came from nowhere! The reason God came from nowhere is that there was nowhere for Him to come from. Coming from nowhere, He stood on nothing. The reason He had to stand on nothing is there was nowhere for Him to stand. And standing on nothing, He reached out where there was nowhere to reach and caught something where there was nothing to catch and hung something on nothing and He told it to stay there. Now standing on nothing, He took the hammer of His own will; He struck the anvil of His omnipotence and sparks flew. He caught them on the tips of His fingers, flung them out into space and bedecked the heaven with stars, but no one said a word. The reason no one said anything is that there was nobody there to say anything. So God Himself said, ‘That is very good.’⁶

God’s Authority Declared

To understand and accept the fact of God’s authority is as simple as accepting the fact of God Himself. Romans says this best: “For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Rom 13:1). This *locus classicus* lays out clearly the source of all authority and articulates the principle of “Divine delegation” (cf. Job 34:13; John 19:11).

There are numerous statements in the OT which explicitly testify to God’s authority. For example, “That power belongs to God” (Ps 62:11) and “Power and might are in Thy hand so that no one can stand against Thee” (2 Chron 20:6).

Jesus declared, “All authority had been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18). Jude wrote, “[T]o the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 25).

God’s Authority Displayed

The Names of God

The names of people do not always correspond to their characters or their accomplishments. But the names of God always reveal something true about Him, especially His authority.

1. For instance, *Elohim* or ‘God’ tells us that He is supreme above all things

⁶S. M. Lockridge as quoted by permission in Richard Mayhue, *Seeking God* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000) 186 [emphasis in the original].

and all people (Gen 1:1). He is eternal while all else is temporal. He is the Creator; all has been made by Him.

2. *Jehovah* or 'LORD' occurs over 6,800 times in the OT and *speaks of God's eternal and unchanging nature*. It literally means, 'I AM.' God used it to instruct Moses (Exod 3:13–14), and Christ confounded the Pharisees with this name (John 8:58).
3. *El-Shaddai* or 'God Almighty' *points to God's invincibility and His omnipotence or all-powerfulness* (Gen 17:1–2). Nothing is too hard for God and no enemy will ever defeat Him. He can do all things.
4. A fourth name is *Adonai* which means 'Master' or 'Lord' (Deut 10:17). *It indicates authority and ownership*. Therefore, God deserves our worship, allegiance, and obedience, because from Him we have received our very existence, as well as our eternal redemption in Christ.
5. Abraham unforgettably learned about *Jehovah-Jireh*, 'the LORD will provide,' when God substituted the sacrifice to replace Isaac (Gen 22:14). The name pictures God as seeing, and thus anticipating His divine provision of the right supply at just the right time. His omniscience or all-knowingness and wisdom are in view here.
6. *Jehovah-Rophe* points to God as healer (Exod 15:26). The Shepherd's mercy, compassion, and loving-kindness show through this name. God's healing is to be understood both in a physical and spiritual sense.
7. God's holiness can be seen in *Jehovah-M'kaddesh* which means 'the LORD who sanctifies' (Lev 20:7–8). He stands as our redeemer and our sanctifier. The name reminds us that He hates sin.
8. Gideon built an altar and called it *Jehovah-Shalom* (Judg 6:24). For him it signified *the quality of peace which is central to God's nature*. Closely associated in a redemptive sense is *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* or 'Jehovah our righteousness' (Jer 23:5–6).
9. *Jehovah-Rohi*, 'the LORD is my Shepherd' (Ps 23:1), and *Jehovah-Shammah*, 'the LORD is there' (Ezek 48:35), describe God's presence to guide, protect, and make provision for our needs.

The Nature of God

The very nature of God displays His authority in that He is characterized as "unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16) and described as

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| • Unsearchable | Romans 11:33 |
| • Immortal | 1 Timothy 1:17 |
| • Inscrutable | Isaiah 40:28 |
| • Incorruptible | Romans 1:23 |
| • Invisible | 1 Timothy 1:17 |
| • Unfathomable | Romans 11:33 |

The following noncommunicable attributes of God pertain exclusively to His deity. They will never be experienced by anyone else. They speak of His authority.

- Omnipotence Jeremiah 32:17
- Omniscience Psalm 139:1–6
- Omnipresence Psalm 139:7–10
- Immutability Psalm 102:27
- Sovereignty 1 Chronicles 29:11–12
- Eternality Psalm 90:2
- Greatness Psalm 135:5
- Self-existence Isaiah 41:4

These next qualities find their ultimate expression in God. They describe the way in which His authority is ministered.

- Wisdom Romans 16:27
- Faithfulness 1 Corinthians 10:13
- Truthfulness Exodus 34:6
- Love 1 John 4:8
- Goodness Psalm 100:5
- Righteousness Psalm 92:15
- Mercy Psalm 86:15
- Compassion Lamentations 3:22–23
- Holiness Psalm 99:9
- Graciousness Psalm 116:5
- Patience 2 Peter 3:15
- Peace Hebrews 13:20
- Kindness Psalm 100:5
- Gentleness 2 Corinthians 10:1
- Joy John 17:13
- Forgiveness Exodus 34:7
- Justice Deuteronomy 10:18

The Prerogatives of God

God's authority is further established by His rights and prerogatives which are possessed by no one else, such as

- Creation
- Consummation
- Eternal forgiveness
- Condemnation
- Defining righteousness and sin
- Blessing
- Cursing
- Setting up kingdoms
- Striking down kingdoms

God's Authority Denied

The fact of God's authority is substantiated in a backhanded way by the

constant attacks upon it from Genesis 3 to Revelation 20. Throughout Scripture, one can see time and time again Satanic and human rebellion against God's authority. Jehoiakim attempted to destroy God's Scripture as delivered by Jeremiah (Jer 36:23). The Pharisees and scribes neglected and attempted to invalidate God's authority in Scripture (Mark 7:6–13). Jezebel attacked God's authority in the church (Rev 2:20).

God's judgments against those who defy His authority further validate His rightful possession and exercise of ultimate authority.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| • Edenic Fall | Genesis 3:18-21 |
| • Genesis Flood | Genesis 6:1–9:29 |
| • Confused Language/Scattered People | Genesis 11:1-9 |
| • Exile of Israel | 2 Kings 17 |
| • Exile of Judah | 2 Kings 24–25 |
| • Premillennial Tribulation | Revelation 6–19 |
| • Final Judgment | Revelation 20:7-15 |

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

The apologetic approach taken in this essay is unapologetically presuppositional.⁷ This starting point is selected because of the Scripture's consistent self-witness to itself.

The New Testament emphasis on veracity is most pronounced. It asserts that God is the true God, or the God of truth (John 3:33, 17:3, Rom 3:4, 1 Thess 1:9); that His judgments are veracious and just (Rom 2:2, 3:7, Rev 16:7 and 15:3); that a knowledge of God is a knowledge of the truth (Rom 1:18, 25). It asserts that Christ is the true light (John 1:9), the true bread (John 6:32), and the true vine (John 15:1). Christ bears a true witness (John 8:14, Rev 3:14); His judgments are true (John 8:16); He is a minister of the truth of God (Rom 15:8); He is full of truth (John 1:14); He is personally the truth (John 14:6, Rev 3:7 and 19:11). Further, He speaks the truth of God (John 8:40–47). The Holy Spirit is repeatedly called the Spirit of truth (1 John 5:7; John 14:17, 15:26, and 15:13). His ministry is to guide into truth (John 16:13). The gospel, or Christian faith, is called the word of truth (2 Cor 6:7, Eph 1:13, Col 1:5, 2 Tim 2:15, and James 1:18). It is called the truth of Christ (2 Cor 11:10) and the way of truth (2 Pet 2:2). The Christians are said to have found the truth, and the heretic or unbeliever to have missed the truth (1 John 2:27, 2 Thess 2:13, Eph 5:9, and 1 John 3:19). The Church is called the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15).⁸

This truth fleshes out in syllogistic fashion thusly:

1. Scripture is the Word of God.
2. The words of God are authoritative.

Conclusion: Scripture is authoritative.

⁷Steven B. Cowen, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

⁸Ramm, *Pattern*, 22.

Both the ontological basis (God is) and the epistemological basis (God speaks only truth) are established in Scripture (Gen 1:1; Ps 119:142, 151, 160). John Frame succinctly asserts, "There is no higher authority, no greater ground of certainty.... The truth of Scripture is a presupposition for God's people."⁹ Thus, the very nature of God and God's Word is not determined inductively by human reason but deductively from the testimony of Scripture (cf. Ps 119:89; Isa 40:8).

The objection is often raised, "If the Scriptures were penned by men, then there is the highest likelihood of error in the writings!" This is countered with the following observations:

1. Human participation in the process of biblical inscripturation is not denied.
2. The idea of formal dictation is not required, although it occurred at times.
3. The background of the human writer is not eliminated.
4. The power, purposes, and workings of God the Father through God the Holy Spirit are not limited.
5. There is a delicate balance between Divine initiation and human participation in the writing of the autographa of Scripture

However, when all is said and done, Scripture is first and foremost "the Word of God," not the "word of men" (Ps 19:7; 1 Thess 2:13).

A careful study of the phrase *λόγος θεοῦ* (*logos theou*, "the Word of God") finds over forty uses in the NT. It is equated with the OT (Mark 7:13). It is what Jesus preached (Luke 5:1). It was the message the apostles taught (Acts 4:31 and 6:2). It was the word the Samaritans received (Acts 8:14) as given by the apostles (Acts 8:25). It was the message the Gentiles received as preached by Peter (Acts 11:1). It was the word Paul preached on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:5, 7, 44, 48, 49; 15:35–36). It was the message preached on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:32; 17:13; 18:11). It was the message Paul preached on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10). It was the focus of Luke in the Book of Acts in that it spread rapidly and widely (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Paul was careful to tell the Corinthians that he spoke the Word as it was given from God, that it had not been adulterated and that it was a manifestation of truth (2 Cor 2:17; 4:2). Paul acknowledged that it was the source of his preaching (Col 1:25; 1 Thess 2:13).

Carl F.H. Henry put forth this truth of the divine inspiration of Scripture in the clearest possible way:

Inspiration is that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit whereby the sacred writers were divinely supervised in their production of Scripture, being restrained from error and guided in the choice of words they used, consistently with their disparate personalities and stylistic peculiarities. God is the source of Holy Scripture; Christ Jesus is the central message; and the Holy Spirit, who inspired it and illumines its message to

⁹John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994) 127. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, "Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism," *JETS* 20 (December 1977):289-305; John M. Frame, "Van Til and the Ligonier Apologetic," *WTJ* 47 (1985):279-99; Tim McConnel, "The Old Princeton Apologetics: Common Sense or Reformed?" *JETS* 46 (December 2003):647-72.

the reader, bears witness by this inscripturated Word to the Word enfleshed, crucified, risen, and returning.¹⁰

Since the origin of Scripture can ultimately be explained by divine inspiration (Zech 7:12; 2 Tim 3:14–17; 2 Pet 1:20–21) as defined above, then the authority of Scripture is directly derived from the authority of God.¹¹ Those who do not take God's authority in Scripture seriously are condemned (Jer 8:8–9; Mark 7:1–13). On the other hand, those who rightfully honor and submit to God's authority in Scripture are commended (Neh 8:5–6; Rev 3:8).

Therefore, the man of God, i.e., God's herald, is to "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2). This declaration is not with the authority of the preacher, but rather the authority of God embedded in Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:17). So Paul admonishes Titus (2:15) to speak with all authority (*ἐπιταγῆς*, *epitagēs*), like the authority of a military commander, such that no one is exempt from obedience, even the proclaimer himself.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE IN PRACTICE

The outworking of God's authority in Scripture can be summarized in a series of negative (what it is not) and positive (what it is) statements.

1. It is *not* a derived authority bestowed by humans; rather it is the *original* authority of God.
2. It *does not* change with the times, the culture, the nation, or the ethnic background; rather it is the *unalterable* authority of God.
3. It is *not* one authority among many possible spiritual authorities; rather it is the *exclusive* spiritual authority of God.
4. It is *not* an authority that can be successfully challenged or rightfully overthrown; rather, it is the *permanent* authority of God.
5. It is *not* a relativistic or subordinate authority; rather it is the *ultimate* authority of God.
6. It is *not* merely a suggestive authority; rather it is the *obligatory* authority of God.
7. It is *not* a benign authority in its outcomes; rather it is the *consequential* authority of God.

¹⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "The Authority and Inspiration of the Bible," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 25 [emphasis in the original].

¹¹See John Murray, "Holy Scripture," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982) 256–57. Also *idem*, in "The Inspiration of the Scripture," *Collected Writings*, v. 4, 40.

While it has only been several decades since the profitable written contributions of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI), it would serve as a helpful reminder to review their summations on Scriptural authority as written and affirmed by the leading conservative evangelicals of the day.

The original document from the first conclave held in Chicago (1978) stated in summary that, “The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.”¹²

It is no wonder then that the very first of nineteen articles on Scripture addressed the authority of God in Scripture.¹³

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

Five years later, an additional set of affirmations and denials was authored by members of ICBI. Again, it is no surprise that a statement on the authority of God in Scripture appears first.¹⁴

Article I. ***WE AFFIRM*** that the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself, and is attested by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.

WE DENY the legitimacy of separating the authority of Christ from the authority of the Scripture, or of opposing the one to the other.

