

BIBLICAL ETHICS

Applying the Ten Commandments in the 21st Century

– A series of 365 daily readings on topics in ethics –

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[2021-2025]

Unless otherwise noted, direct Bible quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).
References from the NIV are from the 1984 edition.

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Planned Future Entries

[Note: it is planned that this document will be updated weekly (usually on Friday) with an additional entry as it is included in our congregational bulletin.]

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- Plotting to Commit a Crime
- Just Judicial Procedures
- Innocent Until Proven Guilty
- Human Rights – False Rights
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- Reasons for Marriage
- Christian Marriage and Remarriage
- Marriage – A Sanctified Relationship
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- God’s Ultimate Ownership
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- Potential Problems with Personal Property Accumulation
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- Lawful Oaths and Vows – False Alternatives
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Additional Ethical Guidance

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- Virtues Identified in the New Testament – Introduction

- Virtues Identified in the New Testament – Love
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- Stewardship of the Environment – ‘Green’ Electricity Production
- Stewardship of the Environment – Global Warming
- Stewardship of the Environment – Enduring Seasons
- Stewardship of the Environment – The End is Near
- Stewardship of the Environment – The Mythical Population Bomb
- Judgement of Mankind Against God’s Standard—His Law
- The Conclusion of the Matter

Biblical Ethics – Foundation

1. Introduction

In July 2019 Crossway published Wayne Grudem's *Christian Ethics*. I purchased it with anticipation, having read other works by him. However, while much is of value, it is disappointing in some important areas, which provided the impetus for producing this series on *Biblical* ethics. Grudem dismisses the Mosaic laws and says that they no longer apply to Christians. According to him, the only laws that apply today are the ones found in the pre-Mosaic Biblical literature and in the NT—as will be argued later, this is a form of the Marcionism heresy. Thus, Grudem indicates that there are only nine commandments, not ten, since, as he argues (incorrectly; see, Lk 23.56), the fourth commandment is not repeated in the NT. In addition, he limits the role of the civil magistrate to applying only the latter six of the Ten Commandments, defends an application of the 'wall of separation' between religion and government and argues that religious pluralism ('freedom of religion' as he terms it) should be the basis on which modern nations operate—for example, he argues that treason against the State should be punished as a capital crime, whereas blasphemy against God should not be punished in any way by a government. He also appears almost to idolize the American system of government and even includes a copy of the *Declaration of Independence*—a thoroughly humanistic document. Another example of issues with his book is the fact that the Scripture Index includes references to the Apocrypha, OT Pseudepigrapha and other ancient writings. These are not Scripture and have no authoritative role for establishing ethical principles. This may have been an editorial oversight but could easily be misunderstood. Grudem has had significant influence as a professor, preacher, and writer within the Evangelical Christian community. However, his book *Christian Ethics* will lead a generation away from a knowledge and application of correct Biblical ethics.

This series on Biblical ethics is structured around the Ten Commandments, which to an extent Grudem has done as well, in *Christian Ethics*. However, the theological context for the interpretation of the Ten Commandments in this series is guided by the following principles:

- The entire Bible, not selected portions of it, must provide our foundation for ethics (2 Tim 3.16-17)—thus this series is entitled *Biblical* Ethics.
- There is not an OT ethic and a different NT ethic. There is only one God and his message to mankind and his requirements for humans has been consistent. Thus, there is only one ethical standard—that given in the Bible.
- The Mosaic Law is good (Rom 7.12), when applied properly (1 Tim 1.8).
- The development of a correct system of ethics cannot be separated from absolute truth and therefore from the source of all truth—God himself who has revealed himself through the living Word and the written word.
- It is irrelevant what other (philosophical or religious) systems of ethics say about how people should live as individuals and together in society. The only true system of ethics is found in Christianity and is derived from the Bible. Ethics did not go through developmental stages (e.g., Sumerian, Greek, ancient Chinese, Jewish, and Roman) to reach a pinnacle with the NT or as applied in the modern world (e.g., with the UN's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*). Therefore, this series will not consider ethical principles from other religions (e.g., to demonstrate the existence of a 'natural law'), except occasionally to point out their deficiencies.
- The duty that God requires of man, is obedience to his revealed will (*Shorter Catechism* [SC], Q39), which is revealed as a rule for obedience in the moral law (SC, Q40), which is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments (SC, Q41).
- "The sum of the ten commandments is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves." (SC, Q42). Thus, the Ten Commandments apply to all men, in all nations, at all times.
- The Westminster standards—the *Confession of Faith*, *Larger Catechism*, and *Shorter Catechism*

provide exemplary and excellent guidance for how to interpret and apply the Ten Commandments, and to apply the case laws which are provided in the teaching of Jesus and the writings of Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles.

- The system of ethics derived from the Bible focuses on how people should live under the rule of God's law. The purpose of living ethically is not to increase one's *karma*, to earn merit points with God, to pay off the debt of sin, to earn salvation, or even to live mutually at peace with our neighbours; but to demonstrate love toward God and to glorify him through changed hearts and lives (1 Cor 10.31), and to enjoy living for him and under his rule (SC Q1). The pinnacle of human happiness in this life can only be achieved when men live for God's glory and under God's law.
- Christ is our model for obedience toward God since he kept the law perfectly. However, no mere man can obey the law perfectly or even well. Our ability to obey God, even a little bit and imperfectly, ultimately rests on Christ's work being applied to us through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We have no innate power to obey God in any way. God alone enables us to do anything that is right and proper.
- Many of the detailed rules for obedience fall under more than one of the Ten Commandments. For example, commands against stealing may also have an application under the tenth commandment that prohibits coveting.
- God requires obedience from mankind. This indicates that God views us as creatures who have rationality and volition and can act responsibly.

2. The Foundation for Ethics

Dozens of books have been written by Christians dealing with ethics, over the last two-hundred years. They include in their titles, words such as, 'Christian', 'Old Testament', 'New Testament', 'Ten Commandments', or 'Biblical'. Some of these focus on ethical concepts found in one Testament or the other. Some also suggest that ethical principles should be different today than they were in ancient Israel. This series of studies on ethics, assumes the following:

- A single standard for ethics exists and that standard has been defined by God. If there is not a single standard for ethics, then there cannot be any standard, since every religion's or person's ethical 'principles' will differ from everyone else's and everyone will do what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17.6).
- Principles for ethics are not derived from an impersonal force, or from an abstract creator of the universe who lets things unfold as they may, or from a god of a non-Christian religion, but from the only true God, the God who defines himself in the Bible.
- God is a communicator and has communicated his moral standards. He has communicated them to all men so that they have an innate knowledge of his moral requirements (Rom 1.18-20, 32). However, since they suppress the truth that they have (Rom 1.18) and rationalize breaking God's law, God has communicated his requirements in written form (the Bible) to reinforce the correct means of obedience.
- God's law is perfect (Ps 19.7) because God is holy and perfect. His law cannot be improved upon by human subtractions or additions.
- The ethical principles defined by God have not changed from the time Moses delivered the laws of God to the Israelites until today. Christ's death and resurrection did not change how God expects mankind to live in his presence. However, the specific application of some of the OT case laws dealing with human behaviour may have changed. For example, laws requiring fences around construction sites is an application of the case law requiring parapets on flat roofs (Dt 22.8).
- The Ten Commandments provide a summary of God's moral law. However, we also need to use the case-law examples in order to understand the full breadth of God's law. For example, the seventh commandment states that 'You shall not commit adultery' (Ex 20.14). However, that is not the full extent of God's requirements for maintaining the sanctity of marriage and controlling illicit sexual liaisons. Likewise, the sixth commandment prohibits not just premeditated murder but anything which

will harm our neighbours or ourselves.

- In order to have a complete set of ethical principles it is necessary to consider what the entire Bible says about how we should live before God and with our neighbours. All Scripture was breathed out by God and provides guidance for how we are to live righteously (2 Tim 3.16). Guidance for our ethics is not to be obtained, as some claim, just from the words of Jesus (e.g., the *Sermon the Mount*), the NT, or the NT along with the creation ordinances, but from the entire Bible, including what is written in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.
- God commands all people to repent (Acts 17.30). This presupposes that all men are accountable for obeying God's law, have broken God's laws and are thus sinners, and must repent of their sins.
- God's definition of morality and ethics applies to all mankind, not just to Christians. God is the creator of all mankind and sovereign over all nations. For example, the Sabbath was instituted at creation and all men are to keep it holy (Gen 2.3) regardless of their national or ethnic affiliation. Likewise, marriage is to be between one man and one woman (Gen 2.24), ruling out the practice of polygamy. The primary focus of God's law is not to tell Christians how they ought to order their lives but how every person (believer or not) must order his life.
- What opinion polls, politicians, or university professors say about ethics is irrelevant if it contradicts the Bible. For example, if some erudite professor or arcane study suggests that capital punishment for murder is inhumane or that spanking children is problematic, the study should be ignored because it is contrary to what God says (Gen 9.5-6; Prov 22.15). Likewise, there is no value in considering alternate moral systems except to critique them. For example, what some ancient Greek or Roman jurist stated about sexual relations should not guide our laws or practices if it is contrary to the Bible. Similarly, a study of Confucian, Buddhist, or Islamic moral or ethical guidance is useless because these religious or philosophical systems were developed by depraved men who had departed from a belief in the revealed word of God.
- People cannot keep the law of God in detail or perfectly. But that does not obviate the requirement for them to do so or excuse their failure to do so. Rather, they are to look to Christ who did keep the law perfectly and stands in our place. Our response must be to accept Christ's work in faith, repent of our sins, and strive for obedience through the grace and assistance that is provided by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- It is the responsibility of each individual to obey God (Ezk 18.20). Every person is accountable for his thoughts and actions, and therefore must choose to do what is right (Dt 11.1; Jn 14.15).

So, let us begin our study of Biblical ethics, and through it determine how we should live *Coram Deo*, "in the presence of God".

3. The Law of God is the Only Standard for Morality

What defines right and wrong? God? A god? The strongest person in the room? The person with the most powerful weapons? Popular opinion? Parliament? The supreme court? A religious guru? Each individual?

Consider for example, the moral requirements associated with the three religions, beside Christianity, with the most worldwide adherents:

- *Islam*. The Islamic *Sharia* identifies Muslim moral principles, including:
 - Criticizing or denying any part of the *Qur'an* is punishable by death.
 - Denying that Mohammad is a prophet is punishable by death.
 - A non-Muslim who leads a Muslim from Islam is punishable by death.
 - A Muslim who becomes a non-Muslim is punishable by death.
 - A Muslim may marry up to four wives. A Muslim man may divorce a wife for multiple reasons, including apostasy; and rape an 'infidel'.
 - Muslims may engage in deception with non-Muslims to advance Islam; however, bearing false

- witness to another Muslim is wrong.
 - Theft is punishable by amputation of the right hand.
 - A woman's testimony in court is permitted only in property cases, and it carries half the weight of a man's.
 - Testimony of four witnesses is required to prove a rape of a Muslim.
 - A female heir inherits half of what a male heir inherits.
 - A woman cannot speak alone to a man who is not her husband or relative (i.e., father, brother, or grown son).
 - Meat to be eaten must come from animals that have been sacrificed to Allah (Halal); and pork must not be eaten.
 - Islam identifies other wrongs, including murder, adultery, earning interest, drinking alcohol, disrespect of parents, and fortune telling.
- *Hinduism*. Principles governing moral thought and action in Hinduism are:
 - *Karma*. Past actions affect present circumstances in a person's current reincarnation. One's *karma* determines how he will be reborn, until his accumulation of *karma* is sufficient for him to reach *moksha* which is release from the cycle of death and rebirth.
 - *Dharma*. The duties with which a person is born are based on gender, caste (i.e., priestly, warrior, owners and merchants, manual labourers), role (e.g., parent, manager, student), and age—such as respect for parents, caring for children, and adherence to cultural norms and social manners. When a person fulfills his *dharma*, acting appropriately in every stage in his life, his *karma* will be positively affected.
 - *Niyamas*. Following religious rituals (e.g., giving charitably, chanting, and yoga) will increase one's *karma*.
 - *Yamas*. Behaviour that includes modesty, non-violence, truthfulness, and compassion will increase a person's *karma*.
- *Buddhism*. Buddhism does not include worship of a deity. Rather, it is the practice of behaviours that bring a person to a state of ultimate reality (enlightenment) and peace (*nirvana*). As in Hinduism, specific behaviours increase one's *karma*, through a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. An adherent of Buddhism progresses through accepting these truths: life is suffering, suffering is caused by attachments and desires, escape from suffering is possible, and the way to escape from suffering is by following the path to enlightenment. To reach enlightenment, one must understand and live out principles such as refraining from killing, stealing, lies, harmful words, sexual misconduct, and substances that alter the mind.

Even without a detailed understanding of Biblical ethics, we can identify significant differences in the moral 'standards' among the four major world religions. They do not require the same things, and these systems cannot be integrated into a unified whole. For example, Islam prohibits consumption of pork and alcohol, but Christianity does not. Thus, we are left with the question of which 'standard' should apply. Or, when a person says, "Polygamy is not wrong; it's just that society says it is." there can be no response from an atheist, a moral relativist, or any other religion but Christianity. When man is considered to be the measure of all things, there cannot be any moral standards and society plummets first into moral relativism—"Do your own thing but don't impose your moral standards on me!"—and then into nihilism in which raping, stealing, and genocide are just part of what is.

For the unbeliever, the Bible cannot serve as a basis for morality because he rejects absolute truth and truth as it is defined by God. To many in the Church, the whole Bible cannot serve as the basis for morality because it deals with matters of salvation, and the economic and justice principles given in the Bible were for a Jewish, agrarian society and have no relevance for us living in the sophisticated, technological, urban society of 21st century North America. People don't like what the Bible teaches and claim that it is not compassionate. It has to be one of the greatest examples of hubris and blasphemy imaginable, to claim that our society is more just and compassionate than God!

God's law, as given in the Bible, is not one of many possible standards, it is the only standard; it is not just a standard for faith and personal holiness for Christians; it is the only definitive standard for morality for all of mankind. The Bible's definition of ethics applies today (Mt 5.17-19; Rom 15.4; 2 Tim 3.16-17). God's law applies to all men through all time and in all nations and gives practical guidelines for all areas of human relationships (Gen 9.4-7; Lev 24.22; Neh 13.20-21; Ps 2.1-7, 10-12; Ps 33.8; Jonah 3.1-10; Mt 14.3-5; Mt 24.14 with Mt 28.19-20; Acts 17.24-31).

4. Applying the Bible's Moral System Today

We can make a few assumptions about the beliefs of most of the people who will read this series on Biblical ethics—they believe that: 1) There is one God, the God who reveals himself in the Bible, not through the writings of false religions such as Islam or Jehovah's Witnesses. 2) This God has communicated moral standards to mankind. 3) Multiple moral systems cannot co-exist, otherwise these differing systems for defining morality will conflict with one another and will not provide a standard. Yet, among professing Christians who accept these statements there are significant differences about how the Bible (in particular, the OT) is to be understood and applied in our nation and generation.

One view is that the teachings of the Bible apply only to Christians, or possibly in a society which is primarily Christian. The moral precepts of the Bible tell Christians how they should behave in their relationships with one another and with their unbelieving neighbours. However, the moral precepts of the Bible cannot be imposed on adherents of other religions and on those who claim that they have no religious affiliation. For example, in accord with this view, it would be wrong to require non-Christians to observe the Sabbath and cease commercial activities on the first day of the week when they don't believe in the Bible, or they consider another day of the week to be their 'holy' day. Thus, governments are not to enforce the Ten Commandments because they come from the Bible but are to enforce only laws which are acceptable across a diversity of belief systems and to the majority of mankind, such as it is wrong to steal from another person or to murder him. In future topics we will respond to this view—(see, *God's Law Applies to All Mankind, in All Times* and *The Right Understanding of the Ten Commandments*)—and argue that the Bible's moral principles are universal and apply to everyone, whether Christian or not.

Another view claims that the commands of the OT no longer apply, and only what Jesus taught in the NT can be viewed as normative for Christian behaviour, or more broadly for mankind's behaviour. This view is based on a faulty belief that God has dealt with mankind through distinctly different dispensations and that we are not under the dispensation of law but of grace. Jesus and Paul teach something quite different. Jesus teaches in Matthew 5.17-19 that he did not come to abolish the law. We will explore Jesus' attitude to the OT law in more detail later (see, *Keeping the Least Commandments* (part 1 of 2)). And Paul, speaking of the OT (since most of the NT didn't exist then) says that, "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 complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3.16-17) Others, who do not necessarily agree with the concept that God deals with mankind through a series of dispensations, nevertheless argue that the OT culture was so different from our own that the laws cannot be applied in our society. However, if they make this claim and believe that the words of Jesus are normative for today, they have the same issue, since Jesus spoke into a culture that was little different from that of ancient Israel and considerably different from our own. However, God's law is not culturally bound, but transcultural.

A modification of the preceding view is that the laws delivered as part of the Mosaic covenant (i.e., in Exodus through Deuteronomy) do not apply today, but only the pre-Mosaic laws (from Genesis) and the commands found in the NT. A key problem with this view is that no prohibitions can be found in Genesis or in the NT for a number of behaviours which Christians widely view as sins today—including, bestiality,

brother-sister incest, transvestite cross-dressing, bribery, astrology and fortune telling, moving property boundary markers, using dishonest weights and measures, hiring a paid assassin, and misleading a blind person. Commands against these sins are found only in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. We will explore this consideration later (see, *The Continuing Applicability of OT Law*).

Another view, almost at the opposite pole, held by some (e.g., Seventh Day Adventists and Messianic Jews) is that some of the OT holiness laws (e.g., abstinence from pork) and aspects of the ceremonial system (e.g., observance of the OT festivals such as Passover and the application of circumcision) continue to apply today. Adherents of this view of the law ignore the typical nature of these regulations which pointed to the Messiah. They also ignore the plain teaching of Paul in Galatians where he condemns the adherence to these practices, and they dismiss the importance of the revelation given to Peter (Acts 10.9-16) indicating that food restrictions are no longer to be applied, and the directions sent from the council held at Jerusalem to the churches (Acts 15.29).

The correct approach for applying the Bible's moral system today, is:

- God's moral requirements that are binding on all mankind are summarized in the Ten Commandments and are expanded upon with numerous case-law examples in the Pentateuch (e.g., Leviticus 18.1-30 provides details for how to apply the seventh commandment) and in subsequent portions of the Bible.
- The ceremonial and holiness components of the Mosaic Law have been abrogated and replaced with a new primarily spiritual equivalent form in the post-resurrection economy.
- Some specific Mosaic laws related to the administration of the nation of Israel while they possessed ancient Palestine (e.g., cities of refuge; levirate marriage; and the festivals, such as the Feast of Booths, centred in Jerusalem; and whom priests could marry) have expired and apply today only as far as principles of general equity may be derived from them.

5. Revealed Law

In Genesis 20.1-18 we read of an incident between Abraham and Abimelech in which Abimelech almost committed adultery with Sarah (but God stopped him with a vision) because Abraham lied about his relationship with Sarah—although he said correctly that she was his sister (half-sister) he had deceived Abimelech by not informing him that she was also his wife. To this point in the revelation from God, we don't have an explicit enactment of laws that prohibited adultery or bearing false witness to a neighbour. Yet, Abimelech and Abraham knew that adultery and lying were both wrong. Thus, we are led to wonder how much of God's moral law (as summarized in the Ten Commandments) is known innately to mankind. For example, do men know innately that they are to devote one day in seven to God, not to worship idols, not to commit murder or fornication, and not to steal or lie?

Every person is born with innate knowledge provided (revealed) by the Holy Spirit. For example, when a baby begins to observe the world, he quickly realizes that his parents are other entities like himself. As he begins to learn a language, he realizes that objects have names and that the attributes of objects and abstract concepts can be defined by words. If we did not have innate knowledge from God, we could not:

- *Know that anything existed other than our own minds.* We could only conclude that we are a single instance of raw mind. Everything beyond our minds could be images in an invented dream world, and even our own minds could be someone else's concocted bad dream.
- *Experience anything received by our senses.* Our brains and minds would not know what to do with sensations such as light striking our eyes or a touch on our arm. External stimuli would be nothing more than 'noise'.
- *Learn anything.* We would have to learn everything including basic first principles, but we could not learn anything without knowing basic first principles. It is only because we are born with innate intellectual abilities and knowledge that we can learn new things and reason logically. As an illustration,

consider a computer. If you want to use it to write a letter you need software. But that software requires an operating system, which in turn requires BIOS firmware. Without the BIOS your computer would be useless. Our innate and instinctual knowledge is like a BIOS.

- *Conclude that characteristics we see in individuals can be extrapolated to the population as a whole.* For example, we could not infer that all normal people have five fingers on each hand, because everyone we know does.
- *Communicate with one another.* Your thoughts and my thoughts would be entirely random. For example, if I pointed to something sitting in a bowl on a table and called it ‘apple’, you might conclude that I wanted you to crawl under a bed. Your interpretation of the noise coming from my mouth would be as valid as the meaning I intended to convey.

We also know innately what right and wrong moral behaviour is—at least in general terms—for instance, that murdering another person is wrong, although some people may be confused (deluded) about the application of the innately known prohibition against murder to abortion or self-defence. Paul argues that all men know about the existence of God and of his righteous requirements and that some things are wrong (Rom 1.18-21, 32; Rom 2.14-15; 1 Cor 5.1; 1 Cor 11.14-16). This innate knowledge has been referred to as ‘natural law’ by some. Natural Law theory posits that there is law that exists independently from the laws defined by a culture, religion, or nation (but may be entrenched in their moral and legal systems). It is argued, for example, that a prohibition against stealing that is found in most religions indicates that this law exists beyond the instantiation of particular religious or philosophical systems. It is also claimed that natural law can be deduced from an analysis of human nature and through the application of reason. The belief that we can discern natural law was argued by some of the Church fathers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and by some Enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Hobbes). J. Budziszewski, a professor of political philosophy and ethics, argues for a universal natural law, consistent with the Ten Commandments, in *What We Can’t Not Know*.

However, a difficulty with the existence of innate law (let alone with the concept of ‘natural law’), is that men suppress their knowledge of God’s law and profess falsehood as a substitute for truth (Rom 1.22). Paul identifies three primary areas in which people rebel against their innate knowledge of what is right—false worship (Rom 1.23, 25), homosexual practices (Rom 1.24, 26-27), and all manner of unrighteousness (Rom 1.28-31). Because men ignore and deny the innate knowledge they have about God’s requirements, God has taken the additional step of revealing his requirements through Prophets and Apostles and having this revelation recorded in the Scriptures. God’s breathed out written word teaches, reproves, corrects and trains us in righteousness—so that we can be equipped to serve him (2 Tim 3.16-17). Or, as the *Shorter Catechism* (Q3) states it, “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” Without the revealed knowledge of God’s law, we would be like men lost in a cave without any lights, searching blindly for a way out. For Christians, who have a knowledge of God’s law in the Bible, our responsibility is greater. As John Murray, says, “The greater the degree of revelation, the greater the responsibility and the more severe the judgement of God upon the transgression.” (*Principles of Conduct*, p. 18) If we are without excuse because of innate law (Rom 1.20), then we who have the revealed law are even more without excuse!

6. Universal, Innate Knowledge of God’s Moral Law

God’s law is universally applicable to all mankind, in all places, in all times and generations. As creatures and image-bearers of God, men know innately the essential requirements of the law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, and that they are accountable before God for keeping those commands. Natural Law theory, as developed by many philosophers including Aristotle and, more recently, Aquinas argue that a common set of laws can be deduced by reason from human nature. However, when we are confronted by the insurmountable differences among human legal systems (e.g., English Common Law vs Sharia Islamic

Law or Tribal Custom Law) and the subjective morality prevalent today, we must question if it is possible to argue persuasively that men can, through rational discourse, develop a single comprehensive set of laws. The reality is that they cannot, since men reject revealed truth and suppress their knowledge of God's law (Rom 1.18). However, this does not mean that there is no innate knowledge of God's requirements. Paul tells us that there is (Rom 1.32; Rom 2.14-15). Men know God's righteous requirements, but they choose to ignore them and entrench in their legal systems laws that are contrary to God's law, often to provide a justification for their sinful actions. For example, men know that God alone is to be worshiped, but they introduce all manner of idolatrous practices (Rom 1.20-23); that sexual relations are to be limited to marriage between one man and one woman, but pervert marriage in an attempt to justify homosexual liaisons (Rom 1.24-27); and that breaches of God's law are sin, but practice and revel in sinful actions (Rom 1.28-31).

God's law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, was known to the world's antediluvian inhabitants and to the postdiluvian patriarchs before the delivery of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Consider the following:

- 1st – The patriarchs knew that idolatry was prohibited (Gen 35.2, 4), and from the earliest days that they were to worship God (Gen 4.26).
- 2nd – Cain and Abel and their descendants knew that proper worship consisted of what God prescribed (Gen 4.3-7; Gen 7.2, 8; Gen 8.20-21).
- 3rd – The patriarchs revered the name of God as sacred and, therefore, not to be misused (Gen 4.26; Gen 12.8; Gen 13.4; Gen 21.33).
- 4th – The Sabbath was instituted on the seventh day of creation (Gen 2.3).
- 5th – The patriarchs understood the importance of honouring and being obedient to parents (Gen 9.20-27; Gen 28.7; Gen 49.29 with Gen 50.13).
- 6th – Cain and Lamech were fully aware that murder is a grievous sin (Gen 4.10-16, 23-24), and Noah was informed that it is a capital crime (Gen 9.6).
- 7th – Men knew that marriage is to be between one man and one woman (Gen 2.24). Men knew that adultery was a breach of the marriage covenant and a wrong to be avoided (Gen 12.17-19; Gen 20.3-7; Gen 39.7-8; Job 31.9-12); and that homosexual acts were a breach of God's law (Gen 19.7).
- 8th – Adam and Eve knew that it was wrong to take another's possessions (Gen 2.17; Gen 3.11). Jacob knew the concepts of personal property and of stealing (Gen 30.33); also, Laban accused Jacob of theft (Gen 31.30).
- 9th – Lying was a sin (Gen 3.3-4; Gen 12.18; Gen 18.15; Job 27.4).
- 10th – Adam and Eve knew that they should not have coveted the tree in the garden (Gen 3.6) and Job knew that coveting was wrong (Job 31.24-28).

All of the Ten Commandments were known to the patriarchs and to their neighbours, prior to God's delivering the law on Mt. Sinai; indicating that they have an explicit application beyond the Jewish audience which received them written on stone tablets. Knowledge of the Ten Commandments is innate and has been reinforced through special revelation through numerous examples of their application, given in the Bible.

The Bible clearly teaches that all of mankind is expected to obey God's law and is held accountable for disobedience. For example:

- God punished the antediluvian world for breaking his law (Gen 6.5-7).
- A blasphemer of the true God, whether a native-born Jew or an alien was to be punished with death (Lev 24.13-16).
- Nehemiah, as a Persian civil magistrate, prohibited non-Jews from carrying out commercial activities on the Sabbath (Neh 13.19-22).
- Kings of the earth and the nations they rule, are to be subject to Christ (Ps 2.1-12; Ps 33.8), who will judge them (Ps 67.4; Ps 96.10; Ps 98.9) by his law.

- Jonah told the Ninevites that their ways were evil because they were breaking God's law (Jonah 3.1-10).
- John accused Herod of committing adultery (Mt 14.3-4), showing that God's law applied to an Edomite king and not only to the Jews.
- Preaching the Gospel is to inform all people of their sin—they have broken God's law—and of the solution for sin in Christ (Mt 24.14; Mt 28.19-20).
- God commands all men to repent of breaking his law (Acts 17.30).
- Civil magistrates the world-over are to punish wrongdoers. Since their authority comes from God, their standard for judging must also come from God (Rom 13.1-5; 1 Pt 2.13-14). The definition for wrongdoing is God's law, as given in the Bible, not the teachings of Hammurabi, Buddha, Krishna, or Mohammed.

The Bible does not come even remotely close to teaching that the law of God is not applicable to every man, woman, and child throughout all of history. All men will be judged by the standard of the Ten Commandments. We must proclaim them and live by them.

7. The Ten Commandments – Their Majestic Delivery

God began to reveal a comprehensive set of laws to govern human behaviour when he brought the Israelites out of their state of slavery in Egypt. Moses recorded these laws in the Pentateuch so that they became a permanent part of God's revelation to mankind. However, before he provided detailed laws to govern mankind's relationship with God and relationships among themselves, he gave Moses a set of summary laws which he referred to as the 'ten words' (Ex 34.28)—the Ten Commandments. When Moses repeats the commands (Dt 5.7-21), at the end of the Israelites' desert wanderings, he reflects on them and states, "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me." (Dt 5.22). From Moses' reflection, we can learn that God's law is:

- *Preeminent.* The words are from God not from men, even of the highest rank or importance. No commands can compare to them since they reveal God's character and his demands upon mankind. Thus, Jesus, the Prophets, and the Apostles appeal to them as their final authority.
- *Public.* The commands were for the whole assembly; for great and small; for men, women, and children, and for the mixed multitude of Gentiles who travelled with the Hebrews (Ex 12.38; Dt 31.12; Josh 8.35) with no exceptions. They were to be read every seven years to the entire assembly (Dt 31.9-13). Thus, the law of God is a model for society and applies to all people, everywhere, and at all times. It was preached to the nations (e.g., by Jonah in Nineveh), and against it the nations are held accountable (Dan 4.34-35) and will be judged (Rom 3.19; Ps 98.9).
- *Powerful.* The law was delivered on a mountain with supernatural phenomena to emphasize that it came down from heaven ('from on high'), not up from the earth like the laws of men, and that it is a powerful message from a powerful God which reflects his glory and majesty. The presence of the phenomena also implies punishments for disobedience.
- *Proclaimed.* When God spoke with Elijah, it was not in a powerful voice but with a whisper (1 Ki 19.11-13). God does not need to raise his voice to demonstrate his authority. Yet, God delivered the Ten Commandments with a loud voice. There is no other instance of God raising his voice. Jesus in his human nature raised his, to be heard over the noise of the crowds only at his death (Mt 27.46, 50). God's voice was raised to be heard over the cacophony of men (Dt 27.14) because they do not listen to him.
- *Perfect.* Moses declares that God added nothing more. Yet, how are they complete when there are hundreds of additional detailed laws given in the Pentateuch? Evidence of their completeness is given by:
 - Their number—a perfect 10 that can be remembered on our fingers.
 - They filled both sides of the stone tablets completely (Ex 32.15-16) so that there was no room for men to add more.

- As a unitary whole they cover all areas of life, our duty to God and our duty to our neighbours. They are the perfect, comprehensive standards for all areas of life, including in the family, Church, and State, and in personal and corporate relationships.

The other laws in the Pentateuch—lesser laws (Mt 5.19)—are applications of the Ten Commandments in various areas of life. Each applies one or more of the Ten Commandments and teaches us how to apply them but do not give us additional obligations before God. The laws of all nations are to follow the examples of the application of the Biblical case laws.

- *Personal.* God wrote the Ten Commandments with his own finger on the tablets (Dt 9.10). God does not have physical fingers, so this figure of speech indicates that the words appeared miraculously. This direct act gives personal authentication and approval to these commands (Ex 8.19; 1 Cor 16.21). Only the delivery of the Ten Commandments is attributed directly to God. All other commands were delivered through a human mediator.
- *Pact.* When legal contracts and treaties are made, two copies are signed, one for each party. Thus, the two tablets represent the eternal covenant of peace (Heb 13.20) that God has made with mankind and is mediated by the God-man, Jesus. A complete copy of all ten of the commandments was written on each tablet, covering the front and back of each tablet. Both God's and man's copies were placed inside the ark (1 Ki 8.9, 21; Heb 8.13). God's copy is symbolically in heaven since his glory rested on the covering of the ark (Ex 25.22). Man's copy, God's obligations for mankind, was placed under God's presence. Both copies were under the atonement covering of the ark which symbolically covered the demands of the law. When blood was sprinkled before the ark on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16.14) it represented Jesus' blood that covers the demands of the law.
- *Perpetual.* The Ten Commandments were not only proclaimed verbally but were inscribed in stone. They were 'cast in stone' to indicate that they are not subject to change or emendation like human constitutions and laws and to indicate that they stand forever. The two tablets were destroyed when the Babylonians plundered the temple. But the tablets symbolically represented the law written perpetually in heaven (Mt 5.17-18) and on the hearts of God's people (Jer 31.33).
- *Prophetic.* God gave the tablets to Moses, who carried them to the people. Moses did not deliver the words; he delivered the tablets containing the words of God. This indicates that God delivers his communications through Prophets and Apostles (Eph 2.20; Heb 1.1; 2 Pt 1.21). The Bible is the breath of the Holy Spirit delivered through prophets, who are to teach only God's commands and not rules devised by mortal men (Mt 15.9).

8. The Ten Commandments – The Moral Law of God

The Ten Commandments:

- *Are from God.* The preface to the Ten Commandments (Ex 20.1; Dt 5.6) indicates that the words which follow are from the God who worked miracles to free his people from their bondage to Pharaoh and slavery in Egypt. The Ten Commandments were delivered by the sovereign LORD who is faithful to his covenant promises and who shows love to his people. Thus, they were delivered in the context of mercy and grace (after the deliverance of Israel from Egypt) and not in the context of judgement (the plagues on Egypt). Therefore, the law shows how people delivered from thralldom to sin should live, not how to be obtain deliverance (Eph 2.8-10).
- *Are perfect.* God is perfect (Ps 18.30), holy (Rev 15.4), and good (Mk 10.18). Therefore, everything that comes from him, including the law is perfect (Ps 19.7), holy (Rom 7.12), and good (1 Tim 1.8). The Ten Commandments display the moral character of God.
- *Summarize the moral law of God.* The entire will of God that man must know, is revealed in the Bible, which teaches what we are to believe about God and what duty God requires of us (*Shorter Catechism*, Q3). Mankind's duty to God is to obey his moral law, which "is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments" (*Larger Catechism*, Q93).
- *Express the will of God for mankind.* Thus, the Ten Commandments provide, in summary form, God's

will for mankind. “The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto” (*Larger Catechism*, Q93).

- *Inform us how to love God and our neighbours.* Jesus, quoting from the Mosaic Law, tells us that our duty is first to love God with all our being and then to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mk 12.30-31). Love is not to be expressed abstractly, but to be displayed explicitly. The way that we can display our love for God is by keeping all of the commandments; and for our neighbours, is by keeping the latter six commandments
- *Present negative and positive obligations.* The Ten Commandments tell us what we are not to do. However, since they are a summary of the moral law, they also include positive obligations. For example, the sixth commandment prohibits murder but also requires that we do whatever we can to protect and preserve the life of others.
- *Are applicable to all men.* Although the Ten Commandments were delivered formally to ancient Israel, they are to be applied by everyone, everywhere, through all time. The essence of them was known to the world’s antediluvian inhabitants and to the postdiluvian patriarchs before the delivery of them on Mt. Sinai (see, *Universal, Innate Knowledge of God’s Moral Law*). They present God’s standard which all men know (Rom 1.20, 32), must meet (e.g., John confronting Herod with God’s law; Mk 6.18), and against which God will judge mankind (Rom 3.19).
- *Are all to be obeyed.* Christians are not to be selective about which of the commands they will obey but are to treat all of them as of equal importance (Dt 4.13; Dt 12.28; Mic 6.8; James 1.25). For example, a congregation should be as concerned about acts of false worship in their midst as they are about overt sexual sins and should exercise discipline in either case. Likewise, the civil magistrate is to enforce all of the Ten Commandments (Rom 13.1-5). For example, Nehemiah as a governor in the Persian Empire enforced the fourth commandment (Neh 13.15-22). The *Larger Catechism* (Q108) states that the duties of the second commandment include, “disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one’s place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry”. The civil magistrate in his place and calling has a duty to enforce the first four commandments. God will not excuse rulers or people who enforce “You shall not steal” but ignore blasphemy or idolatry; and permit commercial activities on Sunday—the Lord’s Day.
- *Are a model for society.* Moses informs the Israelites that the laws God had delivered to them through him, are the best laws a society can have and that the nations should emulate them (Dt 4.5-8). Any society or nation that forsakes adherence and enforcement of the Ten Commandments is doomed to failure (Prov 28.4, 12).
- *Are applied by case laws.* Example applications of the Ten Commandments are provided in the Mosaic case laws, by Jesus (in the *Sermon on the Mount*), and by the Apostles (1 Cor 5.1; 1 Cor 9.9, 13-14; 2 Cor 6.14; 2 Cor 13.1; 1 Tim 5.18; James 5.4). Although the Ten Commandments are complete, in that they provide the whole duty of man, they are not exhaustive. The principles, or the “general equity” of the commands never changes, but the detailed application may change in differing cultural and technological settings (for example, downloading and distributing a performance of a copyrighted song is a breach of the eighth commandment, even though the Bible does not give this as an example). An exhaustive enumeration of laws would not make anyone more obedient (Hos 8.12). Rather, what God seeks are people who constantly live with the law written on their hearts (Jer 31.33) and guiding all their thoughts and actions.
- *Were obeyed by Jesus.* Jesus obeyed God’s supreme standard for mankind, the Ten Commandments. By this, he provided us with an example that we should follow. However, since we sin regularly (1 Jn 1.10), we have to look to his perfect obedience and substitutionary atonement in our place as our means of being declared righteous law keepers before the Father (Rom 3.24-26; Rom 4.25; Gal 2.16).