This first article affirms that the authority of Scripture cannot be separated from the authority of God. Whatever the Bible affirms, God affirms. And what the Bible affirms (or denies), it affirms (or denies) with the very authority of God. Such authority is normative for all believers; it is the canon or rule of God.

This divine authority of OT Scripture was confirmed by Christ Himself on numerous occasions (cf. Matt. 5:17–18; Luke 24:44; John 10:34–35). And what our Lord confirmed as to the divine authority of the OT, He promised also for the NT (John 14:16; 16:13).

The denial points out that one cannot reject the divine authority of Scripture without thereby impugning the authority of Christ, who attested Scripture’s divine authority. Thus it is wrong to claim one can accept the full authority of

¹²“The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.” *JETS* 21 (December 1978): 290.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Norman L. Geisler and J.I. Packer, eds. *Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary* (Oakland, Calif.: ICBI, 1983) 3.

Christ without acknowledging the complete authority of Scripture.

Carl F. H. Henry, one of the twentieth century's leading theologians, summarized the issues with this pithy, striking statement.

Without an authoritative Scripture, the church is powerless to overcome not only human unregeneracy but also satanic deception. Where the church no longer lives by the Word of God it is left to its own devices and soon is overtaken by the temptations of Satan and the misery of sin and death.¹⁵

Like Luther centuries ago, our minds also need to be captive to the divine authority in the Word of God in our preaching and practices.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE IN PROCLAMATION

This book contains: the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers.

Its doctrine is holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable.

Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy.

It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you.

It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter.

Here heaven is opened, and the gates of hell disclosed.

Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet.

Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully.

It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure.

It is given to you here in this life, will be opened at the Judgment, and is established forever.

It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and condemn all who trifle with its contents.¹⁶

¹⁵Henry, "The Authority and Inspiration of the Bible," 13.

¹⁶Author unknown.

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Compiled by Dennis M. Swanson
Seminary Librarian

This bibliography represents the collected research of contributors to this issue of *TMSJ* as well as some additional material not cited in those articles. It is not exhaustive but rather suggestive for those wishing to do additional study of this important area of theological concern. In addition to a section of general works pertaining to the Doctrine of Scripture, the bibliography is divided by subject according to the individual article topics.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten, eds. *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Authority, Reception, Culture and Religion*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 353, BTC 1. London: Sheffield Academic, 2002. x + 207 pp. \$115.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

This volume is the first in a new sub-series to JSOTSS entitled The Bible in the 21st Century (BTC 1). Eight of the contributors to this volume are on faculties in The Netherlands, three are from the USA, two from the UK, and one each from South Africa and Belgium. All but one read their essays in a colloquium at the University of Amsterdam in May 2000. Hot debate and public uproar over the attempt to modernize the Dutch Bible provided a focused atmosphere for the colloquium (1-3). Traditionalists carried the day when the boards involved in the project decided to maintain "HEER" ("LORD") as the translation for the Tetragrammaton (6-7).

"New and Familiar: The Dynamics of Bible Translation," by Sijbolt Noorda, is the first paper in the volume (8-16). It functions as an introduction, so no responses were included (4). Noorda describes the socio-cultural context of Jerome's Latin translation (9-11) as a prelude to discussing the dynamics of producing a translation that will be received by a target audience (12-15). He calls for an increase in empirical research among readers as opposed to multiplying the opinions of translators alone (16).

John Rogerson's essay, "Can a Translation of the Bible Be Authoritative?" (17-30), investigates the way in which older translations came to be viewed as authoritative. After a brief discussion of the Targum, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate (17-20), he discusses the "authorized" nature of Luther's German translation and the various English translations (20-30). Rogerson observes that committees of translators do not guarantee the authority of a translation. G. R. Driver's domination of the New English Bible's (NEB) OT translation, his employment of questionable Semitic philology, and his contempt for theologians doomed the acceptance (and, thus, the authoritativeness) of that version (24-25). Yet, as individuals, Luther and Tyndale both produced translations that influenced Bibles in their respective languages for centuries (25). In the 20th century, commercial power became a factor affecting the authority of translations (26). Rogerson also touches upon problems with dynamic equivalence translations (26-28) and the issue of the inspiration of translations (29-30). Judith Frishman provides a response to Rogerson's paper (31-35).

Simon Crisp's "Icon of the Ineffable? An Orthodox View of Language and

Its Implications for Bible Translation” (36-49) examines the effect that the “hermeneutic of the perspicuity of Scripture” (39) has on translation. An appendix compares literary translations of Luke 1:46-55 (44-49). The response to Crisp is offered by Lénart J. de Regt (50-52).

In “Between Lying and Blasphemy or On Translating a Four-Letter Word in the Hebrew Bible: Critical Reflections on Bible Translation” (53-64), Robert P. Carroll tackles the problem with translating the Tetragrammaton (YHWH). While he does not resolve the problem, he does demonstrate that this issue is related to a number of other problems (e.g., the translation of Exod 3:14, the use of upper case letters for divine speech, and compound divine names). Athalya Brenner’s response (65-69) points out that Carroll passed away the day after he had submitted his paper by e-mail (65).

Lamin Sanneh’s paper titled “Domesticating the Transcendent. The African Transformation of Christianity: Comparative Reflections on Ethnicity and Religious Mobilization in Africa” (70-85) discusses, among other aspects of African culture and Christianity, the African view of God and how it affects Bible translation. The response by Theo Witvliet (86-93) focuses on the mutual impact of Bible translation on culture and culture on Bible translation.

“Translating the Bible in South Africa: Challenges to Responsibility and Contextuality” (94-124) by Jeremy Punt presents a status report on Bible translation in South Africa (97-103) and a discussion of the Xhosa and Afrikaans translation projects (103-9). Punt also touches on what he considers to be emerging issues in third-millennium Bible translation (110-22), including the status of the Bible as a commodity, fetish, and icon (116-18). Responding to Punt, Wim J. C. Weren examines a concrete example (Matt 1:18-25 in the New Afrikaans Bible) to discuss the interconnectedness of translation and interpretation (125-31).

Genesis 3:16 becomes the ultimate illustration in Mary Phil Korsak’s essay, “Translating the Bible: Bible Translations and Gender Issues” (132-46). Unfortunately, she doesn’t really offer any answer to the problems of translating Genesis 3:16. However, she does offer a brief history of female involvement in the translation of Genesis into English (135-41). Caroline Vander Stichele responds (147-55) with an insightful discussion regarding inclusive language (151-54).

The last pair of essays takes place between Everett Fox (“The Translation of Elijah: Issues and Challenges,” 156-69) and A. J. C. Verheij (response to Fox, 170-74). Fox points out that repeated words of thematic import need to be translated by a single equivalent “so that the thematic connections are not lost” (159). He discusses the insertion of meanings for proper names (159-60), the potential of scatological vocabulary in 1 Kgs 18:27 (160), the meaning of “waver/limp” in 18:21 (161), the syntactical sequences in chapter 19 (161-63), “the still small voice” in 19:12 (163-65), and various translational issues in the Naboth narrative of chapter 21 (165-69). Verheij counters by asking “What makes a word a leading word?” (173). The frequency of words for speaking creates a problem for determining a leading word on the basis of occurrence alone.

A concluding essay by Adele Berlin (“On Bible Translations and Commentaries,” 175-91) stands without response. She finds the plethora of commentaries encouraging because it proves that the meaning of Scripture is still important to many people (177). She examines the interplay between translation and commentary,

the changes in interpretive approaches, and the effects of ecumenism and multiculturalism. One of Berlin's better observations is that "Translation is an abbreviated form of exegesis: exegesis that does not have the space to explain or justify itself" (181). She also states that strident secularism in academia has ignored religion, "multiculturalism's last frontier, and I predict that it will soon be discovered and colonized" (190).

End materials include a bibliography (192-202), Scripture index (203-4), and author index (205-7). Overall the volume is an informative, sometimes provocative, contribution to the ongoing debate over translation philosophies.

Walter Brueggemann. *1 & 2 Kings*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2000. xxii + 645 pp. \$65.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

For comments about the format of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series, see my book review of Tony Cartledge's commentary on *1 & 2 Samuel* in this issue of *TMSJ*. The present volume, the first of the series, contains all the features found in Cartledge's contribution. Brueggemann refers to 1-2 Kings as "royal history," but does not understand the term "history" in "any modern sense of an accurate 'factual' account of that past" (1). In other words, the details of the accounts contained in 1-2 Kings are not consistently reliable. It is better viewed as "interpretive commentary" on that royal history or a "theology of history" rather than an accurate and reliable historical account (2).

Recognizing the non-conservative perspective of Brueggemann, one finds it interesting to notice numerous helpful observations relating to the history and culture of Israel. He does not focus on the things about which he might be skeptical or things he would regard as erroneous. The text of the commentary and the numerous sidebars are instructive in the vast majority of instances. It is in the "connections" section (focusing on application strategies) where Brueggemann's less conservative tendencies become most apparent. As with Cartledge's commentary on 1-2 Samuel, Brueggemann's commentary should not be the first one purchased by a pastor who intends to teach or preach through 1-2 Kings. Regardless, Brueggemann does make easily available to his readers a lot of information that relates to the history found in 1-2 Kings.

Tony W. Cartledge. *1 & 2 Samuel*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2001. xx + 748 pp. \$65.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

As part of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series, the present volume offers many features that facilitate one's use of its contents. In addition to a full table of contents, the volume concludes with a complete bibliography, and several thorough indexes (modern authors, sidebars [explained below], Scriptures,

and topics. The commentary series seeks to be visually stimulating, user-friendly, and provides an accompanying CD (containing the entire commentary text, sidebars, and visuals) that offers searching and research tools. Each commentary in this series employs “a stunning array of art, photographs, maps, and drawings to illustrate the truths of the Bible for a visual generation of believers” (xiv). Each chapter considers a pericope or textual unit and arranges the comments under two general headings: “Commentary” and “Connections.” The “commentary” section focuses on linguistic issues and historical concerns, seeking to explore the theological issues presented by the passage under consideration. The “connections” section presents potential applications of the insights given in the “commentary” section. Set off from the text of the commentary, in each commentary in this series, sidebars (or special-interest boxes) are provided with the following kinds of supplemental information: historical information, literary structure, definitions of technical or theological terms, insightful quotations, history of interpretation information, photographs or illustrations, related works of fine art. Each sidebar appears in color to provide a distinctive appearance.

Although Cartledge acknowledges that “a historical basis underlies the books of 1–2 Samuel,” he contends that what really happened “may be irretrievably buried beneath centuries of literary accretions” (10). He regards 1–2 Samuel as part of Deuteronomistic History, compiled fairly late in Israel’s history. He also views biblical history as often imaginative and imprecise and not necessarily factual (12). In spite of this, Cartledge makes numerous helpful observations on key passages throughout the books of Samuel.

This volume would not be the first commentary on 1–2 Samuel that a serious student of the Scriptures should buy, but it deserves a place on the shelf of a preacher who intends to preach through these two biblical books. The cost (\$65.00) might be an obstacle for potential users. If possible, check the volume out from a nearby library and have a “courtship” with the book before purchasing it.

C. John Collins. *Science & Faith: Friends or Foes?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003. 448 pp. \$25.00 (paper). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

The credentials to write on such a divisive subject are certainly there, and they are more than respectable, being earned degrees from M.I.T. (B.S. and M.S.), Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary (M.Div.), and the University of Liverpool (Ph.D.).

In a non-polemical, conversational tone, the author, in twenty-one chapters in four major sections, discusses matters of science and faith, and also enjoins the believer to support the sciences wholeheartedly. In the end, “friend” is most probably the term for science and faith.

The opening section deals briefly with philosophical issues of argument, sound thinking, definitions of science and faith, and the premises of the methods of science. It is a helpful summary and reminder. The longest section deals with theological issues, and is followed by an important section on the interaction of science and faith. Chapter titles attract attention, e.g., “This is My Father’s World:

The Biblical Doctrine of Creation,” or “What a Piece of Work is Man! Human Nature as it was Created,” and one more, “Intelligent Design a Dumb Idea? Answers to Objections.” A glance through the multiple sub-headings in each chapter quickly gives the reader an appreciation of the breadth of the material covered by Collins, who, on more than one occasion, apologizes that space forbids saying more on certain subjects. Well understood! The book is formatted differently from standard texts on such an academic subject. Endnotes have been discarded in favor of unnumbered personalized notes and comments in an appendix (351-417). That Collins is well read surfaces in the wide variety of literary sources referred to for illustration or color, with the most frequently cited source being C. S. Lewis.

Well-composed synopses present the author’s understanding of different subjects, such as man’s composition, body and soul (114-23), the image of God (124-32), Adam and Eve as mankind’s sole ancestors (132-34), “Open” theism (174-76), the biblical view of the environment (203-10), the Big Bang and cosmology (230-33), geology and earth’s history (233-37), the anthropic principle (250-53), Darwinism and neo-Darwinism (256-80), and natural revelation in the OT (184-88) and in the NT (188-99); the latter being composed of four synopses, two on Paul in Athens and in Lystra, and two on Paul’s teaching of God revealed through nature and His testimony in every human heart. Under a few sub-headings spread over two chapters, Collins also gives an extended synopsis on the fall of man (135-45). In all, he displays a knack of being able to crunch down a lot of material into a concise and articulate précis. The book might very well be described as a compendium of well written synopses. For the most part, it does not provoke that much disagreement.

That the days of the creation week are not going to be taken as normal solar days creates an early suspicion which proves to be true! “God’s workdays” or “analogical days” is the preferred option (88). The repetitive marker for each day, namely “there was evening and there was morning,” has another unspoken element to it: “there was also night-time in between” (84), thus allowing for stretching the text time-wise. The actual length of the days is not germane to the purpose of the fourth commandment, which clearly sets up the work-rest rhythm for humanity. Analogy is all that is required. Are not outside influences driving this view of the six days in Exod 20:10-11? Further, Gen 1:1 is considered to be a separate summary statement of the initial creation event occurring an unspecified number of years before Day One (64). Shades of Waltke’s pre-creation chaos theory! This means, of course, that not everything in the universe was made in six days, and that Day Four does not tell of the origin of the sun, moon, and stars. These were merely, on that fourth day, appointed to their role in the seasonal cycle of earth’s calendar, and more particularly in setting the times for worship on man’s calendar (91). The absence of the term “created” in these verses allows for the terms “let there be” and “made” to indicate that these celestial bodies actually existed beforehand. Collins thinks that some unspecified creative activity may very well have taken place, but then he startlingly observes, “but even then it doesn’t say that God brought these things into being at these particular times” (91). This sounds very much like an attempt to make the verse say what it does not say. Out of respect for Collins’ intellectual integrity, one hesitates to go that far in response. Nevertheless, a warning tone has bled! According to his reasoning, Days 1-5 must add up to an unknown number of years in order to establish the seasonal cycle seen in Gen 2:5-7 (90). In

the “endnotes,” he refers to Gerhard Hasel’s 1980 article on the “chronogenealogies” of Genesis 5 and 11 in *Origins* (369)—which he quickly sets aside as of no chronological value (107-10)—but one looks in vain for any interaction with Hasel’s seminal article in the same journal, namely, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?” (*Origins* 21/1 (1994):6-38).

Collins acknowledges that he has no reason to reject the theory of the Big Bang and that his reading of Genesis can incorporate the amount of time this theory demands. Further, such a theory can only tell how we came to be here and not why. One must ask: Are the factual statements of creation’s historical narrative that easily adjusted and generalized so as to embrace theories like the Big Bang? Does the creation account really that easily allow for the oodles of time cosmologists and physicists insist upon? Does the continued upholding of the Big Bang theory by physicists and cosmologists compel the biblical creationist to grant it value and respectability until it is replaced with something more refined? Indeed, can the scientist, Christian or not, really do good science in studying origins without the prior help of the theologian? Not surprisingly, with an old earth quite acceptable to him, Collins does not accept death in the animal kingdom as being a consequence of the fall of man (159). Although aware of young earth and other more traditional studies on radiometric dating (259-260), he leaves the impression that this should not become a defining issue. What should be said is that all who wish to enter the sciences, especially physics or astronomy, will need to know as much as possible on the dating methods selected and those rejected. The ease with which Collins appears to capitulate to scientific theories on the age of the earth, or to show a conciliatory attitude towards such theories, is somewhat disappointing.

The two chapters devoted to intelligent design are informative and are a helpful simplifying of much material on this subject in recent years. The design argument, he concludes, has its place in evangelism and apologetics and in “nourishing our Christian faith” (315). Earlier, Collins had indicated preference for “intelligent design” over neo-Darwinism, including its Christian forms, as well as over “creation science” (282-83). Neo-Darwinism’s Christian forms? Such a comment makes the reader aware that scientific theories really have influenced exegesis.

Is *Science & Faith: Friends or Foes?* worthy of assigned textbook status? Yes, it is, despite the comments and reactions noted above. All in all, it is well written and could be used even in a graduate class, where it would serve both to highlight what needs to be thought through when treating the Bible, science, and origins, and to stimulate a more careful and cautionary mode when exegeting the biblical text. The theologian should ask himself, “Are scientific theories dictating the direction of my study? All should be asking, “Should not the theologian direct the scientist?” Additional critical reading set alongside certain chapters would be beneficial. While reading this book, and particularly the section on theological issues, the reviewer recalled a spate of pertinent books, journal articles, and dissertations. It included the wealth of data available in ICR’s *Impact* articles, and in AiG’s *CEN Technical Journal* (now known simply as *TJ*). Of course, all students and readers should be encouraged to peruse Taylor Jones’ chapter, “Why a Scriptural View of Science?,” in *Think Biblically! Recovering a Biblical Worldview*, edited by John MacArthur with TMC’s faculty (Crossway, 2003). Undoubtedly

Collins pen will stir much earnest reflection on the Bible and science.

Stephen L. Cook, Corrine L. Patton, and James W. Watts, eds. *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 336. London: Sheffield Academic, 2001. 230 pp. \$82.50 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Jane Anderson Morse was an Episcopalian priest and teacher of the Hebrew Bible, doctoral candidate under Brevard Childs at Yale University, and faculty member at Virginia Theological Seminary when she died of lymphoma at the age of 51. Her dissertation on the book of Job was unfinished. The introductory essay of this memorial volume purports to lay a “Theoretical Framework for a *Sensus Plenior*” in keeping with the interpretive approach of Jane Morse (13-39). In the essay, Corrine Patton and Stephen Cook cleverly interweave both a biographical sketch of Morse and brief descriptions of the volume’s essays with a running discussion of the challenges of modernism, historicism, secularism, fundamentalism, and postmodernism. Unfortunately, the united assumption presented in this volume is that Job is a late text (cf. 28-29). In the end, the introductory essay reaches a disappointing conclusion: “A quest for the *sensus plenior* is further an admission that we can never definitively pin down the text’s meaning—that the quest for meaning itself is what is meaningful” (37).

Mark S. Smith’s essay (“The Divine Family at Ugarit and Israelite Monotheism,” 40-68) demonstrates how the royal family at Ugarit was a model for the Ugaritic pantheon. He also discusses the astral background of the god El and his family members as compared to the meteorological background of Baal (51-61). Smith finds a conceptual unity based on family relationships in both the pantheon of Ugarit and Israelite polytheism (cf. 65).

In “The Good, the Bad and the Better: Psalm 23 and Job” (69-83), Douglas J. Green seeks to parallel the spiritual journeys of the psalmist and Job. The primary thrust of his essay is that “restores my soul” (Ps 23:3) “refers to a rescue from (metaphorical) death and restoration to ‘enhanced life’” (83). Victoria Hoffer’s contribution (“Illusion, Allusion, and Literary Artifice in the Frame Narrative of Job,” 84-99) offers a few glimpses of pertinent interaction with the text: (1) Similarities to Genesis 22 could be seen as consistent with a patriarchal setting no later than Jacob; (2) Hoffer provides interesting references to Joban hapax legomena and/or phenomena; (3) proper attention is given to repetition in Job; and (4) she presents interesting observations regarding Masoretic cantillation in Job. However, Hoffer revels overmuch in rabbinic allegory and allusion to exile. She implies too much by accidental similarities between Job and other texts.

“Job and Jacob: The Integrity of Faith” (100-120) by Ellen F. Davis is perhaps the best essay in the volume. It focuses on the term תַּמְהָרָה (*tmh*) describing Job’s “integrity” and the influence the Jacob account might have had on the writing of Job. The very next essay (Claire Mathews McGinnis’ “Playing the Devil’s Advocate in Job: On Job’s Wife,” 121-41) is second best. It argues for a more

positive role for Job's wife than most preachers and commentators have given her. McGinnis presents an intriguing view of Job's wife employing reverse psychology to bring her husband to a correct response to their suffering.

In contrast to the previous two essays, Corrine L. Patton's ("The Beauty of the Beast: Leviathan and Behemoth in Light of Catholic Theology," 142-67) is disappointing in its lack of faithfulness to the biblical text. One example of her twisted interpretation is her statement that "Job suffers because God was amused by Satan's wager" (167). Perhaps equally disturbing is the essay by James W. Watts ("The Unreliable Narrator of Job," 168-80). It is an example of literary criticism run amok because of an unrestrained and unsanctified imagination. In effect, Watts sets himself up as an omniscient interpreter while attempting to paint Job's author as a critic of "omniscient narration" (178).

The final essay (Stephen L. Cook, "Relecture, Hermeneutics, and Christ's Passion in the Psalms," 181-205) is one of the volume's more intriguing contributions. Cook argues for a messianic element in Psalms 22 and 132 that relates to authorial intent rather than to a later Christian interpretation. He observes that "the idea that the Old Testament anticipates Jesus only retrospectively can never add up to the New Testament's self-understanding of fulfilling the Old Testament" (185).

Rounding out the volume is a bibliography (206-21) and indexes of references (222-26) and authors (227-30). While the price is a bit high for individual ownership, several of its essays (especially those by Davis, McGinnis, and Cook) make the volume a worthwhile acquisition for libraries desiring to provide quality research resources for Job and *sensus plenior* in the Psalms.

Jim Cymbala. *Breakthrough in Prayer. The Secret of Receiving What You Need From God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003. 236 pp. \$19.99 (cloth).
Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This is in many ways a sane, balanced approach, a readable survey, and highly refreshing. It is strong on praying in faith, repentance, obedience, humility, and joy. Vigorous remarks warn against misleading ideas by current spiritual leaders, and also the folly of solid Bible teaching not saturated with prayer. Cymbala emphasizes God's desire to answer, and His great power to change lives when a church prays vitally and loves people of all races, colors, and backgrounds.

Cymbala, with Dean Merrill, wrote the widely read *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*. For more than 25 years he has pastored the Brooklyn Tabernacle, New York City, seeing many down and outers saved and transformed. In the present book, 13 chapters sum up what to do and what not to do, so as to avoid "you do not have because you do not ask God" as in Jas 4:2 (8).

Some key points are to ask for God to pour out blessing, plead for great things, absorb God's Word daily, take a holy stand against sin, be quick to confess sin and seek mercy, give God the life's reins, give selflessly in compassion, praise God for answers, and use the armor God gives. Vivid stories describe people freed from seemingly hopeless bondage by breakthroughs linked with prayer. One is a dope addict. Christian ladies kept showing love and praying (chap. 2; also cf. 101-

8). As in Luke 1:37, the writer relates that “nothing is impossible with God.”

One comment (60) concerns a group that helps ministers who have moral lapses or other losses. Interviews in hundreds of cases showed that not one minister had lived in daily, vital prayer. They bypassed contact with God on a road to ruin (cf. Matt 6:13; 26:41). In contrast, Cymbala presses for believers to act on God’s promises, saturate with His Word, and let God’s overflow bless them (81).

He denounces commanding God through some “word of faith,” acting contrary to His will (92), falsely “claiming” things (92), and “seed faith” teachers who misuse verses to promise greater reaping to those who give to their ministry (163). He is also against chanting, praying, and “imaging” money into coffers (163), “giving” unto one’s new level of anointing (so different from Jesus, Paul, Peter, John) (164). He is bold against looking the other way when sin occurs in the churches, preachers divorcing, remarrying, and claiming greater power as a result, as people clap approval (165). He comes down hard on sensuality that some so-called Christians condone—in the form of approving scantily dressed performers—and call this freedom from rigid, old-fashioned ways (166). “Christ sent us to convert the world, not be conformed to it” (167).

Those who really want to pray with power need a breakthrough with greater holiness. Cymbala stresses purity and simplicity, as opposed to carnality, hype, and hardness (173-75). The book speaks in no uncertain terms to urge seeking to be clear of sin, not extending one hand to snatch answers while the other hand tightly clutches sin.

Cymbala also stresses intercession for strengthening other Christians, as in Eph 3:16-17 (187). He seeks to remedy “a critical shortage” of those devoted to prayer. Chapter 12 on the joy of the Lord is very moving, especially its example of Lynette who prayed for her husband when he fell away, joined others in praying him back, and saw him live many years to honor Christ.

This is a rather balanced, often winsome and challenging book that strikes good notes on prayer for laypeople, students, and also pastors and teachers needing new fire. Though it does not cover everything on prayer, it is a catalyst for drawing closer to God.

William G. Dever. *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xi + 268 pp. \$25.00 (cloth).
Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

Dever, who recently retired as professor of Near Eastern archaeology and anthropology at the University of Arizona in Tucson, has spent thirty seasons excavating various sites in Israel. He rejects the proposals by revisionists or “minimalists” who characterize biblical literature as “pious propaganda” as well as conservatives who refuse even to question the factuality of the Bible.

In his introduction (x), Dever presents five approaches that constitute the spectrum of views on Israel’s origins: assume that the Bible is *literally* true (and ignore all external evidence as irrelevant); hold that the biblical text is *probably* true (but seek external corroboration); approach the text (and external data) with *no*

preconceptions; contend that nothing in the biblical text is true *unless* proven by external data; and reject the text and any other data, since the Bible *cannot* be true (emphasis by Dever). Dever enthusiastically holds to the third option.

When setting the stage of the “current crisis in understanding the origins of early Israel,” he sarcastically refers to the saying: “God said it; I believe it; that settles it!” He traces the birth of skepticism and the way the public became aware of this attitude. In the face of this skepticism, conservatives maintained an unswerving commitment to the historicity of the details of biblical events.