9. The Right Understanding of the Ten Commandments

The *Larger Catechism* (Q99) provides guidelines that should be observed for correctly understanding the Ten Commandments. These guidelines, with additional commentary, state that:

- *The law is perfect.* God is perfect (Ps 18.30), holy (Rev 15.4), and good (Mk 10.18). Therefore, everything that comes from him, including the law, is perfect (Ps 19.7), holy (Rom 7.12), and good (1 Tim 1.8). The Ten Commandments display the moral character of God. In contrast, every other law system is imperfect and inferior to God's law (Dt 4.8).
- *The law is binding.* It is binding on everyone, in every society and nation, through all time (see, *God's Law Applies to All Mankind, in All Times*). It is to be applied in its entirety (James 2.10), precisely and in detail in our whole being—in our thoughts, words, and actions (Mt 5.21-44)—in every domain of life—private, family, congregation, interpersonal, and civic—with the requirement that we be perfect as God is perfect (Mt 5.48).
- *The law is spiritual* (Rom 7.14). It applies to our hearts—thoughts, affections, desires, and will (Mt 5.21-44)—as much to our outward actions (words and works). By observing it we demonstrate that we love the LORD with all our being and our neighbour as ourselves (Lev 19.18; Dt 6.5; Mt 22.37-39). Because God alone knows the heart of man (Ps 44.21; Acts 15.8), the legal systems of men cannot address heart-sins, but only actions. Even so, governments attempt to delve into the hearts and minds of their citizens with their definition of 'hate crimes'; when they distinguish crimes that are exacerbated by criminal intent (*mens rea*), that considers an individual's state of mind at the time a crime was committed; and when they create exceptions for the 'criminally insane'.
- *There is overlap among the commands.* The prohibitions and obligations of one command may be included under another. For example, Sabbath-breaking and theft may go hand-in-hand (Amos 8.5), an act of thievery breaks both the eighth and tenth commandments and may involve a breach of the sixth commandment (Prov 1.19), and an adulterous liaison inevitably breaks both the seventh and tenth commandments. Paul states that sins such as sexual immorality and covetousness are idolatry (Col 3.5) and that an idolatrous affection for money is covetousness and the root cause of all other kinds of evil (1 Tim 6.10).
- *Each command has prohibitions and obligations.* Although the Ten Commandments are stated primarily in the negative ("You shall not ...") each command has corresponding duties associated with it (Dt 6.13; Mt 4.9-10; Mt 5.21-25; Eph 4.28). And, where a duty is commanded the contrary sin is forbidden (Is 58.13).
- *Threats and promises are included.* The second commandment includes a statement of the consequences for disobedience ("visiting the iniquity" to subsequent generations) and obedience ("showing steadfast love"). Likewise, the third commandment indicates that God will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name (Ex 20.7). And, the fifth commandment includes an explicit promise ("that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you"). Where a threat is included with a command, the contrary blessing is implied; likewise, where a blessing is included, the corresponding threat is implied (Ex 20.12 with Prov 30.17). This principle applies to all of God's commands. The person who sins will die (Gen 2.17; Ezk 18.4, 20), but the one who keeps God's commands will live (Dt 4.40; Dt 30.16; Ps 24.4-5; Prov 4.4; Prov 7.2; Jer 18.7-8).
- *The prohibitions are absolute.* What God forbids in his commands is at no time to be done; with no exceptions (Rom 3.8; Rom 6.1, 15; Heb 11.25).
- *The obligations may not be applied at all times.* What God commands is always our duty (Dt 4.8-9); but every specific duty associated with a command does not have to be performed at all times—for example, taking a lawful vow in the name of God is only required in important and formal situations, not in casual settings; or the requirement to defend our lives when attacked rarely needs to be applied.
- *The commands are given in summary form.* Each command includes a multitude of sins and duties (Mt 5.21-22, 27-28), which may appear in various forms. Detailed examples of how to apply each command can be derived from the Mosaic case laws and from the way the Prophets, Jesus (e.g., in the *Sermon on The Mount*) and the Apostles apply the commands.
- *The prohibitions are to be enforced.* What is forbidden or commanded is to be applied by everyone in

their various callings and stations. For example, the requirement to worship God alone (and not idols) is to be applied in private, personal worship; in family worship; and in corporate, public, congregational worship. The civil magistrate is to support the worship of the true God and to suppress outward instances of idolatry. Likewise, as unpopular as this concept is today, even in the Church, the civil magistrate is to enforce the fourth commandment by prohibiting commercial activities on the Lord's Day (Ex 20.10; Neh 13.15-22).

- *The obligations are to be applied.* The obligations of each command are to be applied in appropriate contexts, in our various callings and stations. For example, if we are parents or managers, we are to observe the obligations implied by the fifth commandment (Col 3.21; Col 4.1). Christians are to encourage one another to fulfill their obligations (Col 3.16; 1 Thess 5.11-14; 2 Thess 3.12), and governments are not to put hinderances in the way of their fulfillment—for example, by requiring organizations placing children for adoption to agree to place them with same-sex couples.

10. The Use of the Moral Law

Although no mere man can achieve righteousness or attain everlasting life through the observance of the law of God (Rom 3.20) there are uses of the law that apply to all men and also specific uses that apply to either class of mankind—the regenerate or the unregenerate. Thus, the law of God:

- *Reveals the character of God*, whom men should wish to know intimately (2 Pt 3.18), and informs mankind that God is holy and righteous and hates sin (Lev 11.44-45; Lev 20.7-8).
- *Informs mankind of their duty to God* and shows them how they should walk before him (Ps 37.31; Ps 119.105; Micah 6.8). Without the law, men would have to guess at what God demands of them and would never be certain of the right way to obey him. Only through the law can men learn the way of righteousness (Is 26.9). In the false religions, that are all works-based, men can never know if their moral actions are 'good enough'.
- *Restrains evil* (Rom 13.4). Although people ignore and suppress God's law (Rom 1.18), it still has, by God's general grace, a restraining influence on their consciences and on their actions through its administration by the civil magistrates who threaten punishments for crimes (Rom 13.4). To an extent the existence of law keeps people from hurting one another and damaging the property of others.
- *Displays sin for what it is*—a breach of God's righteous requirements—and the extent of the sinful pollution that infects human nature and all human hearts and lives.
- *Reveals personal sins* by defining what sin is (Rom 3.9, 20, 23; Rom 7.7).
- *Convinces men of their inability* to meet God's demands upon mankind (1 Tim 1.9-10).
- *Humbles men* by showing them their moral inadequacy and by giving them a sense of the sin and misery into which their sins have led them.
- *Points men to Christ*. When the Holy Spirit enables men to see their moral inadequacies, he then directs some of them to understand their deep need of a saviour and of the perfection of Christ's obedience since he kept the entire law without a single sin.
- *Awakens men to flee from the coming wrath* and drives them to seek for Christ (Rom 10.4; Gal 3.24). From the beginning (Gen 2.17), the law not only identified the duties of mankind before God but also the punishments that would ensue from any breach of the law (Ezk 18.4, 20; Rom 6.23; Gal 3.10).
- *Destroys any excuses* men may have for their disobedience (Rom 1.20; Rom 2.15). No man will be able to stand before God on the judgement day and claim that God gave him insufficient information about his demands and the consequences of not meeting them.
- *Provides wisdom for running a nation and society*. Although the Bible is not a textbook on sociology, psychology, economics, political science, or jurisprudence; when it does speak on any these areas of human study it is definitive and we ignore its principles at our peril, as the past two centuries have proved with such disasters as evolution, communism, socialism, Freudian psychology, and humanistic naturalism, which have all attempted to dismiss God and his rules for governing human society.
- *Provides mental relief*. Knowing that we are not required to keep the law perfectly in order to receive

salvation is a great relief. Believers have been delivered from the moral law as a covenant based on works and have the assurance that they are neither justified by law keeping (Gal 2.16) nor condemned by a failure to keep the law (Rom 8.1; Gal 3.13-14).

- *Makes believers thankful to God* for the grace they have received. Knowing how depraved man's nature is—the law shows us how high God's demands are and how great is our failure to keep the law—and the punishments associated with a failure to obey God, believers are thankful that through their union with Christ, his perfect obedience has been credited to their account (Gal 2.20; Gal 4.4-5). Believers know that they are no longer subject to the curse on sin and disobedience but are the recipients of rewards that have been procured by the meritorious work of their Saviour.
- *Informs believers of how to please God.* Out of a spirit of thankfulness, believers desire to conform themselves to the law. They use law keeping to please and love God and to show love for their neighbours.
- *Provides blessings* (Ps 19.11; Ps 94.12; Ps 112.1; Prov 13.13). Obedience to the law changes lives. Being taught from God's law, everyone is enabled to live in peace and harmony in their families and congregations and with their co-workers and neighbours. In addition, obedience to the law improves their health and prosperity (Dt 28.1-14; Dt 29.9; Ps 1.1-4; Jn 13.17) as they shun the destructive ways of the licentious, apply self-discipline in their lives, take responsibility for providing for themselves and those for whom they should have a concern, and plan for future eventualities.
- *Brings freedom* (James 2.12). The law is good when it is used lawfully (1 Tim 1.8). Only those who desire to obey the law of God are truly able to live this life to its full potential. Thus, the law should be our delight (Ps 1.2; Ps 119.77; Rom 7.22) and not be viewed as heavy burden (Mt 11.28-30).
- *Produces fruit.* When Christians strive to obey the law, their outward behaviour and demeanor—full of kindness and hope—is noticeably different from that of the world, which is full of selfishness and despair. Through their lives they witness to the truth of the Bible and to Christ. Unbelievers take notice and ask for an explanation of the difference (1 Pt 3.15) and this leads some to Christ and everlasting salvation.

11. The Law of God and Blessings and Curses

Various reasons could be proposed for why mankind should obey God through keeping his commandments, including:

Valid Reasons

- He is the creator of mankind and as such has the right to dictate how we should live before him (Lev 22.31; Acts 17.24, 29-30).
- When we keep his commands, he is pleased that his sovereign majesty over the created order is acknowledged, and this ascribes glory to him.
- We should obey him out of love (Dt 6.5; Mt 22.37).

Invalid Reasons

- Some people believe that we can be saved and earn everlasting life by keeping the law. However, Paul declares this belief to be false (Rom 3.20). It is only through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus that a person can be saved (Rom 3.21-26).
- Some espouse a Pharisaism that makes the outward observance of God's law or of manmade rules a measure of saintliness and a standard for congregational membership.
- Some people believe that we should obey God in order to have a painless life. This is pure superstition. In fact, as Jesus indicates, Christians who are faithful to him may experience hardship through persecution (2 Tim 3.12).
- Some believe that we should obey so that we will receive blessings from God. This concept is wrong because it treats God as if he owes us something for our obedience to him, treats him like a candy bar

dispensing machine—put in a \$1 coin (a ‘good work’) and receive a blessing—and reeks of superstition like a belief in *karma* that views our actions and thoughts as influencing our everlasting destiny.

While our motivation for obeying God’s commandments should never be so that we will receive blessings, the reality is that when individuals, families, nations, societies, or civilizations obey God’s commandments blessings flow from him. However, when individuals, families and nations disobey God they can expect to see his curses poured out on them. God promises (Dt 11.26-32):

- *Blessings for obedience.* For example, the conclusion of the second commandment states, “but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex 20.6); and the addendum to the fifth commandment states, “that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex 20.12). Elsewhere God indicates that blessings are the result of obedience (Lev 25.18-19; Lev 26.3-12; Dt 28.1-14; Ps 19.11; Ps 94.12; Ps 112.1; Prov 13.13; Mal 3.10).
- *Curses for disobedience.* The second commandment includes a statement about the consequences for disobedience, “visiting the iniquity” to subsequent generations (Ex 20.5), indicating that idolatry will result in multi-generational consequences as God hands over a society to indulge in its folly (Rom 1.26). Likewise, the third commandment indicates that God will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Elsewhere God indicates that curses are the result of disobedience (Lev 26.14-33; Dt 28.15-68; Prov 13.13).

Where a threat is included with any of God’s commands, the contrary blessing is implied; likewise, where a blessing is included, the corresponding threat is implied. In general, the person who sins will die (Gen 2.17; Ezk 18.4, 20), but the one who keeps God’s commands will live (Dt 4.40; Dt 30.16; Ps 24.4-5; Prov 4.4; Prov 7.2; Jer 18.7-8).

Temporal blessings that flow from obedience to God’s commandments include:

- Learning to live in peace and harmony in families and congregations and with co-workers and neighbours. Also, nations which have a strong Christian influence are more likely to be at peace with other nations than those dominated by false religions like Islam or Hinduism.
- Improvements to health and in financial stability as people shun the destructive ways of the licentious and apply self-discipline and take personal responsibility for providing for themselves and for those for whom they should have a concern.
- Enjoyment and satisfaction in whatever work God has called us to perform.
- Receiving spiritual and psychological blessings such as hope, comfort, and peace (Ps 119.43, 49, 52, 56, 58, 65, 165); including hope for the promised blessings of everlasting life (2 Tim 4.8; Heb 10.23)—available to those who walk in, and keep, the law with diligence (Ps 119.1-3, 132).
- A tightening of the bonds of love between man and God, learning to manage time and being prepared for the future, and a liberation from the pressures to conform to demands from the world and its appeal to human covetousness, that are a result and a benefit of observing the Sabbath faithfully (Is 58.13-14).

Temporal curses resulting from disobedience to God’s commandments include:

- Unbelievers who ignore God and his commands are wracked by guilt and despair and what appears to be a meaningless life (1 Cor 15.32; Eph 2.12).
- They often experience the consequences of profligate lives from substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and poor financial management.
- Their thinking becomes futile, as their foolish hearts are darkened (Rom 1.21-22).
- In addition, continued disobedience toward God without repentance results in everlasting condemnation.

12. Law and Grace

Notice that the title of this topic is “law *and* grace”, not “law *or* grace”, or “law *vs* grace”. Throughout the history of the Church, the place of law and grace have been debated and misunderstood by many. Some of the mistaken views about law keeping are:

- *Law keeping is necessary for salvation.* At the time of Jesus, many of the Jews believed that salvation could be obtained only if a person kept the law in scrupulous detail. For example, a rich young man who approached Jesus claimed that he had kept the law, but Jesus directed him to consider the state of his heart instead of looking at outward works (Mt 19.16-22). This view about the place of the law was based on the Jews’ faulty interpretation of statements from the OT Scriptures (Lev 18.5; Dt 8.1; Prov 4.4; Ezk 20.11). During the Middle Ages, many in the Church became obsessed with the idea that strict adherence to the commandments was necessary if a person was going to be saved. If a sin was committed—a command breached—then penance was necessary to atone for that sin. For example, Luther, before he came to understand that justification is by faith alone, would spend hours in confession to his superior and in self-abasement in the hope that he could obtain absolution for his sins. Paul condemns this concept about the place of the law. He states that:
 - “[B]y works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight” (Rom 3.20).
 - “[I]f righteousness were [obtained] through the law [i.e., keeping the law], then Christ died for no purpose” (Gal 2.21).
 - “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2.8-9).
- *Grace assisted by law keeping is necessary for salvation.* This view is sometimes referred to as “grace, plus”. The idea is that God graciously saves sinners but if a person does not perform good works, then God’s grace is of no avail, and he will not be saved. Defenders of this view refer to passages such as where James argues that “faith apart from works is dead” and that “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2.21-26). They misapply James’ teaching and view works as a causal factor for justification rather than as a result of salvation and evidence that a person has been saved. No unconverted person can perform any good works (Gen 6.5; Rom 3.10-18); so, salvation cannot be based on works performed before a person is converted. Paul reinforces this when he says that only new creatures in Christ are able to perform good works (Eph 2.10; Col 1.10; Titus 2.14).
- *Observation of the ceremonial/holiness laws is necessary.* Some early converts to Christ argued that it was necessary for Christians to continue to observe the ceremonial and holiness components of the Mosaic Law—for example, the seventh day Sabbath, circumcision, the dietary restrictions, and the festivals. However, Paul refers to those who hold to this view as foolish ones who have been bewitched (Gal 3.1) and reminds them that they did not receive Christ through adherence to laws but through faith (Gal 3.2-9). Peter (Acts 10.9-16) and the council held at Jerusalem (Acts 15.29) indicate that Christians are not required to observe the Jewish food laws. Seventh Day Adventists and Messianic Jews are mistaken in their ongoing observation of the seventh-day Sabbath and the holiness food laws.
- *Law keeping is not necessary for salvation.* This view is derived from a faulty understanding of Paul’s statement, “you are not under law but under grace” (Rom 6.14). The idea that a person can sin wantonly because he has been saved by grace and cannot lose his salvation has led to the development of antinomian heresies such as Gnosticism. Paul condemns this view when he says, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom 6.1-2).
- *Christians do not need to keep the Mosaic laws.* Another form of the antinomian heresy is that when Paul says that we are no longer under law, but under grace, he means that Christians no longer need to keep any aspect of the Mosaic Law. If we say that we should still keep the Sabbath, the advocate of this antinomian view will cry, “Legalist!”. However, he does not understand Paul. Paul is stating that the law (not just the Mosaic portion of it) has no ability to save. But once a person is saved by grace, the curse of the law no longer has any dominion over him (Rom 6.14) to hold him in bondage to sin and death (Gal 3.23). As John Murray says, “The New Testament believer is not without law to God but under law to Christ.” (*Principles of Conduct*. p. 201).

The Bible teaches that salvation is obtained by grace alone, as a free gift from God (Eph 2.8-9) to those who believe in Jesus as Lord (Acts 16.31)—in his virgin conception (Mt 1.23), perfect law keeping (Mt 5.17; Gal 4.4), sinless life (Heb 4.15; 1 Pt 2.22), sacrificial death on the cross (Rom 5.8) as a substitute for sinners (1 Cor 15.3), and resurrection on the third day (Acts 17.31; Rom 8.34). Christians are not saved by performing good works (Eph 2.9) but are saved to perform good works (Eph 2.10). The good works they are to perform out of thankfulness, to please God and to give him glory (Mt 5.16), are defined by his law. Jesus said that if we love him, we will keep his commands (Jn 14.15) and John stated that anyone who claims to know Jesus is a liar if he does not keep his commands (1 Jn 2.3-6). The commands that we must keep are those which Jesus delivered through the Spirit—including the Ten Commandments and case laws which provide examples of how to apply them—not just the commands he issued during his earthly ministry along with those delivered by his Apostles.

13. The Psalmist's Understanding of God's Law

Psalm 119.1-176 provides a perspective on God's law that should guide our studies in Biblical ethics. The Psalmist refers to the law using a number of other terms (e.g., commandments, precepts, rules, statutes, testimonies, and word). The terms appear to be essentially synonyms and used for stylistic purposes. He does not make a distinction between different kinds of laws (e.g., moral, civil, and ceremonial) as is often done by commentators, but treats the law of God as a unit. Overwhelmingly, he refers to the author of this law as the LORD (23X) and mentions the name 'God' only once (Ps 119.115). This indicates that he views the law as emanating from a personal, gracious, covenant-keeping God, rather than from a more distant or aloof sovereign. He views the LORD's law to be unchanging, excellent, and beneficial for what it can accomplish in the life of those who love it as he does.

We may note some of the themes about the law that run through Psalm 119.1-176:

- God requires that his commandments be kept with diligence (vv. 4), since they are everlasting, fixed forever in the heavens (vv. 89-91, 152, 160).
- It is God's truth (vv. 43, 142, 151), worthy of reverence and obedience because it reflects the perfectly righteous and just mind of God (vv. 48, 75, 96, 129, 137-138, 144) and his steadfast love (vv. 64, 76-77, 82, 124, 149).
- Knowing and keeping the law teaches us to reverence and fear God (vv. 38, 63, 120), because our ways are open before him (vv. 59, 168).
- However, keeping it is not a means of salvation but the result and evidence of being saved by the loving graciousness of God (vv. 41, 81, 123).
- Those who do not keep God's law are insolent and accursed (vv. 21, 118-119, 126, 155).
- With the Psalmist, we should be indignant when wicked people ignore and flout God's law (vv. 53, 113, 128, 136, 139, 158, 163).
- Those who walk in, and keep, the law with diligence will be blessed (vv. 1-3, 132); they receive blessings such as hope, comfort, and peace (vv. 43, 49, 52, 56, 58, 65, 165).
- The Psalmist desires that he will hasten to keep the law and be diligent in continually keeping it because he loves it; he knows that it has been proven to be well tried (vv. 5, 20, 44, 60, 88, 112, 131, 140, 147-148, 167).
- He makes a covenant to keep the law because he has been taught by God (vv. 57, 102, 106, 145).
- Those who keep the law will not be subjected to ultimate shame, scorn, or contempt (vv. 6, 22, 31, 42, 46, 80).
- They can rely on the protective hand of God to save them (vv. 94, 114, 117, 133, 146, 153-154, 156, 159, 166, 169-170, 173), help them persevere against sin (v. 133), and in the end turn away the reproach of those who hate them (vv. 39, 116, 121-122, 134).
- Those who love God's law will keep it even when challenged and persecuted by the wicked (vv. 61, 69-70, 83, 85-87, 95, 109-110, 141, 143, 150, 157, 161), who will ultimately be put to shame for

wronging God's people (vv. 78, 84, 115).

- Keeping the law contributes to our living a pure life (vv. 9, 24, 101).
- Keeping it is the result of a conscious choice (v. 30).
- However, we need to ask the LORD to keep us in the way of obedience (vv. 8, 10, 17, 32).
- We also need to ask God to teach us from his law (vv. 12, 18, 33, 34, 66, 68, 125, 135) in contrast to the false ways of the world (v. 29), because it provides guidance for correcting our ways (vv. 26, 67, 71, 75).
- Memorizing and meditating on the law is a way to guard our hearts from pursuing sin (vv. 11, 15, 16).
- Knowing the law makes us wiser than those who oppose God and his people and able to see the foolishness of their ideas and beliefs (vv. 97-100, 104), because the law acts as our guide through its light (vv. 105, 130).
- It teaches us that we should not consider this world to be our permanent abode (v. 19).
- We should delight in the wonders of God's law, and love it, for it is better than worldly riches (vv. 14, 16, 18, 24, 35-37, 47, 72, 127) and sweeter than anything this world has to offer (vv. 103, 162).
- Meditating on God's law will encourage us when we face enemies and feel depressed or discouraged, and will revitalize our lives (vv. 23, 25, 28, 40, 45, 50, 92, 93, 107, 116, 176).
- When we know the law, we have a greater understanding of God's wondrous works of creation and providence in the world (vv. 27, 73).
- Learning and keeping the law engenders praise from those who love it (vv. 7, 54-55, 62, 74, 108, 111, 164, 171-172, 174-175).
- We should declare the wonders of God's law (v. 13) to other believers (v. 79) and before the rulers of this world (v. 46) and the insolent (v. 51).

Psalm 119.1-176 declares the holiness and value of the whole law of God (including those portions dismissed by many modern commentators as 'Mosaic' and therefore no longer applicable in the NT era) and not just creation ordinances, the teachings of Jesus, or the reiterated commands in the Apostles' writings. It declares, as Paul states later, that the law is holy righteous and good (Rom 7.12, 16; 1 Tim 1.8) and that, as part of Scripture, it 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 complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3.16-17).

14. Jesus Endorsed the Old Testament Law

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5.17 have been interpreted in a number of ways. This makes it difficult to know if we have the correct interpretation. On one hand, there are some who argue that the word 'fulfill' means that Jesus completed all aspects of the OT, and therefore the OT laws (generally to be understood as meaning the Mosaic Law) do not apply to NT believers. This interpretation presents a contradiction, because Jesus said that he did not come to 'abolish' the law, which means that it still applies.

There are others who say that since Jesus says that not a single stroke of the pen ("not an iota, not a dot") will disappear from the law (Mt 5.18), this implies that all the details of the OT laws are binding on Christians and are to be observed in the same form today (e.g., the seventh-day Sabbath rather than the first-day Sabbath and the Jewish dietary restrictions). However, at least some aspects of OT law (e.g., laws relating to offering animal sacrifices) are clearly not to be practiced by Christians today. Thus, we might be inclined to say that they have been *abolished*, but Jesus says they have not been abolished. So, we need to understand how *all* the laws of the OT are to be observed in the NT economy—the laws have not been abolished, but the *form* of their observance may have changed (e.g., animal sacrifices are replaced with fruit of our lips which is a sacrifice of praise; Heb 13.15).

To interpret Jesus' words correctly we need to consider as a unit the fulfillment of both the Law and the

Prophets. In the way that the one is fulfilled the other is also fulfilled. It seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus fulfilled both the Law and the Prophets in, at least, the following ways:

- *The promise became reality.* The promises of the Prophets became actual events in Christ's person and life. Likewise, the Law, was also realized in its totality in him. He is the fulfillment of the entire OT (Lk 24.27).
 - The prophecies of the OT which pointed to the Messiah are realized in an awe-inspiring synthesis in aspects of his birth (e.g., Mt 1.22), life (e.g., Mt 8.17; Mt 12.17; Mt 21.4; Mt 26.56; Jn 15.25; Jn 18.32), death (e.g., Mt 27.9; Jn 19.24, 28, 36), and resurrection (e.g., Jn 20.9).
 - He was made subject to the law (Gal 4.4) and kept the righteous requirements of the law perfectly. The first Adam failed to obey God. The Last Adam (Jesus Christ) kept every command in the law in full precision and detail; whether a moral principle (as embodied in the Ten Commandments), an application of a principle (also called a case law), a ceremonial observance, or a holiness or separation ordinance. He kept the law completely in his birth (e.g., Lk 2.21-24), life (e.g., Mt 3.15; 2 Cor 5.21; Heb 4.15; 1 Pt 2.22), and death (e.g., Gal 3.13, with Dt 21.23).
- *The payment was realized.* The debt of sin had to be paid. The Law and the Prophets anticipate this payment:
 - The symbols and types of the OT (e.g., the tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrificial system) culminate in the death of Jesus on the cross. He was the final altar (Heb 13.10), priest (Heb 4.14), and sacrifice (Heb 10.10) as he purchased our redemption. In these functions, he gives full meaning to the elements of the old economy that were hidden in shadows from Abel's offering of fat to the LORD (Gen 4.4) to the tearing of the veil of the temple from top to bottom (Mt 27.51).
 - The requirements of the law were not only met by Jesus' obedience but also by his death. God's law and its demands cannot be set aside. The requirements of the law must be satisfied. The punishment that Jesus received in our place satisfied the divine requirements for justice.
- *The purpose was revealed.* The meaning of the prophecies and many of the laws (and the proper way to observe them) was often obscure to the people of God living before Christ. All the prophecies and laws in the OT (i.e., the entire OT) point to Christ. Jesus revealed through his life and teaching the full intent and meaning of both the Prophets and the Law:
 - Until Jesus appeared in history it was not clear how the Kingdom of God would be manifested. In him all OT prophecies have their correct interpretation. They announce his uniqueness and details of his birth, death, and resurrection. Their ultimate purpose is to reveal God's plan of redemption.
 - He provides principles for how to apply correctly every law (especially as he shows in the verses that follow Matthew 5.17 in the *Sermon on the Mount*). He illustrates how the moral and case laws are to be generalized into principles of justice which reveal God's character and the nature of his universal reign.

Jesus makes an incredible claim when he says, "I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets." In this statement he places his seal of authority on the whole OT, endorsing it as the word of God. We cannot question the authority of the OT, and its normative position in the life of a Christian (Rom 15.4; 2 Tim 3.16-17), without questioning the authority of the Son of God himself.

In his statement about fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, Jesus also alerts his hearers, and us, to the larger context of his teaching. Everything he teaches (and thus the entire NT) is entirely consistent with the OT and contrary to the teaching of the legalistic Pharisees (Mt 5.21-48). He goes on to apply the OT that he endorses in the remainder of the *Sermon on the Mount*. When we read Matthew 5-7, we need to pay attention as Jesus shows us how properly to understand the OT law and how to live as law keeping Christians in this world.

15. Keeping the Least Commandments (part 1 of 2)

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus endorses the OT and tells us that his life and teaching are consistent with it (Mt 5.17). He then tells us that the OT has a perpetual and universal application and that nothing in the OT is abolished by his having fulfilled it (Mt 5.18). Thirdly, he informs us that we must keep the ‘letter’ of the law (Mt 5.19). The ‘little’ laws of God as well as ‘big’ laws are to be obeyed. What are these ‘little’ or ‘least’ laws that we are to obey?

We must first determine what he means by ‘these commandments’ (Mt 5.19). Although he had taught the crowds prior to delivering the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 4.23), we are not told the specific content of his teaching until this point in Matthew’s Gospel. So, it seems unlikely that Jesus is referring to any specific commandments that he had delivered previously. Since he has just mentioned the OT (“the Law and the Prophets”), it seems reasonable to conclude that he is speaking of commandments that are found throughout the OT. In effect, Jesus teaches that the OT commands remain normative for NT believers.

What are these commands? He does not tell his audience specifically which ones, but there are two indicators of how we are to understand the meaning of ‘these commandments’. First, by referring to the entire OT in the preceding verses, it appears that he is speaking of the commands which are found primarily in the Pentateuch (e.g., Leviticus and Deuteronomy). Second, since he uses the word ‘least,’ he seems to be including more than summary commands or principles—e.g., the summary laws in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.2-17. He is teaching that the commands found in the OT (from the two sections of the Ten Commandments to the various detailed laws, such as those found in Leviticus 18-20) are relevant for teaching us how to live as Christians. Paul says essentially the same thing when he tells us that the OT has value for teaching us how to live a Christian life (2 Tim 3.16).

Later, we will consider guidelines for determining how to apply the detailed OT laws to our specific circumstances today, and not just the principles that they represent. God has changed some of the specific *forms* by which his law is applied and observed as he has dealt with men through increased revelation, but not the essential meaning of his commands. However, we should note, as Jesus teaches in Matthew 5.19, that at least some of the detailed (‘least’) OT laws apply today and not just the summary laws (e.g., the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule) or the principles that they reveal.

Don’t misunderstand the place of the law (detailed examples or summary principles) in the process of salvation or in the life of the Christian. Jesus teaches (for example in the Beatitudes; Mt 5.2-10) that law keeping is not the source of our salvation but the fruit of it. He says that anyone who breaks any of the commands in the law will be “called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5.19). Thus, he is speaking of those who are already in the kingdom. They have been saved by grace and not by law keeping. But once saved, they are expected to keep the details of the law meticulously.

There is an indication in Jesus’ teaching that law keeping is not a vain pursuit. The hint that he provides is in the words, “called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5.19), indicating that the rewards in heaven will be greater for those who strive to keep the details of the law (see also, Mt 16.27; Mt 25.14-30). Therefore, it is not enough for us to repent of our sins and then to drift along as Christians in a state of semi-obedience, attempting to cover over our sins with bouts of passionate confession. Jesus wants us to strive for perfection in this life by obeying the law, in detail. Perfection cannot be obtained now; nevertheless, it is to be our goal. But our motive for striving for perfection is not for the rewards we may receive but rather because we want to please God who has given us our salvation. We should keep all the law for his glory and trust that the Righteous Judge will dispense rewards justly.

God is the God of law and order. He expects those in his kingdom to live by the rule of law. He expects also that each of us will teach others to do the same. We all have this responsibility—not just pastors, elders, or Bible teachers. We are to teach others to keep the details of the law through our example, personal encouragement, and verbal instruction. Jesus does not say that because we are to teach others to keep the

law specifically, this gives us the right to sit in judgement of them if they don't. In fact, he teaches exactly the opposite later in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 7.1-5). We have enough to do keeping the details of the law ourselves without worrying about how well others are doing and correcting them.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5.19 how to apply the principles of the law—by keeping the details found in the OT! *Later in the Sermon on the Mount* he will illustrate the correct way to keep the details as he interprets specific sample laws from the OT (e.g., divorce and oath keeping) and shows how they had been misunderstood and misapplied by the Jews.

His instruction presents a challenge for us. Many professing Christians today claim that since we are under grace and not under law (Rom 6.14), we do not need to keep any of the specific OT laws, for example those given as part of the Mosaic Covenant, such as keeping the Sabbath holy. But it is precisely because we are under grace that we are expected to keep the whole law and are enabled, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, to keep the detailed laws (Rom 6.16-18).

16. Keeping the Least Commandments (part 2 of 2)

Jesus endorses the OT in its entirety (Mt 5.17) and tells us, first, that it has perpetual and universal application and, second, that nothing in it is abolished by his having fulfilled the OT (Mt 5.18). Then, third, he tells us that we must obey the 'letter' of the law—the 'little' laws as well as the 'big' ones (Mt 5.19). Then he makes a fourth pronouncement about the law—our keeping of the law must be more precise than (it must exceed) that of the Pharisees (Mt 5.20).

What a challenge Jesus presents in Matthew 5.20! How is it possible to be more righteous than a Pharisee? Paul tells us that the best Pharisee would be faultless with respect to his external righteousness (Phil 3.5-6). We know that we cannot claim that level of perfection. Yet, Jesus tells us that if our righteousness does not *surpass* (exceed) that of the Pharisees, we certainly will not enter the kingdom of heaven. We must wonder if there can be any hope of salvation for anyone (Mt 19.25).

Imagine what Jesus' hearers, sitting on the hillside, must have thought. They knew, in ways that we never will understand, how hard it was to keep all aspects of the Ten Commandments, the sacrifice and ritual cleansing laws, and the detailed examples of how to apply God's law provided in the Law or the Prophets. They knew also that even the Pharisees struggled with law keeping, although most of the Pharisees, were proud and they probably would never have admitted to facing a struggle (Mt 23.2-7).

We need to enquire into how any mere human could keep the law more precisely than a Pharisee and how our righteousness could exceed theirs. We can understand his teaching by considering what he says in the preceding and following sections of the *Sermon on the Mount*. The preceding verses speak of the source of our righteousness (justification); the following ones speak of the fruit of righteousness (sanctification). Let's consider these two aspects of righteousness:

- **Justification** – The problem with the Pharisees was not with the law that they observed. Jesus does not say that we should do something else instead of keeping the OT law. He says that our righteousness is to be *more* than just law keeping. The problem with the Pharisees was that they depended upon their own efforts at law keeping as the basis for their justification and for being declared right with God. They based their justification on their own perceived ability to keep the law. They were self-righteous and self-justifying (Lk 16.14, 15).

Jesus speaks against self-righteousness in the Beatitudes (Mt 5.3-12). He teaches that law keeping is not the means of salvation but the fruit of it. The only way that our righteousness can exceed that of the

Pharisees is if it is not *our* righteousness. The only way to have true righteousness is when we are emptied of self-righteousness and pride, and hunger and thirst after true righteousness. The only way we can be more righteous than a Pharisee is to have the righteousness of Christ granted to us by God. This righteousness is applied (credited to our account) graciously by the Holy Spirit through the instruments of faith in Jesus and repentance of our sins.

- **Sanctification** – Law keeping does not earn us our salvation. Law keeping is the evidence that we have been saved (1 Jn 2.3). If we don't keep the law, it is a clear indication that we have not been saved from sin and declared righteous (justified). Of course, this does not mean that we must, or can, keep the law perfectly or we aren't saved. *All* Christians continue to sin (1 Jn 2.1), but they have a real desire to please God through obedience and to become more like Jesus.

The measure of true, non-Pharisaical, obedience is the attitude emanating from our hearts—the *reason* why we keep the law (Jn 14.15). In the remainder of the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus teaches that it is not the outward observance that is the measure of true law keeping; it is the inward observance. True Christians desire to keep the law in order to please God even if men cannot see that it is being kept—e.g., not lusting (Mt 5.27-28).

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5.20 that true obedience requires conformity to the entire will of God rather than just the observance of a minimal set of outward standards derived from the 'letter' of the commandments. The sad situation in much of the Church today is that we take a minimalist approach to the law. We ask what is the least that we have to do; and we tend, with the Pharisees, to dismiss the importance of putting to death sin in our hearts (Rom 6.2; Col 3.5; 1 Pt 2.24).

The demands of law keeping and obedience to the commands of God are not less for us today in the Church than they were for the people at the time of Jesus. They are greater! We have the complete revelation of God in the Bible, and we can understand fully not only what duty he requires of us, but why—a Christian is called to keep the whole law before man and before God.

The real measure of a Christian is how he stands before God in his private life—for example, if we are able to say that we keep the law even when men aren't watching us. Holiness is the daily practice of law keeping in all our actions and in our *hearts*.

17. Paul's Understanding of Old Testament Law

Many have interpreted in isolation the words of Paul in Romans (Rom 6.14), "you are not under law but under grace", so that he makes a claim that the OT (Mosaic) law has no normative status for Christians. However, this is a faulty interpretation that has led many into heresies. Thus, we need to take a holistic approach in a consideration of Paul's understanding of OT law. Paul's teaching about the law of God as revealed in the OT is:

- Keeping the law (i.e., the moral law given in summary form in the Ten Commandments, the case-law examples illustrating the principles of the commandments, the ceremonial ordinances, and the holiness and separation laws) outwardly is more than a theoretical possibility (Phil 3.5).
- A zealotry for outward adherence to the law can lead a person into sin—for example Paul persecuted converted Jews (Christians) with a 'good' conscience because he believed that they had apostatized. Likewise, a displaced adherence to the outward demands of the law can lead mankind into a false complacency—"I have done all correctly; God will recognize this and give me a place in heaven" (Rom 3.20; Gal 2.16).
- However, law keeping is inadequate as a means of achieving a righteous standing before God. This standing can only be obtained through faith in Jesus Christ (Phil 3.9).

- Combining faith in Jesus Christ with a pursuit of righteousness through keeping the law, as some disciples of Jesus in the early church thought proper, is a toxic amalgam. A person is saved through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not through observance of the law (Gal 3.1-6).
- The law is holy, and the commandments are holy and righteous and good (Rom 7.12), because they bring sin to light (Rom 3.20; Rom 7.7) and declare that men without Christ are dead in their sins (Rom 7.11; Rom 8.2).
- The law is useful as a means of restraining evil (Rom 13.1-7) and can provide a knowledge of sin (Rom 3.20), but this knowledge is not sufficient to lead a person to Christ. Only preaching of the Gospel of salvation through faith and repentance can lead a person to Christ (Rom 10.14-16); and only the work of the Holy Spirit can unite any person with Christ (Rom 8.1-2).
- God has done, through Christ, what the law could not do. He has liberated us by sending his own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin” so that the righteous requirements of the law could be met and, in turn, fulfilled by those who walk in the Spirit (Rom 8.2-4).
- Christ is the end of the law (Rom 10.4)—of the entire law, not just the ceremonial or typical aspects of it. The law was provided temporarily until the seed of the promise made to Eve and Abraham arrived (Gal 3.19-20, 23-24). Yet, Paul does not state that the law has been abolished (a charge of antinomianism, which he rebuts), but that the place of the law in mankind’s approach to God has been changed since the incarnation of Jesus. A believer in Christ is no longer bound by the requirement to keep the law for justification or for the on-going course of his life in Christ but is propelled by grace (Rom 6.14; Gal 2.18-21). Submitting to the law for salvation or to earn merit with God is a yoke of slavery (Gal 5.1) no different from the pagan belief that a person should do good things to earn merit or *karma*. Yet a believer must not sin by breaking the law (Rom 6.15).
- Believers in Christ have been liberated from the bondage of having to keep the law to be saved and are freed to do the will of God from the heart (Eph 6.6)—not by just knowing the law as an external code but by knowing it in the heart as an inward principle—as displayed through the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22-23), out of love for God (Rom 13.10; Rom 14.15; Gal 5.14).
- The law is not overthrown by faith (Rom 3.3-4, 30-31). Rather, it is more adequately upheld and fulfilled by those who live by faith. What was once impossible is made possible through faith (Gal 3.23). Only where there is spiritual liberation from bondage to outward observance of the law for salvation, can people properly obey God and uphold God’s law.
- The will of God and his law have not changed under the New Covenant. Under Moses, the law was written on tablets of stone (Ex 24.12), but now it is written on human hearts (Jer 31.33; Ezk 11.19-20; Ezk 36.25-27; 2 Cor 3.3, 6). Believers are guided by an inner impulse rather than only by an outer command. Before his conversion, Paul outwardly obeyed the law but afterwards he realized that he had not obeyed from his heart (Rom 7.7-25).
- The law cannot bring salvation, cannot grant man merit and righteousness, and is unable to restrain the indwelling power of sin. What then is its use?
 - Negatively, the law reveals the true nature of sin so that man is without excuse (Rom 1.19-20). Although men were sinful by nature and destined for death, before the law was formally delivered on Mt. Sinai; they were not guilty of law-breaking because there can be no penalty apart from an explicit law (Acts 17.30; Rom 2.14-15). The delivery of the law brought the recognition of sin, an incitement to sin, and accountability for sin (Rom 5.12-21; Rom 7.9).
 - Positively, the law vindicates the indispensability of Christ’s life and death, of faith in Christ, the need to be reborn, and the grace of God who saves sinners (Rom 5.20).
 - Also, positively, the law “is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3.16-17) Thus, the law provides a guide for believers—how to live out their lives as Christians before the holy God (Eph 2.10). A man in Christ is not under law as a means of salvation but under it as a rule of law for his life.

18. The Continuing Applicability of OT Law

We noted previously that Jesus endorsed the OT law and that all of his life and teaching were consistent with it and fulfilled it (Mt 5.17). He then makes a second pronouncement—the OT law has perpetual and universal application since nothing in the OT is abolished by Christ’s having fulfilled it (Mt 5.18).