In chapters two through four, Dever provides an overview of the scholarly debate concerning the Exodus (history or myth), the conquest of Transjordan, and the conquest of Canaan proper. His summary encompasses the debate through the 1970s. He deals with specific issues and examines a number of important archaeological sites. When dealing with the Exodus, Dever affirms that a 13th-century date for the Exodus is “now confirmed” (8). He goes on to affirm that an early date for the Exodus is “based on imprecise and contradictory biblical schemes of chronology” and that “only a handful of diehard fundamentalists would argue in its favor” (8). In several places Dever makes sweeping conclusions based on an absence of evidence. He obviously does not place much credence on the maxim: “an absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence.” When he discusses the destruction of Jericho, he does not even mention the work of Bryant Wood (who argues that Joshua led Israel in their defeat of Jericho in the late 15th century B.C.).

In chapters five through seven, Dever overviews evidence relating to Israel’s origins that has been discovered since the 1970s. He examines several specific sites where excavations have taken place and several key discoveries (e.g., the “four-room” house, the ‘Izbet Sartah abecedary, etc.). He also considers several “surveys” of various areas that have been conducted as well as recently discovered evidence from the Iron Age I period.

In chapters eight through ten, Dever summarizes the manner in which various scholars have sought to synthesize the textual and artifactual evidence dealing with Israel. Chapter eight treats those syntheses that were offered up through the mid-1990s. Chapter nine devotes attention to Israel Finkelstein’s proposal that the Israelites were really Canaanite nomads who were gradually “resedentarized” throughout the Late Bronze Age. These individuals had been displaced by various destructions at the end of the Middle Bronze Age and had remained nomadic through most of the Late Bronze Age. As he does in various articles and books, Dever has great reservations about Finkelstein’s methodology and conclusions. In chapter ten Dever offers his own synthesis. Certain key aspects of his proposal deserve brief mention (167-68). First, the *only* possible time frame for Israel’s “emergence” in Canaan is the late 13th and early 12th centuries B.C. Second, archaeology (rather than the biblical text) must be the primary source for “rewriting” Israel’s early history. Third, recent archaeological evidence for Israelites originating in Canaan (rather than coming to Canaan from Egypt) is “overwhelming.” Dever agrees with various scholars who have proposed that the Israelites were essentially displaced Canaanites. These “proto-Israelites” were dissidents from various backgrounds (and may have included a small “Exodus group” [182]) who migrated into the hill country of Canaan (which was very sparsely populated). This migration represented an “anti-statist protest” (188). Dever alleges that these dissidents left the established

regions of Canaan (under the control of established rulers) and moved to the hill country “based on principles of land reform and shared agricultural production” (189).

In light of his conclusions, Dever poses the legitimate question, Is the Bible historically true or a literary hoax? (chapter twelve). He offers three alternatives for assessing the activities of the writers, editors, and compilers of the Hebrew Bible. First of all, based on adequate sources (written and oral), these “historians” told the story as it really happened, as best they could (with the expected literary flair and editorial biases). Secondly, the biblical writers and editors had some genuine sources but felt free to manipulate them to serve their own theological agenda. They were telling the “operative truth,” i.e., well-intentioned propaganda (Dever’s position). Finally, some scholars suggest that those who produced the Hebrew Bible had few if any real sources at all. They simply made it up. Sadly, Dever’s three alternatives ignore the possibility of God revealing His Word to prophetic spokesmen.

Dever is a clear writer and provides a helpful overview of the scholarly debate as it relates to the origins of Israelites. His summary is fairly representative, even though it slights the way evangelicals answer the questions he raises. However, his treatment of the key issues does not support his suggestion that he approaches the biblical text and external data with “no preconceptions (x). A few statements will serve as adequate examples. He concludes that the “biblical texts themselves are suspect, for many reasons” and that most of Leviticus “simply does not have the ‘ring of truth’ about it” (19). After referring to Joshua as historicized fiction, Dever contrasts “more conservative biblical scholars” with evangelical and fundamentalist Christians (39-40). Interestingly, Dever regards evangelicals as more rigid than conservatives. When discussing the Conquest, he writes that “the external material evidence supports almost *nothing* of the biblical account of a large scale, concerted Israelite military invasion of Canaan” (71).

This volume does provide a helpful presentation of a number of key issues that relate to one’s understanding of Israel’s history. It also provides an update of the scholarly discussion on several fronts. However, its attention to critical scholarship and neglect of conservative scholarship will make it less useful to the average layperson or a person interested in understanding the details of Israel’s history from a conservative perspective.

Tim Dowley. *The Kregel Bible Atlas*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003. 96 pp. \$21.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

Dowley has added another volume to the biblical reference tools he has authored or edited. In the present volume he has provided his readers with a brief, colorful, and helpful atlas of Bible lands. The book begins with a brief table of contents and ends with an index (not exhaustive) of place names (3 ½ pages) and a general index (1 page). The main body consists of 88 pages: 55 for the OT, 6 for the Intertestamental period, and 27 for the NT. The written description is brief and

clear. It contains no footnotes or references to any other resources. Informational maps and relevant pictures are interspersed throughout the book. Dowley also provides several helpful charts focusing on key features: e.g., economy, topography, vegetation, soils, rainfall, and temperature. Dowley provides several “narrative” maps similar to the *Macmillan Bible Atlas* in using numbers and arrows to summarize the flow of a given historical event. He also includes various artist depictions: e.g., the Tabernacle, an archer, the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple, and an Egyptian warrior.

In the midst of various helpful comments, maps, pictures, and charts, he has several questionable positions that do not detract from the overall value of the book, but that deserve mention. Continental division took place “millions” of years ago (8). Abraham left Ur sometime after 2000 B.C. (about 100-150 years after more conservative dating schemes). A late date for the Exodus is offered (20-21) and the crossing of the Red Sea took place at a northern marshy lake (unnamed) (21). Finally, the Gospels draw on Q (65).

On the one hand, this volume provides a concise and clear presentation of various details about Israel in the OT and NT. The maps, pictures, and charts included provide helpful visual aids for the student of the Bible. On the other hand, the brevity of the book limits the amount of information it can provide. Also, for a 96-page volume, the \$21.99 price tag does not make it the most appealing book to purchase to serve as a Bible atlas for students of the Bible.

Peter W. Flint, ed. *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*. Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. xv + 266 pp. \$22.00 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

This book is the fifth volume in a series designed to make “the latest and best Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship accessible to scholars, students, and the thinking public” (i). The first volume was *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint (Eerdmans, 1997). Other published volumes are as follows: Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (1999); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* (2000); Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2002). Of these the most significant are, in this reviewer’s opinion, the Fitzmyer and Magness volumes.

The Bible at Qumran focuses on two themes: the text of the Scriptures at Qumran together with its relation to canon and the ancient Jewish interpretation of these Scriptures by the community at Qumran and elsewhere (vii). The former of these themes is the topic for the first five essays by James A. Sanders (“Canon as Dialogue,” 7-26), Bruce K. Waltke (“How We Got the Hebrew Bible: The Text and Canon of the Old Testament,” 27-50), Eugene Ulrich (“The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures Found at Qumran,” 51-66), Craig A. Evans (“The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Canon of Scripture in the Time of Jesus,” 67-79), and Peter W. Flint (“Noncanonical Writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Apocrypha, Other Previously

Known Writings, Pseudepigrapha,” 80-126).

Sanders’s essay is nothing more than an argument for interfaith dialogue among the three monotheistic religions that leaves the reader thinking that the author’s reasoning could equally result in everyone being willing to give up real grapes for plastic grapes in their diet, because he would see no real distinction between the two. Waltke’s essay is excellent, but is identical to the one published in the first volume of *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Zondervan, 1997). Ulrich’s contribution is basically a description of the materials found at Qumran with a brief summary of his conclusions. Primarily, he interprets the biblical text of that time as pluriform and composed in multiple layers (65). Evangelical readers will appreciate Evans’s essay and his discussion of the apparent tripartite division of the OT indicated by 4QMMT (“Matters regarding Works of the Law” from Qumran Cave 4) and Luke 24. He concludes that the two authors probably intended a merism—all parts of the OT attest to the points they were making (79). Variations in the use and definition of “Apocrypha” and “Pseudepigrapha” occupy Flint’s attention in his essay. Besides providing new, more consistent definitions, he classifies the works found at Qumran into their respective categories. His treatment of Daniel as potentially pseudepigraphical (81, 108) mars an otherwise superb essay.

Six essays make up the latter part of the volume, giving attention to the theme of ancient Jewish interpretation inside and outside Qumran: James C. Vanderkam, “The Interpretation of Genesis in *1 Enoch*” (129-48); Craig A. Evans, “Abraham in the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Man of Faith and Failure” (149-58); James E. Bowley, “Moses in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Living in the Shadow of God’s Anointed” (159-81); James M. Scott, “Korah and Qumran” (182-202); Martin G. Abegg, Jr., “4QMMT, Paul, and ‘Works of the Law’” (203-16); and Robert W. Wall, “The Intertextuality of Scripture: The Example of Rahab (James 2:25)” (217-36).

These essays examine the way the Qumran texts handle biblical texts like Gen 6:1-4 (Vanderkam’s examination of *1 Enoch*) and Numbers 16–17 (Scott’s analysis of a Cave 4 fragment’s reference to Korah). Evans attempts to deal with questions about the call of Abram (Gen 12:1-4) and about his deceptions (12:10-20 and 20:1-18). Bowley merely surveys the references to Moses in Qumran literature to conclude the obvious: Moses dominates the texts and much of the community’s theological thinking (180-81). Theological and exegetical issues in the last two contributions are a bit more interesting. Abegg’s essay looks at the phrase “works of the law” in 4QMMT and Galatians. After admitting that there is little common ground between 4QMMT and Romans/Galatians (206), he still concludes that E. P. Sanders’s “new perspective” provides the solution (215, 216). Wall’s treatment of intertextuality in Jas 2:21-26 reveals some very interesting parallel themes and vocabulary between the OT accounts of Abraham and Rahab and the text in James.

J. P. Fokkelman. *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*. Translated by Ineke Smit. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001. viii + 243 pp. \$24.95 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Seminaries and universities around the world are requiring Fokkelman's book as the textbook for courses in biblical Hebrew poetry. Some of the popularity is due to the good reputation he built with the companion volume, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Westminster John Knox, 2000). Nevertheless, this work stands on its own as a practical manual of biblical poetry. Fokkelman designed the book for those who need to rely on a translation of the Scriptures because of their inability to read biblical Hebrew (vii, 2). First occurrences of technical terms are marked by an asterisk (14) indicating that definitions are included in a glossary at the end of the book (225-28). Endnotes provide more technical discussion and resources for Hebraists (14). Notwithstanding the care taken to make this book user-friendly, it is not light or easy reading. Serious students, however, will gain immensely from the author's tour of biblical Hebrew poetry.

At the outset, Fokkelman walks the reader through poems in Isa 1:16-17 and 2 Sam 1:19-27 (3-12). This immersion whets the reader's appetite, provides basic awareness of what Hebrew poetry entails, and sets the stage for a more detailed explanation of Hebrew poetics. This approach reveals Fokkelman's skills as a teacher.

Recent studies have modified the traditional definitions of Hebrew poetry by revising the description of parallelism. James Kugel's *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), Adele Berlin's *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), and Robert Alter's *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) contributed to this significant revision. As a result, some professors and students have tended to throw out parallelism entirely as a characteristic of Hebrew poetry. That over-reaction misrepresents the conclusions of Kugel, Berlin, and Alter. Fokkelman demonstrates that parallelism is present in Hebrew poetry, but that the three traditional categories (synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic) need expanding beyond the simplest categories created by vocabulary and grammar. The exegete must look for parallelism beyond the Lowthian paradigm of the verse (61). Indeed, "a complete ladder of parallelisms should be climbed if we want our attention and emotion to cover the possibilities and effects of poetry in a satisfactory way" (30). Fokkelman employs the metaphor of binoculars to explain how parallelism actually works in Hebrew poetry (78-79). In other words, the differences between two similar lines, verses, or strophes produce a fuller picture of what the poet is saying. Hebrew poets exploit parallelism in order to convey a message (80). It is also "a powerful mechanism for regulating proportions" (86)—a key theme in Fokkelman's work.

Rigidity in any definition of language or literature destroys the objectivity of an interpreter's approach to the biblical text. Language and literature are not rigid and inflexible. As Fokkelman puts it, "There is no call for mathematical rigor in the playful world of poetry" (37). Versets (Fokkelman's term for cola), verses, strophes and stanzas make up the normal biblical Hebrew poem. Accurate translation and interpretation of Hebrew poetry must reflect these divisions (40). Responding to the objection that his model of poetic structure is a Western imposition on the Hebrew text, Fokkelman demonstrates that biblical acrostic poems independently confirm his text model (44-45).

Speaking of the apparent consistency in the number of syllables per verset,

the author concludes, “This highly remarkable finding can be explained only by assuming that the poets themselves counted syllables” (47). His reasoning is suspect because (a) he himself has already spoken against mathematical rigor, (b) we are at too great a distance from the originals to speak so dogmatically about something that cannot be proven, and (c) most poets in any culture and language have an innate sense of balance and length when it comes to poetic lines (note the innate sense of musical rhythm even in very young children). Would it be accurate to conclude, for example, that Martin Luther King’s rhythmic oratorical cadences were the result of counting syllables? Some Hebrew poets might have counted syllables, but certainly not all. Lineation is “a kind of pendulum-swing intrinsic to the experience of poetry. Since the oscillation occurs more times per minute than the parallel experience of reading prose, it contributes to the hypnotic quality of poetry” (Alfred Corn, *The Poem’s Heartbeat: A Manual of Prosody*, SLP Writers’ Guide [Ashland, Ore.: Story Line Press, 1997] 10). On meter in poetry in general, I recommend Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form*, rev. ed. (New York: Random House, 1979).