It is likely that Jesus is referring to the entire OT when he uses the word ‘law’. Jesus is teaching that the entire OT, even to the smallest letter or part of a letter (an iota or a dot), will continue to be valid until everything in history is brought to an end. His work in redemptive history does not end with his resurrection; it ends at the final day—the day of judgement. Everything will be accomplished only at his return in triumph. He teaches that the OT remains valid for all time. Therefore, it applies to us today. This is consistent with what Paul tells Timothy about the usefulness of the OT (2 Tim 3.16-17).

The entire OT is relevant for us today because it:

- Places Christ’s work, and our lives, in a historical context.
- Helps us understand better the meaning of the work of Christ.
- Tells us prophetically of the glory of Christ’s eternal kingdom.
- Provides the basis for God’s moral standard that governs all nations.
- Teaches us how to live wise and holy lives.
- Provides a God-breathed songbook for the Church in all ages.

The law, as a specific portion of God’s word, continues to be valid in the NT era and retains its validity in its entirety and in its parts (Mt 5.18-19). There is no part of the law about which we can say “This is abolished or cancelled.” Jesus says specifically (Mt 5.17) that he did not come to *abolish* the “law”. There is no room in Jesus’ statement for the idea that the OT or the OT law is obsolete, has no application to us, or that we do not have to obey its commands. We are not to be NT Christians; we are *Biblical* (‘whole-Bible’) Christians, and this series on ethics is not entitled ‘Christian Ethics’ or ‘New Testament Ethics’, but ‘Biblical Ethics’.

But the fulfillment of the law by Christ does have the effect of altering the specific *way* we are to keep many of the laws. And in other cases, the specific *form* of how to observe or keep some of the laws has been set aside—the form has been changed, because the righteousness they require is now experienced in a different manner.

This could introduce serious difficulties for us today as we attempt to answer questions such as the following:

- Which OT laws are to be observed today exactly as they were at the time they were communicated by God?
- Which OT laws must we continue to observe but in a new form?
- Have any of the OT laws been discontinued? Which ones? and Why?

Since both Jesus and Paul teach that the entire OT applies to us, the difficulty we face is in determining *how* the OT laws apply. This is not simple to answer. There is much disagreement in the Church on how to apply the OT laws.

We need to determine what is the right place in a spectrum of possibilities—for example, are we to apply only OT laws repeated in the NT by Jesus or the Apostles? Are we required to keep any of the specific OT laws, besides the Ten Commandments, even if they are not repeated in the NT? Are Christians to apply all ten of the Commandments or only nine of them (as Wayne Grudem says in his book *Christian Ethics* by dismissing the fourth commandment)? Are governments today to apply only the last six Commandments?

We will be in danger if we assert a simple extreme such as “all the laws of the OT are set aside” and say that we are required to obey only the laws given in the NT by Jesus or the Apostles. The danger is illustrated by the fact that we would lose many of the specific laws relating to sexual morality given in Leviticus 18.1-30, because these are not repeated in the NT.

We will be in as much danger going to the other extreme: all the laws of the OT still apply in detail except entire classes that are explicitly changed in the NT, such as those that point to Christ’s redemptive work (e.g., the sacrifices). The danger of this extreme can be seen in laws that appear meaningless to apply in their specific form in our context today (e.g., Dt 22.8 which speaks of making a roof parapet). Following this course, we would miss the general principles and carry over features specific to the Israelite context.

We must avoid extremes and affirm that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the OT and the NT. However, too many in the Church today do not recognize the continuity and see only the discontinuity. As a result, they use a ‘smorgasbord’ approach and let either their own opinions or majority opinion be the determining factor about which laws of God apply today. It is important that we try to approach the difficult subject of the applicability of the OT laws with principles derived from the Bible.

No simple ‘rules’ will make this problem disappear. So, we will first develop some principles and guidelines that may help us determine how to apply the OT law in our cultural context and then apply the laws as we consider the relevance of each of the Ten Commandments for the 21st century and beyond.

19. Guidelines for Applying the OT Law

We must avoid extremes when determining how specific OT case laws apply today. We are to affirm that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the OT and the NT. No simple ‘rules’ will make this problem disappear. However, there are some guidelines that may help us determine how to apply specific OT laws today:

- God does not alter his moral law from age to age. God’s law is an eternal and universal standard, reflecting his character and defining righteousness. It applies to all mankind, at all times, in all places (Rom 2.15; Rom 8.4; 1 Cor 7.19; 1 Tim 1.8-11; 1 Jn 3.4). It is against this standard that men will be judged on the last day. Time or geography do not alter his standard.
- Keeping the law expresses love for God (Mt 22.37-40; 1 Jn 5.2-3).
- The Ten Commandments are the universal and everlasting summary of all of God’s laws. All other laws in the Bible are instances, or examples, of how to apply the Ten Commandments in specific circumstances.
- Observance of specific instances of a law is as important as adhering to the intent and general principle of the law (Mt 5.19-20). For example, we cannot say that we do not steal, if we hide some of our income from the tax collector.
- However, God does change specific ways in which his law is to be applied and observed as he deals with men through his unfolding revelation. For example, he places before us the requirement to worship him as he prescribes but has changed the specific forms at various times. Abraham offered sacrifices and had a single covenantal sign (circumcision). The sacrificial system under Moses became more elaborate with the introduction of many elements pointing to Christ. At the time of David, God added new elements such as instrumental music. With the destruction of the temple the form of worship was simplified—the types were replaced by generally non-physical equivalents. Likewise, a change has occurred in the definition of incest. Prior to the Flood and during the patriarchal age, brother-sister marriage was permitted, but with the deliverance of the law by Moses a change occurred, likely because of the increasing danger of genetic defects in progeny produced by consanguineous marriages.
- The fulfillment of the law by Jesus (Mt 5.17) did not abolish any of God’s laws (principles) but did change, in many cases, the specific way we are to observe the laws. For example, the ceremonial law

is *not* abolished. We are still required to worship God. However, some, or most, of the external features of the ceremonial observance have been set aside and replaced with other means of observance. But the principles still apply. For example, male infants no longer need to be circumcised as a sign of being under the covenant, since both male and female babies are baptized—the principle of covenant inclusion has not changed, but the form of indicating inclusion has.

- All the specific laws in the Bible are applications of one or more of the perpetual principles summarized in the Ten Commandments. Although the principles are always binding (Rom 2.15), specific applications may not be. For example, bylaws do not require walls around peaked roofs; but a principle, derived from the sixth commandment and a case law about walls on roofs (Dt 22.8), validates requiring fences around swimming pools.
- The NT writers accept the OT law as normative and often carry forward, either by inference or explicitly, specific laws of the OT in NT contexts (1 Cor 5.1; 1 Cor 9.9, 13-14; 2 Cor 6.14; 2 Cor 13.1; 1 Tim 5.18; James 5.4).
- It is wise for us to operate on the principle that the OT case laws, where the circumstances are the same (e.g., people relating to one another), continue to apply in the same way unless we find a clear reason (either explicit or by logical inference) in the NT showing that this is not the case.
- It is not necessary for the NT to repeat a specific OT law in order for it to apply to us. Where specific laws deal with human interpersonal and business relations, they still apply in detail today, even as to Israel (e.g., laws about sexual relations, weights and measures, employer/employee relationships, kidnapping, theft, etc.).
- The OT forms for observing the redemptive types in God's law—the sacrificial system (Heb 7.11, 12; Heb 9.9, 10; Heb 13.15), the ceremonies (Acts 20.7; Col 2.16-17), and the OT signs of the covenant (Acts 2.38; Gal 5.11)—are not required by NT Christians because of God's completed revelation in Christ. The types have been replaced by NT counterparts by which Christians fulfill the requirements of the law.
- Specific laws of holiness and separation (e.g., food laws; clothing, seed and animal mixtures; intermarriage with non-Jews; levirate marriage; cities of refuge; etc.) are not to be observed today (Acts 10.9-16) as they were by the Jews. These were physical symbols of principles that are to be manifested in the spiritual life of believers (Mt 16.11, 12; 2 Cor 6.14-18).
- The collection of specific laws in the Bible is *not* exhaustive (covering every aspect of life). For example, a civil magistrate may create a law requiring us to stop at a red light as an application of the sixth commandment. Therefore, specific Biblical laws that apply today are not the *only* specific laws we are to follow. However, specific laws created today must be consistent with the principles established in God's law and must follow the examples in the Bible of applying the Ten Commandments to specific situations.

If we apply these guidelines when we consider how the OT laws apply today, we should be able to obtain and maintain a proper balance between the continuity and discontinuity found between the OT and the NT.

20. Neo-Marcionism

Marcion (c. 85-160 AD) was a teacher and preacher in Asia Minor who claimed to believe that Jesus was the Saviour sent by God, and that Paul was God's chief Apostle. Marcion rejected the OT as normative for Christians and claimed that the god described in the OT was a separate, wrathful, lower entity (a demiurge) than the all-forgiving God spoken of by Jesus. He identified a 'Christian' canon, that included only part of Luke's Gospel and ten of Paul's epistles. The orthodox Church responded to Marcion by listing a canon of received books that were recognized as divinely inspired and authoritative, including the OT books that Protestants receive as canonical. Marcion was excommunicated by the congregation in Rome for his heretical teaching.

The Evangelical Church today is possessed of a neo-Marcion spirit. It is not in precisely the same form as the early 2nd century Marcionism, because it generally does not hold to a form of deistic dualism (or ditheism), and most professing Christians believe that the God, Jehovah, revealed in the OT is the same God who is revealed in the NT. However, many modern Bible teachers, and professing believers, reject much of the OT as holding moral authority for the NT Church.

Archibald Alexander (1772–1851), a Presbyterian theologian and professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, in his book, *Christianity and Ethics – A Handbook of Christian Ethics*, states, “In estimating the Ethics of Israel the fact that it was a preparatory stage in the revelation of God’s will must not be overlooked. We are not surprised, therefore, that, judged by the absolute standard of the New Testament, the morality of the Old Testament must be pronounced imperfect. In two respects at least, in intent and extent, it is deficient. (1) It is lacking in depth. There is a tendency to dwell upon the sufficiency of external acts rather than the necessity of inward disposition. (2) It is lacking in Scope. In regard to universality the Hebrew ideal, it must be acknowledged, is deficient. God is usually represented as the God of Israel alone, and not as the God of all men, and the obligations of veracity, honesty, and mercy are confined within the limits of the nation.” (London: Duckworth, 1914; pp. 50-51) From Alexander’s perspective, the OT laws delivered by Moses are inferior to the NT laws. To be blunt, this is heretical! The Psalmist tells us that the law is perfect (Ps 19.7), and Paul tells us that the law is holy, righteous, and good (Rom 7.12-14, 16; Rom 8.4; 1 Tim 1.8).

The *Got Questions Ministries* website, answering the question, “Do Christians need to obey the Old Testament Law?” states, ‘No. However, the Old Testament Law does provide guidelines for living the Christian life. The “moral” laws given to the Israelites describe practical ways to love God and others. It is as if the Israelites were given the rules for soccer and Jesus changed the game to a team marathon. Both sports require similar basics (moral laws), including good health and the ability to run. And both require devotion to the Coach and the team. But the rules (civil laws) are different ...’ So, according to this teaching, the moral law (the *Ten Commandments*, or at least nine of them) still applies, but the rest of the Mosaic laws do not.

Wayne Grudem, in his book *Christian Ethics*, claims that only nine of the ten Commandments are normative for Christians, since the Sabbath commandment is not morally binding on people today (pp. 346-351) and the rest of the Mosaic Law is not binding. He states, “The Mosaic covenant, which began when God gave the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20.2-17), was terminated when Christ died, and Christians now live instead under the provision of the new covenant. However, the Old Testament is still a valuable source of ethical wisdom when it is understood in accordance with the ways in which the New Testament authors continue to use the Old Testament for ethical teaching and in light of the changes brought about by the new covenant.” (p. 210).

Today’s neo-Marcionites teach heresy and are leading the Church into disaster. The Mosaic Law continues to be normative for Christians, because:

- Jesus (Mt 4.7 with Dt 6.16; Mt 5.33 with Num 30.2 and Dt 23.21; Jn 8.12-13, 17-18 with Dt 17.6 and 19.15) and Paul (1 Cor 9.8-9 and 1 Tim 5.18 with Dt 25.4; 1 Tim 5.19 with Dt 17.6 and 19.15) applied the Mosaic laws as normative.
- Paul (referring to the OT) states that *all* Scripture, not just Genesis and the NT, are profitable for reproof, for correction and training in righteousness, so that Christians may be complete and equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3.16-17).
- Jesus endorses the part of God’s law outside of the Ten Commandments to show that the ‘least’ commands (Mt 5.19) as well as the ‘greatest’—the details as well as the summary—apply to all men in all generations.
- Without the Mosaic laws, Christians have no legitimate reason for declaring a number of actions sinful,

because they are not identified as such in the NT; including, bestiality (Ex 22.19; Lev 18.23; Lev 20.15-16; Dt 27.21), brother-sister incest (Lev 18.9; Dt 27.22), transvestite cross-dressing (Dt 22.5), bribery (Ex 23.8), astrology and fortune telling (Lev 19.31; Lev 20.6; Dt 18.10-14), moving property boundary markers (Dt 19.14; Dt 27.17), using dishonest weights and measures (Dt 25.13-16), hiring a paid assassin (Dt 27.25), misleading a blind person (Dt 27.18), and distinguishing between murder and manslaughter (Num 35.20-23).

- Wayne Grudem and others with a similar view about the discontinuance of the Mosaic laws are selective and arbitrary about which parts of God's law they choose to apply as 'guidelines', based on the parts they like or dislike.

21. God's Law Applies to All Mankind, in All Times

God is one, and his law is one. Since the OT God is the same person as the NT God, he does not have an OT law and a different NT law. He does not present his law differently to our innate understanding of his righteous requirements (Rom 1.18-20, 32) than he does in his written word (the Bible). His law is not communicated differently through different religions—e.g., the *Qur'an* does not present God's law in one form and the Bible in a different form. The law of God in written form is communicated in only one place—the Bible. The law of God has been the same since Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden until this moment. Thus, God's law applies to all men, in all times, in all locations.

Do not misunderstand these emphatic declarations about the universality of God's one law. They speak of the essence, purpose, or intent of the law, not necessarily of the forms or applications specific aspects of the law may take through God's progressive providences and revelation of his requirements. For example, God requires sexual purity within a single male-female relationship. This requirement has never changed (Gen 2.24; Ex 20.14; Heb 13.4). However, from the time of Adam until the time of Moses, brothers and sisters could marry—in a monogamous relationship. The introduction of consanguineous restrictions in Leviticus (Lev 18.6-18) does not change the intent of the sexual purity law, but the specific way it is to be applied. We are not told the reason for this change, but God likely introduced these restrictions to limit the increasing impact of decay on the human genome and the increased potential for genetic diseases when closely related individuals marry. Ironically, those who dismiss the relevance of the Levitical laws for Christians, can provide no reason, based on the Bible, for prohibiting brother-sister incest since it is not mentioned in the NT. Likewise, the *form* of worship has changed with the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus (Heb 10.12). Physical sacrifices are no longer required, but spiritual sacrifices (Heb 13.15) continue to be required as they fulfill the intent of the law of sacrifice—focusing our attention on the mediator who offered substitutionary atonement.

When we conduct a sweep through the Bible, we find that God expects all men, everywhere to abide by his law, as revealed in Scripture. We should not need to demonstrate this from different portions of the Bible, since if God says it once, in one place, that should be sufficient evidence that God has given his laws to all mankind, and they are to be obeyed. However, we can consider what God has to say about the supremacy of his laws in various portions of his word:

- *From the time of the patriarchs.* God indicated to Noah that he would demand an accounting for the life of anyone who was murdered, and delegated capital punishment to other men (Gen 9.4-6). This law was introduced when the three sons of Noah, who represented all of post-Flood mankind, were present, which indicates that capital punishment for murder is a universal requirement of God.
- *From Moses.* In Leviticus 24.13-22 Moses gives directions for dealing with a blasphemer and a murderer—both of whom were to be executed. He also addresses the concept of equitable restitution, often summarized with the expression, 'an eye for an eye'. These instances of capital punishment relate to the two portions of the Ten Commandments—our duty to God and our duty to man. These commands were to be applied to the alien (foreigner) as well as to the native-born, with one law for both (Lev 24.16,

22), indicating the universality of the law.

- *From the OT history.* Nehemiah, as an administrator in the Persian Empire, required that the law of the Sabbath be applied to Jews and Gentiles (Neh 13.15-22), indicating that the nations of the earth are to have Sabbath (Lord's Day) observance laws.
- *From the literature.* The Psalmist tells the kings of the earth (Ps 2.1-12) that they are to serve the LORD's anointed (the Messiah, i.e., Christ), and that the nations are to fear (reverence) the LORD. Serving and reverencing Jesus includes obedience to his instructions (Ps 33.8; Ps 49.1-4). Proverbs tells us that "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Prov 14.34). God's law is the perfect standard for all nations, in all times.
- *From the prophets.* Jonah was sent to Nineveh to proclaim that their ways were evil and that they must repent (Jonah 3.1-10). The definition of evil only has relevance if God's law applied to the Assyrians (Jonah 1.2).). In addition, the prophets challenged pagan nations (Jer 47.1-51.64; Ezk 25.1-26.21).
- *From the Gospels.* John told Herod that he was an adulterer (Mt 14.3-4), implying that God's laws applied to an Edomite king. Jesus told the disciples to go to all *nations* (not individual persons) and teach his commands (Mt 28.19-20), which includes the Ten Commandments.
- *From the NT history.* Paul confronted the Athenian town council and told them that they must repent of their sins (Acts 17.29-30). They were to repent of sins that could only be those which are defined by the God whom Paul declared to them (Acts 17.23-29). If they did not repent, they would be subject to judgement from God's appointed judge, Jesus (Jn 5.22, 27; Acts 17.31).
- *From the Epistles.* Paul informs us that civil magistrates (including Nero in Rome) receive their authority from God (Rom 13.1-5) and are to punish evil doers and vindicate God's rule of law (Rom 12.19; Rom 13.4) in accordance with God's definition of right and wrong—i.e., his law. Peter also says that we are to be subject to the authorities because they are God's appointed instruments for administering good (1 Pt 2.13-14), which can only be defined relative to God's standards. It is against the standards of his holy law that God will judge the world (Rom 3.6, 19). Elsewhere, Paul tells us that God's law applies to the wicked (1 Tim 1.9-10) and that every human being will bow before Jesus and confess that he is king over all (Phil 2.9-11; see, Rev 19.16) because his law applies to all mankind, through all time.

22. The Universal Applicability of the Ten Commandments

Christians have historically claimed that the Ten Commandments are God's law, presented in a summary form and applicable to all mankind, and should be enforced by civil magistrates. However, most people today will say things like, "The Ten Commandments may be *your* moral standard, but there are other systems of morality that are equally valid." Or, "Governments cannot impose the Ten Commandments on society today; they are just a Christian view of morality, and not even fully accepted among Christians." Or, "We have to let all moral systems co-exist in our pluralistic society; we cannot impose your views on those who don't accept them." Essentially, what they are saying is that the laws of God do not apply to all men, through all time, in all nations.

Can the single command from God, recorded in Genesis 2.16-17, give us any direction for determining whether Christians have been correct when they have said that God's laws are universally applicable to all mankind?

Genesis 2.16 says that "the Lord God commanded *the man*". At this point in the retrospective account of the creation of mankind, Eve had not been created. The command was given to Adam before Eve was made (Gen 2.22). Yet, Eve knew that the obligation to obey this command applied to her as much as it did to her husband (Gen 3.3); although she incorrectly added a prohibition about touching the tree. This prohibition against eating the fruit would also have extended to any children Adam and Eve might have produced in the garden if they had not sinned. It applied to all the children they produced after they were expelled from the garden—Cain and Abel and all their siblings and descendants were prohibited from eating from the tree

of the knowledge of good and evil; and from the tree of life since Adam and Eve had sinned. All mankind before the Flood was prevented from eating from either tree by the angels who guarded the entry to the garden (Gen 3.24). If the Garden of Eden had not been destroyed during the Flood, this prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would have remained in force to this day and would apply to everyone on earth. Adam stood in a representative position with respect to all mankind. This is the reason that the command not to eat the fruit applied to all his, and Eve's, children.

Any command given to Adam in his federal or representative capacity is universally applicable to all mankind, through all following generations. One might ask, "But, how does the fact that Adam's descendants were not to eat from a particular tree include the demand to obey the Ten Commandments?" There are a number of ways to answer this question, including:

1. God is the Creator and sovereign of the universe who established how his universe should operate. As he gave the natural world boundaries (what we often call 'laws of nature') so he also prescribed moral boundaries for mankind, giving his rational creatures moral responsibility.
2. The essential standard for the operation of the universe does not change through time, because God is unchangeable (Mal 3.6). Any commands he issued at one time will be consistent with those issued at other times.
3. The antediluvian world was required to obey God's law and was judged according to that standard (Gen 6.5), which cannot differ from the Ten Commandments or God is not consistent in his demands upon mankind.
4. All of the Ten Commandments are included in the command not to eat the fruit from the tree, or in the implied aspects of their breach of this command. For example, Adam and Eve broke the commands as they:
 - 1st – Placed their own will above God's will, putting it before God.
 - 2nd – Made the tree into their idol.
 - 3rd – Blasphemed God by agreeing with Satan's falsehood in which he called God a liar (Gen 3.4).
 - 4th – They likely broke the Sabbath command (see, *Interconnected Sins*).
 - 5th – Did not honour their Creator-Father.
 - 6th – Murdered themselves and all of their progeny by introducing physical and everlasting death.
 - 7th – They committed spiritual adultery (Jer 3.6-9; Hos 1.2-3; Rev 2.22).
 - 8th – Stole God's property by eating fruit from the only tree that he had withheld from them.
 - 9th – Lied about what God had told them they could not do (Gen 3.3).
 - 10th – Coveted what they could not have (Gen 3.6).
5. The essence of the Ten Commandments was known to the patriarchs and to their neighbours, prior to God's delivering the law on Mt. Sinai (see, *Universal, Innate Knowledge of God's Moral Law*); indicating that they have an application beyond the Jewish audience which received them written on stone tablets.
6. When a person breaks any of the Ten Commandments, he is guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2.10-11), sins with Adam, and needs to have the atonement provided by Jesus (1 Cor 15.22).
7. There is one eternal law (with some variation in its continuing application), summarized in the Ten Commandments; and one Redeemer for those who repent of sinning against this law.

If the law of God is not applicable to all mankind, then it does not make any difference how we interpret the Bible or view the Ten Commandments—all morality is relative and subjective, and the Ten Commandments cannot be considered normative even for Christians. However, if God's law is universally applicable to all men, there are profound implications, as we will consider next.

23. Implications of the Universal Applicability of God's Law

Pernicious lies promulgated by Satan, that the Church has been duped into accepting, are that law is derived from social contract or based on tradition, or that we must permit a pluralism of laws from different cultures

to co-exist. The Bible teaches that God's law is universally applicable to all mankind, through all time, in all nations. This conclusion has profound implications—some of which are as follows:

1. God's law is communicated explicitly in the Bible. Therefore, we must strive to understand what God says to us when he gives us commands. There can be no excuse for sloppy interpretation or a misguided application of God's law since the principles underlying his law must be applied universally. For example, if it is determined that capital punishment is a requirement from God, and that it is to be applied to all murderers, then we must carry it out. Conversely, if it is determined that capital punishment was not intended to be a universal principle, then we must fight to see it abolished in all those 'barbaric' countries where it is still practiced.
2. Since God's law applies to all men, governments are required to enforce the law of God and, by logical extension, the laws of the nations are to be applications of God's law. There cannot be two absolutes. Since God's commands are absolute, then all of man's commands must be:
 - *Derivative*: It must be possible to demonstrate that any specific human law is a *direct* application of at least one of the Ten Commandments and follows the example of case laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. For example, restitution in tort cases (as a penalty for a breach of the eighth commandment) should apply a three-fold, four-fold, or five-fold repayment model (Ex 22.1); speed limits on highways should be enforced as an application of the sixth commandment and of our duty to use instruments with care (Dt 19.5-6); fences around construction sites can be required as another application of the sixth commandment and of the case law requiring parapets on flat roofs (Dt 22.8).
 - *Consistent*: No human law may be contrary or contradictory to God's law—for example, taking property by expropriation, without just cause and just compensation; inflating currency, which is a form of theft and the creation of an unjust measure (Dt 25.13-15); or permitting Sunday shopping and the 'marriage' of homosexuals.
 - *Subordinate*: No human law can be of greater importance than God's law—for example, requiring Christian universities to accept professed atheists into their faculty or executive ranks if they want to be recognized; or allowing a mother's 'right' to abortion to trump the father's right over a child or a child's right to life.
 - *An application*: The previous point can be restated in the inverse: since governments are to enforce God's law, they are not to create new laws which are not applications of God's law:
 - When men create new laws which do apply God's law, the implication is that God has not given us enough information about how we are to live in his world.
 - Legislatures should not make laws that are not applications of God's law. However, when they do, Christians (and all citizens) are required to obey their laws (Rom 13.5-7; Titus 3.1), unless they are directly contrary to God's law. For example, if the government operates a retirement plan and requires us to pay into it, we are to do so even though the government has overstepped its God-given mandate by operating a retirement plan.
 - We are not required to obey human laws that are directly contrary to God's law (Acts 4.19-20; Acts 5.29)—for example, a nurse is to refuse a command to participate in an abortion.
3. False (i.e., non-Christian) religious systems, including their moral constructs, teachings, and ritual practices, cannot be permitted. By logical extension, those who publicly teach and practice the ritual observances of these systems are to be stopped (but with discretion and gentleness). This is an idea that causes difficulty for most Christians today. They feel that somehow it is okay for the State to make a law against murder, but it is not right for the State to make a law prohibiting the public worship of Allah. They believe that this is a private matter that does not belong in the laws of any modern nation. Ironically, the proponents of Islam know that this dichotomous model cannot work and prohibit the practice of Christianity. Our allowing the practice of Islam in the West does not make us more enlightened, it only shows that we do not take God's law seriously.
4. The God-given role of the civil magistrate is to punish those who do not obey God's laws (Rom 13.1-4). The Bible says nothing about the State usurping the God-given duties of the family and the Church (e.g., in areas such as education, health care, welfare, and economics). If it cannot be demonstrated

clearly from the Bible that the State has been assigned a particular role, then when it takes on that role, or we permit or encourage it to take on that role, we are going against the Bible's teachings and God's law. The limited role of government is to enforce God's law.

5. The first prohibitive command to man (Gen 2.16-17) was given in the context of tremendous blessing (access to all the other produce of the garden), with the assurance of everlasting life if the command was obeyed (symbolized by access to the tree of life). God's law is not oppressive or harsh but a positive expression of his character and given to man as a blessing. Christians must not be embarrassed by God's law, but rather proclaim it as the standard for all nations.

24. Negative-Action Commands

From Genesis 2.16-17 we learn that God is the ultimate source of law; that his law is universally applicable to all mankind (through all time, in all nations); and that his commands, given in the Bible, are to be the basis for all of human law, which must be derived from, and consistent with, the law of God. We also learn from the way he issues this command about the general *form* that our derived laws should have when instituted among men. God has given here, and in other places in Scripture, a model for how laws should be formulated.

This command was given with respect to a specific physical action of man—eating a piece of fruit from a particular tree. It was also given in the negative form—i.e., God commanded Adam *not* to eat the fruit. The command did not deal with Adam's thoughts, attitudes or feelings. He could have given Adam a command such as: "Do not be proud". Instead, he gave a command related to a specific action. God certainly does give commands that deal with our thoughts, attitudes, or feelings—for example, the tenth commandment says "You shall not covet ..."; and Jesus in the *Sermon on the Mount* deals extensively with sins of the heart. God also gives commands in the positive form (i.e., to *do* something), such as the fifth commandment which requires that we honour our parents. Also, some commands combine negative and positive injunctions, such as the fourth commandment, which enjoins us to keep the Sabbath holy and then speaks against performing certain actions on the Sabbath. However, most of the laws that God delivers deal with outward, visible actions and are stated in the negative form. It is worthwhile for us to consider why God formulates this initial requirement for mankind, and most commands, as negative-action commands.

If God had told Adam and Eve not to be proud (i.e., dealing with an attitude), they could have resorted to a ruse when confronted by God with their sin and said, "But God, how do you know that we sinned? We really didn't plan to be proud. The idea crossed our minds, and then we dismissed it." God knew that man would deny responsibility for his actions. Right after man sinned, he was fully polluted as a sinner and his sinful nature became what we see in any young child. Confront a child with a sin (e.g., a lie or having hit another child) and he will immediately deny it. Sometimes it is difficult for parents to get evidence to prove that their child has done wrong. For example, they are sure that he is lying, but cannot prove it. The proof is not necessary for the parent, or for God, but it is necessary to confront the sinner and bring him to confess his action. Since God gives mostly concrete negative-action commands, it is relatively clear and simple to demonstrate when a command has been broken. In Adam and Eve's case, the evidence would have been the missing bites in the fruit, a pit lying on the ground, and fruit juice dribbling down their chins. God could point to this evidence and say: "What do you mean, 'I didn't eat the fruit,' what is this?" Since God requires men—civil magistrates, parents, and church officers—to judge according to his commands, he generally gives his commands in a form which makes it unnecessary for the one making the judgement to know anything about the thoughts, attitudes, or feelings of those who disobey his commands. God alone can know the hearts of men (Gen 6.5; Dan 2.22; Lk 8.17). However, no human court can determine if a man has coveted someone else's possessions or honoured his parents (e.g., by measuring degrees of respect or kindness to them); but it certainly can determine if the person has stolen money or murdered someone.

In addition, since God structures man's obligations primarily as negative-action commands, he provides a model for how human laws should be structured. For example, it is impossible for human laws to legislate and enforce honest behaviour, equality of outcome, or compassion through *positive* commands (e.g., "love your neighbour" or "be fair"). We could never determine if someone was keeping this kind of law since we could never know if his heart was right. Therefore, human laws need to deal with 'do not's' rather than with 'dos'. If a law says, "Do not dilute milk with water." we can identify this as an application of the eighth commandment and of the case law that speaks against using false weights and measures (Lev 19.35-36; Dt 25.13-16). However, it is not possible to use positive commands to enforce behaviour without creating a labyrinth of subjective interpretation such as a law that says, "Women and men shall be paid equal wages for equivalent work."

God's use of negative-action commands also teaches of the danger of making laws which legislate harsher penalties for 'hate crimes' where a person's motives must be inferred—for example, if a person apparently caused harm to another person *because* of his sexual preferences, religious practices, or colour of his skin. Laws, and associated punishments, exist which can be applied when someone harms someone else. Why is beating up or murdering someone because you don't like his sexual preferences, religion, or skin colour worse than carrying out the same actions because you don't like him as a person or because you are psychotic psychopath?

Our legislators and judges need to consider carefully every law which they create to ensure that it is consistent with God's requirements; enforceable; and stated in the form of a negative-action command, so that a breach can be determined easily. Laws enacted by human governments should deal only with direct violations of God's law that are overt and visible such as theft, murder, blasphemy, failing to stop at a red light, or abusively beating a horse.

25. Interconnected Sins

James says that if we fail to keep one command from God's law, we are held accountable for breaking all of it (James 2.10). James does not mean that we literally break every command when we break one. For example, a person who covets another's fancy car does not break the commandment against adultery. Rather, he is pointing out that a breach of any commandment makes man fully guilty and liable to receive the death penalty. However, his warning also implies that the laws of God are interconnected. If he breaks one command, a person may actually break multiple commands.

The Ten Commandments (along with the detailed commands—that is, the case laws—which apply the Ten Commandments to specific situations) are highly interconnected. Often when one command is broken, one or more of the other commands are also broken. An act of committing a specific sin often includes multiple sins. For example, when someone steals, the reason for his theft is usually connected with the sins of idolatry and covetousness.

We often think of the sin that Adam and Eve committed (Gen 3.6) in the garden as a rather simple and straightforward action. However, the actual act of taking the fruit was preceded by sins of unbelief, pride, and ingratitude. Thus, the first sin that they committed was far more complex than it may at first appear. On examination, we find that Adam and Eve broke all ten of the commands Moses would record later (Ex 20.3-17):

1. They defined for themselves other gods, which they viewed with greater esteem than the living God. In this instance, their gods were self-will and pleasure. They declared through their action that their wills were supreme and above the will and prohibition of the only true God.
2. They did not make a carved image to worship. However, the command also includes a prohibition against bowing down to natural objects (e.g., a star, tree, or animal). They made the fruit of the

forbidden tree into an idol which they worshiped by believing that eating from it would give them blessings that they did not already possess.

3. They blasphemed the name of God by accepting Satan's statement that God was a liar (Gen 3.4). When Satan lied to Eve, her passive concurrence without objection, confirmed Satan's position, and she misused the name of the most holy God.
4. They broke the Sabbath by using it as a day to indulge their idolatry rather than as the holy day, which they were to set aside for the worship of God. The first sin did not occur on the sixth day of creation since God set aside the Sabbath day on the seventh day and gave them instructions about its being holy, and they had not yet been expelled from the garden. The sin had to have occurred before Eve conceived Cain (Gen 4.1). At most, they would have had approximately two weeks from the time of creation to Eve's first conception as they fulfilled their mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1.22). Therefore, it is certain that they retained their sinless state for only a few days, at most. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that they committed the first sin during their first full day in the Garden of Eden. The day that was to be exclusively set aside for honouring the glory of God, they turned into a day of rebellion and idolatry.
5. Adam and Eve did not have parents in the natural sense. However, God is considered to be their ultimate parent, as their Creator (Lk 3.38; Acts 17.29). God was also their parent in the broader sense of how the fifth commandment is to be applied—they were not to neglect or do anything against the honour and duty which belonged to the one in authority over them. By disobeying God's prohibition, they dishonoured their parent. And, interestingly, they failed to reap the blessing of the first command with a promise (Eph 6.2)—they lost the deathless life with which they were created and became subject to physical death.
6. Adam and Eve committed suicide, murder, and genocide. Adam, as mankind's representative, was the first murderer, not Cain (Rom 5.12, 17). Billions of people have died because of Adam's sin.
7. The command against adultery (and all sexual sins) may appear to be the only command that they did not break. Ironically, many interpreters claim that the first sin was the discovery of sexual intercourse. However, consistent with Scripture, we can interpret their infatuation with the fruit as spiritual adultery (Jer 3.6-9; Hos 1.2-3; Rev 2.22).
8. They committed theft by taking that which did not belong to them.
9. They indulged in lies by accepting Satan's lies, by deceiving themselves, and by deceiving one another about the benefits that would accrue from an indulgence in the fruit that was pleasing to their eyes and palates.
10. Adam and Eve's only neighbour was God, who enjoyed access to his property (Gen 3.8). They coveted the fruit of their neighbour specifically because they did not possess it, even though he had graciously given them, as guests, free access to every other tree in his garden (Gen 2.16).

Although the Ten Commandments would not be formally delivered to mankind for another 2,500 years, they are a summary expression of God's eternal law that applies to all of mankind through all time. Adam and Eve broke all of the Ten Commandments, individually and as a set, and became liable to the threatened punishment of death (Gen 2.17) for their crime (Rom 5.16, 18). Eating the forbidden fruit was no mere indulgence; it was the greatest disaster ever to befall mankind! Like Adam and Eve, when we break one command, we often break multiple commands and are guilty of breaking the whole law, and liable to everlasting death, if we persist in rebellion against God and his law.

26. Heart and Walk Obedience

What Jesus endorses he also applies. He endorses the OT law (Mt 5.17-20) and tells us that it provides the abiding standard for the life of a Christian. In his teaching in the remainder of the *Sermon on the Mount* he uses examples to apply the OT law to NT Christians.

We must be careful not to misunderstand the *Sermon*; as many do. It is not:

- *A new law* – Jesus does not present in the *Sermon* a challenge to the OT. He shows that the true meaning and intent of the law is that both our actions and our hearts should be tuned to obedience to God.
- *A works-based means to obtain salvation* – The *Sermon* teaches how those who are saved should and will behave, not how to be saved by obeying.
- *An exhaustive NT ethic* – The *Sermon* provides sample applications, not a complete ethic. The entire Bible provides the Christian ethic.
- *An unattainable ideal* – It is true that we cannot obey God perfectly, nevertheless Jesus expects us to strive to obey his commands (Jn 14.15, 21) as given throughout Scripture.
- *A higher standard than the OT* – God’s laws are eternal (Ps 119.160; Mt 5.18), the NT does not provide a different standard than what is revealed in the OT. The *Sermon* provides an explanation of how a Christian’s righteousness is to exceed that of the Pharisees (Mt 5.20), not that of Moses (Num 12.7).
- *A commentary on just the Ten Commandments* – Jesus gives examples of how to apply correctly the Ten Commandments (e.g., murder [Mt 5.21-26] and adultery [Mt 5.27-30]). He also gives examples of how to apply correctly the “least commandments” (Mt 5.19)—the OT laws that are derivatives of the Ten Commandments (e.g., oath keeping [Mt 5.33-37], divorce [Mt 5.31-32], and just punishments for crimes [Mt 5.38-42]).

The remainder of Matthew chapter 5 provides a correct exposition of selected OT laws against the false interpretation of the Pharisees. Matthew chapter 6 gives examples of how a Christian should walk before God—that is, it provides applications of the first four of the Ten Commandments—and Matthew chapter 7 shows how a Christian should walk before his neighbours—that is, applications of the remaining six of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus gives the proper interpretation of six OT laws that were misapplied by the Pharisees to illustrate how they, in particular, and men in every age find ways to twist and rationalize the keeping of God’s law.

In his commentary on OT law, Jesus sets up two important contrasts:

- *The tradition of the elders vs the written word of God* – Each example is introduced by the words, “it was said” (Mt 5.21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). In most cases the Jewish teachers reported the basic form of the laws correctly. The problem was that they misinterpreted the intent and application of the laws. Jesus’ words, after his endorsement of the OT Law (Mt 5.17-19), contrasts the oral tradition of the interpreters of the law with the God-breathed written word. Jesus appealed to the written word as his final authority (Mt 4.4, 7, 10; Mt 12.3, 5; Mt 19.4; Mt 21.16, 42; Mt 22.31). By this contrast he teaches the supreme importance of the written word of God, and that the Bible is the definitive standard for establishing truth.

We are to respect the wisdom of those of the past who have given much thought to the interpretation of the Bible. But we are not to appeal to the Church Fathers for a final interpretation of the Bible. Scripture alone is its own interpreter. When the fathers contradict Scripture, we are to follow the teachings of the Bible. This is a principle that was re-established during the Protestant Reformation. It continues to be a feature distinguishing Protestantism from Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. These traditions accept the interpretation of the fathers even when it contradicts Scripture. Jesus teaches that we must not accept the opinions of the elders over the written word of God.

- *The tradition of the elders vs the word of Jesus* – He follows each statement of the oral tradition of the Pharisees with the words “but I tell you.” Jesus declares that his interpretation contradicts the mistaken interpretation of the Pharisees—not the OT law. His innate authority as the supreme Prophet gives him the right to overthrow the false interpretations of centuries and show how the law of God is to be

correctly applied.

But more importantly, by giving the correct application of the law, he teaches that he is the one who provides its true meaning and intent. This makes him greater than Moses who only delivered the law (Dt 5.22). Jesus declares in the words “but I tell you” that his authority is unique. He is not just a teacher (one of the elders); his word has final authority—the authority of God. He places himself on God’s throne and declares that he is ultimately the one who proclaimed the law to Moses. As the supreme lawgiver he teaches that we are not to obey the law just outwardly for its own sake but also inwardly to please God and to bring him glory.

At this point, we won’t review the specific laws Jesus addresses in the *Sermon*. As we progress through our study of Biblical ethics, we will encounter portions of the *Sermon* and apply them within the context of the Ten Commandments.

27. Experiencing Guilt

In the sinless state, Adam and Eve experienced no shame associated with being naked (Gen 2.25). When sin entered into their lives, the first thing that they identified as being out of order was their nakedness. Although they were physically naked, the statement, “they knew that they were naked” (Gen 3.7), includes spiritual and psychological dimensions—as shown by the fact that they became ashamed of their nakedness and covered it up.

The account of man’s rebellion continues with a brief, pointed, statement of the events which followed, and uses two metonymies—‘eyes’ for minds and ‘nakedness’ for guilt (Gen 3.7). Because of their sin, the purity of their nakedness in the original created order had become a source of shame. Feelings of shame that are now associated with nakedness are not because being naked is in itself sinful—clearly not, since Adam and Eve were originally naked and yet sinless. Rather, nakedness is associated with intimacy and serves as a symbol for it (Lev 18.6)—in particular the intimacy and trust between God and man and between a husband and his wife that has been destroyed by sin. The open display of nakedness in our society (in movies, TV shows, advertising, and on the internet) is an indicator of a society which knows no shame and is in open rebellion against God. While public displays of nakedness should be shameful, our society has turned good and evil upside down and views them as acts of ‘bravery’, expressions of ‘artistic freedom’, and a ‘right’ not to be interfered with by prudish religious zealots.

The knowledge that Adam and Eve gained by sinning was not the blessing that they had anticipated. What they thought would be good, became a curse to them as their minds were filled with guilt and embarrassment (Titus 1.15). Instead of becoming like God, as Satan had promised, they now were experiencing separation from God and from one another and a fear of facing God (Gen 3.10). They had exchanged true wisdom—knowing God and being in awe of him, and knowing each other with total open intimacy—for isolation and dread. Their guilt compelled them to cover their sex organs—not because the sex organs or sexual act are inherently sinful, but because the sex organs symbolized intimacy, life, and obedience to God’s first command to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1.28).

The problem of guilt underlies *most* psychological problems that people experience today—with rare exceptions, psychological problems may be the result of biochemical imbalances in the body. The Genesis account tells us that they *knew* that they were naked, not that they *felt* naked. Guilt is first a problem of knowledge, then a problem of feelings—it is what we know that leads to how we feel and act. Modern psychology tries to deal only with the symptoms of guilt—the feelings. For example, it suggests that ‘healthy’ guilt has a purpose to help us recognize aberrant, sinful behaviour and that we need to take a different course of action; that we need to accept the fact that we did something wrong, but move on since

we cannot change the past; and that we acknowledge that no one is perfect. It does not deal with the root cause, which is sin and the need for repentance and forgiveness. In fact, modern psychology does not permit the word ‘sin’ to be voiced within its unhallowed sanctums.

Popular approaches for dealing with guilt include binge behaviours such as going shopping for more shoes or a new yacht, eating Rocky Road ice cream, pounding a ball on the squash court, or consuming excess amounts of alcohol. All of these approaches are attempts to hide from guilt through distraction and physical solutions to what is a spiritual and psychological problem. Adam and Eve tried the same approach. They couldn’t run out to the nearest Walmart to buy the latest outfits and fashion accessories, so instead they sewed together fig leaves to make loincloths. They were attempting to hide their inner guilt with outer solutions—by covering up guilt in their own way. It is ironic that with their great intellectual capacity (e.g., Adam named the animals) the first engineering feat of mankind was to design a covering behind which they attempted to hide from their creator.

However, the fact that that they knew that something was amiss—i.e., they felt guilty—was a good sign and a first step toward a solution. Moments before, they had been challenging God’s authority and calling him a liar; now they were cringing at the thought of facing him. Their sense of guilt and shame before God, indicates that they had a conscience which still worked to condemn them by their own judgement. Their consciences had not been burned out or buried deep as they are in many today. God has designed man with a conscience that makes us feel guilty. Guilt is his stop sign to arrest our forward plunge into the super-highway of debauched baseness. He wants us to pause, look both ways, see the dangers, and turn around and return to him. Yet most men ignore the stop sign, rush into traffic, and become roadkill.

Human efforts to deal with guilt are always as ineffective as the attempt of our first parents. They could not hide from God or hide their guilt (Gen 3.8-10). What they needed was a permanent solution to their guilt. At this point they did not know about the redeemer who would come and who would provide a true solution—a covering—for guilt, but God would introduce him to them momentarily (Gen 3.15), and then he would provide them with a symbol of the that atonement covering, which would require the shedding of blood (Gen 3.21).

28. Repentance

When Paul was in Athens, presenting the Gospel to the Areopagus (the city council), he concluded his message by stating that, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17.30–31) From Paul’s statement and interaction with the Athenians, we can infer that repentance is:

- *Relative to a standard.* Repentance is not an abstract action or thought such as just having a nagging doubt (e.g., guilt) or a ‘pit in the stomach’ that something is not right. Also, repentance is not remorse that ‘feels sorry’ about the consequences to self or others that could result from a mistake or dysfunctional action. Repentance requires heartfelt grief over a sin against God (Ps 51.3-4) and an understanding that a thought, word, or action has been contrary to the righteous standard against which God will judge the world. The righteous standard is the law of God that is summarized in the Ten Commandments. Repentance is an action that causes a person to confess that he has sinned and to turn away from that sin. Thus, it is incumbent on the Church to make known to the world the righteous requirements of God. The Church has been failing to preach the moral law of God and instead has been declaring a ‘feel good’ message based on positive thinking. We need a return to declaring sin as God has defined it, not using euphemisms. Like Paul and John the Baptist (Mk 6.18), we need to declare emphatically the Ten Commandments—idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, abortion, fornication, adultery, homosexual practices, divorce, theft, etc. are sins against God!

- *A moral imperative.* Paul states that God commands all people everywhere to repent. Thus, every person on earth of every age and ethnic group must repent of the sins that they have committed. Repentance is not a one-time event. When we first realize that we have broken God's law, there is a lifetime of sins for which we must repent. We cannot remember them all, and are even unaware that many of our thoughts, words, and actions were sins. So, at that point, our initial confession is general and comprehensive. However, as Paul (Rom 7.21-24), John (1 Jn 1.8, 10), and James (James 5.16) indicate, believers in Christ are not without sin. A Christian must continually—every day, and even hour by hour—repent of sin. Jesus indicates this through the object lesson he gave by washing the disciples' feet on the night in which he was betrayed (Jn 13.1-11), and tells Peter that he doesn't need his hands and head washed but only his feet because he is clean—a metaphor for washing off the daily grime of sin through regular repentance.
- *Directed.* Repentance is not thoughts or words directed nowhere or to the 'universe'. It is directed to God—the one who has been offended by our sin. Therefore, repentance requires the utterance (silent or voiced) of words to God. This is accomplished through prayer. Without speaking directly to God in prayer, there can be no repentance—which indicates that daily prayer is required, because we sin daily.
- *Life saving.* Paul states that God will judge the world. The implication is that if a person has not repented, he will be judged relative to God's righteous standard and condemned to everlasting death (Gen 2.17; Ezk 18.4, 20). Paul indicates that the evidence that judgement is coming is given by the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. Thus, the implication is that anyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ and his resurrection will be judged and condemned. However, those who believe in Jesus (Jn 3.16-18; Acts 16.31) and repent of their sins will be saved from the pending everlasting condemnation. Once God's righteous demands (the moral law) have been presented to a sinner, he must be immediately presented with the solution to his sin—belief in Jesus Christ.
- *Effective.* If a person repents of his sin, he will not be condemned. John states that. "If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn 1.9) Thus, we are assured that repentance is effective as the only means of cleansing and avoiding condemnation.
- *Difficult.* Luke tells us that after Paul had completed his message to the Athenians that, 'Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."' (Acts 17.32). Most of Paul's hearers had two reactions—either contempt or curiosity—to his message. The reasons that people initially react this way to the Gospel is because men:
 - Love darkness because their works are evil (Jn 3.19). They do not want to hear about sin because they enjoy sinning (Heb 11.25).
 - Deflect blame from themselves onto others (Gen 3.12-13), following the example of our first parents.
 - Cannot admit that they have done anything wrong lest their works should be exposed (Jn 3:20).
 - Suppress the truth that they know about God and his moral absolutes, because they do not want to be accountable to God (Rom 1.18-23).
 - Ultimately have not (yet) been converted by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16.14).

Luke reports that some of Paul's hearers received his message and became Christians through faith in Christ and repentance, including at least one of the members of the Athenian council named Dionysius (Acts 17.34). This codicil encourages us to call men to faith, repentance, and obedience to God's laws.

Biblical Ethics – Have No Other Gods Before Me

29. God Exists

The Bible opens with the assumption that God exists. In Genesis 1.1 God refers to himself as 'God'. Later, but still before the Flood (Gen 2.4), he will introduce to mankind his personal name—LORD. The Bible

never recounts the origin of God, like pagan myths do; or attempts to prove his existence, like sceptics wish he would do. Nor does the Bible begin with a description of who God is, like a theology textbook. Rather, it demonstrates who God is by what he does in creating and governing the universe and dealing with man's rebellion.

Sinful men (and even many who profess to be believers) struggle with a lack of proof for the existence of God in the Bible, or outside of the Bible. They claim that it is incumbent on God to prove to us that he exists. Some people even challenge God and say that if he would but prove his existence to them, they would believe in his existence. Many philosophers and theologians have attempted to prove the existence of God through different forms of 'proof', such as the: cosmological (there must be a first cause), teleological (order, complexity, and design are evident in nature), ontological (God must be the greatest entity conceivable), moral (an objective standard must exist), epistemological (we can know anything only because we are his image bearers), or transcendental (logic, beauty, ethics, etc. make no sense without the existence of God).

These arguments flounder on one common problem. To *prove* the existence of God we would have to stand somewhere outside of God and the universe and declare our standards for logic and proof to be ultimate. This simply cannot be done since we cannot step out of our existence as creatures within God's created realm. In addition, we would have to analyze God with our polluted intellects and powers of reasoning. The very idea of subjecting God to our analysis, in order to establish the truth of his existence, is absurd as well as being blasphemous. God is the final authority for all truth, not man; and God is not going to cede his authority by allowing men to think that they can decide for themselves whether or not he exists.

All men know that God exists (Rom 1.18-23). Man's problem is not a problem with knowing about the existence of God. It is not a problem of knowledge but a problem of will. By nature, men don't want to acknowledge that God exists. We can respond to the professed atheist who demands proof of the existence of God, by reminding him that he must acknowledge that he cannot prove that anything exists—including himself, the universe, systems of order and repeatability, or even thoughts and concepts. He ultimately must assume the existence of all these things on *faith*. He hides his presuppositions behind his denial of God's existence. Even though he claims to reject the existence of God, he actually assumes his existence while claiming he doesn't exist, because otherwise he would have no basis on which to replace capricious materialistic chance (e.g., the apparent random vibration of atomic particles) with meaning, order, repeatability, and logic. So, he actually accepts the existence of God on faith! But in his case, it is blind faith because he denies that there is a rational reason for why he believes in the existence of anything. Only the Christian's worldview accepts, based on a rational faith in God's word, the fact that order and repeatability exist throughout the universe because God has decreed them. The non-Christian's worldview accepts, on *irrational* faith, that they exist, based on his limited assessment of his experiences—in other words, on his own authority. He works on the principle that they exist everywhere in the universe even though he can have no experiential or empirical basis for his conclusion. In philosophy, this is called the *problem of induction*, and it includes a search for a justification for inductive reasoning. The philosopher David Hume noted the problem that "everyday reasoning depends on patterns of repeated experience rather than deductively valid arguments."

Professed atheists suppress the truth about God because they hate him and his authority, *not* because they believe that he does not exist. They even try hard to disprove his existence, which shows that they know that he is real. Men don't try to disprove something that they know does not exist—like a manticore or a centaur. Nor do they hate something that does not exist.

By definition there can only be one God. It makes no sense to speak of 'Gods' (as distinct from '*gods*') since there can be no equal to God (Is 46.5). This, of course, does not exclude the existence of the Trinity. It is not illogical to say that there are three persons in the divine being; it is only incomprehensible. The

existence and nature of God is, without a doubt, a mystery to us because of our finiteness. We simply cannot grasp the full meaning of God. So, men are inclined to envelop God in limitations and define him after their own imaginations. They limit God in many ways. For example, they claim that God cannot know the future if man is volitionally free, that God cannot suspend the ‘laws’ of physics, or that he cannot simultaneously know precisely the present position and momentum of a subatomic particle.

The Bible calls deniers of God’s existence fools (Ps 14.1) because they are irrational—denying the one whose very systems of causation, order, and logic they use in their feeble attempts to dethrone him—and immoral—denying that their maker and sovereign Lord has a right to demand their allegiance and obedience. We must avoid any concept or belief, or interpretation of the Bible, which would place man-defined limits on God, the personal, rational, infinite, and all-powerful Creator.

30. There is Only One True God

When God delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses, he declared himself to be “the LORD your God” (Ex 20.2) and then opened the commandments with the words, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20.3). He is not declaring that he is one among many gods and only more important than other gods; but that he is the *only* God, and that the gods are mere imitations and pretenders who are presented by men to challenge the uniqueness of his position and authority. Thus, our Bible translations distinguish between ‘God’ and a ‘god’ by using a capital ‘G’ when referring to the only true God.

It has been posited by many anthropologists and historians that the concept of monotheism (i.e., the existence of a single god) was a late innovation in the philosophical and religious thinking of men, and that when mankind evolved to the point that they developed religious sensibilities they first had many gods—e.g., associated with natural objects and forces. However, at the beginning God presented himself to mankind as the only God—Adam, Enoch, Noah, and the other antediluvian righteous patriarchs believed in the one true God. However, mankind was unwilling to accept God’s uniqueness and desired to become gods themselves (Gen 3.5) and to create their own gods (Rom 1.23). Thus, other forms of theistic belief and professed atheistic unbelief are not precursors of trinitarian monotheism. Rather, other forms of belief are the result of rebellion and suppression of the innate knowledge about God which all men have.

That there is a God, and only one, can be argued from different perspectives:

- God must exist because of the impossibility of the contrary. If God does not exist, there can be no rationality, truth or error, morality, or meaning to our existence. ‘The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”’ (Ps 14.1).
- The logical impossibility that nothing created something, as proposed by Stephen Hawking, Lawrence Krauss, and others who suggest that a quantum ripple occurred in nothing, points to the Creator God.
- Genesis 1.1 opens with, “In beginning God ...”, indicating that before there was anything else, there was only God.
- God declares that he is the only God (Dt 4.35; Dt 6.4; Dt 32.39; Ps 83.18; 1 Cor 8.4; Eph 4.6; 1 Tim 2.5; James 2.19). Either his statements are true, or they are false. If true, then there is only one God.
- By definition, only one God can exist. It makes no sense to speak of ‘Gods’ (as distinct from ‘gods’) since there can be no equal to God (Is 46.5).
- If there were multiple living gods, then we would be confronted with an endless regress, and need to determine what or who is the greatest god that brought the other gods into existence.

So, if we accept the fact that God must exist, that he does exist, and that there is only one God, we are then confronted with a question of understanding the nature of that God. There are only a few possibilities for addressing this question, such as: God is unknowable, is knowable only through natural revelation (Ps 19.1; Rom 1.19-20), or he has defined himself through a communication to mankind. God has communicated to

mankind (1 Chron 17.20). The only possibilities relating to God's self-revelation are: the whole Bible (i.e., the Christian, Protestant Scriptures), part of the Bible (e.g., the Jewish belief that only the OT is God's communication to mankind), or an alternate communication (e.g., the Islamic, *Qur'an*). We do not have space to consider the detailed evidence that the Bible is the only written revelation from God. Rather, we reflect on the historical and prophetic accuracy of the Bible that demonstrates its truthfulness and points to the work of the Holy Spirit that convinces people of the veracity and uniqueness of the Bible. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation is the word of God, all other claimed communications from God are imitations and false.

Since there is only one God, who reveals himself (his person and attributes) only in the Bible, then the first commandment teaches that we are not to:

- Deny the existence of God (Ps 14.1) or dismiss him as irrelevant (Ps 94.7).
- Profane him with belittling thoughts or words, or with blasphemies.
- Hate, deny, or ignore the moral demands that he places on us (Dt 30.8).
- Put anything forward (before him, in front of him) as an alternative to God.
- Acknowledge the existence of other gods (1 Cor 8.5-6), in addition to the only true God.
- Be self-loving and self-seeking rather than loving God first and foremost (Mt 22.37-38) and glorifying him (1 Cor 10.31).
- Offer worship, praise, obeisance, or obedience, to anything or anyone in the place of God, or along with the only true God.
- Neglect our obligation to worship God correctly, both with a correct form and with a true spirit or attitude (Gen 4.3-7; Jn 4.24).
- Create false definitions of God. God has described himself in the Bible as an infinite and eternal triune being who knows everything, created all things, and is holy, wise, all-powerful, just, good, true, and loving. For example, we are not to limit God by saying things like, "God could not have created stars and galaxies on the fourth day and made them visible to Adam on the sixth day because they are billions of light-years away."
- Question his word by doubting that he will punish sin (Acts 17.31; Heb 9.27) and requires that all men repent of their sins (Acts 17.30) and confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom 10.9; Phil 2.11); nor to display a lack of trust that he will care for us (Rom 8.28) and help us persevere to the end (Rom 8.30).

31. God's Self-Definition

In the preface to the Ten Commandments, God said to Moses, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Ex 20.2). He then followed his introductory statement with the first commandment, which is, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20.3). When he introduces himself as the speaker, he uses the Hebrew word *elohim*, to declare himself to be the LORD (Jehovah) *God*, and then he uses the same word to describe the 'gods' that people are not to bring before him. Thus, the word 'god' in Hebrew and in English (and its equivalent in a number of other languages) can be applied in different ways. For example, it can:

- Be a reference to the one true, almighty God (Gen 1.1; Dt 4.35)—sometimes with the prefixed article 'the' (Gen 24.7). English translations capitalize the word as 'God' to distinguish him from false gods.
- Mean an idol or false god (Judges 11.24; 1 Ki 11.33; 1 Ki 18.24), such as Baal in the ancient Levant, the Greek god Zeus, or the Norse god Oden.
- Be applied to a man who inspires awe or is greatly admired (1 Sam 28.13), as in the expression, "he is a god among hockey players".
- Refer to a man's boastful self designation (Ezk 28.2, 9).
- Refer to human beings created in the image of God (Ps 82.6; Jn 10.34).
- Possibly be applied to angels (Ps 82.1; Ps 97.7).

Since the word ‘god’ has a broad spectrum of meanings, it is necessary that we identify how the speaker defines himself when he uses the word ‘God’ in the introduction to the Ten Commandments and in the body of the commandments. One way to determine his meaning is by considering what he communicated about himself before this point in history—about 1490 BC—when he delivered the Ten Commandments. The word *elohim* (referring to the true God) occurs hundreds of times in Genesis 1.1 through Exodus 19.25. From these occurrences we can learn (among other things) that God defines himself as:

- *Eternal*. He states, “In the beginning God ...” (Gen 1.1). This means that before anything else existed, only he existed. Since time is an aspect of the physical universe and tightly coupled with space and natural forces such as gravity, time came into existence as the universe was created. Thus, God exists outside of time and is the only eternal entity in existence.
- *Self-existent*. Since nothing else existed before (we cannot avoid using time-based terminology when speaking of eternity) God created the universe, this means he is self-existent and self-sufficient. Nothing created him and he exists from, of, and for himself. He communicates this self-existence in his chosen personal name ‘I AM WHO I AM’ (Ex 3.14). God exists because it is a necessary aspect of his being. To ask why God exists or how he came into existence results in an endless regress of causation which shows a marked misunderstanding of the nature of God. As it is of necessity that God be the uncreated-one, so he exists because it is necessary for him to exist. Any other definition of God would not define God.
- *The creator*. The account in Genesis 1.1-31, which God communicated to Adam (since no human being was present to witness creation), indicates that God created all things in the space of six natural days purely by thinking and speaking. By logical extension, because he is the creator of all things, this means that he is all-powerful. He illustrated his power later when he sent the plagues on Egypt and delivered the Israelites from slavery as they crossed through the Red Sea.
- *A spirit*. Since matter (as we know it) cannot be eternal and all material entities were created by him, this means that God must be non-material. We refer to this transcendence by saying that God is spirit (Jn 4.24).
- *Personal*. God presents himself as a personal entity (not an abstract force) who communicates within himself (Gen 1.3, 26; Gen 2.18; Gen 11.6-7) and with his rational creation (Gen 1.28-29; Gen 3.9-19).
- *A plural personality*. God does not explicitly reveal himself to be a trinity until the incarnation of Jesus (Jn 1.1-18; Col 1.15). However, there are hints in the OT Biblical account, even from before the Flood, that God is a plural personality (Gen 1.2, 26; Gen 11.7).
- *A lawgiver*. Prior to issuing the Ten Commandments, and at the beginning, God indicates that he is the author of law—he defines what is holy and what is evil, and what is right and what is wrong (Gen 2.3, 16-17; Gen 4.7).
- *Just*. God reveals himself to be just by punishing wickedness (Gen 2.17; Gen 3.9-19; Gen 6.5-7; Gen 7.11, 17-24; Gen 18.20-21; Gen 19.23-28).
- *Forgiving*. At the same time, he shows that he is merciful and gracious to those who repent of their sins and who look to the work of the Messiah as their means of salvation from sin (Gen 3.15; Gen 15.6).

God revealed himself (his nature and attributes) progressively as he spoke through his prophets and through his works of providence. Thus, if we wish to obtain a fuller definition of God, we should not confine our consideration only to what he revealed in Genesis 1.1 through Exodus 19.25. We can identify some of the additional self-definitional truths about God from subsequent revelation as recorded in the Bible. For example, he is holy (Lev 11.44-45), without sin (Hab 1.13; Mt 5.48; 2 Cor 5.21; Heb 6.18; James 1.13; 1 Pt 2.22; 1 Jn 1.5), patient (Ex 34.6; 1 Pt 3.20), omniscient or all-knowing (Ps 139.1-3; Ps 147.5; Heb 4.13; 1 Jn 3.20), unchangeable (Mal 3.6); and a trinity (Jn 1.1-2; 2 Cor 13.14; 1 Jn 5.7-8). Any definition of God that is different from God’s self-definition, as given in the Bible, is a false god. Anyone who worships such a false god breaks the first commandment and is without God and without hope (Eph 2.12).

32. Protecting God's Uniqueness

The first commandment states, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20.3). This commandment, along with the preface to the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-2) and a portion of the second commandment, “You shall not bow down to them [idols] or serve them ...” (Ex 20.4-5), implies that God:

- *Defines what ‘God’ and ‘gods’ means.* If God does not provide a definition of the terms ‘God’ and ‘gods’, then it is impossible to know what he means. However, as we noted previously, God defines himself through his written word and through his works of creation and providence. Thus, any definition of ‘God’ or ‘gods’ which is not in conformity with God’s self-definition given in the Bible—i.e., it subtracts from or adds to God’s definition—is a false definition. Anyone who worships a false god, of his own definition, breaks the first commandment.
- *Is unique.* Based on God’s self-definition, there can be only one God. Since God is self-existent and uncreated, and he created everything else that exists, there cannot be multiple Gods.
- *Is God alone.* While some people might claim to believe in God, as he is defined in the Bible, they also believe that other gods could exist; for example, Mormonism claims that humans can be gods. This syncretistic belief could also hold that God as he is defined in the Bible is God, but the god defined by Islam is also valid—this idea was put forward by Pope Francis in 2018 when he caused shock throughout Christendom by attending a service in a mosque and by hosting an Islamic ‘prayer’ and a *Qur’an* recital in the Vatican. Others (even some professing Christians) believe that God is a good god, but Satan co-exists as an evil god. Also, all unbelievers, and many Christians, implicitly declare themselves to be gods when they attempt to be autonomous from God by declaring themselves responsible for their destinies and for defining their own morality (and by flouting God’s laws). The first commandment forbids ascribing deity to idols or to any other creature, including to ourselves.
- *Controls all things.* Many people, including some professing Christians, believe in luck or that events that happen in the distant cosmos can have a controlling influence on their lives. The first commandment forbids ascribing God’s providential control over everything that comes to pass to chance, non-personal forces, or one’s own actions (e.g., *karma* or earning brownie-points with God).
- *Must not be denied.* The first commandment forbids the denial of God’s existence, person, and works of providence. Anyone who claims to be an atheist is an intellectual and moral fool (Ps 14.1; Rom 1.22) who suppresses the innate knowledge he has about God (Rom 1.18). Likewise, anyone who claims that God does not know all things, has not foreordained (predestined) all that comes to pass, is not all powerful, or is not involved intimately in working out his plans in the material universe, denies the true God. Thus, religions that have a deistic definition for God, or professing Christians who question God’s foreknowledge and declare man’s autonomy, are guilty of denying the true God.
- *Requires worship.* Since idols are not to be worshiped, then the only option is that the true God is to be worshiped. Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy (Dt 6.13), declares to Satan, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” (Mt 4.10). Thus, he states that God must be worshiped and not demons and reinforces both the first and second commandments. It is as grievous a sin not to worship God as it is to worship a false God.
- *Is worthy of worship.* John sees angels and the twenty-four elders casting their crowns before the throne of God and worshipping him. They declare that he is worthy to receive glory and honour and power because he is the creator (Rev 4.11). They also declare that the Lamb is worthy of worship (Rev 5.12)—thus indicating that Jesus, the Lamb of God (Jn 1.29, 36), is God (Col 1.15) and worthy of worship as God because he has provided salvation through his sacrificial death on the cross. However, a mere creature, even an angel, is not to be worshiped (Rev 19.10; Rev 22.8-9). That God would create creatures to honour, praise, and worship him (Ps 29.2; Ps 96.8; Mt 4.10), and that he desires that his creatures worship him, strikes a God-hater as blatant pride. However, to suggest that God is proud is blasphemous, and logically false. Men believe that it is proper to praise certain kinds of people, such as heroes who rescue children from burning buildings or the wounded on the battlefield, successful businessmen whose policies are ‘environmentally friendly’, great athletes, philanthropists, or masters

of diplomacy and statecraft. We have a tendency to nominate for sainthood those who are ‘good’ and ‘just’ in our own eyes. Yet, God is the only totally morally good person, the only truly just person, and the only source of anything that is truly good. As the ultimate good, God is worthy of all praise. Since there can be nothing that is more good than God, he must expect that the goodness in himself be praised—otherwise no goodness can be praised—and that we are to praise him for his goodness.

- *Must have priority.* The first commandment forbids giving worship and glory to any other being or entity. Yet we allow things to take priority over God (i.e., we place our gods before him). Our gods are manifold, and include property, popularity, power, praise, and persons. As the *Shorter Catechism* (Q1) says, “Man’s chief end [primary purpose] is to glorify God (1 Cor 6.20; 1 Cor 10.31), and to enjoy him forever (Ps 16.5-11; Ps 144.15; Is 12.2; Phil 4.4).” Therefore, we need to strive to maintain God’s unique position by properly worshiping him (Jn 4.23-24) and no other.

33. False Gods – Idolatry

Most people think of idols as small carved images that might fit on a fireplace mantel or be placed on a hallway accent table. However, the word ‘idol’ clearly has a broader meaning in colloquial English, as evidenced by a popular TV show called *American Idol*, and by expressions such as, “I idolize him!”. Thus, dictionaries define idolatry to include the worship of icons or images as well as offering excessive admiration or reverence for something or someone. The second part of the dictionary definition was illustrated by a broadcast of a hockey game late in Wayne Gretzky’s career, possibly during his last game in Edmonton. The televised image showed him skating out of a corner, and behind him someone in the crowd could be seen holding a poster that read, “Gretzky is God”. The Bible also includes both definitions, physical objects (2 Chron 33.7; Is 40.19; Acts 7.41) and excessive admiration for something or someone (1 Sam 15.23; Col 3.5) within its definition of idolatry.

The first commandment’s prohibition against having other gods before the only true God, and the second commandment’s explicit prohibition against the worship of any created object, encompasses all forms of idolatry, including:

- *Bowing to objects as acts of reverence.* Nebuchadnezzar raised a large image on the plain of Dura and demanded that all the people in the province of Babylon fall down in worship before it (Dan 3.6). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the image and were cast into a fiery furnace. However, Jesus, in a pre-incarnate appearance, walked with them in the furnace and protected them from the fire. Their example teaches that it is a sin to reverence any manmade object and that we must be willing to face death rather than worship an idol. In the West, we encounter equivalent pressures to conform to this form of idolatry—thankfully not yet to the point of death. For example, in 2019, two students were suspended from a school in Manitoba, for ‘hate speech’, when they provided reasons why they would not conform to the suggestion that students should wear rainbow poppies on Remembrance Day. The ‘rainbow flag’ is the modern equivalent of Nebuchadnezzar’s image. If people refuse to bow to the homosexuals’ demands they will be ostracised.
- *Venerating images of saints.* A class of bowing to an image that is practiced in some churches is the veneration of images of individuals who have been declared to be saints by church officials. There should be no distinction made between individuals who are in Christ (Gal 3.28), they are all saints (Rom 1.7; 1 Cor 1.2) and are all alike since they have been saved by grace, and any gifts which they have are endowments from the Holy Spirit. We should not hang pictures in our church sanctuaries which, it is claimed, represent Mary, Paul, Peter, or Augustine, or display images of Calvin or Spurgeon. As Paul indicates (1 Cor 3.4-9) they are only servants of God, who is building his Church, and not persons to be venerated.
- *Praying to saints.* Some professing Christians go beyond the veneration of the saints and offer prayers to them. For example, they use the *Hail Mary* or *The Angelus*, or they pray to other historical figures such as Joseph or Therese. Those who advocate prayers to the saints claim that they are not venerating

the saints but only asking for their prayers, which they claim is the same thing as asking for a brother or sister in the Church to pray from them. However, prayers to, or through, dead believers assume that they can hear words that are uttered by those on the earth, that they have mediatorial power with God, and that they can offer the equivalent of angelic protection or comfort to those living on the earth. Our prayers should only be directed to God, through Jesus, who is the only mediator between God and mankind (1 Tim 2.5).

- *Worship of angels.* John was informed by the angels who brought him visions that he was not to worship them, because they are creatures and servants of God like him (Rev 19.10; Rev 22.8-9). Obviously, if we are not to worship the holy angels, then we are not to worship the fallen angels, including Satan (Mt 4.8-9) and the other demons (Rev 9.20).
- *Attributing divinity to created entities.* Throughout the OT, Moses and the Prophets declare the foolishness of creating or identifying objects which are given a standing as representative of God or in the place of God. Paul also speaks against this folly (1 Cor 8.4-6) and indicates that it is demonic (1 Cor 10.19-20). Today, this foolishness is advanced through the belief that objects in our solar system or galaxy (e.g., the alignment of planets or being born in the month assigned to a constellation) can influence our destiny. Likewise, this foolishness is advanced through the pantheism of Eastern mysticism portrayed in the ‘force’ of Star Wars, the belief in *karma*, and the idea that the spatial-temporal universe dictates a fatalistic purpose for our lives.
- *Idolizing living people.* The idols in popular culture include actors, entertainers, athletes, and high-tech entrepreneurs. Screaming fans line the stanchion belts beside the red carpets to see them pass by and vow never to wash again if they were ‘blessed’ by the touch of the superstars. Sadly, the same form of idolatry, if not as hyped, exists within the Church, when adoring fans flock to hear the latest purveyors of CCM or even to be able to make the claim that have heard speaker so-and-so at a conference.
- *“Making men lords of our faith and conscience”.* The quoted statement is from the *Larger Catechism* (Q105). Thus, the authors of the *Catechism* would have viewed as examples of idolatry any capitulation to statist government demands about how and by whom children should be educated or the abdication of personal responsibility for providing childcare and for our own and family’s health and welfare to the ‘almighty’ State.

34. False Gods – Atheistic Unbelief

Atheism is the rejection of a belief in the existence of God—not in gods, but in God, since all men have their own gods (at minimum, deification of self) if they do not accept the sovereignty of the one and only true God. To reject a belief in the existence of God is a sin that if not corrected through repentance and belief in Jesus as the God-man will lead to everlasting condemnation. However, there is really no such thing as a true atheist. All men know that God exists (Rom 1.19-23). Man’s problem is not a problem with the existence of God. It is not a problem of knowledge but a problem of will. By nature, men don’t want to acknowledge that God exists, and they suppress the knowledge of his existence (Rom 1.18), because when they acknowledge his existence they know that they will be morally accountable to him (Rom 1.28-32) and can no longer think that they can get away with doing what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21.25).

Professed atheists cannot prove the non-existence of God (any more than Christians can *prove* the existence of God). They cannot even prove their own existence, yet they demand that Christians provide unequivocal proof of God’s existence. Ironically, they attempt to offer proofs against the existence of the God that they claim not to believe in, such as using the presence of evil in the world (*theodicy*), man’s supposed free will (distinct from man’s responsibility to obey God volitionally), the ‘impossibility’ of miracles, or the ‘impossibility’ of a person (God) having omniscience in a ‘random’ universe. However, none of their ‘proofs’ demonstrate the non-existence of God and have all been addressed (many times!) with reasonable and rational counter arguments by Christian theologians and philosophers.

Some people claim to hold to an unbelief in God because they do not like how his providences have unfolded in their lives—for example, they lost a beloved child or spouse, endured a serious illness, or suffered financial difficulties. However, expressing hatred toward God for the consequences (the curse) of the sin that were brought into the world by our human representative, Adam, does not give anyone a warrant to question God's providences in his life (Ezk 18.25, 29; Rom 9.20) or to claim a disbelief in the God who works all things according to his purposes and for the good of his people. Ironically, their hatred is directed at a God that they claim not to believe in.

Beside being sinful, atheism is foolishness (Ps 14.1). It is foolish because it is irrational—it denies the one whose very systems of causation, order and logic the professed atheists use in their feeble attempt to dethrone God. For example, if an atheist attempts to use a deductive argument, write coherent prose, conduct an experiment, balance his chequebook, declare that an action is immoral (e.g., using too much fossil fuel), he uses systems and methods of logic, communication, replicability in nature, mathematics, and morality that presuppose the existence of standards and laws, and therefore of God. An atheist assumes the existence of God while denying it. As a Christian philosopher and theologian once said, a professed atheist slaps God in the face while sitting on his lap. Another reason that atheism is foolish is because it is immoral—enduring unbelief has everlastingly disastrous consequences.

Another problem with professed atheism is that it ultimately leads to despair. When men do not acknowledge the existence of God and of his providential involvement in the government of the universe and the moral demands that he places upon mankind, the logical result is that the professed atheist cannot appeal to anything beyond himself to give purpose and meaning to his life. A consistent professing atheist will be like Friedrich Nietzsche who suffered from a mental illness which can be attributed to his doubts and cynicism. Paul says that before the Ephesians were converted, they had no hope because they were without God (Eph 2.12). Of course, not all professing atheists suffer mental breakdowns or commit suicide, because God through the administration of his general grace, permits them to live inconsistently, while professing one thing (that there is no God) they live as if the opposite were true.

Adherents of non-Christian religions, even if they claim to be theists (i.e., claim that there is a god or gods), are essentially professing atheists because they deny that the God who communicates about his own nature through the Bible is the true God and exists. For example, Jews, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses deny that God exists in three persons and that Jesus is God. By this denial they are caught in a web of misbelief and distrust of the Bible, accept falsehoods as facts, and become incorrigible, stopping their ears against the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel (Acts 7.57).

Professing Christians often live as practical atheists. They live as if they are not accountable to God—breaking his holy law with impunity; for example, giving no thought to the unacceptability (Heb 12.28) of their offerings of 'false fire' (Lev 10.1-2) as worship, frequenting commercial establishments on the Lord's Day, fornicating as if they were rutting animals, using unlawful means to advance their own welfare (e.g., remitting cash for services to avoid paying taxes), becoming drunk, depending on worldly things in the place of God (e.g., health insurance plans or investments), and proudly displaying possessions. They also often have doubts about God's goodness toward them and about his ability to care for them; which is a sin (Mt 6.25-34; 1 Pt 5.7). And, they exhibit vain credulity, accepting the teachings of men as gospel truth—for example, about the supposed old age of the earth and universe or views about how Christ will one day return to this earth and set up a temporal kingdom in Jerusalem.

35. False Gods – Secular Humanism

When people are offered an option of identifying their religious affiliation in surveys or censuses, a percentage (e.g., over 20% in the US, and about 23% in Canada) will indicate that they have no 'religious

affiliation' (this includes professed atheists and agnostics). The percentage choosing this option increased during the latter half of the 20th century and during the first two decades of the 21st century. We can reasonably conclude from these data that those people who claim to have no religious affiliation do not believe in God as he defines himself in the Bible, accept the Bible as the word of God, or believe that Jesus is the God-man.

However, contrary to their selected option in a survey instrument, we cannot conclude that they really have 'no religious affiliation'. As Paul indicates, all mankind knows that God exists, and that each person has enough innate information to know that God places moral demands on mankind and that each person is guilty before God as a lawbreaker (Rom 1.18-32). The suppression and rejection of the truth that people know innately is an immoral, anti-God choice—an act of the will—and as such is a religious declaration. By making this choice, they declare that their religion is something other than Christianity.

Our immediate thought may be that those who select 'no religious affiliation' are irreligious. However, while dictionary definitions of 'religion' speak of a religion as including the worship of a superhuman or higher power, they also define 'religion' as a system of faith or the pursuit of something to which a person ascribes with supreme importance. Mankind was created by God to be a religious being, and to reach out for him (Acts 17.27). If men don't know the truth as revealed in the Scriptures of the old and new testaments, then they will seek to fill their religious void with a substitute invented by humans. In this instance their substitute religion is secular humanism, which is a philosophy of life that includes attempts to define reality without the presence of God.