Fokkelman places his greatest emphasis and makes his greatest contribution on the levels of structure above the verse: the strophe (87-115) and the stanza (117-40). Students of Hebrew poetry usually have great difficulty in distinguishing these two layers of the Hebrew poem (cf. 161). The distinctions are not simple, but the author lays a solid foundation of definition and explanation followed by his *pièce de résistance*, extensive but carefully expounded examples from the biblical text. For the strophe he develops Isaiah 1 (100-108) and Psalm 88 (108-15); for the stanza he presents Isa 44:24–45:7 (123-32) and Job 28 (132-40). Fokkelman also provides detailed descriptions of a number of psalms to illustrate how a full poem is initiated and closed (142-57). He hammers home the point that “the correct division in turn is the basis for a correct interpretation of the poem” (157). He devotes another chapter to the pursuit of correct divisions (159-73). This treatise highlights repetitions in Psalm 103 as a means of determining its divisions.

Separate chapters are dedicated to discussions of wisdom literature (175-88), illustrated by Job 10, and love poetry (189-206), illustrated by the Song of Songs. A summary chapter deals with the attitude of the reader of Hebrew poetry and the questions to be asked (207-9). The book’s final chapter (211-24) presents Fokkelman’s divisions for all 150 Psalms as well as the books of Lamentations, Job, the Song of Songs, and a number of other major OT poems (Genesis 49; Exodus 15; Numbers 23–24; Deuteronomy 32; Judges 5; 1 Sam 2:1-10; 2 Sam 1:17-27; 22; Isaiah 40–55; Proverbs 1–9).

Liabilities in this volume include an occasional glimpse of Fokkelman’s apparently pessimistic view of the Masoretic Text (cf. 51, 232 n. 2, 234 nn. 2 and 3), his treatment of Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes as pseudepigrapha (190), his over-dependence on literary and mathematical analysis to establish eight as the “central norm figure” of Hebrew prosody (48), and the absence of a subject index.

Robert H. Gundry. *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially Its Elites, in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 137 pp. \$14.00

(paper). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master's College.

In the theological and educational circles where I have moved throughout my Christian life, to recommend a book by Robert Gundry might be deemed an act of ecclesiastical suicide. Yet this reviewer offers such a recommendation whatever the implications may be.

Bob Gundry has taught at Westmont College for forty years. He has produced a number of biblical commentaries and theological studies, primarily in the NT field. His *Survey of the New Testament*, which recently appeared in its fourth edition, has become a standard college level textbook. (See the review of this edition in the Spring 2004 edition of *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 120-21.) Recently I examined that fourth edition, mainly because it includes hundreds of excellent photographs by my colleague, Todd Bolen. That examination then led to a consideration of Gundry's greater literary efforts and eventually resulted in the reading of the little volume presently under review.

To many observers, Gundry remains something of a conundrum, and this volume will only add to the perplexity of those who wonder how to slot him within the broad spectrum of evangelical Christianity. For example, Gundry's *Survey* presents and defends traditional evangelical positions on the authorship and dates of the NT books. I would have no hesitation in using it as a textbook in classes at The Master's College, where a high view of Scripture is a *sine qua non*. On the other hand, anyone following the theological controversies within the Evangelical Theological Society during the last quarter of the twentieth century is very aware of Gundry's view that Matthew employed a Jewish Midrashic redactional criticism in embellishing and even inventing "events" that never happened in space-time history. This was particularly evident, according to Gundry, in the Matthean nativity accounts. For his espousing and defending of these views, Gundry was asked to surrender his membership in the ETS in 1983. Though most evangelical scholars disagree with his position, Gundry has continued to maintain that his view of Matthew's literary method of redacting Gospel accounts is consistent with an affirmation of inerrancy, the requirement for ETS membership.

This reviewer admits that when he first saw the rather odd title of this little volume, he wondered what Gundry was attempting to accomplish in it. Knowing the reputation he had gained, I approached the book with a bit of built-in skepticism. To write that I was pleasantly surprised is a gross understatement. Gundry's book is marked by a skilled employment of linguistic, semantic, and theological analysis for which he has always been known. What he adds to the discussion is a trenchant application of John's "Word-Christology" and acute sectarianism to challenge the "evangelical elites" of today to recognize that they have gone far too far in accommodating their agendas to pleasing the "world" and its postmodern agenda.

Chapter one is an excellent analysis of John's "Word-Christology." Gundry demonstrates quite effectively that the rest of John's Gospel is entirely consistent with the prologue (1:1-18), which lays out the theological groundwork for the rest of his Gospel. Although in a less detailed way than chapter one, chapter two develops Gundry's analysis of John's bold sectarianism throughout his Gospel. The sharp distinction between light and darkness, world and church, truth and error, and

many other polarities in John's writings are brought to bear on the contrary evangelical mixing and compromising of distinct and different matters. In chapter three Gundry effectively applies the results of his theological exegesis to the practices of what he calls "the elites of contemporary evangelicalism in North America" (see subtitle). Gundry does not simply revert to an uncritical fundamentalism that most readers will assume. He is fond of that group of scholars that produced the early-twentieth-century series of volumes that gave the name to this movement, *The Fundamentals*.

This reviewer thinks it best not to list the targets of Gundry's trenchant criticisms, lest the reader be biased by either an unfair negativism or a smug satisfaction over who and what the author condemns. I only mention that Gundry's book evoked a response by three major evangelical authors in the *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* (19/1, Spring 2002). Gundry was also given the opportunity to respond to his critics in that issue. Perhaps Gundry will issue a second edition of this little volume in which he also responds to his critics, as he did with a second edition of his Matthew commentary in 1994.

Gundry's book will not answer all the questions that critics have asked about his controversial "Matthew Midrash." Some might even wonder how this book could be written by the same author. Some, like this reviewer, will still wonder how his approach to Matthew squares with a commitment to scriptural inerrancy. But *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian* is a book that will challenge every reader to rethink both the Gospel of John and also his own uncritical dismissal of the contributions of fundamentalism, which are often ignored and even scorned by the "elites" whom Gundry so effectively admonishes.

It is a book that should be read and appreciated by every pastor, scholar, and student who needs to realize that the outward successes of evangelicalism have not been gained without incurring heavy losses. Gundry believes that the losses may be regained by attention to something that is so obvious that it can easily be ignored—the sectarian teaching of the Gospel of John.

Erwin W. Lutzer. *The Truth About Same-Sex Marriage*. Chicago: Moody, 2004. 118 pp. \$7.99 (paper). Reviewed by Donald E. Green, Faculty Associate, New Testament.

Erwin Lutzer, the long-time pastor of historic Moody Church in Chicago, provides this brief contribution to the current literature on homosexuality. Unlike White and Niell [see review below], Lutzer is more concerned to give a biblical analysis of the contemporary problem of the legalization of same-sex marriage (9).

Lutzer writes with a pastoral warmth and a polemic urgency on the modern issue. He calls the church to examine itself before speaking against homosexuality, stating among other things, "We must be as concerned about our own sins as we are about the sins of the homosexual community" (11), and "We must repent of the double standard that sees the sin of homosexual behavior in a different category than adultery, premarital sex, and pornography" (38).

He also urges believers to recognize that not all homosexuals are extreme

radicals trying to advance “the homosexual agenda.” Some are simply confused young people; others have adopted the homosexual lifestyle but are looking for a way out (38). The discerning pastor will heed Lutzer’s distinctions so he can minister either a word of rebuke to the radical or a word of hope and forgiveness to the homosexual under conviction of sin.

Lutzer seems to have two main purposes in writing the book. First, he explains why homosexuality is wrong. He defends that thesis by briefly affirming the biblical view of marriage that consists of one man and one woman (45-50). Sexual relationships outside of marriage—including homosexual relationships—can only lead to brokenness as God’s design for marriage is abandoned (53-56). He also pertinently warns against the consequences of same-sex marriage upon the children who are raised in the midst of such a relationship (57-70). Finally, he gives concise responses to arguments advanced in favor of homosexual marriage (71-88). All of these sections are helpful at some points.

Secondly, he issues a call to the church to respond to these developments in American society. He says the church must work internally to strengthen its families and the lives of the unmarried (91-96). In the neighborhood and in the marketplace, Christians must be vocal to express their values in a loving but firm way (96-100). In politics, Christians must support political efforts to oppose homosexual marriage (100-104). Finally, he issues a call to watchful prayer as the only hope for success (105-9).

Though much of Lutzer’s book is profitable, some readers will have important differences with him. As he calls Christians to political involvement, he exhorts the reader to set aside doctrinal differences with others who also oppose homosexual marriage. He includes Catholics as compatible comrades (100). One may legitimately question whether present political expediency is sufficient grounds to set aside the doctrinal issues that launched the Reformation, and whether there is eternal value in a superficial unity with those whose “doctrinal differences” actually indicate that they themselves need to repent and believe in the gospel. Unfortunately, as a practical matter, the call to set aside doctrine for the sake of politics will always lead to a setting aside of evangelism. Such alliances are not the path to building the kingdom of God (2 Cor 6:14-17).

Lutzer also does not explain how his call to political action can be reconciled with his other comments exhorting the church to reach out to the homosexual community. The very nature of the American political process forces confrontation with the opposing agenda. How can Christians legitimately treat homosexuals as opponents to be conquered in one breath and preach the gospel to them in the next? Is the church’s mission one of political reform or evangelism (cf. Matt 28:18-20 and 2 Cor 5:20)? Let Christian leaders choose wisely; in the end they cannot have it both ways.

Ultimately, homosexuality is a spiritual problem that shows the hovering wrath of God (Rom 1:18-32). As such, it requires the spiritual solution found only in the gospel. Political victories may produce a society that is outwardly more moral, but they cannot turn away the wrath of God. Distinctions between the agenda for a moral America and the agenda for a flourishing church must be made. The two are not equivalent.

Finally, today’s Christian leader must remember the pastoral needs of his

flock as he addresses this issue. Perhaps America *is* changing irreversibly. Perhaps our children *will* inherit a society more openly wicked than what we received from prior generations. But that is hardly cause for despair! Pastors need to remind their flocks that the Bible said that evil men would proceed from bad to worse (2 Tim 3:13). So why the surprise and fright when it happens in real life? More than a call to political action, believers today need to hear the triumphant certainty of a sovereign God who still reigns over all, and they need to hear the call and encouragement to live a godly life in the midst of a crumbling society. Just as righteous Boaz and Ruth honored God in the wicked days of the judges, so the tender believer of this generation can live righteously even if the most radical of homosexual agendas becomes reality.

The Truth About Same-Sex Marriage hints at these surpassing truths and makes many helpful observations along the way. Lutzer will stimulate thinking on some issues, but his brevity limits the extent of the contribution that he otherwise could have made.

Grant Osborne. *Romans*. IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004. 447 pp. \$23.00 (paper). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master's College.

The contemporary evangelical movement is experiencing something of an “embarrassment of riches” when it comes to commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans. In the last quarter of the twentieth century and at the dawn of the twenty-first, we have been blessed with a large number of substantive works written at various scholarly levels. Just to list a few of the authors that come to mind with the date of their publication: Cranfield in the International Critical Commentary series (1978); Hendricksen in the New Testament Commentary series (1981); Bruce in the Tyndale series (1985); Morris in the Pillar series (1988); Moo in the New International Commentary series (1996); Schreiner in the Baker Exegetical series (1998); and Wright in the *New Interpreter's Bible* (2001). The “word on the street” is that N. T. Wright is also writing the Romans commentary for the New International Greek Testament series. On the broader theological canvass, one also recalls Dunn's two volumes in the Word Biblical Commentary series (1988), plus Kasemann's (1980) and Stuhlmacher's (1994) individual volumes. Of course, this list does not include the classic commentaries contributed in days past by John Murray, Charles Hodge, and Robert Haldane, which are usually kept in print somewhere, plus the always available Reformation classics of Calvin and Luther. But even when limiting the list to new commentaries in the last generation, one must conclude that evangelicals have been blessed beyond their wants—and some might say, their needs! Of course, the dozens of helpful works on Romans that are more on a devotional or homiletical level are not included above.

And now another substantive contribution on Romans by a major NT scholar at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School! Osborne does appear to be sensitive to the question of why, in light of the contributions already available, another commentary on Romans is needed. His response to that question should be noted.

No doubt, we in the West have published too much, while churches in the rest of the world have been unable to publish what they need. Yet many Western commentaries, for the most part, are too technical for many pastors and nearly all laypersons. Others are too shallow and miss the meaning of the text. There still needs to be a work that will make all the deep insights of the critical commentaries accessible and understandable to those without technical training, and that will show the way to apply these truths to modern life. This balance—deeply committed to the God-intended meaning of Romans and yet at the same time relevant for the daily life of the Christian—is somewhat rare in a commentary. This is one of the primary purposes for this work on Romans. The reader will have to judge how well I succeed (12).