Secular humanism is a religion that is based on the following premises:

- *Rejection of the supernatural.* As Richard Lewontin, an evolutionary biologist, mathematician, and geneticist said, "Materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine foot in the door." The fundamental belief of secular humanism is that there is no God, and therefore no miracles (God interacting with his creation in ways by which he does not normally govern it) and no divine providence controlling humanity and the unfolding of events in the universe. Ironically, secular humanists display contradictory beliefs when they allow their 'brethren' in Hollywood to produce drivel that includes concepts such as the pantheistic 'Force', *karma*, or fate, or that distant objects in outer space (such as the alignment of the stars) may have a controlling influence on our destinies.
- *Philosophical naturalism.* Another key tenet is that everything in the temporal-spatial realm is the sum-total of all that exists, and that it all arose purely by chance (e.g., beginning with a quantum ripple in *nothing* or in an eternal space-time container) and that human beings are the result of purely natural cosmological, biochemical, and biological evolutionary processes that unfolded in the eons-long 'goo-to-you' sequence that is guided by chance events acting on matter. The proponents cannot see, or they dismiss as irrelevant, the contradictory existence of non-physical entities such as logic, mind, information, and love, which are realities that cannot possibly have come into existence purely through natural processes.
- *Subjective morality.* Men believe that they are capable of defining morality without any reference to the absolute standard of God's commandments. However, they quickly discover that a pluralism of moral practices cannot co-exist peacefully—for example, some people, based on their religious beliefs, may declare homosexual 'marriage' and abortion to be evils, but the adherents of secular humanism position them as key 'rights' within their 'moral' platform. Likewise, secular humanists require obedience to the State over freedom of religious conscience—such as requiring a Christian adoption agency to place children with lesbian couples—unless, of course the laws or policies of the State require actions which contradict their cherished beliefs, such as demanding a nation drop support for a UN initiative to control climate change through reduction of CO₂ emissions.
- *Self-actualization.* According to secular humanistic belief, people define their own meaning and purpose in life. The term 'self-actualization' was used by the developers of theories of psychology such

as Kurt Goldstein, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow (in his ‘hierarchy of needs’). It means such things as activating all one’s capacities or capabilities or realizing one’s full potential. Other terms that have also been popularized in line with ‘self-actualization’ include ‘self-empowerment’, ‘self-realization’, ‘beingness’, and ‘self-transcendence’. However, man is nothing until he rests in God and lives for the glory of God (Gen 1.26; 1 Cor 10.31). All the hype about self-actualization is worthless. Mankind cannot obtain meaning in life without God. As Augustine said, “Our heart is restless until it rests in you.” (*Confessions*, 1.1.1).

- *Self-deification*. At root, secular humanism, is the declaration by men that they (or a collective, as in communism) are their own god (Gen 3.5)—they create themselves (or at best they are only the product of random genetic events), they give meaning and purpose to their own lives, they define ‘standards’ for right and wrong, and they control their own destinies. When they depart this scene with a puff of breath, their existence will be recognized only by the accomplishments which they leave behind them.

36. False Gods – Non-Christian Religions

Acceptance of the beliefs of any of the major (i.e., with a significant number of world-wide adherents) non-Christian religions, or participation in their rituals and practices, is a breach of the first commandment since it places an alternate god (or gods) before (in addition to, or in the place of) the true God, or provides a false definition of God—inconsistent with what he declares about himself in the Bible. John warns us that we must be on the lookout for false prophets who come in the spirit of antichrist and deny that Jesus is God (1 Jn 4.1-3).

All religious beliefs fall into one of the following categories:

- *Atheism*: There is no God and the belief in God, or gods, is superstitious.
- *Animism or pantheism*: The universe (nature) is divine, but an impersonal force, and we are all part of the divine, as in Buddhism.
- *Polytheism*: There are many gods; these may be spiritual entities (e.g., an angel or demon) as in Hinduism or physical entities (e.g., the Sun) as in astrology.
- *Henotheism*: There are many gods, but there is only one god for our tribe or nation (some interpreters claim that Paul is expressing henotheism, because of his expression, “for us” in 1 Corinthians 8.6. However, Paul declares that there is only one God, all other so-called gods are not gods.
- *Monism*: There is one god that is distinct from nature. This god may be at best a force and may not have a personality; but usually this god is viewed as having a personality (e.g., as in Islam or with Jehovah’s Witnesses).
- *Trinitarianism*: There is one God, with three distinct persons in the one God, who are equal in glory and power.

Most anthropologists and researchers studying world religions, and many theologians, claim that belief in gods and God evolved through these, or similar, levels. However, this is not how beliefs about God developed. The original religion of Adam (and later of Noah) was monotheism with an understanding that God consisted of a plurality of (at least two) persons. Other forms of theistic belief and atheistic unbelief are not precursors of Biblical Trinitarianism. Rather, the other forms of belief are the result of rebellion and suppression of the innate knowledge about God which all men have.

We can also categorize all religious beliefs in terms of how they view God, Jesus, and God’s word. When we compare religions in these areas, we find that common themes are found in all false religions. They all:

- *Degrade God*. God is not defined in false religions as he defines himself in the Bible. The gods of every false religion are inconsequential when compared with the true and almighty God. Their gods are often non-personal forces; irrational and capricious; finite, impotent, and time-bound; and non-trinitarian single personalities.

- *Position a false god before God.* In addition, all false religions include other gods, even if they claim to believe in the God of the Bible or they replace entirely the true God with a false god, the invention of their own minds. These false gods may be represented with physical objects (e.g., statues, icons, or natural entities) or may be purely abstractions (e.g., money or fame) that have priority over God in the minds of their adherents.
- *Degrade Jesus Christ.* In every religion, other than in Christianity, Jesus is not considered to be God and an eternal person in the Godhead, in contrast to what the Bible declares (Jn 1.1). He may be considered a prophet or teacher but never as God.
- *Elevate man.* Every false religion portrays individual humans as autonomous entities with absolute free will and as innately sinless, without culpability for the sin that Adam introduced (i.e., original sin).
- *Demean Christ's saving work.* Thus, every religion, other than Biblical Christianity, makes a man responsible for his own salvation and able to procure it through good works that may earn merit with his god(s) or give him good *karma*. Christianity is unique among all religions in that it makes salvation dependent only on the redemptive work which Christ performed on the cross—that is applied by God's grace to believers and received by faith (Eph 2.8-9).
- *Undermine Scripture.* In every false religion, the Bible from Genesis 1.1 to Revelation 22.21 is not accepted as the complete, full, and only written revelation from God to mankind. Some false religions view only portions of the Bible as revelation (e.g., Jews reject the NT) and other religions add to the Bible claiming that additional prophetic words are necessary (e.g., Mormon additions). And, where the Bible may be viewed as a holy book, it is twisted so that the plain sense of its communication is incomprehensible (e.g., Islam and Jehovah's Witnesses).

There are other areas where non-Christian religions are defective imitations of the truth—e.g., in their moral precepts, anthropology, cosmogony, cosmology, and eschatology. However, the primary distinguishing factor can be summarized by the question that Jesus asks of his disciples, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” (Mt 22.42). At the core, the dividing line between the true religion (Christianity) and all other religions (which are all false) comes down to one question—who is Jesus Christ? The correct answer is that Jesus is the eternal Son of God (fully God) who came into the world and became a man to save sinners (1 Tim 1.15), according to the promises of God (Gen 3.15; Is 9.6-7), through his keeping the law and sacrificial death, and conquered death through his resurrection. Everyone who believes these things and confesses them will be saved (Acts 16.31; Rom 10.9).

37. False Gods – Non-Christian Religions (Hinduism)

Anthropologists and historians of religion often claim that Hinduism is the oldest religion that is still practiced today. However, that is incorrect. *Christianity* is the oldest religion. Someone, may respond to this assertion with the suggestion that Christianity did not appear until about 33 AD. However, such a counterclaim is mistaken. Adam was a Christian, as were Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel, among many others in the OT era. To say that they were Christians is not an historical anachronism, since Adam was given the promise of the coming Messiah who would provide redemption (Gen 3.15), Jesus indicates that Abraham rejoiced that he would see the day of Jesus (Jn 8.56), and David wrote of the coming Messiah who would be in his royal line (Ps 110.1; Mt 22.43-44). Also, Paul argues that believers in the OT times were saved by the same faith that NT believers have (Rom 4.13-24). The OT saints believed in the Messiah (the ‘anointed one’) who was to come, Christians believe in the Christ (the ‘anointed one’) who has come. Other than that, all believers, throughout all time and in every place, have worshiped the one true God, have placed their faith in the same redeemer—the Lord Jesus Christ—and have been converted by the work of the Holy Spirit. So, while Hinduism is not the oldest extant religion, it is one of the oldest continuing *false* religions. However, animistic paganism is probably older.

Hinduism appears to have arisen in the Indian subcontinent sometime around 1500 BC (around the same

time as when Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt), and is thus not, as some practitioners claim, “the eternal way”. It spread to other parts of Southeast Asia and has travelled with migrants (e.g., to the West) as they left Asia. Hinduism is an amalgam of a number of cultural traditions and religious practices which makes it difficult to identify a single definition against which to provide a critique. However, a “Hindu synthesis” appears to have developed during the centuries between 500 BC (around the time that Esther was the queen in Persia) until about 300 AD (the time of Constantine in the West).

Hinduism is a false religion and following its practices is a breach of the first commandment because, among other things, it:

- Is a polytheistic religion with many physical or spiritual manifestations (gods) of an impersonal absolute. Its gods are depicted as idols which adherents revere in their homes and shrines (temples) and at their festivals.
- Claims that the universe originated from ‘potentialities’ or is eternal (not created by the transcendent God) that goes through an endless cycle of repeated births and deaths.
- Teaches that all life forms, including mankind, are the product of an evolutionary process. Since mankind is not a unique creation, made in the image of God, but part of a continuum of life, many Hindus consider eating meat to be an immoral action.
- Identifies mankind’s purpose as striving to understand eternal spiritual truth, called *Brahman*, from whom [which] all existence comes and to understand one’s eternal identity as a non-physical *atma* (soul). To obtain this enlightenment (*moksha*) one must realize that the observable world is unreal and impermanent.
- Posits that persons are governed by fates; but that the result of a person’s free will actions result in *karma*; whatever happens is the result of the past.
- Has no formal moral code. It has five principles for living and five guides for social behaviour (*dharma*). Actions that violate (unspecified) moral and ethical standards, have negative consequences that create negative *karma*. The impersonal *karma* law of the universe ensures that all good or bad deeds eventually return as rewards or punishment.
- Considers the goal of a religious life to be escape from a cycle of death and rebirth (reincarnation). Death is not a calamity since eventually every spirit is released from physical life and men come to a state of completeness by becoming one with the impersonal god-essence of the universe.
- Does not include the concept of a final punishment for sins against God. A Hell-like abode is a temporary place of punishment until reincarnation occurs. A concept of heaven is ephemeral and related to the physical body. In the end, everyone is ‘saved’ through a process of many reincarnations.
- Rejects Jesus as the God-man; although some adherents of Hinduism view him to be avatar of one of their deities and a saint.

Christians can challenge adherents of Hinduism with questions such as:

1. How can personality and intelligence arise from an ultimately impersonal, non-physical absolute?
2. How can a spatial-temporal realm exist if ultimate reality is an impersonal, non-physical absolute?
3. If the spatial-temporal realm (i.e., the universe) is eternal, then how can ultimate existence be only the non-physical *Brahman*?
4. If the universe is eternal (i.e., has always existed), and is therefore infinitely old, then why has it not already reached a state of total absorption into *Brahman*?
5. Since true enlightenment is obtained by realizing that the observable world is unreal and impermanent, then why have you not been absorbed into *Brahman*, since you declare that the observable world is unreal and impermanent?
6. Is your *karma* the result of fate, or of your own efforts?
7. How do you know which of your actions and attitudes will produce good or bad *karma*? Why?

38. False Gods – Non-Christian Religions (Buddhism)

Buddhism has the fourth largest number of world-wide religious adherents (after Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism). In its various forms, it is espoused by about 7% of the world's population; and is mostly found in Asia. However, its influence extends beyond its traditional region, since it is the religion of choice among the 'intelligentsia' and 'glitterati' of our day (e.g., in Hollywood and among entertainers), expressed through the application of yoga meditation with mantra recitations, *mudras* (symbolic hand gestures), and a 'mindfulness' concept that has infiltrated ostensibly secular institutions, including many public schools. Buddhism arose in India sometime after the formation of Hinduism and has many similarities to Hinduism; although any of its original beliefs and practices are attributed to Gautama Buddha, who was a monk who lived around the time of the Persian Empire when Esther was queen.

Buddhism is a false religion and following its practices is a breach of the first commandment because, among other things, it:

- Rejects the existence of the personal God, who is the creator who describes himself in the Bible. In Buddhism, ultimate reality is a transcendent truth, not a divine person. While denying the existence of a personal, intelligent first agent (God), it teaches that angels are celestial emanations of enlightened beings. But demons are forces (not persons) that inhibit people from achieving the state of *nirvana*.
- Claims that the universe originated from 'potentialities' or is eternal (not created by the transcendent God) that goes through an endless cycle of repeated births and deaths.
- Teaches that all life forms, including mankind, are the product of a merely materialistic and evolutionary process. And that if events occur that Christians would consider to be miracles they are merely imaginations or hallucinations due to our lack of an understanding of the phenomena; or are expression of mind over matter.
- Posits that persons are governed by fate yet actions result from a person's free will; but rejects the idea that there is an agent behind determinism, and certainly not a God who predestines all that comes to pass (Rom 8.29).
- Considers the goal of a religious life to be escape from suffering through a cycle of death and rebirth (reincarnation). In Buddhism, death is not a calamity (and certainly not the last enemy, as in Christianity; 1 Cor 15.26) but part of the process of life and rebirth to be accepted. Eventually every spirit is released from physical life so that every person can come to a state of completeness by becoming one with the impersonal god-essence of the universe. How this will work is unclear, since according to Buddhism man does not have an immortal soul that could be carried through from one reincarnation to the next.
- Claims that man's purpose in life is to end suffering by embracing (not suppressing or denying) cravings and conceptual attachments, to attain a perfect dispassion, ultimately leading to the state of *nirvana*.
- Has no concept of sin. Rather, it claims that there are no moral absolutes. Ethics are not based upon duty towards a deity; ethical decisions involve a complex nexus of causes and conditions. The impersonal, universal law of *karma* ensures that all good or bad deeds eventually return as rewards or punishment in accord with man's actions. Reaching *nirvana* is dependent on a personal discipline that gives up desires; this quest relies on oneself, not on gods or priests; a person can work himself toward *nirvana* by making use of acquired merit.
- Presents a false eschatology. Buddha's teachings are to disappear 5,000 years after he proclaimed them (i.e., in about 4600 AD). Then the knowledge of *dharma* will be lost and a new era of the next Buddha, Maitreya, will begin; preceded by societal collapse. Maitreya will attain *bodhi* in seven days, by virtue of his lives (through multiple reincarnations) of preparation, and rule over an earthly paradise. He will teach humanity the abandonment of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, impious speech, covetousness, etc. Ultimately the earth will be destroyed by the appearance of seven suns, causing progressive ruin.
- Does not include the concept of a final punishment for sins against God. Rather, it views as

unreasonable the concept of condemning a person to an everlasting Hell for human weaknesses. In the end, everyone is ‘saved’ through a process of many reincarnations and reaches *nirvana*.

Christians can challenge adherents of Buddhism with questions such as:

1. Can you explain why humans (and animals) suffer?
2. Why is suffering bad and why is it necessary to eliminate it?
3. If there is no divine moral standard, and morality is self-established, why are killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, impious speech, and covetousness to be eliminated by the Buddha’s next incarnation, Maitreya?
4. What makes an action bad or good, resulting in bad or good *karma*?
5. How can there be an ongoing role for *karma* if there is no supernatural and no immortal soul that passes from incarnation to incarnation?
6. Why should we accept the *Buddhavacana* (the words of the Buddha) as authoritative when it teaches that our own experience is authoritative?
7. Do logical constructs have meaning—such as identity (anything is identical to itself and different from everything else; i.e., ‘A’ is ‘A’ and not ‘not-A’), non-contradiction (a statement cannot be true and not-true at the same time), excluded middle (an entity is either ‘A’ or ‘not-A’ and nothing else), and truthfulness (a statement is either true or it is false)?

39. Yoga

Opinions vary about whether it is permissible for professing Christians to participate in the practice of yoga. For example, some prominent Christian teachers such as Al Mohler and Pat Robertson have spoken out in the past against Christians participating in the practice. On the other hand, some people believe that yoga is a beneficial form of physical exercise which can be practiced by Christians and that it is a mistake to associate yoga with any religion such as Hinduism or Buddhism. For example, there is a blogging website, Christians Practicing Yoga, that provides ‘wonderings’ about how to enhance the practice of yoga. One defender of the practice among Christians documented examples of Christian brands including Yahweh Yoga, Christ Centered Yoga, and Holy Yoga. In response to the adoption of yoga by ostensibly Christian advocates, Christian speaker and author Laurette Willis, who is outspokenly opposed to the practice, introduced an exercise program called Praise Moves, which she describes as a Christian alternative to yoga.

There can be little doubt that the practice of yoga postures and moves has been associated with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Yoga appears to have arisen about five or six centuries before Christ in ascetic movements in India. It is mentioned in Eastern religious texts such as the *Rigveda* (Vedic Sanskrit hymns), *Upanishads* (Sanskrit texts of spiritual teachings) and the *Bhagavad Gita* (Hindu scriptures). The practice appears to have been given a semi-standardized form about 400 BC by Patanjali, who synthesized various older practices and traditions and documented them in his *Yoga Sutras*. These Sutras went into obscurity from about the 12th century but were revived by Swami Vivekananda of the Theosophical Society and others in the late 19th century. Yoga became popular in the West in the 20th century primarily as an exercise and relaxation technique. However, in some schools of Hinduism (and as it was adopted among those who were influenced by the New Age movement), Yoga is more than physical exercise, it is a meditative means of working toward a ‘spiritual’ enlightenment and has philosophical and religious presuppositions affecting a person’s understanding of ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics.

Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians (1 Cor 8.1-13) about eating meat sacrificed to idols has a bearing on how we should approach the matter of Christians’ participation in yoga. Paul says that since an idol has no real existence, eating meat that has been sacrificed to them has no moral consequences. Thus, the stretching exercises of yoga cannot have any real spiritual meaning. From this perspective, we could conclude that if

a Christian participates in the physical activity which may have therapeutic value, with this understanding, he does not commit a sin.

However, the wisest course of action for Christians is to avoid yoga and yoga-like practices entirely, because:

- The term ‘yoga’ in Sanskrit means ‘union’ or ‘connection’. Thus, by definition, it implies that one is participating in an act of spiritual connection with something. Dictionary.com defines yoga as, “attaining liberation from the material world and union of the self with the Supreme Being or ultimate principle”—i.e., union with a pantheistic god such as an inanimate force, or the ‘universe’. Christians are united to Christ (Phil 2.1) through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8.9, 11) and are to be separated from anything that would cause that union to be compromised. ‘Christianizing’ yoga by substituting words does not change its underlying principles, which include not making a distinction between God and man.
- As Paul indicates (1 Cor 8.7-12) even if an activity may not be sinful in itself, if we cause an immature Christian to stumble in his faith and his walk with Christ, then we have sinned. Thus, if our participation in only the physical activity of stretching and breathing actions of yoga influences another Christian into thinking that all aspects of yoga are acceptable, then we have caused harm to a Christian brother or sister.
- Some practices of yoga encourage a false form of meditation. For example, the *Hakini Mudra* hand pose (hands held in front of the face with spread fingers touching in a pyramid shape) with the eyes gazing into nothing, and the pose where the participant sits cross-legged and holds his hands at his sides with thumb and forefinger touching, while chanting “Om”, are examples of movements intended to empty the mind. Biblical meditation is not emptying of the mind, but filling it with the truth—about God, his law, his work of redemption, and his providences (Ps 77.12; Ps 119.97, 99; Ps 145.5; Phil 4.8). A Christian’s mind is not to be emptied but to be filled with the Holy Spirit, through the words of Christ—for example, as found in the Psalms (Eph 5.18-19; Col 3.16).
- Practicing yoga in a group setting can lead to the incorporation of other practices, such as placing the palms together, bowing, and saying the common Hindu greeting “namaste”. While many use the expression in a casual manner, it is idolatry since it means literally ‘I bow to you’ and has the underlying meaning of, ‘the god in me bows to the god in you’, an action which God condemns (Ex 20.3; Is 42.8). We wouldn’t say such a thing as “You are a god; I bow to you” in English, so we should not say it using words from other languages that mean the same thing.
- At root, yoga is a form of self-worship, disguised with ‘spiritual’ trappings, which makes it difficult to disassociate the useful physical exercises from their pagan origins. If some of the stretches and balancing poses are used, they should be incorporated into a separate and distinct physical training regime.

40. False Gods – Non-Christian Religions (Orthodox Judaism)

Until the incarnation of Jesus, Jews who believed in the coming of the Messiah who had been promised from the beginning (Gen 3.15) were Christians. To say that they were Christians is not an historical anachronism, since, as Paul argues, believers in the OT times were saved by the same faith that NT believers have (Rom 4.13-24). The OT saints believed in the Messiah (the ‘anointed one’) who was to come, Christians believe in the Christ (the ‘anointed one’) who has come. Thus, all believers, through all time and in every place, have worshiped the one true God, have placed their faith in the same redeemer—the Lord Jesus Christ—and have been converted by the work of the Holy Spirit.

However, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, a new religion—Judaism— originated in the Middle East, which was based on a faulty interpretation of the OT, and which rejected Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT messianic prophecies. Today, there are about 15 million people in the world who claim to be Jewish.

However, many are cultural or secular Jews, such as were (or are) Louis Brandeis, Marc Chagall, Noam Chomsky, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Stephen Fry, Billy Joel, Stan Lee, Gustav Mahler, Karl Marx, Arthur Miller, Marilyn Monroe, Robert Oppenheimer, Boris Pasternak, Ayn Rand, Bernie Sanders, Jerry Seinfeld, Baruch Spinoza, and Leon Trotsky. These individuals did not, or do not, adhere to a belief that the OT (or at minimum, the *Torah*) is a divine communication or that its precepts are to be followed and its prophecies believed. So, our consideration today will focus on Orthodox Judaism which teaches that the Law and the Prophets is eternally binding and unalterable, and that God has made an exclusive, unbreakable covenant with the Children of Israel.

Although Orthodox Judaism has some commendable features (e.g., an emphasis on family and outward morality) it is a false religion and following its practices is a breach of the first commandment because, among other things, it:

- Rejects the truth that God has a triune nature (one God in three persons) and declares Jehovah or Elohim to be a singular personal entity.
- Teaches falsehood about God as the creator. Despite their claim that Genesis is the word of God, most Orthodox rabbis believe in an old earth and accept guided evolution as the means by which God formed all life, including mankind.
- Rejects Jesus as the God-man and promised Messiah of the OT (1 Jn 2.22) and claims that he was a false messiah who considered himself to be a rabbi but was lying; according to them, the true Messiah is yet to come.
- Perverts the doctrine of God's sovereignty and providence by claiming that everything is foreseen by God, but not predestined by him as Paul states (Rom 8.29), since absolute free will is given to individuals.
- Claims that man's purpose is to elevate the physical world (*Olam HaZeh*) and prepare it for the world to come (*Olam HaBa*), the messianic era, not to bring glory to God (1 Cor 10.31).
- Rejects the concept of original sin and claims that individuals are born innocent and sinless. Their guilt before God is not inherited from their first representative, Adam, but is the consequence only of their own sins.
- Is a works-based religion. Men can keep the moral law and be justified by their works. Thus, salvation is based on individual merit, not on grace received through faith in the Saviour and an accompanying repentance.
- Teaches that there is no everlasting damnation of the wicked. Individuals who do not "pass the test" go to a purifying place to "learn their lesson".
- Requires male circumcision into the covenant on the eighth day, which Paul says is no longer required (Gal 5.2-3) since the old-order sacraments have been replaced by the new ones of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- Presents a false eschatology, which includes the ingathering of the exiled diaspora; the coming of a Jewish messiah (not Jesus), descended from the Davidic line, who will rule and unite the people of Israel and will usher in the messianic age of global and universal peace; and the bodily resurrection of the dead, which many believe will occur 6,000 years from creation (i.e., based on their calendar, about 300 years from now).

Christians can challenge adherents of Orthodox Judaism with questions such as:

1. Do infants sin? When do people become sinners, why, and how?
2. If God asks you why you should be admitted into heaven, what will be your answer? Will you be good enough?
3. About whom do the following portions of Scripture speak? [Gen 49.10; Dt 18.15-19; Ps 2.1-12; Ps 16.1-11; Ps 22.1-31; Ps 24.1-10; Ps 40.1-17; Ps 41.9; Ps 45.6-9; Ps 69.9; Ps 72.1-20; Ps 89.3-4; Ps 102.1-11; Ps 110.1-7; Ps 118.17-18; Is 7.14; Is 9.6-7; Is 52.13-53.12; Dan 9.24-27; Mi 5.2; Zech 9.9.]
4. How could a future expected Messiah demonstrate that he is the true Messiah in a way that Jesus could

not?

5. What was the purpose of animal sacrifices?
6. If animal sacrifices were essential during the time before Jesus, why are Jews not insistent that they be performed today? Why are Jews not required to go up to Jerusalem once a year and offer sacrifices? How does the fact that the temple was destroyed free them from that obligation?
7. What will happen in the messianic age to pagans, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians who die before the messiah arrives?

41. False Gods – Non-Christian Religions (Islam)

Islam has the second largest number of adherents (at about one-quarter of the world's population), is the predominant religion in over fifty countries (primarily in the Middle East, north Africa, and Southeast Asia), and has a growing presence in most countries in the West. It is a religion that was invented by Mohammed in the early seventh century AD.

Islam is a false religion and following its practices is a breach of the first commandment because, among other things, it:

- Rejects the truth that God has a triune nature (one God in three persons) and declares Allah, the Islamic deity, to be a singular entity.
- Denies the deity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. The *Qur'an* declares that Jesus was a created man, 'Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allah is like that of Adam. He created him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was.' (Surah 3:59) The *Qur'an* also claims that the Jews became so confused that they crucified someone else instead of Jesus, who had his likeness (Surah 4:157). Six hundred years after Christ's crucifixion, a man appeared who ignored the historical evidence and declared that the one who was crucified was not Jesus. We would not believe someone like this, if he came in the 26th century and said that the president who was assassinated in Dallas was not JFK but a mistaken substitute.
- Claims that while Jesus may have been a prophet, Mohammed was the final true prophet of God and not Jesus. This is contrary to what the Bible teaches about Jesus (Jn 1.1-19; Heb 1.1-2).
- Rejects the Bible as the God-breathed word, and replaces it with the *Qur'an*, the most revered writing among Muslims. However, the *Qur'an* was not delivered through the archangel Gabriel to Mohammed, and is not the verbatim words of God, but an amalgam of Arabic folk religion, combined with disjointed myths derived from a misunderstanding of Jewish and Christian writings, including from the Bible, and Mohammed's own ideas. The *Qur'an* is rife with statements that are not in accord with history—for example, it mentions (a number of times) that Mary was the sister of Moses and Aaron and the daughter of Imran; it speaks of Alexander the Great as a righteous man and a teacher. In contrast, the Bible is constantly being vindicated for its historical accuracy.
- Is not an 'Abrahamic' religion. Mohammed and his tribe of Arabs were probably not descendants of Abraham physically through Ishmael, but from Elam or Aram rather than Arpachshad (or from Joktan rather than Peleg), and Muslims are not the spiritual seed of Abraham because they are not justified by faith through belief in Jesus as the Messiah (Jn 8.56).
- Claims that the universe is very old, and that mankind is the product of long ages of evolutionary creationism (i.e., a form of theistic evolution).
- Has no remedy for sin. It is a works-based religion that teaches that 'salvation' is based on actions; including rehearsing a creed, multiple daily 'prayers', almsgiving, fasting during Ramadan, and a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a person's lifetime.
- Does not have a moral code consistent with the Ten Commandments and does not emphasize moral purity. Rather, it permits fornication with non-Muslims, polygamy, adultery, easy-divorce, abuse of strangers, lying to strangers, and abuse of women.
- Perverts the doctrine of God's sovereignty and providence into an amalgam of fatalism, in which everything is preordained, and nothing happens unless permitted by Allah, with the belief that Allah

creates the possibility for human action whereby humans can follow through, acquire the act, make it their own and take responsibility

- Teaches a non-Biblical view of the afterlife, including soul sleep until the last day, when all people will be judged according to their life deeds. At the end of days, which will begin with the appearance of the *Mahdi* ('guided one'), the third period of history will end with an assessment of humanity by Allah. There will be an annihilation of all current life, a resurrection, and judgement. On the one hand Islam teaches that there will be an eternal division of the righteous (rewarded with the pleasures of *Jannah*) and the wicked (tortured in *Jahannam*). However, it also teaches that non-Muslims will attain paradise after a purification in the fires of a purgatory.
- Has a demonic goal of global *dhimmitude* (to subject all people to Islam) to be executed by the sword (*jihadism*) and forced slavery and servitude.

Christians can challenge adherents of Islam with questions such as:

1. Does Allah have the attributes of love and mercy? How are these attributes to be displayed by Muslims?
2. How do you explain Allah's requirement that Muslims send their sons to die for him (*Qur'an* Surahs 4:74; 9:111; 61:10-12), when God says that love is displayed by his sending his son Jesus to die for men (1 Jn 4.10)?
3. Do you commit sin? If you have free will, then why do you sin?
4. If God asks you why you should be admitted into heaven, what will be your answer? Will your observance of the Five Pillars be good enough?
5. What is untrue in the Bible? When was it corrupted, and by whom?
6. Do non-Muslims attain heaven after a purification in the fires of a purgatory, are they annihilated, or are they tortured in *Jahannam* eternally?
7. How can the *Qur'an* speak of Jesus as a mere man, but also a prophet of Allah, when he claimed to be God? Is not his claim to be God blasphemy if it is not true?

42. False Gods – Non-Christian Religions (Mormonism)

Mormonism is an American-made religion, not from the East or Middle East like the other dominant worldwide false religions. It was invented by Joseph Smith (b. 1805) who claimed to have received golden plates from an angel named Moroni and to have translated them by wearing special spectacles. What he supposedly received and translated is now known as the *Book of Mormon*. The *Book of Mormon* supposedly recounts the journey and subsequent events of the lost ten tribes of Israel who left the Middle East around 600 years before Christ and migrated to the Americas. However, a Mormon lawyer, Thomas Ferguson, conducted extensive archeological work in Central America beginning in 1948. He stated that, "The *Book of Mormon* is either fake or fact. If fake, the [ancient] cities described in it are non-existent. If fact—as we know it to be—the cities will be there." His investigations failed to demonstrate that any of the book's account can be aligned with history or archeological finds. In contrast, the Bible is continually being vindicated for its historical accuracy.

Joseph Smith left NY State in 1831 and founded a colony in Zion, Missouri. He and other 'prophets' have added revelations, and Mormons include two other books among their supposedly inspired collection (*Pearl of Great Price* and *Doctrine and Covenants*) and the *Book of Mormon*, along with the Bible. In 1847, after facing anti-Mormon sentiments (and apparently a failed business and accusations of immorality), Brigham Young (with his numerous wives) led a migration of his followers to Utah. The Mormon movement has experienced splits over the past 150 years, often over the issue of polygamy—particularly when Utah applied to become a state (granted in 1896) and had to include a ban on polygamy in its constitution (which it moved to decriminalize in 2020). Mormons are an outwardly moral, disciplined, family-oriented, and self-reliant people, who in some respects put Christians to shame. Of late, there have been suggestions among Christians that Mormonism could be considered a Christian denomination and that Mormons can

be called Christians. In 2012, Mitt Romney was invited to give the commencement address at Liberty University.

While there may be Christians in some Mormon communities, Mormonism is a false religion and following its practices is a breach of the first commandment because, among other things, it claims that:

- There are three distinct gods that make up their godhead.
- Jesus Christ is the literal son of God and a god; Jesus and Lucifer were the two oldest sons of God.
- Jesus was married at Cana of Galilee (to one of his three wives, who were Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene) so that he could see his own seed before he was crucified.
- Matter is eternal and God organized the existing matter as the act of ‘creation’; thus, creation out of nothing pre-existing (Heb 11.3) is rejected.
- Adam came into the Garden of Eden with a celestial body and brought Eve, one of his wives. Adam sinned so that he could be with his wife and obey the command to be fruitful.
- All people exist before physical birth, as spirits or ‘intelligences’ in the presence of God, are given bodies to experience sin and suffering, and advance to become gods.
- Justification by faith is a faulty doctrine; works (what people have to do themselves) are necessary to obtain salvation. Man’s primary purpose is to keep the commandments so that he can be worthy to return to live with the Father in heaven again after death.
- Family units endure eternally and people in heaven, in celestial marriages as gods, produce spirit children waiting to be born to mortal parents so that they can earn their salvation.
- Hell is a temporary place of the dead without knowledge of the truth or who were disobedient in life, but the permanent location of Satan and the sons of perdition. Heaven has three divisions: telestial, terrestrial, and celestial. All men will be saved eventually and included in one of these.

Christians can challenge adherents of Mormons with questions such as:

1. How can there be multiple gods in the godhead, when the Bible speaks of there being only one God (Is 41.4; Is 43.10; Is 44.6; Is 45.5-6; Rom 3.30; Eph 4.6; 1 Tim 2.5)?
2. How can created (or generated) beings become gods, when they are not infinite, eternal, unchanging, or all-powerful?
3. How can the universe be eternal when God created space, time, energy, and matter and all living beings (Gen 1.1-31)?
4. What do you mean when you say that “Jesus is the son of God”? Do you mean that he is the infinite and eternal God (Jn 1.1; Jn 20.28), the second person of the Trinity, who took upon himself a human nature and was born of the virgin Mary (Mt 1.18-21; Lk 1.34)?
5. There are numerous ancient manuscripts of the OT (including the Dead Sea Scrolls) and NT which allow us to determine the original words of the Prophets and Apostles with near certainty. What textual evidence supports the *Book of Mormon* and Joseph Smith’s translation?
6. Can you provide historical evidence which supports the claims of the *Book of Mormon* with respect to the purported journeys and settlement locations of the Israelite tribes in Mesoamerica?
7. How can salvation be a free gift, not based on works (Eph 2.8-11) and irrevocable (Rom 8.1, 31-39), and yet be dependent on your works and retained by your continued faithfulness?

43. False Gods – Non-Christian Religions (Jehovah’s Witnesses)

The Jehovah’s Witnesses cult is another American-made religion, like Mormonism. It was founded by Charles Russell in the late 19th century. It is active in recruiting converts through its door-to-door visitations and its Watch Tower Tract Society publications. It emphasizes strict discipline and control over its members—using strong ostracization (disfellowshipping) and shunning of family members who depart from their teachings. The control that leaders in the organization have over members impels them to undertake their recruiting efforts with a diligence to perpetuate a lie that puts Christians to shame who

should be heralding the truth.

Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings are anti-Christian. Adhering to their beliefs or following their practices is a breach of the first commandment because, among other things, it claims that:

- God is not a trinity and is strictly singular.
- Jesus is not the God-man but is the son of God, and is a created god; one of his forms is as the archangel Michael.
- Jesus Christ was not raised physically from the dead and that statements in the Bible about the resurrection are not God's word.
- The Holy Spirit is not a person but an impersonal force that God uses to accomplish his will. They often refer to the Holy Spirit with the impersonal 'it', rather than 'he', appellation.
- Salvation is dependent on God's undeserved kindness toward men and requires the ransom sacrifice of Jesus and faith in God; but is also contingent on a person being baptized, having an accurate knowledge of the Bible, and adhering to God's moral standards. Salvation is thus based on a person's works and not merely on God's grace, as Paul teaches (Eph 2.8-10).
- The death of Jesus on the stake freed those under the law, including from the basic Ten Words or Commandments.
- All things are not predestined by God as Paul states (Rom 8.29), since absolute free will is given to intelligent creatures.
- At physical death, a person goes into a state of non-existence since the soul is mortal and does not continue to live after a person dies
- Exactly 144,000 people will be in heaven. Other believers will dwell in a physical paradise on earth after they are recreated.
- Hell does not exist, because Hellfire does not properly represent divine justice from a loving God.
- Jesus has been ruling in heaven as king only since 1914.
- The end of the current world society ("system of things") is imminent, and will be precipitated by God's judgement, beginning with the elimination of all false religions, culminating in Armageddon, and the saved will be delivered. After Armageddon, God will extend his heavenly kingdom to include earth, and the dead will gradually be resurrected to a "day of judgement" lasting for a thousand years; the end result will be a fully tested and glorified human race.
- Its 'prophets' can make end-time predictions. However, all their predictions have failed to materialize—for example, the 1918 prediction of the earthly return of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in 1925; and multiple predictions of when Armageddon was supposed to have occurred. Moses declares that every false prophet, whose prophecies do not come to pass or come true, are not to be revered (Dt 18.22).
- Evangelical Protestant Bible translations are faulty, and their New World Translation is the only adequate representation of the word of God; yet it is an incorrect and dishonest translation from the original languages.
- The Sabbath is no longer applicable. Thus, they do not observe a Sunday (Lord's Day) Sabbath.
- It is wrong for a person to use some medical procedures, endangering lives. For example, leaders once instructed adherents to refuse vaccinations and organ transplants (which they said was a form of cannibalism), but later rescinded these prohibitions. They still prohibit blood transfusions.

Christians can challenge adherents of Jehovah's Witnesses' teaching with questions such as:

1. What do you mean when you say that "Jesus is the son of God"? Do you mean that he is the infinite and eternal God (Jn 1.1; Jn 20.28), the second person of the Trinity, who took upon himself a human nature and was born of the virgin Mary (Mt 1.18-21; Lk 1.34)?
2. Why does Thomas refer to Jesus as "*the* God of me" (Jn 20.28)? And, why does Jesus accept worship (Mt 28.9, 17), which is reserved for God alone (Rev 22.9), if he is not God?
3. How can there be meaning in the concept of rewards or punishment after death, if there is no immortal

soul that passes from this life into the next?

4. Why should anyone adhere to your beliefs, when in the end everyone will eventually be raised to live in a restored paradise?
5. Why should we accept your belief that the heavenly reign of Jesus began in 1914 (and not in 33 AD), when Jesus and the Apostles taught that no man could know the day of Christ's second coming (Mt 24.36; Mt 25.13; Acts 1.7; 1 Thess 5.2)?
6. If Jesus' death on the cross ('stake') freed men from the law (including the Ten Commandments) what divine law are men to follow? Why?
7. If God asks you why you should be admitted into his heavenly kingdom, what will be your answer? Will you be good enough?

44. False Gods – Chance

A favourite god of modern man is named Chance (also called Luck or Fate). In the ancient world it went by the name of Furtuna (Roman luck deity) or Tyche (Greek luck deity). However, the proverbial 'man on the street' would deny that Chance is his god, let alone a favourite god. He would say that he has no god, or his god is something else (e.g., Allah or an avatar of Krishna). However, Chance reigns supreme in the modern pantheon of false gods. For example:

- Non-Christian physicists believe that the universe created itself out of nothing. Stephen Hawking in his book, *A Brief History of Time*, stated that "[I]f the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end; it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?" (p. 141) When asked how everything started, they state something like what appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen* (1985-08-31), "In answer to the question of why it happened, I offer the modest proposal that our universe is simply one of those things which happen from time to time." That is, Chance created everything.
- Evolutionists claim that all of the variety of life that we see around us is the result of chance mutations in DNA or chance recombination of genetic material. They claim that beneficial mutations are selected by chance through natural processes. Thus, all living entities were created by Chance. However, in their honest moments, evolutionists realize that biological evolution from molecules to man, with complexity of genetic information increasing through time, could not have occurred in a short time (not that it ever occurred!). When creationists mention the astronomical improbability of self-replicating molecules (let alone the incredibly complex DNA molecule) arising through chance encounters of atoms then, "Scientists counter that these principles are oversimplified and inaccurate, and that the physical evidence is irrefutably conclusive. For instance evolution took place over an unimaginably long time period—enough that the seemingly improbable aspects of evolution become probable."¹
- Creationists use the anthropic principle as an argument for the existence of an intelligent designer who established the earth and our solar system as an environment that could be inhabited by mankind. The anthropic principle refers to the fact that various observed values for physical constants and parameters in nature appear to be incredibly well tuned (beyond the realm of coincidence) to support human life, such as the earth's orbital distance from the sun and its axial tilt, the size of the moon and its distance from the earth, the properties of water (e.g., it floats when it freezes), the strength of the gravitational force, the ratio of electron to proton mass, earth's gravitational level that retains an atmosphere, earth's spin rate that permits heat dissipation, and the mix of atmospheric gasses. The improbability of so many physical factors aligning points to purposeful design. However, a modern 'escape clause' from this conclusion is offered by the concept of a 'multiverse'—i.e., that we just happen to live in one of an infinite number of universes that have arisen by the instrumentality of Chance.
- The concept of indeterminism has gained a following among scientists. It is the idea that events are not caused deterministically. It is often expressed as the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which applies

¹ Henry, Tamara. "Is God in the Classroom," *Popular Science*, October 2000, pp. 59-63.

specifically to the quantum theory in physics, and indicates that an observer cannot know with precision both the location and velocity of an elementary particle or what quantum state an elementary particle will possess by mere chance. This concept has been extended into the realm of philosophy and has had an influence on the development of views such as that the human will is entirely free (non-determined) and that God's foreknowledge is limited ('open theism') because of the 'impossibility' of knowing what will happen in natural systems and what free choices people will make—thus making God's knowledge dynamic and his providence flexible. However, the Bible teaches that God's omniscience is absolute (Ps 139.1-3; Ps 147.5; Is 40.28; Is 46.9-10). Contrary to modern thinking, God not only knows where every elementary particle is and how fast it is moving but decrees their motion.

- That mankind operates at the behest of a mindless Chance is the ruling paradigm of popular culture. For example, in the *Hunger Games*, Effie Trinket declares, "Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor." Likewise, millions of people purchase lottery tickets (over \$70B is spent annually in the US), directed to a vain hope that Chance will dispose events to their advantage. And, if they win anything, they thank their 'lucky stars' rather than the sovereign God of the universe.

In contrast to the belief in Chance as a god, the Bible teaches that there is but one God who controls everything that comes to pass. The *Larger Catechism* (Q14) summarizes the Bible's teaching, "God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will". The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 5.1) provides a more comprehensive summary, "God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy." Chance is not God; it has no will and no power to affect our lives. All events are subject to the great God (Prov 16.33).

45. False Gods – Astrology and Superstition

Both of Canada's 'national' newspapers (the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*) include daily horoscopes on their websites in their Life sections. You can also download [horoscope](#) or [astrology](#) apps for your 'smart' phone or an app that recommends [stock picks](#) based on your astrological sign. Also, references to non-rational forces controlling human destinies permeate popular media such as the 'force' in the *Star Wars* series and in *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, a 1943 musical comedy film made by Warner Brothers as a World War II fundraiser. The irony in this is palpable—modern mankind has supposedly rejected superstitious beliefs, claims to make decisions based only on scientifically empirical results, posits a pure materialism with the non-existence of supernatural entities, believes that all events are non-deterministic, and denies the existence of a God who providentially governs the universe including mankind. Not only is it ironic, but it would be laughable if it were not for the reality that millions (billions) of people have been deluded into a belief in the false gods of astrology and the occult through Satan's diabolical schemes.

With today's cultural hubris, we think that we are smarter than people were in the 'primitive' past. Yet, we are actually stupider since, despite having more knowledge about the operation of the physical universe (e.g., that spirits do not inhabit stars, that an aether does not fill space, that bloodletting with leeches does not cure illnesses, or that the future cannot be predicted from studying the entrails of sheep), many in our society still are highly superstitious and believe that inanimate objects can control their destinies. For example, some:

- Athletes touch a spot on the door frame as they leave their locker room or on a lintel in the hallway or tunnel as they enter the arena or playing field.
- Athletes and spectators attempt to send 'hex' signals during games, such as twirling a finger or an item of clothing.
- Baseball players execute the sign of the cross before they take their place at bat or throw a ball from

the pitcher's mound.

- Some buildings do not have a floor labelled with '13' (yet they must have a thirteenth floor if they have more than twelve floors).
- People say 'knock on wood' as they tap their fingers on a desk when they speak about pending events that they hope will transpire.
- People cross their fingers and hold them up to the sides of their faces, at shoulder height, to wish for luck, or they hold them behind their backs when they are making a false statement and wish to disavow a lie.
- People carry lucky charms on their key rings, wear lucky necklaces, or carry a lucky coin in their pockets or purses.
- Folks say 'gesundheit' to a friend who has sneezed to wish that person good health, based on the notion that a piece of the person's soul has been expelled with the sneeze.
- Gamblers kiss their dice before a throw.
- Hikers rejoice if they find a four-leaf clover or spot a pure white deer.
- Campers sitting around a fire make a wish upon a shooting star.
- Stock traders follow a rule of never setting stop-losses on round numbers.

We could multiply examples of these kinds of superstitions. Sadly, many professing Christians, often unthinkingly, apply similar practices.

These forms of superstition, and similar ones, are problematic and sinful because those who believe in them:

- Attribute divine powers to inanimate and non-rational entities—for example, claiming that an alignment of distant celestial objects could have a direct influence on a person's life and prospects for the future.
- Place a false god before the face of the only true God—a direct breach of the first commandment (Ex 20.3). By attributing divine powers to something other than God, a person places a created object before the face of God as a challenge to God's omniscience and omnipotence.
- Break other specific commands. God warns his people not to lift their eyes to objects in the heavens to worship or reverence them (Dt 4.19; Dt 17.3; Job 31.26-28; Jer 8.2). Instead, when men view the objects in the heavens, they are to see the majesty of the God who created them (Ps 19.1).
- Participate in rebellion; since knowing the truth about God and his unique attributes, they reject it and supplant it with falsehood (Rom 1.18-21).
- Exhibit utter foolishness. Belief in philosophical materialism, a favourite concept of evolutionists, is folly (Ps 14.1; Rom 1.22-23).
- Experience fear and doubt. People who place their hopes in superstitious beliefs are plagued with dismay as they try to read and understand the signs (Jer 10.2), rather than trusting in the Lord who works all things out for his glory and the good of his people (Rom 8.28).
- Deny God's providential control over all events, including over apparently chance events (Prov 16.33; Acts 1.24-26).

The fact that so many people in our society today cling to superstitious beliefs is a sign of God's indictment on our society and of his punishing it. Stephen, in his apology before the Jewish leaders, states that God turned away from his ancient people and "gave them over to the worship of the host of heaven" (Acts 7.42). Likewise, Paul indicates that a society in rebellion against God is handed over by God to the worship of inanimate and irrational entities (Rom 1.24-25). Thus, an apparently innocent statement made by a rejected lover in a romantic drama that she must have offended the 'universe', is not an innocent observation but a blatant denial of God and an indication of his curse upon our culture and nation.

46. False Gods – Demon Worship and the Occult

The *Larger Catechism* (Q105) includes “all compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions” under the sins forbidden by the first commandment. The concept of making a deal with the devil is the subject of various accounts of the life of Johann Faust (1480-1540) who was an alchemist, astrologer, and magician who wanted a life of pleasure and is supposed to have made a deal with Satan but later attempted to renege on the deal and Satan killed him. Goethe’s *Faust*, published in 1808, is the best-known account of the Faust tale. Oscar Wilde’s only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), is similar. Dorian Gray wishes to engage in a hedonistic life and yet maintain his physical beauty, so he makes a deal with the devil. As he lives wantonly, his portrait ages and records every sin. History records other individuals who supposedly made deals with the devil, including artists (e.g., Giuseppe Tartini [1692-1770] an Italian composer and violinist, Nicolo Paganini [1782-1840] a virtuoso violinist, and Robert Johnson [1911-1938] an American Blues musician), a soldier (Gilles de Rais [1404-1440] who tortured and sacrificed around 100 children to a demon named Baron), and even churchmen (e.g., Theophilus the Penitent [d. c. 538], Pope Sylvester II [c. 945-1003], and Urbain Grandier [c. 1590-1634]) who used their pacts with the devil to advance their careers. There is even a website, *How To Sell Your Soul To The Devil: A Practical, Step By Step Guide*, that claims to offer assistance for those who wish to make a pact with the devil. And, in 2019, *A Children's Book of Demons* was published, which tells kids how to summon their personal demons.

A person cannot engage directly in a two-way contractual discussion with the devil because he is non-material—even when Satan tempted Eve, God had to permit him to engage with her through a physical intermediary, the serpent. However, one does not have to make a formal deal with the devil to make a compact with him or to consult with him. Ways that people can consult with the devil, which are condemned by Scripture, include:

- *Addressing worship such as invocations and praise to Satan or to demons* (Dt 32.17; Ps 106.37; Rev 9.20), which is expressly forbidden in God’s word (1 Cor 10.20). There have always been Satan worshipers, although at times in the past it was more blatantly open than in the West since the time of the Reformation, such as through the worship of Nergal (2 Ki 17.30) or Beelzebub (2 Ki 1.2; Mt 10.25) throughout much of ancient Mesopotamia (Akkad, Assyria, and Babylonia) and the western Levant, and in the Roman world (Rev 2.13). However, beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, Satanism became more visibly public again in the West. For example, Anton LaVey established the Church of Satan in 1966 and published *The Satanic Bible* in 1969 that directs kindness only to those who deserve it rather than unconditional love, while shunning abstinence based on guilt, equality, and pacifism; extolling physical pleasures and pragmatism; and propagating a naturalistic, amoral worldview. Since 2010, some cities (e.g., Detroit, Little Rock, and Oklahoma City) in the US have permitted the erection of large statues of Baphomet, the goat-headed totem of the ancient Middle East (Lev 17.7) and of contemporary Satanism.
- *Participating in occult practices*, such as attending seances in which a medium attempts to make contact with a dead person to provide ‘comfort’ for a living person, or a necromancer supposedly communicates with the dead in order to obtain information to predict the future. Although the Bible records an actual, miraculous, instance of a medium communicating with a dead person (1 Sam 28.12-19), anyone who claims today to be a medium or necromancer is a charlatan (Is 8.19-20). God explicitly forbids turning to fortune tellers, mediums, or necromancers (Lev 19.31; Dt 18.10-14; Is 2.6) because this is an abominable practice (Dt 18.9, 12) and indicates that anyone who does so should be cut off from among the people of God (Lev 20.6)—in the Church context, a person who does not repent of participating in occult practices should be excommunicated. We should note that most Christians today would agree that a Christian should not participate in occult practices. Yet there is no command in the NT which prohibits participation. This indicates that we are to base our ethics on the entire Bible, including the specific commands delivered to Moses which are recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The idea held by many Evangelicals today, that the Mosaic Law was abolished by Christ, is nonsense.

The OT law also indicates that acting as a medium or necromancer was a capital crime (Ex 22.18; Lev 20.27). Such a command could not be administered today in our secular and pluralistic society. Church officers do not have authority to punish crimes in this manner. In a truly Christian society, if civil magistrates were to apply this punishment, they would have to be diligently cautious not to become subject to a mob mentality as occurred during the 17th century witch hunts in Massachusetts.

- *Casting spells* such as with voodoo, or similar, rituals that use black magic invocations, often calling on dark spirits, to cast spells on enemies is also a sin that falls into the general category of demon worship and the occult and is prohibited by God (Dt 18.11; Mic 5.12).
- *New Age beliefs and practices* , including Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Anthroposophy, are also part of the occult. New Age beliefs include the ideas of holistic divinity (a form of pantheism) that encompasses the entire universe including humanity, the human potential movement that cultivates the untapped potential within people to improve happiness and fulfillment, spiritual channeling through psychics, using crystals to deflect bad energy or attract good energy, reincarnation, aspects of alternative (e.g., Eastern) medicine, and an extreme environmentalism that worships Gaia.

47. False Gods – Religious Dualism

Zoroastrianism is a religion that was founded in ancient Persia by Zoroaster (c. 630-553 BC) during the time that the Jews were in captivity. He was a contemporary of Daniel and died around the time Esther was born. The rapid ascendancy of this religion in the Persian Empire and its acceptance by the Persian rulers could have caused distress among the righteous Jews of Daniel, Mordecai, and Esther's day, and been a contributing factor in their general feelings of despair. Most Zoroastrians today live in India and are called Parsis—some prominent Indian families such as Tata (Tata Motors, Tata Steel and Jaguar Land Rover), Godrej (real estate, consumer products, industrial engineering, appliances, furniture, security and agricultural products), and Wadia (textiles and shipping) continue Zoroastrian practices.

A development from Zoroastrianism spread into the Mediterranean world in the 3rd and 4th centuries and incorporated teachings from the Bible. It became known as Manichaeism, after its founder Mani who was born in western Persia and lived in the third century AD. Augustine initially adhered to Manichaeism, but after his conversion he adamantly denounced it. Many of Mani's writings have been lost and much of what we know about his teachings is derived from his biographers or his opponents who challenged his teachings. Mani claimed to be the Paraclete (comforter or helper) of the Truth, whom Jesus had promised to send, and the Last Prophet who finalized a succession that included Hermes, Buddha, Zoroaster, Plato, and Jesus. Similar claims would be made later by many other false prophets including (the list is almost endless), Mohammed, Jacob Frank, Joseph Smith, Charles Russell, Sun Myung Moon, Louis Farrakhan, Jung Myung Seok, Rael, Alan John Miller, and David Shayler. Mani declared that he was a disciple of Jesus, but early Christian leaders rejected him as a heretic. Mani attempted to incorporate what he believed were the best ideas and practices from various known religious traditions into his system. This is similar to the statement often heard today that all religions are essentially the same and should coexist.



You might think it unnecessary to consider Zoroastrianism—a religion with fewer than 250,000 world-wide adherents today—and Manichaeism—a dead religion—in a series of topics on Biblical ethics. However, prominent features of Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism continue to infect religious thinking today and its ideas are even promulgated by some Christian theologians.

The most prominent feature of both these religions is dualism. In philosophy, the term 'dualism' can refer to a number of concepts, including the mind-brain distinction *vs* monism that posits that consciousness is purely a physical phenomenon caused by the firing of neurons, and the spirit-body distinction which holds that man is composed of two distinct dimensions and that the spirit dimension can exist without a physical

body. There is also a form of dualism that holds to the belief that there are two uncreated, eternal entities. This type of dualism is manifested in various forms. For example, is it found in eastern Chinese religious philosophy as the *yin* and *yang*, that holds that two opposite or contrary forces can be interconnected and complementary—such as male and female, light and darkness, receptive and active principles, and good and evil. The *taijitu* symbol (found in the ‘coexist’ meme above) that visualizes the *yin* and *yang* is included in the flags of Mongolia and South Korea. Both Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism include religious dualism among their teachings. Another example, of religious dualism is found in the *Star Wars* series with the force and the Jedi (good or neutral) in opposition with the Dark Side and the Sith (evil), which is derived from the Daoistic duality in Zen Buddhism.

Religious dualism includes two key concepts:

- The existence of two ultimate natures that have always existed—a good god and an equally powerful evil one (e.g., God and Satan)—and are in constant conflict. The idea that Satan is eternal and an uncreated being provides some religious scholars with a ‘solution’ to the theoretical problem of evil. In their thinking, it addresses the difficulty of how an infinitely good God could decree and permit evil. Rather, they claim, evil has always existed in the dark god and realm. Although the Bible does not describe the creation of angels (including demons, which are fallen angels) it is clear from Scripture that the only uncreated entity in existence is the triune God (Prov 16.4; Jn 1.3; Col 1.16).
- A distinction between material and transcendent realities within a human person, expressed as the separation of soul which is composed of light and under the power of the good god, from the body which is filled with darkness and under the power of an evil god. This duality was also incorporated into Gnosticism. Some Christians use this concept to rationalize the existence of immoral practices committed in the body while claiming that they are spiritually sinless. It is also the basis of an asceticism similar to that found in Buddhism that renounces corruptible corporeity, with the eventual freeing of the immortal soul from the power of matter, when a person comes to an enlightened understanding—thus denying the physical resurrection taught in the Bible.

Many people today claim that Satan is a myth. Others claim that he exists, and they worship him. And still others believe that he is an eternal counterforce to God. Satan doesn’t care which false belief people hold. He is pleased if people hold any of these beliefs, as long as they don’t worship the only one true God.

48. False Gods – Syncretism

Some religions claim to be amalgams of the ‘best’ of other religions. For example, we noted previously that Manichaeism, which had prominence in the 3rd and 4th centuries and had developed primarily out of Zoroastrianism, had also adopted some aspects of Christian teachings. Thus, it is was a syncretistic religion. Extant religions that are syncretistic include:

- *Islam*. Although much of Islamic teaching is contrary to the Bible and is mythical, portions of its beliefs are perversions of Jewish and Christian teachings along with pagan superstitions that were believed among tribal Arabs in the 6th and 7th centuries.
- *Sikhism*. This religion came out of the Indian subcontinent and is based on the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539). A key tenet of Sikhism is that no religion has a monopoly on truth.
- *Bahai*. This religion was established by Bahauallah (1817-1892) of Persia in 1863 when he announced that he was a semi-divine prophet in the same way as were Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Mohammed. A key teaching of Bahai is the unity of the core teachings of the world’s major religions and part of God’s plan to reveal progressively his truth to humanity as it has matured and can understand his revelation. Ironically, Bahais explicitly reject the claim that Bahai is a syncretistic faith and claim that belief held in common with other religions is the result of progressive revelation that supersedes other revelation, not adoption of previous beliefs.
- *Cults*. Cults such as Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses are syncretistic because they claim to accept

the Bible as God's word but include prophetic utterances and writings which they claim have equal authority as the Bible.

Adherence to any false religion, syncretistic or not, is a direct breach of the first commandment—"You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20.3). However, many professing Christians, even some of those who claim that the Bible is the only revealed truth from God, hold syncretistic beliefs and engage in syncretistic practices. Examples of syncretism in the Church today include:

- *All religions lead to the same God.* Examples of this false notion are often reported. For example, in 2019, Pope Francis met with Grand Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb in the United Arab Emirates and declared a "diversity of religions" with the clear intent that we are to believe that all religions have merit, particularly Islam. Later in the same year, Pope Francis appointed a new archbishop, Jean-Marc Aveline, in Marseille, who was known for his commitment to 'Islamic-Christian dialogue'. Similarly, in 2012, Mitt Romney, a Mormon, was invited to give the commencement address at Liberty University. In his speech he spoke of religious liberty and stated, "Men and women of every faith, and good people with none at all, sincerely strive to do right and lead a purpose-driven life." He fed his listeners the regurgitated cud that all religions are essentially the same and spouted humanistic psychology.
- *Humanistic psychology.* Many Christian psychologists and counsellors who have imbibed secular views about mankind promulgate false and at times dangerous teachings—for example, that gender dysphoria and homosexual attractions are natural and not sins (Rom 1.24-27) to be confessed and avoided; that corporal punishment of children by parents should not be used because, contrary to the Bible (Prov 13.24; Prov 22.15; Prov 23.13-14; Prov 29.17), it will engender future abusive behaviour; and the need to forgive and love oneself and develop self-esteem
- *Multifaith engagements.* Some Christian leaders participate in interfaith prayer breakfasts, memorial services for victims of terrorist actions, or reparation services (e.g., to apologize for our ancestors' role in slavery or in the maltreatment of indigenous people). Paul warns Christians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor 6.14-18). Even where there is a common cause between adherents of different religions (e.g., protesting abortion) Christian leaders should not work with the leaders of false religions because it will be implicitly understood that the false religion is being endorsed—as for example, Brentwood Presbyterian in Santa Monica that included a Jewish Rabbi on its staff as a pastoral associate.
- *Deep time and evolution.* Some prominent Evangelicals claim to believe that God is the creator, and that Genesis 1-2 speaks of God's creative work. Yet they undermine this claim with their endorsement of deep time and evolution (e.g., on BioLogos)—they accept the secular (unprovable) view that the world is 4.5B years old and the universe is 13.8B years old, rather than the 6,000 years that can be calculated from Genesis 5.1-32 and Genesis 11.10-26 and key event dates given in Scripture; they question the historicity of Adam and believe that God created humankind through a process of guided evolution, rather than as unique creation; and they propose synthesis readings of Genesis 1.1-31 (e.g., framework, day-age, gap) instead of accepting the plain sense of what God says—he created everything in six consecutive natural days and rested on the seventh day (Ex 20.11).

Christians often fail to apply the logic law of non-contradiction. When they accept syncretistic beliefs, they attempt to hold two contrary views which cannot both be true. For example, the *Qur'an* states that Jesus was not crucified (Surahs 4:157-159) but the Bible does. One statement must be wrong. Since the *Qur'an* appeared 600 years after the crucifixion, there were multiple witnesses of the crucifixion, and the Gospels were written during the lifetime of many of the witnesses, the Bible's account is the credible one. Therefore, the *Qur'an's* teaching is wrong, which discredits its claim to be the reliable word of God.

49. Respect for God's Providences

Different views are promoted that suggest how inanimate forces, gods, or God influence the lives of people living on the earth, including the following:

- On one side, is the idea that nothing controls the lives of humans because each person is an absolutely free agent who can choose to make decisions and act without any influence or control from another entity.
- On the opposite side, is the idea that the destiny of every person is entirely programed in advance and that a person cannot deviate from his destiny. The concept of pre-programed destiny appears in various forms:
 - An advocate of pure materialism might contend that every thought and action is the product, and only possible outcome, of the series of all previous events. Humans are the product of their genes and of previous events and the actions of their parents and others around them. In this view if we had a powerful enough computer, we could theoretically model all subatomic, atomic, and molecular events and predict precisely what would happen next in natural systems (e.g., weather patterns, an earthquake, or a bridge collapse) or among rational beings (e.g., what thoughts they will express as their neurons fire).
 - Our destiny is ‘written in the stars’. The idea expressed in this view (promoted by theosophists, astrologers, and adherents to some forms of Eastern mysticism) is that non-personal entities (e.g., the alignment of celestial objects) control our destiny.
 - Some people propose the idea that we are part of a large computer program or virtual reality simulation. Movies such as *Tron*, *The Matrix*, *The Thirteenth Floor*, and *Inception* have explored this concept, as did a 2015 documentary film called *The Simulation Hypothesis*. A number of technologists and scientists promote this concept and state that if the world is a program, then someone with a higher intelligence wrote it.
- A view that falls between these two opinions is that man is a free agent, but that God looks into the future and sees what actions free agents will take, and then influences at various points the actions of men to direct events. In this view, foreknowledge is not the same as fore-determination; being able to predict that something will happen is not the same as making it happen.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that everything that is planned by God will happen (Is 14.24; Rev 4.1). The only possible way for this to be true is if God *makes* happen that which he purposes. If events are truly contingent, then they are indeterminate; and if indeterminate, they are unknowable in advance. There is no way that even God could have predicted hundreds of years before that a pregnant virgin in the line of David, living in Nazareth, would give birth in Bethlehem because she was summoned there by a Roman census, or that her son would be crucified while men gambled over his clothing, unless he made it happen. God knows, and can reveal, the future because he makes it certain.

Everything that happens, including all intermediate second causes and conditions necessary for something to happen unfold according to God’s eternal plan. His eternal plan is manifested through predestination; which is his decreeing and controlling all events (Acts 4.27-28; Eph 1.11; Eph 3.11). Most people think of the word predestination in the context of God’s saving the elect (Rom 8.28-30; Eph 1.4-5). However, it must logically apply to his decreeing *all* events, since nothing happens in the world which is disconnected from every other event. For example, assume that a person from a previously ‘unreached’ native tribe in the jungle hears a Gospel presentation, believes in Christ, and repents of his sin (Acts 13.48). His presence at the moment he heard the Gospel is connected to a long chain of events including his being rescued from a canoe accident the week before, the day of his conception, and the year in which his distant ancestors began their migratory trek from the vicinity of the tower of Babel. Likewise, the presence of the missionary at that moment is linked to a similar chain of events, which includes his parents taking him to Sunday School, the Protestant Reformation, a liaison between Charlemagne and a milkmaid, and Noah’s son Japheth moving north-west from Shinar. Thus, predestination applies to every event leading up to the salvation of the last elect person, identified in God’s eternal plan.

When we state that God predestines man's actions, most people object with the claim that this removes man's freedom of will, and that man becomes nothing more than a carbon-based computer which cannot be held accountable for its actions (e.g., for sin). They even go as far as to say that if God predestined man to sin, then God is the author of sin. Yet, God tells us without an equivocation that he predestines everything that comes to pass (Ps 139.4, 16; Prov 16.33; Acts 13.48; Rom 8.29-30; Rom 9.1-29); and at the same time that man is a responsible agent, fully accountable for his actions (Ezk 18.1-32; Rom 6.23). God even states that events are simultaneously predestined by him and the actions of responsible human agents (Gen 50.19-20; Acts 2.23; Acts 4.27-28).

The *Larger Catechism* (Q105) includes among the sins against the first commandment, "impatience at his dispensations, charging him foolishly for the evils he inflicts on us". Questioning the doctrine of predestination and God's providential dispositions in our lives (Rom 8.28) and claiming that we have control over the events of tomorrow (Prov 27.1; James 4.13-16) shows a disrespect for God and his providences. Christians must not be fatalists. Rather, they must love the doctrine of predestination because it provides the foundation for our acceptance with God, in Christ, and assurance of our salvation.

50. In, But Not Of, the World

A *Logos Bible Software* search on the terms 'of the world' and 'of this world' in the ESV text, provides us with an understanding of how Jesus, and his Prophets and Apostles, viewed this world in contrast with the world to come. From an analysis of the 'hits' we see that this world is:

- *Ruled by Satan.* He has usurped authority from Christ (Mt 4.8-9; Jn 14.30) and from mankind as God's sub-sovereigns (Gen 1.26) and has done everything in his (limited) power to enslave mankind and destroy this world. This does not mean that Christ is not currently the ultimate ruler of this world (Ps 2.1-12; Jn 16.33), but that Satan's rule over it is temporary, since he is condemned and consigned to an everlasting Hell (Jn 12.31; Jn 16.11; Rev 20.10). In contrast, the world to come will be ruled by Christ (Jn 18.36) without any interference from Satan, demons, or sinful mankind; and his reign is everlasting (Ps 146.10; Dan 2.44; Dan 4.3; Rev 11.15).
- *Full of moral and intellectual folly.* Paul rhetorically ridicules the wisdom of the world, declaring that God has made it foolishness (1 Cor 1.20; 1 Cor 3.19). This 'wisdom' declares man to be innately good, God's moral requirements a burden, and God's means of salvation from sin a joke. Thus, God hands mankind over to irrationality and depravity (Rom 1.26-31). In contrast, life in the Spirit consists of a renewed mind and heart (Eph 4.23).
- *Enslaved.* Those who live only in this world are slaves to its principles (Gal 4.3, 9) and full of covetousness and anxiety (Mt 13.22; Lk 12.30). In contrast, the believer in Christ is freed from sin and Satan and from a lust after the temporal things that are destined for destruction (2 Pt 3.7).
- *Hatred against God.* Unbelievers, goaded by Satan and his demon hordes, are at war with God because they are friends with the world (James 4.4) and are blinded by Satan to the light of the Gospel (2 Cor 4.4). They desire to overthrow Christ's reign and his Church, and to destroy Christians and their faith (Mt 10.22; Jn 15.18-19; Jn 17.14). In contrast, those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb desire to please God, through acts of love (Lev 19.18), and to see his glory displayed in the world (Mt 6.10).

A person who is of the world holds to its anti-God, amoral, and antinomian principles; lives for moments of physical, social, and intellectual pleasure (Ps 17.13-14; Lk 12.19; Eph 2.3; James 5.5; 1 Jn 2.16); is consumed with superstition; and imbues his mind with psychological fictions and manmade religions that esteem self-worth, rather than seeing himself for what he really is, a sinful, unworthy creature and a child of wrath (Is 6.5; Lk 17.10; Rom 3.12; Eph 2.1-3), without any hope (Eph 2.12).

While Jesus has chosen believers *out* of the world (Jn 17.6-7) and they are no longer *of* the world (Jn 15.19;

Jn 17.16), he declares that they are still *in* the world (Jn 17.11). Thus, he does not ask the Father to take them out of the world but to protect them from the evils of Satan and to keep them holy (Jn 17.15, 17). Therefore, believers must continue to live in a world, of which they are not a part, until called home to be with Christ. While in this world, we are to:

- *Despise the things of the world.* John, who records Jesus' prayer in the upper room, in which Jesus asks the Father to protect his people in the world, gives us the command, "Do not love the world or the things in the world", because if we continue to love the world, that is passing away with its desires, we cannot love God (Dt 6.5; Dt 10.12; Mt 22.37-38) or have the love of the Father in us (1 Jn 2.15-17). We cannot be of the world and not of the world at the same time. Our allegiance must be with one master or the other (Mt 6.24).
- *Understand the things of God.* Believers in Christ, those who have the Spirit who is from God dwelling in them, must reject the spirit of the world and strive to understand and meditate upon the message of truth that God has freely given to us (1 Cor 2.12).
- *Be on guard.* We must be constantly on our guard that no one takes us captive by the deceptive and empty teachings of the world (Col 2.8) that are based on an un-Biblical anthropology (e.g., biological evolution), psychology (e.g., man's innate goodness), theology (e.g., Christianity is one of many ways to God), or pseudo-science (e.g., 'deep time').
- *Avoid regression.* If we do not fill our minds with the principles of Biblical theology and ethics, there is a possibility that we can regress and turn back to be enslaved again by the weak and worthless teachings of men (Gal 4.9), which will shipwreck our faith (1 Tim 1.18-19; 2 Pt 2.20).
- *Engage with the world.* Paul teaches the Corinthians, who had come out of sensual and idolatrous paganism, that they were not to disengage from the world (1 Cor 5.9-11). Christians who think that they can live in ascetic or separated communities to avoid defilement do not understand that sin originates in their own hearts (Mt 15.18-20; James 4.1-3).
- *Live as if disengaged.* We must engage with the world, or we cannot be salt and light in (Mt 5.13-16). But our engagement must be with discretion and wisdom and the application of Biblical principles. In order to do this, we must deal with the world as though we had no dealings with it—because it is temporary and passing away (1 Cor 7.31).
- *Travel as pilgrims.* We must live in this world as those who are travelling through it without plans to settle down. This world is our temporary abode because we are travelling to a city whose builder is God (Heb 11.10; Heb 13.14), that is positioned in the promised new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells forever (2 Pt 3.13).

Biblical Ethics – Do Not Make an Idol

51. Protecting the Proper Worship of God

When a lawyer asked Jesus, "which is the great commandment in the Law?", Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment." Jesus went on to say that the second is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22.35-39). It has been commonly believed that Jesus provides a summary of the two portions of the Ten Commandments—our duty to God given in the first four commandments, and our duty to our neighbour covered by the second six commandments. Thus, Jesus states that the most important commandments are those which relate to our direct responsibilities toward God—worshiping only one God without idolatry, protecting his name, and keeping his day holy.

It is therefore worth considering how much attention the average modern Evangelical gives to the correct observance of the first four commandments—which appears to be relatively less than for the last six commandments. A survey reviewed by *Christianity Today* in 2018, ranks the commandments by the importance which survey respondents, out of the general population in the US, gave to each command. The

results were as follows:

Command	Still Important	Not Important	Don't Know
Do Not Murder	94%	3%	4%
Do Not Steal	94%	4%	3%
Do Not Bear False Witness	91%	5%	4%
Honor Your Father and Mother	85%	10%	6%
Do Not Commit Adultery	83%	10%	6%
Do Not Covet	78%	13%	9%
Do Not Make an Idol	63%	26%	11%
Have No Other Gods Before Me	59%	30%	11%
Do Not Take the LORD's Name in Vain	59%	33%	8%
Remember the Sabbath Day as Holy	49%	37%	13%

A similar survey in the UK indicated comparable results in the rankings, but in every case (but one), the percentage viewing each commandment to be important was *lower*. The one exception was the fifth commandment, which was slightly higher (by 2%). However, the percentage viewing the first four commandments to be important were dramatically lower in the UK than in the US. This difference probably reflects the fact that the UK has a higher percentage of the population that are Muslims than in the US (thus the slightly higher emphasis on parent honour), and the population as a whole is more secular than in the US. The ranking order for the commandments among those in the US who stated that they were Evangelical Protestants was essentially the same as the *order* for the population as a whole, but each was rated higher. The first three commandments received a 94% rating as important compared with a 97% or 99% rating for five of last six (the tenth commandment was at 94%). The fourth commandment received only an 84% rating as being still important.

The fact that the first four commandments are viewed as less important than the last six is indicative of a problem within the Church—which has deemphasized the uniqueness of the God of the Bible and of his demand that he be worshiped as he specifies—particularly on his holy day. This deemphasis must be attributed to church leaders (professors, pastors, elders, and Sunday School teachers) who do not take seriously what Jesus says about the greatest commandment being our duty to God, as given in the first four commandments. For example, Wayne Grudem in *Christian Ethics* allocates 76% of the pages in the book to addressing the obligations associated with the last six commandments, but less than 1% to each of the first and second commandments, 1.7% to the third, and 1.8% to the fourth commandment (the remainder of the text is introduction). However, a significant portion of his discussion of the fourth commandment, trashes the observance of the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath.

In contrast the members of the Westminster Assembly viewed the observance of the first four commandments to be of the utmost importance. For example, the *Larger Catechism* (Q108) states that, The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in his Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

In the following question (Q109), the *Larger Catechism* emphasizes the sin of devising and using forms of worship that are not instituted by God himself. Thus, following the teaching of Jesus on the premiere importance of the first four commandments, and following the example of the 17th century Puritans and Covenanters, we must apply ourselves with diligence to protecting the proper worship of the one, true, and holy God from all encroachments of idolatrous worship practices in the Church and in society.

52. Idolatrous Images and Icons

The second commandment opens with the words, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” (Ex 20.4) If we take this statement out of its context, we might conclude that God forbids the creation of any realistic artistic rendition of a living entity or natural inanimate object. An example of this incorrect interpretation—known as *aniconism*—is found in some sects of Islam that ban the depiction of animate entities. Thus, much of Islamic art tends to be abstract and uses shapes, forms, colours, textures, and repetition of elements—as is seen in Middle Eastern mosaics and woven carpets. This is not what God intended when he gave the command, as evidenced by the immediate context, “You shall not bow down to them or serve them” (Ex 20.5); and by the fact that he instructed the Israelites to include artistic renditions of animate entities, including angelic cherubim, in the tabernacle and temple (Ex 25.18; Ex 28.33; 1 Ki 6.23; 1 Ki 7.18, 20) and in other instances such as the bronze serpent on a pole (Num 21.8-9).

The second commandment condemns the creation of:

- Carved or cast images for the purpose of direct worship, such as an Asherah of carved stone or cast clay depicted as a naked, voluptuous female deity; or a carved metal image of a deity such as Heket, the Egyptian frog god.
- Carved or cast images used supposedly as an aid in the worship of the true God—a visual representation or surrogate to which people can look because they cannot see the invisible God—for example, the golden calf made at the direction of Aaron (Ex 32.4) or the golden calves that Jeroboam made (1 Ki 12.28).
- Icons, such as a statue or picture of a ‘sacred’ personage (e.g., Jesus, Mary, Peter, or a canonized ‘saint’).

The Bible never mentions artistic renderings of human beings as generic art. The only condemnation of the representations of *humans* is in the context of idolatry (Dt 4.16) and apparently in a few other places (e.g., 1 Ki 16.33; Dan 3.1)—assuming that these were images of a man or woman, or of a part-human and part-animal chimera (e.g., Baal was sometimes depicted with a man’s body and a bull’s head). It cannot be inferred from the Bible’s silence about the representation of humans in art that there is a prohibition against it. Therefore, it is not necessarily wrong for a Christian artist to paint a portrait (or take a photograph) of a realistic scene that depicts people at work, in a family setting, or enjoying a recreational activity. However, when the representation of the human can be used for the purposes of worship (direct as in deifying a human, or as a supposed aid as through an icon of a ‘saint’) then it should not be made or displayed. Idolatrous statues of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Saddam Hussein, and Kim Jong have been erected to the supposed glory of these individuals. The US Marines did the right thing when they toppled the statue of Hussein in Baghdad in 2003. The Council of Constantinople in 753 AD ruled against the use of images in church buildings. However, by the end of the 9th century supporters of the use of icons had prevailed. During the Reformation, statues and art representing ‘saints’ were removed from churches.

Condemnation of the use of images and icons for the purposes of worshipping a false god or as a supposed aid to the worship of the true God is reiterated in the Bible, beyond the second commandment (Dt 4.15-19). Idolatry is portrayed as being a worthless and fruitless activity (Dt 32.28; 2 Chron 25.15; Is 45.20; Jer 2.28; Jer 11.12) because idols are lifeless and nothing more than inventions of the hands of men (Dt 4.28; 1 Ki

18.26-29; Ps 115.5-7; Ps 135.15-18; Is 44.6-20; Jer 1.16; Jer 10.1-16; 1 Cor 8.4) and have no power to provide for the wellbeing of people or to save them from disaster (Jer 51.17-18; Hab 2.18-19).

Idolatry is an egregious sin because:

- God is unique and the only entity that is worthy of worship (Ex 20.3).
- It robs God of his glory (Is 42.8).
- God is jealous of any other object of worship (Ex 20.5; Ex 34.14).
- It causes our ultimate allegiance to be directed somewhere other than toward God (1 Ki 11.2-4).
- It challenges God's sovereignty with an attempt to offer an alternate explanation for the meaning and purpose of life, which can only be derived from living for the glory of God (1 Cor 10.31).
- It is the result of self-deception (Is 44.18-20; Rom 1.18-22).
- God cannot be represented by physical entities (Dt 4.15), other than by the perfect Son of God incarnate (Jn 1.14; Col 1.15; Heb 1.3).
- It is equated with spiritual adultery (Eph 5.5; Col 3.5) and associated with physical sexual immorality (Rom 1.18-32; 1 Pt 4.3).

Nevertheless, God's people are constantly tempted to engage in idolatry (Ex 23.32-33; Dt 11.16; Dt 31.20; Jer 11.13) and are warned to avoid apostasy (Dt 29.17-18), to flee from idols (1 Cor 10.14; 1 Jn 5.21) and to destroy them (Dt 7.25-26; Dt 12.2-3) or they will be judged and punished (Lev 26.30; Dt 8.19; Dt 11.17). God is angered by idolatry (Dt 29.18-20; 2 Ki 22.17; Dan 5.22-28), and anyone who persists in idolatry will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6.9-10; Gal 5.20-21; Eph 5.5; Rev 21.8). However, God will forgive anyone who turns away from idolatry to serve him (1 Cor 12.2; Gal 4.8; 1 Thess 1.9).

53. Worship Must be God-centered, or it is Idolatry

A key Reformation distinctive was the form of worship. Reformed and Puritan worship was markedly different from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran worship because it was founded exclusively on the what the Bible teaches as being acceptable to God. Therefore, a fundamental question that must be asked is, were the Reformers wrong? Today, there is considerable misunderstanding about what worship is, what it means for God to regulate worship, and what constitutes true worship. There are many reasons for this misunderstanding. However, one reason is that those who defend the historic Reformed position that God regulates worship have often presented their arguments in such a way that their opponents can drive a proverbial truck through their inconsistencies. For example, the common argument that regulations for worship apply only in public formal worship and not to private or informal worship is full of problems. However, the Bible's regulations for the correct acts of worship are not based on time and place. True worship is timeless and placeless, as Jesus told the Samaritan woman, in John 4.21-24.