If that is Osborne's purpose in this commentary, then in this reviewer's opinion, he has succeeded in accomplishing it. I would not say that this is the only commentary that succeeds in maintaining this "balance," but it would be hard to find one that does it any better than this one.

As is the case with the other volumes in the NIV-based IVP Commentary on the NT, more technical matters are relegated to the footnotes with transliterated Greek words utilized. (One of the other authors in this series complained to me privately that the publishers had severely edited out many of his technical notes.) The comments that are directly in the main body of the text, however, indicate that there exists a scholarly substructure beneath them.

Osborne espouses traditional evangelical views on the authorship and date of Romans (13-15). He sees Paul's purpose as primarily ministerial, not theological, i.e., to solve existing problems in the Roman church by setting forth good theology (21). In regard to theme, Osborne sees "themes" as a better approach and seems to agree with Moo's suggestion of three themes, related to (1) Christology, (2) Salvation History, and (3) the Gospel (21). There is nothing radically new here. Perhaps mention of Wright's approach of suggesting a grand narrative or "story" that Paul is telling in Romans, whether one agrees with it or not, would have strengthened Osborne's comments at this point (see Wright's commentary in the *New Interpreter's Bible* mentioned earlier).

The epistle raises some controversial issues that scholars have wrestled with in recent years. Osborne shows familiarity with these discussions, and though usually mentioning the alternative views, he usually will tip his hand as to what direction he leans in these "controversies." He does briefly refer to the recent discussions over what has been called the "New Pauline Perspective," most often associated with the names of Sanders, Dunn, and (sometimes) Wright. In his footnotes on various passages from 3:27-4:25 (100-124), he agrees with the critics of Sanders and Dunn, and affirms that dependence on works righteousness in the Judaism of Paul's day was a real problem that he was addressing in this epistle. These discussions most often are limited to the footnotes. In the main body of his commentary he faithfully seeks to explicate Paul's meaning without digressions into controversial issues.

In his discussion of the meaning of the "hilasmos/ hilasterion" word group in Rom 3:21-26, Osborne agrees with Morris' and Ridderbos' criticisms of C. H. Dodd's idea that God's wrath is absent from the concept of "expiation"—the

translation that Dodd prefers to “propitiation.” Osborne affirms: “Both the appeasing of Divine wrath and the forgiveness of sins are part of the concept” (97). Osborne mentions the association of the “hilasterion” with the OT mercy-seat and refers to a 1987 article by N. S. L. Fryer that defends the metaphorical “mercy seat” translation in Rom 3:25 (97). He could have strengthened his argument further if he had referred to a recent dissertation which also defends that translation by Daniel Bailey (“Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul’s Use of *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1999); see also his summary article with the same title in *Tyndale Bulletin* 51/1 [2000]:155-58).

Though space forbids an examination of other individual texts, some notice should be made of Osborne’s treatment of “Israel” in Romans 9–11. Simply stated, he agrees with Cranfield and Dunn that the word, especially in its use in 11:25-27, refers neither symbolically to the church nor to an elect group in Israel, but to the Jewish people as an ethnic group existing at the Parousia who will experience corporate spiritual salvation by faith in Jesus the Redeemer (305-7). Though not engaging the implications of this interpretation for the millennial debate, Osborne does appear to underscore a premillennial reading of Romans 11. He does this, not out of some blind commitment to an eschatological system, but out of a reading that arises from the texts involved.

Pastors and teachers will especially appreciate Osborne’s commentary. To be honest, pastors and even many professors have often been frustrated in plowing through pages of detailed exegetical discussions in a commentary to find the point that they want elucidated. Osborne clearly summarizes the main interpretations of the difficult passages, but he always proceeds to “give the sense” of the passage itself. He does not, like some commentators, neglect to see the forest as he wanders interminably among its many trees.

Yes, here is still another commentary on Romans. It will not replace anyone else’s volume. It will not be the standard for all commentaries for years to come. It should, however, assume a role as a very helpful aid to studying and teaching this foundational document of the Christian faith.

Jenell Williams Paris. *Birth Control for Christians: Making Wise Choices*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. 217 pp. \$14.99 (paper). Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

The author is an associate professor of anthropology at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota and serves as a fertility awareness instructor in the Twin Cities area. In this book, she seeks to answer the following question: What is the best form of birth control for you—morally, relationally, and medically? She divides the book into six main sections. Most chapters end with “Questions for Conversation.” The book concludes with a table summarizing the effectiveness of the contraceptive methods considered in the volume.

The first subdivision lays the foundation for the rest of the book. In the first chapter she addresses the importance of this issue for Christians by generally summarizing those who oppose contraception and those who favor it. In the second

chapter, she considers the factors for determining whether birth control is right, and then, which kind of contraception is best. Building off the Hebrew word *shalom*, she contends that right relationships with God, self, each other (spouse), and the world (i.e., technology) are foundational to a person's decision about birth control. In discussing one's relationship with God (32-33), she refers to two issues: one's motive for using birth control and the fact that some contraceptive methods are intrinsically wrong because they are "abortifacient" (i.e., they cause abortion). Later on in the chapter, as part of a listing of steps a person can take with regard to this issue, the author devotes a paragraph to developing an ethical framework for one's sexual life (42). Her concern is that a Christian's decision about birth control should harmonize with his/her worldview (an issue addressed below). In the third chapter she overviews key issues relating to male and female fertility and anatomy and summarizes five categories of contraception: behavioral methods, barrier methods, hormonal methods, IUD's, and sterilization. In the fourth chapter she addresses "legendary" but ineffective methods of birth control. As she considers the five categories of birth control (5 sections, 12 chapters), she consistently presents information under the following headings: mechanism of action, effectiveness, how to maximize effectiveness, advantages, disadvantages, cost, and questions for conversation.

With regard to hormonal methods (e.g., "the pill") and IUD's (intrauterine devices) in particular, the author provides a helpful summary of the question of whether or not these methods are abortifacient (142-46, 174-75). Unfortunately, medical experts are not unanimous in the way they answer this question. Certain versions of the pill and IUD's (because of the hormones they release) make the womb less receptive to the implantation of a fertilized egg. Consequently, if an egg becomes fertilized (as a result of a failure of that method), and that fertilized egg cannot implant on the wall of the womb, the fertilized egg passes out of the woman's body (i.e., an abortion takes place). Since this is not a "known" risk and is only theoretical, some Christian doctors prescribe these contraceptive methods and many Christian women utilize them. They do this with confidence that they are not causing an abortion. Although the present writer recognizes his lack of medical expertise, in light of the theoretical risk, he counsels couples to utilize other methods of birth control that are clearly non-abortifacient.

This book does a superb job of presenting the birth control methods that are commonly used. The author provides clear and concise explanations and seeks to face potential risks that various methods present. The footnotes provide a wealth of sources a person can consult for further information. The "questions for conversation" provide avenues for good discussion by a couple wrestling with this issue. The book's greatest weakness is the scant attention it gives to the question of whether or not birth control is right or wrong. Although the author exhorts every Christian spouse to make sure his/her decision about birth control harmonizes with his/her Christian worldview, she offers no explicit help in this area. With that weakness in mind, this book provides significant help for a Christian who is seeking an overview of birth control methods and a helpful evaluation of those methods. A person will need to turn elsewhere, however, for theological help in answering the deeper questions of what the Bible has to say about birth control.

Ray Pritchard. *Beyond All You Could Ask Or Think. How to Pray Like the Apostle Paul*. Chicago: Moody, 2004. 172 pp. \$14.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

Each of six chapters expounds one of Paul's prayers. In sequence these are discernment (Phil 1:9-11), knowledge (Col 1:9-14), enlightenment (Eph 1:15-23), power (Eph 3:14-21), endurance (2 Thess 1:11-12), and stability (2 Thess 2:13-17).

The book is fast-reading, simple, often illustrated, and refreshing to laypeople, students, or pastors. The author is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary who also has a Doctor of Ministry from Talbot School of Theology. He has been Senior pastor of Calvary Memorial Church, Oak Park, Illinois since 1989, and writes from a practical, simple pastoral perspective. The book explains key points in Paul's prayers, and briefly surveys highlights.

Pritchard encourages deliberate praying *for* others (p. 19) and *with* others (20). The book focuses much on basic ideas, but gives little actual guidance in ways to apply such prayer. Some points are strong, and some are weak, needing help.

Surely rephrasing is needed. Rather than saying that love is a matter of luck, as he does when he says that luck is being full of God's love (31), he should have focused on God's grace as the source of fruit (Gal 5:22). He tabs John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart* "a fine book" (66-67), a very misleading appraisal since that book on finding true manhood has shortcomings, e.g., many misrepresentations, misinterpretations of Bible passages, misguided theology, frequent lack of clarity, a Hollywood overload, questionable pop psychology. Pritchard sets up the short-sighted either/or that the glory of heaven is not streets, gates, river, or angels, but Jesus (86). It seems better to say that in the eternal city God's glory centers in Christ, yet extends to all persons and things. Pritchard is inconsistent with his point when he uses the illustration of coming home and feeling "home is precious to me because of the people I love who live there." This will be even more true of heaven, and still in harmony with Christ's having greater glory.

Good points abound. One, on Col 1:9-14, is in wanting to be engulfed in God's will, not just to have help to make a tough decision (34). Pritchard is pertinent about yielding life's control to Christ to be shaped by His purposes (66). The book is helpful regarding Christians' desperate need to pray to God for strength, as in Eph 3:16-17 (96-97). However, the author's use of this good purpose does not catch Paul's focus on *interceding* for others' strengthening. When the point is made that Paul in Eph 6:20 does not ask prayer to be freed from prison but to be bold to preach even in prison (98), the book loses sight of Paul's desire for prayer for his deliverance as stated elsewhere (cf. Phil 1:20; Phile 22).

Another valuable idea is that "filled" (Eph 3:19) means dominated by God (105). Among other helpful comments is God's ability to act beyond men's ability (Eph 3:20) to meet any need (112, 117-21). A brief summary of Paul's prayer texts ends the book.

The book has a great title and is a catalyst for things to pray and for uplift. A light, short, quick book, it has moments, but not nearly the help on Paul's prayers found in D. A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* ((Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth, eds. *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003. 428 pp. \$29.99 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

The Challenge of Bible Translation is a collection essays on Bible translation in honor of Ronald F. Youngblood, OT scholar and Bible translator. In the former role he is a colleague of Scorgie and Strauss at Bethel Seminary, San Diego. In the latter role he is a colleague to Voth (translation consultant, United Bible Societies) and an active member of the International Bible Society's Committee on Bible Translation. Contributors to the volume are internationally recognized scholars with considerable experience in Bible translation projects. They are also "generally united in their support of the translation theory of functional equivalence in its basic contours" (24). Those contributors are Kenneth L. Barker, D. A. Carson, Charles H. Cosgrove, Kent A. Eaton, Dick France, David Noel Freedman, Andreas J. Köstenberger, David Miano, Douglas J. Moo, Moisés Silva, James D. Smith III, John H. Stek, Ronald A. Veenker, Larry Lee Walker, Bruce K. Waltke, Walter W. Wessel, Herbert M. Wolf, and the three editors. The essays by Wessel ("A Translator's Perspective on Alister McGrath's History of the King James Version," 199-211) and Wolf ("Translation as a Communal Task," 143-57) were completed just prior to their respective departures from this world into the presence of the Savior.

Scorgie's introductory essay (19-34) sets the tone of the volume with its emphasis on understandable Bible translation. He argues that "Babel was not God's final and fateful verdict on the human race" (21). Recognizing the extremes to which some might go to make the Bible understandable, Scorgie ardently defends verbal inspiration (22-23). The remaining eighteen essays are organized in three sections corresponding to the theory, history, and practice of Bible translation.

Rather than commenting on each contribution (Scorgie gives an excellent summary of each one in his introductory essay, 25-34), this review will focus on a select few in order to demonstrate that this volume makes a significant contribution to the methodology and ministry of Bible translation.

Carson's essay ("The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—and Other Limits, Too," 65-113) is an updated version of his older essay, "The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation" (*Evangelical Review of Theology* 9 [1985]:200-213). It is a finely balanced presentation of the two opposing philosophies labeled functional equivalence and linguistic conservatism. The realities of translating the Bible into another language are not as simplistic as the adherents to these two philosophies sometimes make it out to be. Accuracy, naturalness, and clarity can all be very tricky results to accomplish (69). Employing two essays by Tony Payne defending the ESV over against the NIV ("Is this the English Bible we've been waiting for?" *The Briefing* 278 [Nov 2001]:13-15, and "FAQs on the ESV," *The Briefing* 283 [Apr 2002]: 23-24), Carson explains the strengths and weaknesses of both translations (71-78). With the same attention to detail, he provides a balanced examination of the debate over gender-inclusive

language (78-91). In a section entitled “The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation” (91-106), Carson offers considerable insight and sounds significant warnings regarding the problems inherent in focusing on reader response, creating a dichotomy between meaning and message, interpreting biblical history through contemporary history, distorting salvation history, pursuing comprehensibility, allowing stylists and receptor-language specialists to override the original languages, neglecting the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of the Word to the human heart, and failing to understand the potential for misrepresentation of the biblical text in study notes. Extensive end notes (106-13) provide additional discussion as well as identification of Carson’s sources.