How we worship God is correlated with of our theology. Although theology and worship practices are correlated, it is not entirely clear which is the cause, and which is the effect. However, it is probably a bi-directional causal relationship. Faulty theology leads to bad worship practices, and faulty worship practices lead to bad theology. In the one direction, when a church is imbued with a theology that is man-centered (e.g., individuals make a decision to accept Christ as their Saviour rather than receiving the salvation graciously given by the Holy Spirit), human initiative and individual works become viewed as being essential in the process of salvation. Thus, a time set aside for worship activities becomes filled with human initiatives and actions.

In the other direction, churches that supposedly have good theology (e.g., those with a Reformed and Puritan confessional heritage), have almost universally adopted worship practices that developed from the liturgical practices associated with Arminian and dispensationalist theology. In this case, worship practices have been leading, and theology has been following. The result is that instead of accepting the Bible and a systematic

theology of worship derived from the Bible as the normative source for defining worship practices, those churches that formerly followed the worship practices established during the 16th and 17th century Reformation have increasingly adopted the worship practices of adherents of false theologies that are explicitly man centered. With a change in worship practice inevitably comes a change in theology—as goes the worship practices so follows their theology. A review of historical examples appears to indicate that when a denomination, that at its formation held to a *cappella* exclusive-Psalm singing, adopted mere-human compositions for singing and introduced the use of musical instruments into their worship, within a few generations other changes were introduced, such as the ordination of women, and eventually the ordination of practicing homosexuals.

The corrective to false worship is to start with the premise that it must be God-centered. For worship to be fully God-centered it must be three things:

1. *For God's Glory.* Man's primary purpose is to glorify God. Worship is, ultimately, a rational creature's bowing before the creator of the universe, acknowledging that he alone is worthy to receive glory and honour (Rev 4.11).
2. *God's ministry to man.* Man's secondary purpose is to enjoy God forever. Worship is also for man's benefit and enjoyment (but not for man's glory!). In worship, we receive rebuke, instruction, comfort, and encouragement from God's word and the sacraments. God uses the elements of worship as means of grace to strengthen and enliven Christians in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, and to prepare them for their mission in the world. If the elements of worship are not God-centered, but human-centric, they lose their power, God is not acting through the actions and they become not means of grace, but entertainment to the glory of men.
3. *Defined by God alone.* God is the only one who can define what true worship is, since he alone knows what will bring glory to him and provide for our needs. Any definition of what true worship is must be derived from God. To be God-centered, worship must not come from man's will, desires, or passions. Therefore, worship must be only what God has defined it to be.

Much of what passes for worship in the modern Church gives attention to men and women—e.g., to the skill of singers, the quality of the performers' voices, the abilities of musicians, and the inventiveness of the song writers. However, if worship practices in any way draw attention to men and women and their gifts, they can only detract from God's glory, and cannot be true worship. If the content and form of worship is defined in any way by man, it cannot be God's means of dispensing grace. If the definition of true worship is not derived entirely from God's word, it detracts from his authority over worship, and cannot be true worship. If the three propositions above are not true, then there are really no standards for worship, and everyone can do what is right in his own eyes. If God does *not* care about who receives glory from worship, if it doesn't matter how worship works for the good of God's saved creatures (Rom 8.28), and if God does not define the proper content of worship, then it is idolatry and a breach of the second commandment, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Ex 20.4-5).

54. The Importance of Worshiping God as He Requires

At various times during the history of the NT Church, there have been people who believed that the Bible was to be their standard for guiding every area of life. These people have been particularly concerned about ensuring that they worshiped God correctly—in accordance with the instructions in his Word.

In the first few centuries of the NT Church, until the time of Constantine, many Christians gave their lives because they would not compromise the true worship of God with pagan practices. They refused to worship the emperor or to accept the introduction of idol worship.

During the Middle Ages there were disputes over aspects of worship, such as the use of icons. However, as the belief that the Bible alone is the standard for regulating all of life was compromised, a concern for proper worship faded. The Church introduced into the worship of God practices that would not have been accepted during the apostolic era: the mass along with incense and candles; worship through saints; the veneration of Mary; the observance of seasons and days such as Lent, Good Friday, Advent, Ascension, etc.; and the use of musical instruments and hymns that were not God-breathed.

At the time of the Reformation, theologians began to review the elements of worship and purge out those that were not consistent with the instructions and principles they found in the Bible. The Bible again became the final source for guiding all areas of life—from government and laws to economics and business practices, from family and private life to worship. The desire of the Reformers was to follow the practices of the Apostles. Many of those who wished to purge the false elements from the worship of God paid the price of their lives because they refused to adhere to the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

At the peak of the Second Reformation, Protestants temporarily gained control of the parliaments in Scotland and England. It was during this time, in the mid-17th century, that the proponents of the Reformation produced the finest systematizing of the Bible's teaching—the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, and *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*. These documents were the product of men who held seriously to the belief that the word of God is normative for all of life and that, in particular, God is to be worshiped only as he provides direction or example in Scripture.

Shortly after the production of these documents, the Puritans and Presbyterian Covenanters faced cruel persecutions because of their adherence to Biblical standards for worship. From 1660 to 1688, many hundreds were killed because they refused to allow the worship of God to be polluted with the additions of men and would not follow the dictates of the Bishops who attempted to regulate worship through books of common order. Similarly, in France, the Huguenots faced persecution because they refused to worship in the manner of the Roman Catholics. During the persecutions of the 17th century many Puritans, Presbyterians, and Huguenots fled to the Americas to set up new communities where they would be able to worship God in a right manner.

Regardless of what people today may think of the Puritans and the Presbyterian Covenanters of the 17th century, no group in the history of the NT Church has been more clearly concerned about obedience to God in every area of life than they were. Their driving motivation in life was the true glory of God. They believed, without equivocation, that God alone set the standards for worship and that any worship not authorized by him by precept or principle was not to be tolerated. We need to consider seriously why such godly and thoughtful men and women considered defending the correct worship of God something worth giving their lives for.

Since that time, the Church has allowed the principles for which the Puritans and Presbyterian Covenanters stood to be compromised. There has been a waning of the belief that God does have standards for worship and that he cares about how he is worshiped. As this belief has weakened, belief in the Bible as the standard for all of life has also diminished. Whether one is the cause of the other is not clear. What is clear however, is that very few in the Church today view the Bible as the standard for worship as well as the standard for guiding scientific and historical disciplines; determining morality; governing civil institutions and laws; directing economic, educational, and social-welfare practices; ruling family life; and dictating personal holiness. The belief that the Bible alone is the standard for determining how we are to worship God has been overshadowed by man's personal preferences, just as the Bible as a standard has been pushed from all other areas of life.

God cares about correct worship. It is an important matter to him. We are not dealing with a single proof-text. The pages of Scripture proclaim loudly that God must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. We are not dealing with a trivial matter. We are dealing with one of the most important matters that we can imagine. How we worship God stands and falls with how we respect God and his law in all areas of life. The closer we come to the correct worship of God, the more likely it is that we will be close to his standards in all other areas of life. The Bible, and only the Bible, must be our standard for determining how God is to be worshiped.

55. The Correct Worship of God – A Life and Death Matter

The congregation of an Evangelical church was “treated to one of its regular features. A handsome young woman, attractively dressed, stood before the congregation with an eight-inch microphone, the head of which she held gently to her lips while she writhed and cooed a song in which she, with closed eyes and beckoning gestures, begged Jesus, as she worked her way toward its climax, to come fill her emptiness. The crowd liked it. Her song had a different effect on me than I suspect she thought it would. It did, perhaps, bring me closer to Jesus, but by bringing me closer to the sinfulness of my own heart, the kind of heart that would be excited to lust ...”²

Evangelical Protestants reading about this performance should feel a degree of uneasiness and should question the appropriateness of the performance and wonder about its suitableness in worship and ask: What in particular causes the uneasiness? Is it the sensuality? Why is the sensuality different from that found in the Song of Solomon? If the singer had been ugly, dressed in burlap, and had stood in an erect posture, would that have made a difference? Would it then have been suitable for inclusion in a congregation’s worship? Was the singing performance worship? Was it true worship? Was it worship of God or man? Was it pleasing to God? On what basis are we to answer these questions?

The questions raised by this performance show that the topic of correct worship clearly needs to be considered by Evangelical Protestants. However, for most people in the modern Church, worship is subjective rather than objective—it is what I want to do in a God-ward direction, it is whatever I think is right or proper. Yet, when we consider the performance described above, most of us must feel, at least a little, that something is missing when we base our standard for worship on subjective opinion. There must be some things that others feel are valid as worship, which are not really true worship. We must begin to wonder if there just might be an *objective* definition of true worship.

During the Reformation, the Reformers stumbled into this question. The original impetus for the Reformation was not to reform or change worship. At least from Luther’s perspective, the original motivation for change began with matters related to the doctrine of salvation. He was first concerned about the application of earned merit to salvation (e.g., purchasing indulgences), and the question of the role of good works in salvation. As he began to grapple with the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, he couldn’t avoid challenging other aspects of the Church’s beliefs and practices.

What Luther started in Germany, and Zwingli in Switzerland, turned very quickly into a reformation of worship. Two writers stated that the “connection between theology and worship is so vital that it is impossible to change the form (worship practice) without altering the content (theological conviction).”³ For the Reformers (particularly those in Switzerland), the connection between worship and theology was so vital that it was impossible for them to change the basis of their theology without also changing their

² Posted by Marvin Olasky on *World* magazine’s *blog*. From an article written by S. M. Hutchens in *Touchstone*, posted 2004-05-02; www.worldmagblog.com/archives/003812.html.

³ D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), p. 16.

practice of worship.

During the following one hundred years, the Protestant Reformers worked through many of the complex issues related to worship. From Calvin to the Westminster Assembly (c. 1645) the Reformers, and then the Puritans, became increasingly convinced that it was primarily in the area of worship that the Church needed purification. The name ‘puritan’ comes from the Puritan’s conviction that worship had to be pure—only what God allowed and required. The Reformers and Puritans desired to remove from the worship of the Church any practices that they believed had been introduced by the will of men during the Middle Ages, and for which they could not find a warrant in the Bible.

We should try to determine why the question of worship was so important to the Reformers and Puritans that they considered their lives worthy of forfeiture rather than to participate in worship practices that they equated with paganism. As one writer has said, ‘Men like John Knox thundered forth and risked their lives over things like *not* kneeling before the sacrament. When they could find no scriptural warrant for a practice, they would not permit it—even if it “made sense” to men. What strikes me is that this worship permanently changed the world. But with our worship, we “chirp and mutter” over overhead projections, films, music directors, dramas, parking lot sizes and conversational/counselling sermons—and we change nothing!’⁴

Worship is an important topic. There probably is not a *more* important topic from God’s perspective than worship. From our perspective, after receiving salvation, there should be nothing more important than how we worship God. Even though worship is such an important topic, it is clear that the Church has not yet learned how to worship correctly or there would not be so many opinions and disagreements about what proper worship is.

56. God’s Concern for Proper Worship – The Command

The second commandment states, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Ex 20.3-6).

From this commandment we may observe that God expresses concern about how he is worshiped. Yet, most people in the Church today appear to give little thought to questions, such as, “Does it matter how we worship God?” and “Does God care about what we offer to him as worship?” They have a sense that their hearts and attitudes must be right before God during worship, or there is something wrong with what they do. However, they rarely, if ever, consider the question of what constitutes valid forms and elements of worship that are pleasing to God. On the rare occasions that they consider these questions they seem to answer them using criteria such as: 1) what feels right, 2) what the tradition of their denomination is, 3) an example of what they have seen others doing in another church, such as a growing mega-church, or 4) what they think will be effective at attracting seekers to their own church.

It seems that the only people today who ask serious questions about what constitutes proper worship are in denominations that are descended from some French, Scottish, or Dutch churches at the time of the Reformation. Even when people in these Presbyterian and Reformed churches ask questions about what constitutes proper worship, they arrive at widely divergent conclusions. In practice, there is little difference between the worship formats in most churches that claim an adherence to a regulating principle (such as in the Westminster Assembly’s *Directory for Public Worship*) and those that make no such claim. Today

⁴ R. E. Knodel Jr., ‘The Current “Liturgics” Crisis,’ *Journey*, January-March 1991; p. 9.

there is a broad range of worship styles, from formal liturgy, to ‘traditional’, and to contemporary. These styles appear to be found in about the same proportion in most Presbyterian and Reformed denominations as in the Church as a whole.

Does the question of what constitutes proper worship need to be answered? Most people will argue that there are far more important issues facing the Church than the question of what is the liturgy, style, or format of worship that we should follow. Instead of worrying about whether to use guitars, organs, or pianos, or no instruments at all; what hymns to include in the hymnal or which choruses to bind into a stapled song book; or whether or not we recite the Creed during a worship service; they claim that we should address ourselves to the real issues facing the Church. What are the issues that are more important than how we worship God? Are lobbying against homosexual ‘marriages’ or counselling in a crisis pregnancy centre more important than observing the proper worship of God? Is preaching salvation by grace alone more important than the doctrine that is contained in the songs we sing as worship? Is caring for the poor, whom Jesus says will always be with us (Mt 26.11), more important than bringing proper spiritual sacrifices to God?

If God really does care about how we worship him, then it is not right for us to consider worship as an unimportant matter. Asking the question of what constitutes true worship is not a ‘little matter’ if God does not view it to be trivial. If God has standards for worship, it is not unwarranted to suggest that some (many) aspects of what is offered to God today as worship are false.

What we offer to God as worship and how we worship him really are important matters. In fact, how we worship God may be the second most important question we could ask. The most important question is surely, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” (Mt 22.42). Once we have answered that question, there is no more important question to ask than, “Now that we know God truly, how should we worship him truly?” Let us consider the evidence that supports such an astounding assertion.

The key evidence that demonstrates that how we worship God matters to him, is found in the contents and structure of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments summarize how we are to live lives that please God. They open with commands relating to worship. They tell us that God alone is to be worshiped and that false worship (e.g., worshipping carved idols, or worshiping him through manmade images) is unacceptable to him. They tell us that God’s name is to be revered (i.e., worshiped), and that a holy day is to be set aside (“remembered”; Ex 20.8) for consideration of spiritual matters (i.e., for the worship of God). We have been so influenced by our culture that we have bought into the myth that it is more important how we treat our neighbours (e.g., not hurting them or stealing from them) than how we treat God. God does not see it that way. He tells us first to worship him correctly, and then how to show neighbourly concern. As Jesus said, when summarizing the two sections of the Ten Commandments, “‘The most important [command] is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mk 12.29-31) God considers worship to be so important that he used more than half of the text of the Ten Commandments to reinforce its importance.

57. God’s Concern for Proper Worship – Representative Examples

God is concerned about how we worship him. This is shown by what he says about offering him true worship and avoiding false worship, for example:

- The Ten Commandments (Ex 20.1-17) open with commandments dealing with worship. The first deals with the proper object of worship—God, and the second deals with the proper approach to God in worship.

- Moses instructs the people with these words: “Be careful to obey all these regulations ... take care that you be not ensnared to ... inquire about their gods ... You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods ... Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.” (Dt 12.28-32).
- God said: ‘I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig’s flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels; who say, “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.” These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before me: “I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their lap both your iniquities and your fathers’ iniquities together, says the LORD; because they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds.”’ (Is 65.2-7).
- Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their false worship when he said: “You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. And he said to them: “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.” (Mk 7.8-9).
- Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well: “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (Jn 4.23-24).
- The writer of Hebrews tells the Church: “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb 12.28-29).

God’s concern for proper worship is also shown by his punishing those who offered him improper worship. He provides representative examples of punishment for false worship as a warning to us:

- When Cain and Abel brought offerings to the LORD, we are told: “And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” (Gen 4.4-5) One offering was acceptable and the other was not. God told Cain that he had not done what was right and that his deeds (not just his attitude) were evil (1 Jn 3.12).
- “Now Nadab and Abihu, ... each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.” (Lev 10.1-2) It does not appear that they had a bad attitude. They wanted to worship God, but the offering they chose was wrong. They used fire, but not the fire from the right source. As a result, they were burned up with fire from God. ‘They presumed to serve God in the way that they found “worshipful,” but they were unwilling to regard God’s commanded worship as sufficient. They thought this was the sort of business about which God might not care very much, at least as long as the worshiper’s heart was in the right place.’⁵
- Saul, the king of Israel, became impatient waiting for Samuel, and decided to offer sacrifices on his own. Just as he had completed the offering, Samuel arrived and said, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God ... For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.” (1 Sam 13.13-14) Saul lost his kingdom because he did not do what was proper as worship.
- When David was bringing the ark on a cart into Jerusalem, Uzzah reached out his hand to keep the box from slipping off the cart. God struck him down for touching the sacred object that was part of the old covenant ceremonial worship system (1 Chron 13.9-10).
- ‘But when [Uzziah] was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. But Azariah the

⁵ Michael Horton, *A Better Way—Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), p. 144.

priest went in after him, ... and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God.” Then Uzziah was angry. And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and ... was excluded from the house of the LORD.’ (2 Chron 26.16-21).

- Ananias and Sapphira claimed to be worshipping God with an offering of the proceeds from the sale of their land. It was false worship because it was based on a lie. They lost their lives because of false worship. (Acts 5.1-11).
- Paul informed the Corinthians that some of their number had become sick or died because they had abused the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and sacrament and ordinance of worship (1 Cor 11.29-30).

58. God’s Concern for Proper Worship – Covenant Administrations

At the inauguration of each major new form of worship, God punished breaches of the new worship ceremonies. Consider the following:

Punishment of False Worship During the Inauguration of a New Form of Worship		
Associated Covenantal Administration	Primary Worship Form	Punishment for False Worship
Creation (Adam): Commencement (Gen 1.26-2.17)	Animal Sacrifices (Gen 4.4; Gen 8.20)	Cain rebuked (Gen 4.4-5) for his evil deeds (1 Jn 3.12)
National (Abraham): Promise of Seed and Land (Gen 15.1-21; Gen 17.1-14)	Fellowship Meal of Bread and Wine added (Gen 14.18)	—
Sinaitic (Moses): Law (Ex 24.1-18)	Ceremonial System (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)	Nadab and Abihu consumed with fire (Lev 10.1-2) Golden calf plague (Ex 32.35)
Royal (David): Kingdom (2 Sam 7.5-16)	Psalms and Musical instruments (1 Chron 23.5)	Uzzah struck down (1 Chron 13.9, 10)
New (Christ): Consummation (Jer 31.31-34; Lk 22.7-21; Heb 8-9)	Spiritual Equivalents, bloodless sacrifices (Heb 13.15)	Ananias and Sapphira struck down (Acts 5.1-11) Corinthians sick and dying (1 Cor 11.29-30)

These examples show that God’s concern for proper worship did not apply only during the OT economy. At the inauguration of the New Testament’s new form of worship, God reminded the Church that it was important that they worship correctly. The requirement to worship God in a correct manner and with a proper attitude has not changed since the time of the Apostles.

Today we don’t hear of people being struck dead for introducing new forms of worship. This may lead Christians to think that God no longer punishes false worship. This is not correct thinking. We must not assume that God always deals with the introduction of false worship in the same way. Paul tells us that God gave us examples in the past to warn us of the dangers of disobedience (1 Cor 10.9). We do not know how or when God will deal with false worship in the Church, but he will. Others may conclude that since God appears to be blessing their congregations, their worship must be acceptable to God. This is also false reasoning. God often blesses us despite our sin—consider the examples of Jacob and David. This is because of his grace.

The following responses are sometimes given when it is suggested that God is concerned about proper worship being offered to him:

- *Worship isn’t an important subject* – Christians have more important things to do than get involved in debates about the form and content of worship.
- *Worship isn’t regulated by God* – Even though the form of worship may have been highly regulated in the OT, we are now free under the NT to worship God however we like, as long as what we do doesn’t

go against obvious prohibitions (e.g., worshipping idols).

- *Worship isn't regulated formally by God* – God may regulate worship, but the boundaries are quite broad.
- *Worship may be regulated formally by God, but I don't care to change* – Scriptural evidence may be strong, but not convincing enough to make a person change his worship practices.
- *Worship is regulated by God; I need to change my beliefs and practices* – The idea that God regulates the details of worship is a new concept. The person wishes to change his practices to conform to God's requirements.

In each of these responses, the heart (intellect, will, beliefs, convictions, etc.) plays a significant part. As much as we can debate the topic of worship, the real issue is the state of our hearts. Do we really want to do what God wants us to do? Do we really want to do what will please him? Or is it our own desires and egos that need to be satisfied? In the final analysis, the debates related to the topic of worship are not how we interpret Ephesians 5.19 or Deuteronomy 4.15-19, but whether we really desire to walk with God and how he wants us to walk. If we do not want to be convinced that worship is important to God and only worship that he authorizes pleases him, we won't be. As Calvin said, 'I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," (1 Sam 15:22; Mt 15:9). Every addition to His word, especially in this matter, is a lie.'⁶

How we worship (the form and content) is an important matter to God. Four of the Ten Commandments deal with matters relating to correct worship. How we worship God directly influences our theology. Worship is the most important Christian duty during our time spent on earth. Worship will be our primary engagement in heaven. We need to place any discussion of worship into this essential context, for in worship the "church displays her otherworldliness".

59. Defining True Worship – Possible Definitions

Before we consider the Biblical definition of worship, we can review suggested definitions of worship that don't appear to be complete or valid:

- *Worship is a matter of the heart and not specific actions.* This definition claims that any particular action may be, or may not be, worship. What makes it worship is the attitude of the heart of the worshiper, not the action *per se*. There can be no doubt that our attitude must be right, or our worship is false (Ps 51.6; Mt 6.1-18; Mk 12.33). An act can be false or true worship, depending on the state of the person's heart (Prov 15.8). However, just because a person performs a legitimate action with a pure heart does not mean that the action becomes worship. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that those who worship correctly must worship in "spirit and truth" (Jn 4.23). True worship consists of proper acts and a right heart.
- *Worship is what is done in Church.* One person has said that worship is "the calling of saints to assemble together to meet and renew covenant with God."⁷ If worship can occur only in the covenant assembly, then what did the two Marys do when they fell at Jesus' feet (Mt 28.9)? What did Gideon do in the field

⁶ Jean Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Protestant Heritage Press, 1995), www.swrb.ab.ca/newslett/actualnls/nrc_ch00.htm.

⁷ T. David Gordon, "Review Article: The Westminster Assembly's Unworkable and Unscriptural View of Worship?" *Westminster Theological Journal*, 65, Fall 2003, pp. 353.

(Judges 7.15)? And what did the man who was cured of his blindness do when he fell before Jesus (Jn 9.38)? Confining worship to a place, time or setting (e.g., the temple, the synagogue, or a church building on Sunday morning) does not fit with the spirit of Scripture. We find individuals and groups of people worshiping God in formal liturgical services, informal family settings, or in spontaneous acts of adoration; in buildings designed for worship, in upper rooms in homes (in Jerusalem or Ephesus), or even outdoors (e.g., beside a river in Macedonia).

We can eliminate as definitions of worship: any morally right action directed to God with the right attitude, and actions performed in church. But we have not formulated a positive definition of worship. Some of the positive definitions that appear to be heading in the right direction include the following:

- ‘There is no finer definition of worship than *Te Deum* (Latin for “You are God”). It is a prayer that dates from the fourth century and represents a high point in the development of the theology of worship. ... and this fact calls attention to the forgotten reality that worship is primarily prayer.’⁸
- ‘Exactly what is worship? I like King David’s definition. “Oh magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Ps 34.3 NASB). Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of him.’⁹
- “[W]orship, put simply, is nothing more and nothing less than glorifying and enjoying God.”¹⁰
- “What is worship? It is essentially doxology, a giving of glory, praise, honour, and homage to God. In the broadest sense of the word, all true piety is worship. ... Usually, however the Puritans used the word in its narrower and more common sense, to signify simply all our direct communion with God: invocation, adoration, meditation, faith, praise, prayer and the receiving of instruction from his word, both in public and in private.”¹¹
- “Worship is the work of acknowledging the greatness of our covenant Lord.”¹²
- “Worship is the activity of the new life of a believer in which, recognizing the fullness of the Godhead as it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and His mighty redemptive acts, he seeks by the power of the Holy Spirit to render to the living God the glory, honor, and submission which are his due.”¹³
- “Worship—in the sense of telling God his worth by speech and song and celebrating his worth in his presence by proclamation and meditation—has been largely replaced, at least in the West, by a form of entertainment calculated to give worshipers the equivalent of a sauna or Jacuzzi experience and send them away feeling relaxed and tuned up at the same time.”¹⁴
- ‘Central to a biblical understanding of worship is the notion of *covenant*. ... It is in this context that we talk about the “covenant renewal ceremony.” ... worship is a covenant renewal ceremony. ... [T]he covenant renewal ceremony that God enacts not once but each Lord’s Day.’¹⁵

We will next consider a Biblical definition of worship.

60. Defining True Worship – Specific Holy Acts

It is possible to establish that God has a concern for proper worship using a general notion of the term

⁸ Robert E. Webber, *Planning Blended Worship: The Creative Mixture of Old and New* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 36.

⁹ Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group [a division of Thomas Nelson], 1998), p. 74.

¹⁰ D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), p. 51.

¹¹ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: the Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 249.

¹² John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996), p. 1.

¹³ Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, *Revelations of the Cross* (Peabody, MA: Paternoster Press/Hendrickson, 1998/2013), p. 181.

¹⁵ Michael Horton, *A Better Way—Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), pp. 19, 24, 26, 27.

‘worship’. However, we need to define the word ‘worship’ from God’s perspective, since without a precise definition we have no way of knowing what falls within his definition and what does not.

If you ask a typical Christian to define worship, he will probably respond by giving examples rather than giving a formal definition. For example: “Prayer is worship.” or “Singing praise is worship.” These definitions are probably not far from being accurate. However, we won’t canvas the opinions of the average Evangelical church to define worship. Our definition must be consistent with how God defines it. So, we will use the Bible as our source for the definition.

Before we determine how God defines worship in the Bible, we need to address one definition that is usually raised whenever the question of God’s regulation of worship is discussed with those who don’t agree with the position held by the 16th and 17th century Presbyterian and Puritan Reformers. This definition says that all of life is worship.¹⁶ This definition is usually presented when someone attempts to define a boundary around what constitutes worship. For example, if someone said that we should not allow a drama production in a church service because it is not permitted as NT worship, you can be sure that someone else will challenge the statement with the claim that all things that a Christian does (if they are not sinful) are worship. The logic when applied to worship goes something like this: 1) all of life is worship, 2) there are many legitimate things that we do (for example, riding in a subway car) that are not regulated by explicit positive commands in Scripture, 3) therefore worship cannot be strictly regulated either.

It is true that all of our lives are to be lived in homage to God (Rom 14.7-8; 1 Cor 10.31; Col 3.17, 23). In addition, it is true that a few passages of Scripture refer to worship as how we live before God (e.g., Rom 12.1). However, even if there is a general sense in which the Christian’s life is worship, this is not the prevailing sense in which the word ‘worship’ is used in the Bible. Even though all of life may occasionally be referred to as worship, this does not mean, necessarily, that all actions are worship. We are to always live before God with a reverence for him and in all that we do, but the acts or elements of worship are precisely defined by God and separated from daily acts of life.

There are many passages in Scripture that show that the acts of worship are separate from other activities of life. One example is Matthew 28.16-17. The eleven disciples went to Galilee as Jesus had commanded them. When they saw him there, they worshiped him. It is clear from this example, that whatever they were doing before they worshiped, wasn’t worship—they went from a state of non-worship to one of worship. They were obedient to his command (Mt 28.16) and honoured God through their obedience. Yet, their travelling from Jerusalem to Galilee wasn’t considered by Matthew to be worship. It was only when they performed a particular action that they worshiped Jesus. We are not told specifically what they did—e.g., falling on their faces, praying, singing a Psalm—but whatever they did, it was an act of worship.

If all of life is worship, then why does Paul make a distinction between how one should eat in the assembly at the Lord’s table and at one’s own table at home (1 Cor 11.20, 33, 34), or require silence of women in the churches but not at home (1 Cor 14.33-35)? Also, it appears that there are different guidelines for when Christians are assembled for public worship than at home. Other passages that show that worship is a particular act, or special acts, performed in appointed places, and that worship is distinct from all of life, include the following: Gen 24.26, 48; Gen 47.31; Ex 4.31; Ex 12.27; Ex 33.10; Ex 34.8; Lev 23.3; 1 Sam 1.19; Ps 22.22, 25; Ps 87.2; Mt 2.11; Mt 14.33; Heb 10.24-25.

Advocates of contemporary worship often challenge the idea that worship is a set of specific holy activities. They do not like the idea of making a distinction between what we do as worship and what we do at other

¹⁶ For example: “Our Heavenly Father wills that the whole life of believers should be worship.” Gary A. Parrett C. “9.5 Theses on Worship: A disposition on the role of music,” *Christianity Today*, February 2005, pp. 38-42. In this article the author says, ‘Any discussion of worship, then, must begin with the biblical concern for worship as lifestyle not merely a formal gathering that features specifically “religious” actions.’

times, because such a distinction requires that we account for God's definition of what acts properly constitute worship. What makes a particular act holy (i.e., worship) is not that we do it on Sunday and not on other days of the week, but that God has set it apart as a holy act. This distinction is similar to the regulation God made concerning the clean and unclean animals (Lev 11.26). Some animals were clean (holy) and others were not. Some acts are holy, and some are not. All animals are devoted to God and are for his glory (Ps 50.10; Rev 4.11), but only some animals could legitimately be offered as worship and others could not be. In the same way, all of life is to be devoted to God and for his glory (1 Cor 10.31; Rom 11.36), but only some acts are valid as worship and others are not.

When we look at the use of the words 'worship(s)', 'worshipped', 'worshipping', and 'worshippers' in the Bible we find that all of the acts of life can be divided into three classes of activities: true worship, false worship, and non-worship.

61. Defining True Worship – A Biblical Definition

We have considered definitions of worship which state that worship consists of some form of specific action that is different from what we do most of the time in our everyday lives, and that is directed toward God. However, few of these definitions were supported with Biblical references. So, it is to Scripture that we now turn to derive a precise definition of worship.

In the OT and NT, various words are translated into the English word 'worship'. A study of all the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated into the English word—in its noun and verb forms—would be exhaustive but also exhausting. Instead, we will look only at usages of the single word 'worship' in the English NT. This will provide us with a reasonable understanding of how the Bible defines true worship. Adding the OT occurrences would provide us with essentially the same mix of usages as we find in the NT.

When we consider representative NT instances of 'worship', we find that worship includes acts such as:

- Kneeling or falling down in reverence to pay homage (*proskuneo*); for example, "[w]e saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" (Mt 2.2; others are: Mt 2.8; Mt 4.9-10; Jn 4.20-24; Acts 7.43; Acts 8.27; Acts 24.11; 1 Cor 14.25; Heb 1.6; Rev 4.10; Rev 13.8; Rev 14.7; Rev 15.4; Rev 19.10).
- Serving or ministering (*latruo*); for example, "after that they shall come out and worship me in this place" (Acts 7.7; other occurrences include, Acts 7.42; Acts 24.14; Rom 9.4; Rom 12.1; Phil 3.3; Heb 9.1; Heb 12.28).
- Being God-fearing or devout (*sebomai*); for example, "in vain do they worship me" (Mt 15.9; Acts 18.13).
- Reverencing an entity (*eusebo*); for example, "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." (Acts 17.23).
- Following a religious practice (*threeskeia*); for example, "insisting on asceticism and worship of angels" (Col 2.18).

We can conclude from this brief analysis of the words that are translated into the English word 'worship', that worship is an activity that is distinct from other activities of life. Worship is an act of reverence such as kneeling before God, paying homage to him, offering a prayer to him, or thanking him. Worship also includes the state of mind, or attitude, of the worshiper—the acts are to be performed reverently with awe and respect (fear). However, worship is not just a state of mind or an attitude. Worship consists of specific actions that are performed for, and directed toward, God. Thus, worship is specific actions performed with the right attitude—it is attitude in action.

There are only a few instances in the NT where we can infer from the context that specific actions fall within the definition of worship. These are:

- Offerings (Acts 7.42; see also Josh 22.27; 1 Chron 16.29; Is 19.21).
- Sacrifices (Heb 10.1; see also 2 Ki 17.36).
- Ordinances of the tabernacle/temple (Jn 4.19-24; Jn 12.20; Heb 9.1).
- Prayer (Rev 7.11-12; Rev 11.16-17).

Adding OT examples, we can expand the list of actions that are (or were) included in the definition of worship:

- Singing praises (Ps 100.2).
- Singing accompanied by musical instruments (2 Chron 29.28, 30).
- Possibly prayer (2 Chron 29.29).
- Offering incense (Ex 30.8).

Thus, we can refine our definition of true worship by noting that worship consists of the following:

- Reverential acts offered in a right spirit—i.e., governed and enabled by the Holy Spirit (Jn 4.23-24).
- Actions not offered to false Gods (Dt 12.1-4; Dt 31.18).
- Actions not invented by men. The human heart, even in its regenerated form, cannot be trusted to provide valid acts of worship to God (Is 29.13; Mt 6.1; Mk 7.6-13; Col 2.18-23).
- Actions that are not performed to please men but God (Mt 6.2, 5, 16).
- Actions performed by God's people. Acts performed by unbelievers and even believers with an improper attitude are not true worship (Prov 15.8, 29; Jn 4.24).

Using this information, we can formulate a Biblical definition of worship:

True worship consists of reverential acts authorized by God that are directed to him and that are performed to honour him or his name (Ps 96.9).

Just because someone calls a particular action by a name does not mean that that action is in fact what it is called. For example, at one time when hundreds of homosexuals in San Francisco decided to break the laws of California and get 'married' on a Valentine's Day weekend, that does not mean that they were in fact married. Marriage is what God defines it to be—a covenant of one flesh between a man and a woman. In the same way, if an individual or congregation decides to introduce a new ritual or action and call it 'worship' that does not make it worship. Even performing this action on Sunday morning at the 11:00am service does not make the action magically become worship.

62. The First Recorded Instance of the Worship of God

The worship of God is often defined today as being whatever we dedicate to the Lord before the assembly of believers (e.g., a newly composed song, a musical performance or dance routine, a prayer, etc.), an attitude of awe toward God, or all of one's life being lived for God. These definitions are usually suggested when someone attempts to put a boundary around what constitutes worship. It is true that all of our lives are to be lived in homage to God (Rom 14.7-8; 1 Cor 10.31; Col 3.17, 23). However, the Bible is clear that worship consists of specific actions that are distinct from the other activities of life. For example, riding a bicycle is not an act of worship, but praying is. True worship consists of reverential acts authorized by God, that are directed to him and that are performed to honour him or his name (Ps 96.9).

In Genesis 4.3-4a, we find a reference to the first *recorded* instance of worship, although likely not an account of the first act of worship outside the garden. It is a mistake to think that what is recorded here is a spontaneous result of the innate human impulse to bring worship to God. Men would not have known how to worship God in the right manner (as Abel did), if God had not given explicit instructions to Adam. Adam had undoubtedly instructed his children about how they should worship God and had led his family in

worship on each Sabbath from the time that he and Eve had been expelled from the garden. Except for those in the line of Seth who called on God rightly (Gen 4.26), mankind participated in every form of idolatrous blasphemy at that time (Gen 6.5) as they did after the Flood (e.g., with their Baal and Ashtaroths), and continue to do today. Therefore, this instance of worship is called out, not because it is the first instance of worship but because it presents the first instance of *false* worship contrasted with true and acceptable worship.

The original form of worship, authorized by God, may have consisted of Adam acting as a prophet (a preacher of righteousness like Noah; 2 Pt 2.5), prayer, and offering animal sacrifices which served as a tribute payment (the firstborn of the flock) and a symbol of substitutionary atonement. Adam would have told his family about God's works of creation, his giving the law, mankind's disobedience and need of a saviour, and the promise of the coming Messiah. Then he would have led his family in a prayer of invocation as he placed the burnt offering in the fire on a stone altar. Their worship would have been focused around hearing God's revelation, speaking to God through prayer and looking forward to their hope of salvation in Christ. Adam did not rashly devise this form of worship, or it would not have been accepted by God, but followed God's instructions for worship. Their worship would have honoured God as God; humbled man by pointing out his sin and inability to pay the debt of sin and need of a saviour; and looked forward to the renovation of all things and the restoration of paradise.

Cain and Abel brought their offerings before God. They took them from their places of daily employment and carried them to another place—a place set aside for worship. It is quite likely that they brought their offerings to the entrance of the Garden of Eden where the way to God's holy abode was indicated by the honour guard of living cherubim—similar to how images of cherubim in the tabernacle were later used to symbolize the presence of God dwelling among men. Adam had probably set up an altar outside the entrance to the garden, where animals could be offered as burnt offerings—it is unlikely that Abel brought pieces of meat and left them scattered about, or in a pile, to rot—since the offerings that were brought by Cain and Abel were intended to be consumed by fire.

The account says that they came “in the course of time” or more literally, “at the end of days”. There are a number of suggestions for what is meant. Some say that it is a reference to an annual festival (e.g., at harvest time or at the end of the solar year), others that it was at the end of the week (i.e., on the Sabbath), but in either case it is referring to an established time. Regardless of what time period came to an end (a week, a harvest season, or a year), the offerings were most likely presented on a Sabbath. In addition, there seems to be something different about this offering, this time. At previous times, as his children were growing up, Adam, acting as a priest in a covenant mediator role, would have brought the offerings on behalf of his family. This may have been the first time his sons had brought their own offerings. Or it may have been the first time that an offering other than slaughtered sheep or goats was brought before the LORD.

Something was different about the nature of the two offerings this time, from offerings that had been brought previously. This made it necessary for God to challenge Cain about his offering (Gen 4.5; Heb 11.4) and not only about his attitude. So, a fundamental question is why did God require these offerings? In the Mosaic economy, there were different types of offerings (including grain and animal sacrifices). In addition, God introduced the requirement to pay a formal tribute in the form of a tithe. The offerings required before the Flood were not formulated into a complex system of sin, burnt, guilt, and peace offerings like they were in the Mosaic system. The example we have of Abraham's offering (Gen 22.1-24) is a better indicator of what God originally had required as the form of an offering—an animal substitute for man's sin that requires death, serving as a pointer to the sacrifice of Christ.

63. Fat from the Flock's Firstborn

Abel “brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Gen 4.4). The ESV’s almost word-for-word translation does not make obvious exactly what Abel did. The NIV translation says, “brought ... fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock”. The NIV makes the assumption that his offering consisted *only* of fat portions. Later, in the Mosaic ceremonial system, it appears that some slaughtered animals were to be burned entirely as a holocaust offering (Num 28.3-4), in other cases only portions of the animal were offered (Lev 3.6-17; Lev 4.8-10) and the other parts were disposed of in different ways—the offal was taken outside the camp for burning (Lev 4.11-12) and portions of the meat could be consumed by the priests mediating on behalf of the worshipers (Lev 6.26; Num 18.9-10). Regardless of exactly what Abel sacrificed, we can infer that God had instructed Adam how to conduct acts of worship properly which involved animal sacrifice, as he would later tell Moses how animal sacrifices were to be offered.