David Noel Freedman and David Miano provide one of the more technical essays in the volume (“Slip of the Eye: Accidental Omission in the Masoretic Tradition,” 273-99). Their focus is on the all-important first step in Bible translation: determining the exact wording of the original text. The specific accidental error of haplography (writing only once that which should have been written twice—whether letters, syllables, words, phrases, or clauses). Following an enumeration of the varieties of haplography (274-78), the authors present their textual analysis of Genesis 1 (278-82). They conclude that “due consideration should be given to the possibility of scribal oversight when explaining a variant *before* resorting to any theory based on intentional alteration” (283). In addition, they believe that the evidence indicates that textual critics too often show a prejudice for shorter readings to the detriment of the text (277, 283-84). While their presentation of the twelve examples in Genesis 1 is generally cautious and judicious, this reviewer was not convinced to adopt any of the proposed revisions of the Masoretic text even though agreeing, in principle, with their caveat concerning preference for shorter readings. Freedman and Miano appear to have ignored the expansionistic tendency of Bible translation itself and of the LXX in particular. Three of the twelve examples involve the omission of וַיְהִי־כֵן (“and it became so,” Gen 1:6-7, 20-21, 26-27). Apparently Freedman and Miano think that the text is predictable enough to hypothesize an inviolable pattern of occurrence for this phrase. The problem with this hypothesis is that it over-formulizes the text and eliminates the original author’s freedom to depart from what the reader might expect in order to produce emphasis or simple variety to enhance the literary quality of the work.

For everyone interested in Bible translation, this volume is must reading. No matter whether one agrees or disagrees with either the thrust of the volume as a whole or with specific points raised by the individual essayists, it succeeds in advancing the debate over various aspects of the theory and practice of Bible translation to a new level of excellence.

Mark Sheridan, ed. *Genesis 12–50*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1. Ed. by Thomas C. Oden. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002. xxxix + 392 pp. \$39.99 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

The 28-volume Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS) targets

the patristic period of church history (approximately A.D. 95-749). For a more detailed description of this series and the format of its volumes, see my prior review of the first OT volume (*TMSJ* 13/1 [Spring 2002]:134-36). The "Introduction to Genesis 12-50" (xvii-xxxix) opens this volume with an informative essay on the history and methodology of patristic exegesis. Sheridan identifies and illustrates the influence of the apostle Paul's interpretation of Genesis on Origen as a key factor in the development of patristic exegesis (xvii-xix). His discussion encompasses Philo of Alexandria, Origen, Ephrem the Syrian, Didymus, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Caesarius of Arles, Venerable Bede, and the anonymous compiler of the catena on Genesis.

Rules of patristic interpretation, according to Sheridan's analysis, were heavily influenced by Origen, who thought of himself as continuing Paul's work on the OT (xxvi). The Alexandrian school with its allegorical methodology succeeded in shaping early church interpretation more than the Antiochean school's literal interpretive method (xxvi). Origen employed a number of Pauline passages (1 Cor 10:1-11; 2 Cor 3:6-18; Gal 4:21-24; Heb 8:5; 10:1) as examples of Pauline exegesis (xxvii). Sheridan develops the impact of these texts on patristic exegesis (xxvii-xxxiv). It is an introduction worth reading before utilizing either one of the two volumes on Genesis.

Due to covering 39 of the 50 chapters of Genesis, the editor's choices are restricted by space considerations. Key sections of Genesis (e.g., chaps. 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 22, and 49), do not appear to be subject to noticeable scrimping. However, the total lack of any example of patristic discussion of the sin of homosexuality in Genesis 19 causes this reviewer to wonder if the editor avoided it in an effort to appear politically correct in the contemporary American environment.

Regardless of possible omissions for doubtful reasons, the reader will be rewarded with many gems of patristic interpretation that will enhance his/her own study of Genesis. Ancientness is no guarantee of orthodoxy, but modern fascination with novelty in interpretation desperately needs the tempering influence of the early church fathers. On the other side of the coin, it is inevitable that new interpretive errors will be discovered to be nothing more than old heresy dressed in an updated vocabulary.

A few excerpts from this volume will whet the appetite for more. Novatian's (fl. A.D. 235-258) argumentation for a distinction between the Persons of the Godhead in understanding OT theophanies is classic: "If God cannot be seen, how did God appear? If he appeared, how is it that he can not be seen? . . . But certainly Scripture does not lie; therefore God was really seen. Accordingly this can only mean that it was not the Father, who never has been seen, that was seen, but the Son who willed to descend and to be seen, for the simple reason that he has descended" (5-6, re: Gen 12:7).

Ambrose (fl. 374-397), writing on Sarah's beauty (Gen 12:11-15), is as contemporary as this past Sunday's sermon: "Whoever desires the happiness of marriage should look not for a wealthy woman, who will not be held in check by the obligations of marriage. One looks not for one ornamented with jewels but with good manners. The wife who is conscious of being of a higher social level generally humiliates her husband" (8). Origen (fl. ca. 200-254) is no less practical when he summarizes Gen 18:2-7 by saying that Abraham "himself runs, his wife hastens, the

servant makes haste. No one is slow in the house of a wise man” (65).

Of course, this volume also contains many examples of patristic eisegesis and allegorical excess. Consider how Origen supports his view that Lot should be taken as a figure of the Law (Gen 19:37): “Let not the fact that the word *law* is declined in the feminine gender in Latin appear incongruous, since it preserves the masculine gender in Greek” (82; *is* in italics is an editorial error). Caesarius of Arles (ca. 470-543) took the reference to Abraham’s arrival at Mt. Moriah on the third day (Gen 22:4) as a representation of “the mystery of the Trinity” (103). Concerning the food Esau prepared for Isaac (Gen 27:31), Hippolytus (fl. 222-245) indicates that it signifies “the cult of the people under the law. Since they are inflated with pride and are certain of being justified by circumcision, they offer the pagan converts as nourishment, whereas they themselves need nourishment because they cannot touch the heavenly bread” (177). Ephrem the Syrian (fl. 363-373), Ambrose, and Rufinus (ca. 345-411) all concluded that “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf” (49:27) refers to Paul (346).

Early church fathers wrestled with some of the same apparent contradictions in Scripture that present day neo-theists exploit. For example, Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-367) concludes that the knowledge about which God speaks in Gen 22:12 “is adapted to the time rather than to the result of a change, since in connection with that which God knew it is a question of the opportune moment to divulge what is known rather than to acquire it” (108).

Anyone fascinated with hermeneutics, homiletics, church history, historical theology, and even OT and NT studies, will find the two ACCS volumes on Genesis a valuable resource. May these volumes be but the stepping stone to expanded studies of the patristic writings.

Anthony J. Tomasino. *Judaism Before Jesus: The Events and Ideas That Shaped the New Testament World*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2003. 345 pp. \$24.00 (paper). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master’s College.

With so many good treatments of Second Temple Judaism, the intertestamental period, and New Testament backgrounds, every new author in these areas feels the need to justify another offering. So it is with Tomasino’s handling of the same material which he styles as a description of what Judaism was like before and during the New Testament period. He mentions that he originally conceived of his book as “an introduction that assumes almost no prior knowledge of the subject matter. It’s an introduction for the uninitiated intended for Christian lay readers” (7, 8). His editor, however, envisioned the book also as a text for classroom use and for scholars, so he added some textboxes and more documentation (8). In this reviewer’s opinion, the editor should have left well enough alone and Tomasino’s goal would have been achieved. As it stands, however, the book could serve well as an introduction for laymen, but it falls far short of being of great value to the student or scholar.

Such an effort invites comparison to the many other standard works on this

subject (e.g., Schurer and Grabbe), especially the one that is quickly becoming a standard volume, *The Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* by Julius Scott (Baker, 2000). To be fair to Tomasino, the above books are directed to a more academic readership, but some of the expressed targets for Tomasino's book are classroom and scholarly readers. So a comparison is justified.

Tomasino covers the basic historical facts of the period leading up to the New Testament in a serviceable way. The book is well-written and easy to follow. A "Glossary and Pronunciation Guide" (329-36) is quite helpful. The "textboxes" every few pages offer some additional information to the serious reader. I was particularly impressed with the box on "Chronomessianism" (292, 293). For a lay introduction, it is good. The reader who wants to be exposed to the issues presently under discussion, however, will be disappointed. The textboxes only add information that a lay reader should also know.

Although suggested reading lists appear at the end of each chapter and include many of the standard works, observing what books and subjects were omitted was shocking. For example, unless this reviewer missed it, Scott's influential volume does not make a single appearance in the entire volume! An "Author Index" would have been helpful to locate which authors were cited. Not only was Scott ignored, but recent writers who have written extensively on the theological worldview of Second Temple Judaism (James Dunn and N.T. Wright, for example) are also ignored. Now one may respond that Dunn and Wright have not written so much about the *events* of this period as they have about the *ideas* in this period. But look again at the subtitle of this book: *The Events and Ideas That Shaped the New Testament World*. Whatever one thinks of Dunn's and Wright's perspective, they should not be overlooked simply because of the massive influence they have wielded. Even lay readers need to have some awareness of the currents of thought on this subject in the last two decades.

Did Tomasino fulfill his goal? If you are looking for an introduction to the *events* of the period that shaped the *Judaism Before Jesus*, this book will serve you well. If you are looking for an introduction to the *ideas* of the period that shaped the *Judaism Before Jesus*, then you must look elsewhere.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life. What On Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. 334 pp. \$19.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

A famous pastor of the booming Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California follows up on his earlier book, *The Purpose Driven Church*. Laity of many churches have used his 40-day plan, keyed to this latest book's 40 chapters, and claimed spiritual renewal. The flow is easy to read on aspects of spiritual life, from receiving the Lord initially to developing God-given gifts in service.

A great number of statements offer a healthy, accurate outlook. These Warren crafts in practicality and passion that show the attractiveness of living all-out for the Lord. However, many claims need to be thought through soundly and changed to be correct, freed from opinions that do not represent anything that God's

Word says. Warren does not qualify many of his ideas to reflect a reliable balance. Quotes of more than 1,200 verses, conveniently picked from more than a dozen translations or paraphrases often express the author's arbitrary ideas read in rather than what the verses say. Though much in the lengthy book can be a catalyst for spiritual life, recurring misrepresentations hurt the overall dependability. Unfortunately, this age sometimes gravitates to and is satisfied with the shallow, and many are susceptible to writings that give imbalanced treatments. Easy tolerance is restless about exercising discernment, often falsely claims discernment is unloving or divisive, and jumps on a bandwagon with blithe unawareness or carelessness that approves what misleads.

Still, Warren is rich in the apt and helpful. He sees it as vital to know God and His purpose (17-18). He sharply distinguishes getting success by achieving a goal the world applauds from realizing the purpose God created one to achieve (19, 24-25). People err in being driven by guilt, resentment, fear, materialism, need for approval, and missing the key of God's purpose (27-30). The present life is the dress rehearsal before eternity (36). When one lives in light of eternity, values change in the use of money, relationships, character prized over fame, wealth, achievements, and pleasure (38). It is important each day to make it one's business to prepare for the final day (40). Warren rightly says that "faithfulness to God does not guarantee success in a career or even in ministry" (50). Paul was put in prison, and many of the saved were martyred or lost material things (50). But when life is hard for a Christian, it helps to think that he or she is not home yet, for this life is not the end (50-52; cf. 2 Cor 4:18).

Other good points appear. The ultimate goal of the universe is to show God's glory (53-59, 63), as Jesus did (John 17:4). God will give what a person needs to live for Him (58). A life driven by the purpose of living for eternity has as its focus not "how much pleasure am I getting out of life?" but "how much . . . is God getting . . .?" (76). Warren sees in Rom 12:1 a moment of surrender to serve Christ as Lord and, as in Luke 9:23, also an ongoing daily submission (83-84). This will sometimes mean "doing inconvenient, unpopular, costly, or seemingly impossible tasks" (84), not always what one feels like doing.

A good focus occurs on meditating in God's Word through the day (90-91), on faith that obeys (95; cf. John 15:14), and on true worship (100-106). One section shows that God can help a believer grow even through seasons of dryness (108-9). Warren feels it crucial to be related to and committed to others in the church (130-37), and offers good points about restoring broken fellowship in love and in peace-making ways that foster unity (152-67). Concrete steps discuss how believers grow (179-83). Another uplifting part urges things vital for growth, such as the Word (Acts 20:32), abiding in the Word by accepting its authority, assimilating it, applying it, being transformed by it in a right response to trials, and believers developing fruitfulness by defeating temptations (201). It is also good to see the emphasis of chapters 29-30 on God placing those He saves on earth, each one a servant to Him and to others (229), no one with an insignificant ministry (230), with all held accountable for service (232). Warren shows that God has given abilities (gifts) to all believers, and all can glorify Him as they offer these to Him and to the church unselfishly (242-58). The part on "Thinking Like a Servant" (265-71) makes profitable comments.

Shortsighted misstatements, which abound, could have been avoided. One such claim is that “whenever God wanted to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days” (9). Yes, in a few cases. But Warren should have said “in some cases,” for in many situations 40 days had nothing to do with people’s lives. Romans 8:6 gets misquoted as “obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life” (18). The verse mentions death, which offers no hope, quite different from a dead end where one might turn around and try another way. And how does “peace” become lost in favor of “a spacious, free life”? And where is reference to the Spirit? As often, even while sincere, Warren’s recasting into his own rather different words sacrifices the actual or full thought in God’s Word, which is better. One can achieve a helpful reading and be accurate too.

Some passages which in their primary meaning refer to Israel are referred to any person, without clarification. An example is Isa 44:2, where the Lord says He is “your creator” and adds that the people of Israel were in His care before they were born. It is true that God cares for Gentiles also, as those of “all nations” were included in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3). A further passage referring to Israel (Jer 29:11) is linked with all believers today (31). A little qualifying by Warren on how he derived this (24-25) would help with accuracy about primary meaning of a text and a valid principle having application to other cases.

One man’s opinion or arbitrary rating is rather frequent. An example is, “The greatest tragedy is not death, but life without purpose” (30). Biblically, what can be worse to the unsaved than death without ever having come to salvation? They will face “the second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:12-15; 21:8), an eternity apart from God and bliss, with conscious suffering in “the lake of fire.” And what can be better from the standpoint of believers than God, and being in the New Jerusalem with Him (Rev 21:7)? Also troublesome is Warren’s mislead, “You weren’t put on earth to be remembered. You were put here to prepare for eternity” (33-34). Actually *both* are true. God’s Word gives examples of people He remembered—e.g., Noah, Abraham in the covenant God made with him, Hannah, David. God remembered and used some believers as special examples, such as Moses and Samuel in prayer (Ps 99:6; Jer 15:1), or Daniel in wisdom (Ezek 28:3). Daniel came up for remembrance before God as “greatly beloved” (Dan 9:23). God remembers to reward people (Mal 3:16; Heb 6:10). Many other details in God’s Word could be added. In some sense God remembers men’s deeds in relation to future reward (2 Cor 5:10).

Some statements reflect an overlooking of aspects in truth. A case is, “Nothing energizes like a clear purpose” (33). What ever happened to God, and more particularly the Holy Spirit, who energizes (Eph 3:16-17)? Warren also says, “It is usually meaningless work, not overwork, that wears us down, saps our strength, and robs our joy” (33). How did he verify his rating of “usually”? Hard work even with a meaningful purpose very often wears people down, and saps their strength, but need not rob their joy. Yet a further example is the claim that God treasures simple acts of obeying “more than our prayers, praise, or offerings” (96), then citing 1 Sam 15:22, “to obey is better than sacrifice.” In that instance, yes, obedience is better if the sacrifice is done in disobedience that makes the sacrifice a sham. Warren does not qualify his statement responsibly. Prayer, praise [and praise is also an aspect of prayer], or offerings are, if done as God wills, obedient acts. Qualifying things

would bring the true, balanced situation into focus.

Another instance is Warren's "There is nothing that God won't do for the person . . ." (76). There are many things God will not do for a particular person, since He has a differing role and plan for each, so some things He will do for one He will not do for another. A better statement could be, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (cf. Ps 84:9-11), for God in His knowledge, purpose, and working with each person decides things that are good to give in each unique case.

Often claims fit a biblically illiterate age. Such a case is, God "wants all his lost children found! That's the whole reason Jesus came to earth" (97). It is one great reason, yet not the *whole* reason! Jesus also came as King set to fulfill kingdom promises; to give an example of glorifying the Father, of love, and of prayer; to speak further promises of a future kingdom and of heaven and hell; to build His church; to teach holiness; to pray that the Father would send another comforter; and other reasons. It is also more accurate to say that people while still spiritually lost are *not* yet *God's* children, on the contrary they are children of a different father, the *devil* (John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). The author and editors so often, as here, have let misleading things slide by. Inaccurate, careless words keep cropping up, and they cast a shadow over careful ones.

Within its 334 pages, the work covers various good facets in sync with God and His plan. For the undiscerning it can do some good in many ways, but mislead in numerous others. For the discerning, who count as very important interpreting God's Word along with a life of vital purpose, the book, if used at all, will be used with many responsible cautions. Or it will be bypassed in favor of works that are more often carefully aware and consistently responsible. True, the author's program has met with rapid church growth, and God's people should rejoice about any who truly draw close to Him. But crowds at a church or in buying a book do not equate with correctness. Mark that many spiritual movements, evangelical as Warren's is, or even cults, have had booms in attendance. What way will most fully glorify God? For a great number, it will be a way that keeps a purpose-driven life in much closer harmony with God's purpose-driven Word.

Stephen Westerholm. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. xix + 488 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Preston Sprinkle, TMS alumnus and Ph.D. candidate, University of Aberdeen.

With the publication of E. P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, the year 1977 was a decisive turning point in Pauline studies. This monumental work challenged the traditional "Lutheran" reading of Paul regarding scriptural themes such as justification by faith, Paul's view of the Law, and the background of Paul's critique of Judaism. This so-called "new perspective" on Paul (a term coined by James D. G. Dunn) has gained many adherents (e.g., Dunn, N. T. Wright, Terence Donaldson), but continues to arouse many critics (e.g., Tom Schreiner, Mark Seifrid, Andrew Das). Stephen Westerholm has summarized the current debate and offered

a modified traditional reading of Paul. No matter where one stands on these important issues, his book helps greatly toward a clear understanding of an often misconstrued discussion.

Westerholm originally intended to revise his previous work on Paul—*Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, published in 1988—but saw a need for a more expanded work (xi). The book divides into three major sections: (1) “Portraits of the Lutheran Paul” (3-97); (2) “Twentieth Century Responses to the Lutheran Paul” (101-258); and (3) “The Historical and the ‘Lutheran’ Paul” (261-445), which is Westerholm’s own reading of Paul.

In the first section, Westerholm summarizes the views of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, regarding the various Pauline themes significant in the current debate. He labels these 4 men “Lutheran” since “their reading of the apostle [is] as one for whom the doctrine of justification by faith is central and deliberately excludes any role for human ‘works’” (xvii). Westerholm is quite familiar with the writings of these four as he weaves in and out of many sources. The bibliography records 16 sources on Luther alone. He summarizes each man in about 20 pages, with a helpful summary of all at the end (88-97). In the end, though they may differ on various doctrines, all 4 represent a composite picture of the “Lutheran” Paul who has undergone various attacks in recent years (88).

The second section summarizes the works of many Pauline interpreters in the last 100 years, such figures as Schweitzer (108-16), W. G. Kümmel (135-46), Krister Stendahl (146-49), Rudolf Bultmann (150-54), and, of course, E. P. Sanders (129-33, 159-63). The bulk of the section is virtually a reproduction of Westerholm’s previous work (chaps. 6-10 are chaps. 2-6 of *Israel's Law*), but the latter part of section 2 is a helpful summary of the last 30 years of scholarship on Paul. Not only does he review the works of “new perspective” advocates such as N. T. Wright (179-83) and James Dunn (183-200), but he also looks at Tom Schreiner (208-12), Mark Seifrid (219-25), and C. E. B. Cranfield (201-8), who have offered a contemporary defense of the traditional “Lutheran” Paul. Westerholm goes further in summarizing “other perspectives” on Paul, ones that defend neither a traditional reading nor a “new perspective” reading on the apostle. He summarizes such scholars as Tim Laato (226-28) and J. Louis Martyn (235-40) in this section. The final pages of section two give an valuable summary of various critiques of the “Lutheran” Paul (249-58). The most helpful aspect of this section is that it compiles various quotes from different authors concerning Paul’s critique of Judaism (250-53) and his doctrine of justification by faith (252-58).

These first two sections are very helpful, but over 250 pages summarizing over 25 scholars are wearying to the reader. Commendably, Westerholm refrains from gross caricature of his opponents by saturating himself in their works. Clarity and honesty are the hallmarks of this tedious part of Westerholm’s book.

Section 3 begins the author’s presentation of his views on Paul, keeping a keen eye toward the current debate regarding the “new perspective” and its critics. The first part of this section is the most helpful, focusing on the various facets of Paul’s concept of “righteousness” (261-96). Westerholm believes that justification involves both ‘making righteous’ and ‘declaring righteous’ (277 n. 39), though “declare righteous is as good a rendering as any” (286). He says that in theory, humans would be okay if they upheld God’s moral standard of righteousness (283),

but due to humanity's moral depravity such a goal is impossible. He affirms an already/not yet tension in justification, though does not discuss it at length (274 n. 29). He believes the much debated expression "righteousness of God" is an objective genitive in Phil 3:9, Rom 10:3, and "could be meant in Romans 1:17 and 3:21-22 as well" (284-85), though the last texts contain an element of both God's act of salvation and man's possession of the gift of righteousness (cf. 390). He also gives a severe critique of those (e.g., N. T. Wright) who take "righteousness of God" as meaning "covenant faithfulness" (292-93) and the term "righteousness" as meaning "covenant membership" (286-91). "Part of the righteousness of the righteous is that they keep their commitments, and Paul certainly believed that God made promises to the patriarchs.... On the other hand, 'righteousness' itself does not *mean* 'covenant faithfulness'" (292). To sum up, "God's righteousness in Paul is, explicitly, the act of divine grace by which, through the sacrificial death of his Son, he declares sinners righteous—thus championing ... the goodness of his creation" (293).

Another issue covered in this third section is the definition of the terms "Law" and "works of the Law" (297-340). He takes "Law" to refer most often to "the Sinaitic legislation" rather than Scripture as a whole (299-301). "Works of the Law," then, are simply "deeds demanded by the Law" (313, cf. 429-30) and not social boundary markers (so Dunn) or a legalistic misuse of the Law (so Cranfield). He also offers a cogent critique of E. P. Sanders' definition of "grace," which is believed to be pervasive in early Judaism (341-51). "Sanders has shown that Judaism did not generally believe that salvation was earned from scratch by human deeds of righteousness; the point is well taken, but it by no means differentiates Judaism from the classical opponents of 'Lutheran' thought.... What the opponents of 'Lutheranism' emphatically did *not* do, however ... was to suggest that humans can contribute *nothing* to their salvation" (351). He wraps up the book with a lengthy section on justification by faith (352-407), and finally discusses the function of the Law in salvation history (408-39).

Westerholm has given a thorough discussion on various issues surrounding the "new perspective" on Paul. His writing style is clear, witty, and at times downright hilarious. His "Whimsical Introduction" (xiii-ix) along with his various comical snippets (e.g., 23, 164, 202, 214) will cause the stiffest scholar to laugh aloud. A few deficiencies include his lack of interaction with Tom Schreiner's recent work on faith and works (*The Race Set Before Us*) which would probably alter his representation of this author (cf. 211-12). Westerholm also fails to interact with a popular view regarding the interpretation of "works of the Law," promoted by Scott Hafemann, Don Garlington, and J. Christiaan Beker (cf. 313-30). Most seriously, Westerholm (with the majority of Pauline scholars today) does not take Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Pastorals to be authentically Pauline, though he does discuss briefly the epistles as representing Pauline thought. Nevertheless, this book is a significant and persuasive defense of a fairly traditional view on Paul (for statements signifying a more mediating position, see 383, 388-89, 400-401). For anyone wishing to familiarize himself with the web of issues regarding Paul, this book is a must.

James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell. *The Same Sex Controversy*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002. 254 pp. \$12.00 (paper). Reviewed by Donald E. Green, Faculty Associate, New Testament.

The recent legal and political maneuvering about same-sex marriage in American society and the expanding acceptance of homosexuality in modern culture over the past several years have generated a corresponding expansion of literature providing biblical analysis of homosexuality from different viewpoints. *The Same Sex Controversy* contributes to the literature by answering the claims of those who attempt to interpret the Bible to support the homosexual agenda (21).

James White, the prolific author and apologist, combines with Jeffrey Niell, a Presbyterian pastor, to produce this helpful volume. They organize the book primarily around the key biblical passages on homosexuality. After an introductory chapter, they evaluate Genesis 18–19 on Sodom and Gomorrah, spend three chapters analyzing key passages from Leviticus, interpret Paul's argument from Romans 1, and provide a helpful discussion of key terms from 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

The merits of this book are many. The authors document the arguments that pro-homosexual interpreters use against the traditional view that the Bible condemns homosexuality, and then proceed to dismantle those arguments with the application of sound hermeneutical principles, such as word studies (e.g., 32-33; 146-50), close attention to context (68-69), and background information (128-29).

The authors also buttress their position with several quotations from early church fathers to refute the pro-homosexual assertion that "using the Bible to oppose homosexuality is a rather recent occurrence" (168-72), including a devastating homily from John Chrysostom against homosexuality that is reprinted in its entirety (221-33). The bibliography and suggested reading list at the end of the book is also beneficial.

The book is most courageous in its pastoral appeal to those who are struggling with homosexual practices or desires (199-210). It offers hope and forgiveness with an uncompromising call to repentance (e.g., 206), and through that example reminds Christian leaders to preach the gospel to the homosexual community with humility and clarity. Homosexuality is not the unpardonable sin—but it *is* sinful and should be declared as such.

White and Niell did not include any insights on responding to the political issues that have arisen over homosexuality, but one can hardly fault them for the omission. They obviously intended to restrict their discussion to the biblical data, and delving into political implications would have strayed beyond the scope of the book and perhaps even undermined the thesis that proper biblical interpretation is the most important aspect of the debate.

The Same Sex Controversy will be most beneficial to the busy pastor who wants a clear and concise defense of the biblical testimony against homosexuality. It could provide a framework for an edifying series to a congregation that on a daily basis faces the issue in the news and in the neighborhood.