In Abel’s case, a portion of the sacrificed animal was probably not consumed as food, since at creation God had given to mankind vegetable materials for their food (Gen 1.29-30). Many interpreters believe that until the Flood, men were required to continue this pattern. However, it is hypothetically possible that God permitted men to eat meat after Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden of Eden and did not give a written endorsement of the practice until later (Gen 9.2-3). This would be consistent with the fact that the principles and specifics of the Ten Commandments were known to men centuries before they were formally delivered in written form through Moses.

Sheep or goats from the *flock* were selected for the sacrifice. Later we learn that the antediluvian patriarch Noah knew of a distinction between clean and unclean animals (Gen 7.2). Presumably, God had also revealed this to Adam, who communicated it to his sons and other descendants. Why God designated some animals (e.g., cows or sheep) as clean but others as unclean (e.g., pigs, horses, or camels) is not known. Some argue that it was for sanitary and safety reasons. However, that is mere supposition. It is not important that we know the reason. Rather, what we need to notice is that some forms of offering, and of animal sacrifices, were acceptable and others were not. This teaches the principle that God is to be worshiped acceptably (Heb 12.28).

The animals selected for the sacrifice were taken from among the *firstborn* of the flock—i.e., the first lamb or kid born to a young female sheep or goat. This is the only mention of firstborn animals being offered as sacrifices until God instructs Moses to consecrate the firstborn of man and beast (Ex 13.2). In the Mosaic system, the firstborn of animals belonged to God. The firstborn of humans were to be redeemed with a substitutionary animal (Ex 13.13). At the time of the Exodus, God relates the consecration of the firstborn to the slaughter of Egypt’s firstborn. However, this would not have applied to offerings at the time of Adam. The firstborn were consecrated to God as a token of his being the author of life. Jesus was Mary’s firstborn (Lk 2.7), and he was consecrated to God (Lk 2.22-23) in accordance with the command given to Moses. Thus, when Jesus went to the cross, he was an acceptable sacrifice because he was a firstborn without any blemish. The example of Abel’s offering the firstborn, and the endorsement of his sacrifice, teaches that worship is to be an offering back to God of a portion of what he has given to us. We do this, for example, when we tithe, observe one day out of seven as holy to the Lord, or use the Psalms in worship, since they were ultimately composed by the Holy Spirit and given to us in his word.

Abel’s offering consisted of (or, it may have included) the *fat* portions from the flock’s firstborn. The fat portions were to be offered because they represented the best (‘richest’) portions of the animal, particularly the fat from around the kidneys and liver (Ex 29.13). Throughout the OT ‘fat’ is used as a metonymy for rich or good things (Gen 45.18; Dt 31.20; Dt 32.15; Neh 9.25; Ps 63.5). In our case, we should also offer ‘fat’ as our sacrifice. The spiritual equivalent of offering fat is to offer the best possible as worship. For example, if a congregation offers a rendition of a mere human composition such as John Newton’s *Amazing Grace*, rather than singing a Psalm, it is not offering the ‘fat’ as a sacrifice. As good as the hymn is, offering it instead of a Psalm is like offering a pig’s foot instead of the fat of a sheep’s liver.

Acceptable worship is not, as some suggest, “Any human act intended as worship which carries with it reverence toward the divinity.” It is not okay to sacrifice a pig with reverence, or to pray through Mary with reverence. We are to offer only the fat from the flock’s firstborn. We must not follow traditions or popular opinions, or consult our own wills, to determine what is acceptable worship. Rather, we must consult the Bible and apply guidelines which can help us determine what is right, for example, by asking:

1. What did Jesus and the Apostles do? Their example establishes the standard for the NT Church through the remaining ages.
2. Is our action based on principle or preference? If we are not able to defend our practice from the Bible and are not willing to defend it even to the point of death, then it is not true worship.
3. Are we worshiping in Christ? Our works have no value or merit before God. We cannot ascend to God on our own terms. Our worship becomes acceptable to God only if it is through Christ (1 Pt 2.5).

64. The First Example of the Unacceptable Worship of God

Many commentators on Genesis 4.3-5a say that the reason God rejected Cain’s offering is not immediately obvious or it is unspecified. They also are quick to state that this passage (and Heb 11.4) cannot be used as a proof text for the superiority of blood sacrifices. And they dismiss the suggestion that what was offered by Abel was acceptable to God while what was offered by Cain was unacceptable. So, they conclude that the reason that God confronted Cain was not because his offering was vegetable-based rather than animal-based, but only because his attitude in making the offering was not right. However, the passage says that God looked favourably both on Abel *and* his offering; but was displeased with Cain *and* his offering. A distinction is made between the persons and also between their offerings. In addition, Hebrews 11.4 indicates that Abel’s offering was better. The primary reason, though rarely stated, why these commentators are unwilling to admit the truth that Cain’s offering was unacceptable is that they realize that there are significant ramifications if they do acknowledge the difference between the forms of the two offerings. If the form of Cain’s offering was unacceptable to God, then this means that only what God has required can be offered, and much of what men offer to God as worship today is unacceptable to him.

There is no question that a person’s attitude when he offers up worship to God must be right in order for the offering to be acceptable to God. However, we must be very careful when we consider the implications of this statement. Every one of us has a bad attitude when we offer worship to God. Cain’s offering was a heathen grudge—he brought the offering only because God required it. Also, his heart was probably filled with pride as he thought that he was bringing to God the efforts of his hard work and that God should be pleased to accept his offering. However, Abel’s heart was also affected by the remnants of indwelling sin and his offering was thus polluted. Even if Abel had a true desire to please God, there was still an element of pride in his offering. It is impossible for it to be otherwise, until we reach heaven. The difference in their attitudes did not arise from anything innate within Cain or Abel. The difference was due to the work of Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Abel’s offering was given in faith (Heb 11.4), whereas Cain’s was not. But since faith is a gift of God, the only reason Abel’s attitude was better was because Christ made it acceptable to the Father. The right attitude in worship can only be that which is humble before God and fully dependent on the merits of the work of Jesus Christ. So, even if someone offers the proper form of worship, if it is not offered in faith, it is unacceptable to God (1 Sam 16.7).

Equally important as the attitude of the worshiper, is the form of worship that he offers up. It may sound trite, but a worshiper can be sincere, and yet be sincerely wrong in what he offers as worship. He can come before God with a humble attitude, a desire to please God, and a heart overflowing with love for Jesus, and yet offer worship that is unacceptable to God. Consider for example, a nun who has devoted her life to caring for lepers for Jesus’ sake, lives an austere life, attends mass every day, and prays in her cloister for two hours every morning. Her attitude may seem to be right. However, if she prays to God, appealing to one of the saints or to Mary to assist her prayers to reach heaven, the form of her worship is unacceptable

to God.

The difference between Abel's offering and Cain's is not that one brought the first fruits and the other retained the best for himself; or that one brought a costlier offering, thus expressing greater devotion. The difference was that the *form* of Cain's offering was unacceptable to God because God had not authorized it. At one time, most Protestants understood the fact that true worship must be offered up with both a right attitude of heart and in the right form (Jn 4.23-24). They knew that true worship consists of reverential acts authorized by God, that are directed to him and that are performed to honour him or his name. However, most Protestants today have forgotten the lessons of the Reformation when false worship was purged from the Church and are wilfully re-introducing all the forms of human innovation and invention that had seeped into the Church during the Middle Ages.

Many today say that the form of Cain's offering was okay, but that Abel's offering was better. They make the difference relative rather than absolute. However, our passage tells us that Cain's offering was not acceptable to God, not that it was okay but not as pleasing as Abel's. Cain viewed worship as being defined by his own will and determined that he could bring whatever he wanted as an offering. He was testing the boundaries of God's law, as his parents had in the garden—his deeds were evil (1 Jn 3.12).

Abel's offering was acceptable to God because at that time the only form of physical offering God had authorized was that which required the slaughter of an animal. From the earliest days, God was teaching mankind that without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness of sins (Heb 9.22). Abel understood the necessity of animal sacrifice, which he had learned from his parents' example of having their nakedness (symbolical of the shame of sin) covered with animal skins (Gen 3.21). He understood the principle of substitutionary atonement and sacrifices being a sign pointing to the coming Messiah. By his offering, Abel acknowledged himself to be a sinner who deserved to die, but who had placed his hope for mercy in one who would come and offer to God a greater sacrifice—the sacrifice of his perfect life.

65. God Regulates Worship

Genesis 4.3-5a teaches that God regulates worship. By rebuking Cain for the form of his offering, as well as for his bad attitude, God demonstrates that he defines what is, and is not, acceptable as an offering that can be brought to him as worship. Cain's offering was unacceptable because, at that time, the only physical offering that was acceptable to God was that which required the slaughtering of an animal, as a symbol of substitutionary atonement.

The idea that God regulates the content and form of worship, even in the NT era, is largely dismissed in the Evangelical Church today. A widely held view is that anything, as long as the action is believed not to be inherently sinful, can be offered to God as worship; and that men (through tradition or practice) define the standards for what is valid worship. However, the position that God does not regulate worship is not supportable from Scripture (Mk 7.6-13; Acts 17.25; Rom 1.21-25; 1 Cor 14.40; Col 2.18-23) and results only in subjectivism and chaos. God regulates worship (Ex 20.25-26; Mal 1.6-10; Jn 4.23-24; 1 Cor 11.17-34; 1 Cor 14.1-40) and defines what is acceptable as worship. He defines the legitimate elements of worship both by *proscription* (negative exclusions; Ex 20.4-6; Dt 4.15-19) and by *prescription* (positive inclusions; Ex 40.16; Dt 4.2; Dt 12.28; 2 Chron 26.16-21; Mic 6.6-8).

God used different covenantal forms, with associated worship elements, as he progressively revealed his law and redemptive plans to mankind. In each significant covenantal administration, God demonstrated the importance of correct worship by providing representative examples of punishment for men who invented or introduced false worship. Not all instances of false worship were punished; just as not all overt sins are immediately punished today. The first example was Cain's bringing his unauthorized and illegitimate

offering of farm produce. At the introduction of the Mosaic covenant and its new forms of worship, God punished Nadab and Abihu for bringing unauthorized fire (Lev 10.1-2). David, acting as a prophet, not in his role as king, introduced the form of worship used in the temple. So, God reinforced the importance of true worship by punishing Uzzah (1 Chron 13.9-10), and later Uzziah (2 Chron 26.16-21). When the NT form of worship, consistent with the New Covenant, was being introduced in the apostolic Church God again provided examples to demonstrate that he continues to demand correct worship, by punishing Ananias and Sapphira who claimed to be worshipping God with an offering of *all* the proceeds from the sale of their land (Acts 5.1-11). Paul informed the Corinthians that some of their number had become sick or had died because they had abused the observance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11.29, 30).

Cain attempted to introduce false worship and was punished for it. He was not a prophet, like his father, and had no warrant from God to change the prescription for worship that God had delivered through Adam. Likewise, today, no unauthorized individual has the right to introduce changes in worship. In the past, once a new form of worship was introduced by a person with prophetic authority, the generations that followed continued to observe the form exactly (Josh 8.30-31; 2 Chron 8.13-15; 2 Chron 29.25-30; Neh 12.24) or were declared guilty as idolatrous law-breakers. The last covenantal administration is the one introduced by Jesus Christ, directly and through the Apostles. Since there has been no prophetic office since the close of the NT era, our worship form must be based upon, and be in accord with, the apostolic form. No one in the Church today fills the prophetic office, and therefore, no one has authority to make changes to the form or elements of worship introduced by the Apostles who acted on behalf of Christ. We, therefore, have an obligation to do what we can to determine from Scripture what the apostolic form of worship was, and follow it exclusively.

The contrast between the worship forms of Cain and Abel teaches us that:

1. God alone defines true worship. Anything that he does not require by precept or example as worship is, by definition, not true worship.
2. True worship consists of reverential acts authorized by God, that are directed to him and that are performed to honour him or his name.
3. In each covenantal age, God provides a suite of elements that constitute true worship. These are the only elements of worship that he permits; any other elements that people bring before him are false worship.
4. God cannot tolerate false worship. His nature requires that true worship be guarded jealously, and that false worship be punished.
5. Men are finite creatures. So, it is absurd to think that they can determine what is right as worship, and what will please God.
6. Men are sinful creatures, and their natural tendency is toward idolatry and the introduction of false worship.
7. Men have no authority to change the form of worship. Only prophets, under direct revelation, were given temporary authority by God to introduce changes in his worship. There are no prophets today, and no changes to the Covenant, so there cannot be changes introduced in the elements or form of worship that differ from what the Apostles practiced.

From the beginning, what men did in worship has been the definitive factor in demonstrating their obedience to God. The question we must ask is simple, do we do what God requires of us, or not? Worship is not a matter of opinion or taste, it is what God defines it to be, because God regulates worship.

66. The Regulative Principle of Worship

Previously, we determined that God is not pleased with false worship. This implies that there are some acts that men call 'worship' that are not in fact true worship. We have also defined true worship, from the Bible,

as performing one or more reverential actions (authorized by God) that are directed to him and are performed to honour him or his name (Ps 96.9), and are offered in the right spirit or attitude. We now need to determine what specific actions are acceptable and pleasing to God as worship and what types of actions are not acceptable. Otherwise, we won't know what true worship is and what false worship is. Actions that Scripture shows to be proper actions of worship are the elements of worship. However, before we can identify the elements, we need to answer the question: How does God regulate worship? Answering this question is necessary because there are different ways in which it can be answered. The way it is answered will, largely, determine what are the proper elements of worship.

During the Reformation, Reformed Protestants (i.e., mainly the Swiss, French, Dutch, and Scottish churches) took the position that innovations in worship introduced during the Middle Ages were not legitimate worship and worked for their removal from the practice of the Church. They developed a set of principles for determining what the elements of worship should be. This set of principles has been called The Regulative Principle of Worship. Presbyterian and Reformed documents from the 16th century Reformation and the 17th century Second Reformation (i.e., the Puritans and Presbyterian Covenanters) such as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* present this position.

The Regulative Principle of Worship was the position held to be normative within Presbyterian and Reformed churches until about the middle of the 19th century. For example, William Cunningham said: "First, that the written word of God is the only rule by which the whole administration of the affairs of the church and the execution of the functions of its office-bearers must be regulated; secondly, That the worship and government of the church are settled and laid down in Scripture, and that it is unwarranted and unlawful to introduce any new thing in worship and government which does not rest upon scriptural authority, in other words, with respect to which God has not positively intimated to us in His word His will that it should form part of the ordinary administration of the affairs of His Church; thirdly, That no laws or regulations should be made except those which it is necessary to make [i.e., not to bind the consciences of men]"¹⁷

The Regulative Principle of Worship has largely been removed from the working principles of the Church. It can no longer be assumed that it forms the basis of a common operating principle that guides the practice of worship in Protestant churches. Even among Presbyterian and Reformed churches, where denominations, congregations, pastors, or professors claim to accept and adhere to this Regulative Principle, there is considerable variation in how it is understood and applied.

There are only two possibilities, either:

- *God does not regulate worship.* This position holds that anything is permissible as worship. It is based on an assumption that the OT church may have been bound, but that the NT church is free to do as it pleases. It permits anything that men define as worship, including such things as horse riding demonstrations and juggling or tearing apart a leg of lamb during the Lord's Supper instead of breaking bread. Man (through tradition or practice) sets the 'standard' for what is 'valid' worship and it results in chaos. However, the Bible is clear, manmade worship is unacceptable to God (Gen 4.3-7; Is 29.13; Mark 7.6-13; Acts 17.25; Rom 1.21-25; 1 Cor 14.40; Col 2.18-23). This position is not supportable from Scripture.
- *God regulates worship.* God controls, in some form, what he finds acceptable as worship. At the highest level, this is the over-riding definition of the Regulative Principle of Worship. This creates boundaries of some kind around what can be considered the legitimate elements of worship, and the Bible serves as the basis for determining what is legitimate worship (Ex 20.25-26; Mal 1.6-10; Jn 4.23-24; 1 Cor 11.17-34; 1 Cor 14.1-40).

The Biblically correct position is that God regulates worship. Some people concede that God regulated

¹⁷ William Cunningham, *Discussions on Church Principles* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), Chapter 9, pp. 248-56.

worship in the OT economy (e.g., in the tabernacle and temple) but claim that he has lifted the regulations under the NT economy. They claim that since Christ has abolished the Ceremonial law in his death, worship is now unregulated under the NT economy. The Apostle Paul, writing after the regulative principle was supposedly abolished, states a regulative principle and condemns manmade doctrines, commandments, and human will-based worship (Col 2.20-23). He also laid out specific guidelines for worship in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 11.17-34; 1 Cor 14.1-40). Everyone draws a boundary of some form around worship. The question is whether it will be God's boundary or man's. God regulated worship in the OT economy and continues to regulate it today.

67. God Regulates Worship by Prescription and Proscription

Accepting that God regulates worship in the NT economy as a starting premise, there are only two possible basic positions that can be proposed as to how he regulates it:

- *God regulates worship by proscription alone.* God excludes particular elements (acts, forms, objects, ceremonies, etc.) from worship, such as worshiping idols or using bloody sacrifices in NT worship. However, anything not excluded is permitted—for example, singing mere human compositions, observance of Lent, and liturgical dancing. This position is not supportable from Scripture because (as we see next), God regulates worship prescriptively (positively) as well as proscriptively (negatively).
- *God regulates worship by prescription and proscription.* We are to worship God only as he directs prescriptively and proscriptively. In this regard, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 21.1) states, “The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.” This position limits worship to what God has stated or shown by example should be included in NT worship, and excludes by default anything not included in the prescription

The idea that God regulates worship by proscription is the popular view that is held by most people in the Church today, even though they may not argue explicitly that if God hasn't prohibited a particular act, then it is permissible. A practical problem with this view is that God would have to give a very long list of exclusions to provide a clear indication of what is unacceptable in worship. However, it is clear, through an objective analysis of Scripture, that God does not need to provide a lengthy list of exclusions. He provides representative exclusions and a specific list of only those items that he permits as acceptable forms of worship. This is, probably, the most important division in all of the debates about worship. If God permits anything not excluded, then his regulation of worship is very limited and essentially ‘anything’ goes. However, if God defines what are the acceptable elements of worship, then we are not to offer any other form of worship than what he has permitted.

Our prescriptive warrant for what to include in worship must be taken from the entire Bible, not just from the teachings of Jesus or the Apostles (Mt 5.17-19; Mt 23.23; 2 Tim 3.16-17). If we limit our warrant to the NT alone, we will have to remove immediately many of the practices of the modern church., since we can find no explicit warrant for them in the NT (e.g., writing new songs for use in worship; the celebration of Christmas and Easter and increasingly in the Evangelical Church, Lent). However, many of the worship practices of the modern Church likely should be eliminated because they find no warrant anywhere in Scripture.

In addition, if we limit our warrant for what to include in worship to direct precept or command, we are confronted with problems because, for example, we don't find a command to baptize children or to allow

women to take the Lord's Supper. We reject the position that direct precept is required for every act of worship—not because it is impractical or because it doesn't allow us to continue worshipping according to our own traditions or desires. Rather, we reject it because we are told in Scripture to follow the example of the Apostles and because we base our interpretation of Scripture on a set of hermeneutic principles that apply the comprehensive teachings of Scripture as a whole, to every area of life, including worship. Thus, we derive our warrant for the elements and practices to include in worship, not only from direct precepts but from examples of Jesus or the Apostles and from what may be derived by logical inference from principles governing worship. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (ch 1.6) states, "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture ..." This statement assumes the completion of revelation in the Bible (all that we need to know is present); the unity of OT and NT and of God's law; that God does not have to repeat himself in the NT; the replacement of the forms of ceremonial worship, but not the substance which continues in spiritual form under the NT economy; the maintenance of a balance between covenantal continuity and discontinuity; and a distinction between elements versus the modes and circumstances of worship.

We find in Scripture that God tells us what the acceptable forms of worship are. By default, this should exclude all other forms and elements. However, because of our foolish tendency to introduce false worship (Eccl 5.1), God also includes specific instructions about what are representative unacceptable ways of worshipping him (e.g., through idols).

We can summarize our analysis of how God regulates worship, as follows:

God regulates worship by proscription (negative exclusions) and prescription (positive inclusions) through commands and examples, which may be derived from the OT and NT by inference from principles.

68. The Elements of Worship for the NT Church

The valid acts of worship, as required by precept or endorsed by the examples of Jesus and the Apostles, which may be offered to God by the NT Church are:

- *Reading Scripture.* Jesus sets an example (Lk 4.16-19) as does Paul (Acts 13.15); and Paul and John require the Scriptures to be read (Col 4.16; 1 Thess 5.27; 1 Tim 4.13; Rev 1.3). Yet, this element of worship is rapidly disappearing from many churches. In contrast, the Puritans who composed the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Directory for Public Worship*, recommended that a chapter from each of the OT and NT should be read systematically each week from the pulpit so that the entire Bible was read through regularly. Regular Bible reading is rare in Church worship today.
- *Preaching/Teaching.* This is a worship activity that the Church is required to undertake. It was established by the example of Jesus and the Apostles and by their command (Mt 10.7; Mt 11.1; Mt 13.54; Mt 28.19-20; Mk 3.14; Mk 16.15; Jn 13.7-16.33; Acts 2.40, 42; Acts 8.35; Acts 9.20; Acts 13.14-47; Acts 17.16-31; Acts 17.17; Acts 18.5, 11; Acts 19.8; Rom 10.14; Eph 4.11-13; 2 Tim 4.2). Preaching is covenantal communication. The hearer is accepting and agreeing to covenant obligations in an act of worship. Hearing Jesus' ambassadors preach is to participate in a relationship with God. Much has been written about how preaching should be performed—from notes or extemporaneously, topically or exegetically, with visual aids or not, and so on. We will not consider these questions in this series. However, the principle that preaching and teaching must present Christ as Saviour and apply Scripture, is so integral to the life and worship of the Church that the principle is rarely questioned. We will consider the topic of ordination to leadership roles in the Church, under the fifth commandment.
- *Benediction/Blessing* (Mt 19.13, 15; Lk 24.50; Acts 6.5-6; Heb 13.20-21).

- *Singing Psalms* (Mt 26.30¹⁸; Rom 15.9 [Gk: ‘psalm’]; 1 Cor 14.26 [Gk: ‘psalm’]; Eph 5.19; Col 3.16; Heb 13.15; James 5.13 [Gk: ‘psalm’]). Exclusive Psalmody—i.e., excluding mere-human compositions as a form of valid worship—is a topic that we will consider in detail later. It is the ‘lightning rod’ in any consideration of what constitutes the valid elements of the worship of God.
- *Prayer* (Mt 6.5-15; Jn 17.1-26; Acts 1.14; Acts 14.23; 1 Cor 11.13; 1 Cor 14.14-15; 1 Thess 5.17). No one questions the propriety of prayer as worship, and we will consider some guidelines later. Questions are raised about whether prayers should be extemporaneous or written and read and about how to interpret Paul’s instruction about women remaining silent in the Church (1 Cor 14.34) and whether that instruction applies today, and if it does, whether it applies to prayer as well as to preaching/teaching. These are debated questions and beyond the scope of this study of Biblical ethics.
- *Lawful, Religious Oaths and Vows* (Mt 26.63-64; 2 Cor 1.23). Some may disagree with the inclusion of oaths and vows as an element of worship. They will usually belong to denominations of the Protestant Church that have concluded, from a misinterpretation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5.33-37, that it is wrong for a Christian to take oaths or make vows. This topic is dealt with under the ninth commandment. While there are no examples in the apostolic Church of the use of oaths or vows in a gathered assembly, this does not mean that taking an oath or vow is not an act of worship. There would likely have been an oath and a benediction/blessing associated with the ordination or commissioning of elders in the early NT Church, as there is in congregational ordinations today.
- *Tithes and Offerings* (Mt 6.1-4; Mt 23.23; Acts 4.34-37; Acts 11.29-30; 1 Cor 16.1-2; 2 Cor 8.2-4; 2 Cor 9.12; Heb 13.16). Returning offerings as a portion of the blessings we have received from God is a reverential act, authorized by him and performed to honour him, and is therefore worship. This topic will be addressed under the eighth commandment.
- *Lord’s Supper* (Mt 26.26-29; Acts 2.42; Acts 20.7, 11; 1 Cor 11.17-34). Everyone agrees that observance of the Lord’s Supper is an act of worship. However, there are ways of observing it (e.g., viewing it as a sacrifice of the body of Christ) that invalidate the observance as true worship. We will not consider these questions in this study of Biblical ethics.
- *Fasting* (Mt 6.16-18; Acts 13.2; Acts 14.23). Fasting is an act of worship, which we will address later in this section on the second commandment.
- *Baptism* (Mt 28.19; Acts 2.38, 41; Acts 18.8; Acts 19.4-5). Baptism is a contentious element of worship. But not usually over its being an act of worship, but rather over matters such as the meaning (e.g., a sign of conversion or of membership in the covenant community), the proper mode, the valid recipients, and the manner in which grace is conferred through the act. These questions are beyond the direct scope of this study of Biblical ethics. However, believers are commanded to be baptized, therefore it is a moral requirement (see, *Baptism*).

Most Protestant Evangelicals would probably agree that the actions (elements) in the above list may be included in a liturgy of worship. However, many will not agree that these are the *only* authorized elements of worship in the NT age. They may want to also include speaking in tongues (Acts 2.4; 1 Cor 14.27; Acts 19.6) and prophecy (1 Cor 14.26; Acts 19.6) that occurred in more than one early NT church and healings. However, these were temporary signs of the apostolic age that ended once the Apostles died, and the NT canon of Scripture was complete. Another item that an observant reader may notice that is missing is instrumental musical performances. We will address this topic later.

69. The Biblical Elements of Worship – An Exclusive List

Previously, we identified the following valid acts of worship, as required by precept or endorsed by the examples of Jesus and the Apostles, which may be offered to God by the NT Church: reading Scripture;

¹⁸ It is generally agreed by commentators that the hymn they sang was one or more of the Psalms from the Hallel portion of the Psalter (Psalms 113-118).

preaching/teaching; offering a benediction/blessing; singing Psalms; prayer; making lawful religious oaths and vows; tithes and offerings, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and baptism. These elements of worship are *the* elements of worship for the post-apostolic Church. God has prescribed them as acceptable worship and as the *only* acts of worship that he accepts. Anything else that we do in our lives, whether routine or extraordinary, even if the action is intrinsically good and done with a God-honouring motive, is not an act of worship. Anything offered as worship to God that consists of something other than these elements is not true worship.

Other acts may be offered to God as claimed acts of worship, but because the Bible does not prescribe and endorse them by positive command or example or by inference from principles, they are not accepted by God as worship. These other actions may be *perceived* to be worship, but just because they are called 'worship' does not make them true worship. This means that the following actions, along with many others, are not acts of worship under the NT economy: playing musical instruments, singing songs of mere human composition (i.e., not God-breathed), liturgical dancing, conducting drama performances, burning incense, lighting candles, carrying a cross in a processional, washing hands, foot washing, ablutions other than baptism, gestures such as making the motion of a cross, anointing with perfumed oil, placing palm fronds before an image of Jesus, and observing 'holy' days such as Lent and Good Friday.

Until we list exclusions (i.e., specifying acts that are *not* worship), most people find the whole discussion of what constitutes worship to be purely an academic exercise and dismiss it. However, the list of exclusions hits 'below the belt'. Their view and belief of what constitutes worship is challenged since the list *excludes* forms and acts with which they are familiar. Their shrug suddenly turns into a strong hostile challenge and sometimes even to anger. People respond with passion, and make statements like: "What do you mean, we can't sing *Amazing Grace* in church?" Or, "Are you telling me I can't use guitars, a piano, or an organ during the Sunday service?" Or, "You've got to be kidding when you say that a trained choir singing Handel's *Messiah* isn't pleasing to God?" Or, "What is wrong with a Christmas pageant?" No one who slaughters sacred cows is popular.

Thus, we reach the crux of debates about worship. It seems always to come down to three key concepts:

1. *A Complete list of the elements of worship* – The list of elements is complete. Only the acts identified in the list are worship; anything else is, by God's definition, not worship.
2. *Exclusive Psalm singing* – Only the Psalms from the OT Psalter are to be sung as worship.
3. *Singing Psalms without instruments* – The Psalms when sung as worship to God are to be sung without instrumental accompaniment.

Debates in the Evangelical Church over such things as liturgical dancing, drama productions, the role of choirs, etc., are relatively easy to resolve if conclusions have been reached and accepted about these key points—the ten elements of worship and exclusive Psalm singing without instrumental accompaniment.

Everyone in the Evangelical Church agrees that there is some kind of boundary around worship. They will also agree that some good actions that men perform are simply not worship—for example, replacing the piston rings in a car engine or singing a song about love between a man and his wife. At some point everyone draws a line and says, "This is worship, and this is not." Also, everyone agrees that some songs that are sung as 'worship' are just not acceptable as worship—for example, to praise Mary as a perpetual virgin or to espouse a form of pantheism—and theological criteria are applied for selecting 'worship' songs. Regardless, a line is drawn, and some songs are excluded, and others permitted. The same thing happens with music. It may be that particular instruments or genres of music are permitted and others excluded.

The fact that some form of a line is drawn around the elements and forms of worship demonstrates that the real issue is not that a line is drawn, but *where* it is drawn. Most people who react to the exclusive list of worship elements are not reacting to the concept of a line. What they are reacting to is where the Bible draws the line. The real issue is whether men and women are willing to accept God's line or create their own. This places us back in the Garden—we are once again confronted with the question: "Did God really

say ...?”

Of course, someone will say, “But your list isn’t the *Bible*’s boundary, it is your own narrow interpretation and definition!” This is the same claim that is raised on just about any topic you can name. There is a Biblical position on marriage, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, divorce, abortion, conducting wars, grace and works, capital punishment, God’s law, the mode and recipients of Baptism, women preachers, election and predestination, eschatology, etc. The fact that there are debates throughout the Church on these topics does not mean that the Bible is not clear. It just means that some people are not willing to accept God’s position. On all these topics, it is necessary for the parties both to defend positively their own views and constructively critique the alternate views.

70. Elements, Modes, and Circumstances of Worship Defined

God regulates every aspect of worship by proscription and prescription and through commands and examples, which may be derived from Scripture directly or by inference from principles. Someone may respond and say that God does not regulate *some* aspects of worship—at least not under the NT. For example, in the OT the garments of the priests were described in detail, but nothing is said about how NT elders should dress. The OT prescribed morning and evening sacrifices every day, but the NT does not mention the times of worship that the Church met on the Lord’s Day. The temple was laid out according to the precise instructions from God, but NT congregations assemble in school gymnasiums, hotel meeting rooms, living rooms, auditorium-style sanctuaries, and cathedrals. If God regulates all aspects of worship, why is it that we are not provided detailed direction for all of these aspects of worship?

In fact, we are provided with direction for *every* aspect of worship. However, not all of the directions are as explicit as others. Some direction is given by example, and some is derived from Scripture by inference from principles. We can think of commands, examples and principles as being directions on a continuum. At the one end (command), there is a high degree of certainty about what God requires. At the other end (principle), we have less explicit direction from God—it is still direction but our means of deriving the direction is inferential. Between these two poles are examples of how Christ and the Apostles worshiped.

Explicit Command Element	Example Mode	Principle Circumstance
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In the same way, there is a continuum between those aspects of worship that are specified as elements that God requires and those aspects that are derived from principles by Christian’s applying Biblically based common sense in local circumstances. Between the elements of worship and the circumstances, are modes. Modes of worship may be derived from command, example, or principle. God regulates the entire continuum. There is no aspect of worship that is not under his authority. While every aspect of worship is regulated by God, not everything connected with worship is an act (element) of worship.

That there is a distinction among element, mode, and circumstance is clear to most people, in practice if not in principle. They would agree that prayer is an element of worship. They would also agree that whether one stands, kneels, or sits to pray is a distinction of mode—although they might not be able to explain the reason for the distinction between element and mode. They would also agree that whether a public worship service is held at 10:00 or 11:00 on Sunday morning is a circumstance—again, even if they could not explain the taxonomy defined here.

John Frame argues that there cannot be circumstances to worship, because all of life is under the Regulative

Principle of Worship.¹⁹ He contends that since all of life is regulated, circumstances don't exist, and therefore the distinction is artificial. Therefore, his conclusion is that we can do just about anything in worship as long as it is consistent with Biblical principles. He states, "I therefore reaffirm the regulative principle in the form ["whatever is not commanded is forbidden"], while denying that this principle for worship is any different from the principle by which God governs other areas of life."

Frame is correct when he says that, "all human actions are ruled by divine commandments. There is no neutral area where God permits us to be our own lawgivers." The mistake Frame makes is to deny that in both "all human actions" and in worship, God lays out some aspects of his commands more explicitly and some less fully. For example, God has given detailed instructions about consanguineous relationships (Lev 18.6-18), has given less specific details about using weights and measures in commerce (Lev 19.35-36), and has only given general guidance about how the office of the civil magistrate is to be organized and to function (e.g., Rom 13.4). In the same way, some aspects of God's law were temporary, relating to a particular time and place (e.g., the cities of refuge) but teaching universal principles such as due process.

In the domain of worship, we find the same thing. For some aspects of worship, God gives explicit commands. He specifically lays out the elements that constitute worship—for example, prayer is an act of worship but performing a juggling act or brain surgery are not acts of worship. God also gives general guidance, through examples of the modes by which the elements may be properly performed (e.g., we believe that modes of Baptism include immersion, pouring, and sprinkling). He leaves us to work out the fine details of the circumstances (e.g., how often the Church will meet for communal prayer) from principles such as balancing the requirement to work six days and rest on one day. God also provided specific instructions that were temporary for some aspects of worship. For example, he gave specific instructions about how the tabernacle was to be laid out and which kinds of animals were to be used for the sacrifices.

71. Elements, Modes, and Circumstances of Worship are All Regulated

Some people have misunderstood the distinction between elements of worship and circumstances and have suggested that the elements are regulated but the circumstances are not. This is not correct. The distinction is not that some aspects of worship are regulated, and others are not. Rather, since all aspects of worship are regulated, the distinction is with respect to the *type* of regulation. This is the position of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 1.6) that makes a distinction between the elements and circumstances as follows:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

We should note that the *Confession* does not say that the circumstances are unregulated, but rather that they are to be regulated "according to the general rules [i.e., principles] of the Word, which are always to be observed."

¹⁹ John M. Frame, "Some Questions About the Regulative Principle," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 54, Fall 1992, pp. 357-66.

George Gillespie²⁰ and Samuel Rutherford,²¹ who were members of the Westminster Assembly, give guidelines for differentiating the elements of worship from the circumstances. Circumstances:

- Are not a commanded part of worship and are therefore not essential to worship. Christians must perform the elements of worship; they are not required to perform a specific circumstance. For example, we must all sing Psalms, but the particular tune we use is not necessarily of the essence of singing the Psalms.
- Do not have sacred significance or typical association. For example, preachers may wear ties or turtleneck sweaters; they are not required to wear linen ephods, because the garments in the OT economy represented the spiritual holiness that all believers are to wear in Christ.
- Are of natural or physical import, not spiritual or moral import. For example, the place where the Church meets (generally) does not have spiritual or moral import. In the OT economy the temple had special significance, but in the NT economy the assembled saints are the temple of God (1 Cor 3.16, 17; Eph 2.20-22; 1 Pt 2.4-5).
- Are not directly determinable from Scripture because the specifics are infinitely variable. Circumstances are not spelled out explicitly in the Word of God and cannot be learned directly from it. They can only be derived from broad principles. For example, the Church is to assemble for public worship on the Lord's Day, but the time of that assembly must be determined by Christian prudence.

Circumstances of worship are to be governed by principles found in Scripture:

- They are to be introduced with a legitimate justification that can be made obvious to the worshiping saints (1 Cor 10.31; 1 Cor 14.40).
- They are not to be imposed at the whim of the Elders or to appease some faction within a congregation (Phil 2.3; 1 Tim 5.21; 1 Pt 5.2-3).
- They are to be consistent with love for the brothers/sisters in the congregation (1 Pt 1.22; 1 Pt 3.8).
- They are not to put obstacles (stumbling blocks) in the way of weaker brothers (Rom 14.19-23).
- They are to encourage unity, peace and harmony (Rom 12.18).

The distinction between modes and circumstances is more difficult to define. In general, we can consider the elements (acts) of worship to be the *what* of worship—i.e., what we are to do. The modes of worship are the different ways that the elements can be performed, as shown by Scriptural example—i.e., the *how* of worship. Thus, the modes of worship are legitimate, reverential, and edifying ways of performing the elements. For example, a person can pray in various reverential postures—kneeling/prostrate (Mt 26.39; Lk 5.12; Lk 22.41), reclining (Lk 22.14, 17); or sitting (2 Sam 7.18; Mt 14.19; Mk 14.32, 37, 38)—and can use various forms of prayer—including the exact words given by the Lord Jesus in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 6.9-13). The circumstances provide for, in general, the *when* and *where* of worship. Of course, these distinctions are not absolute, since we believe that worship has a special place on the Sabbath day and that, to some extent, the *when* of worship is not a mere circumstance. Also, as there are legitimate ways (modes) of performing the elements of worship, there are also illegitimate ways of performing them. For example, it would not be appropriate to sing a Psalm to the tune for *99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall* or to say a prayer in the style of urban ghetto-rap.

72. Example Modes and Circumstances for the Elements of Worship

The following table provides examples of possible modes and circumstances for each of the Biblical elements of worship. While the elements are invariant, in that no additional elements can be added under the NT economy and none can be subtracted, the modes and circumstances allow for variety suitable to the

²⁰ George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded Upon the Church of Scotland*, Ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press, [1637, 60] 1993), pp. 112, 114.

²¹ Samuel Rutherford, *Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication* (Paul's Church Yard, London: John Field, 1644), p. 4.

specific situation in which the elements are performed—as long as Biblical guiding examples and principles regulating them are observed.

Possible Modes	Possible Circumstances
Reading Scripture	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing or sitting (Neh 8.5; Lk 4.20) • Version of translation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portion of Scripture chosen
Preaching/Teaching	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitting (Lk 4.20, 21; Lk 5.3; Jn 8.2; Acts 13.16; Acts 16.13; Acts 17.22) or standing (Acts 2.14) • Children's message (Dt 11.19; Is 54.13) • Style: exegetical, topical, parabolic, historical-redemptive, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of sermon •
Benediction/Blessing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised hands (1 Tim 2.8) • Hands laid on head (Mk 10.16) • Various forms (Num 6.24-26; Rom 4.7-8; Rom 16.25-27; 1 Thess 5.23, 28; Heb 13.20, 21; Jude 24; Jude 25) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before or after a public assembly of worship
Psalm Singing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Style: chanting, four-part harmony, etc. • Translation and meter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tune • Number sung • Portion or all of a Psalm
Prayer	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posture: standing, sitting, kneeling, prostrate (2 Sam 7.18; Mt 14.19; Mt 26.39; Mk 11.25; Mk 14.32, 37, 38; Lk 5.12; Lk 22.14-19, 41) • Raised hands (1 Tim 2.8) • Form of words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of prayer • Number of prayers
Lawful/Religious Oaths and Vows	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised right hand (Gen 14.22) • Form of oath (Gen 31.53; Judges 8.19; 2 Sam 19.7; Jer 44.26; 2 Cor 1.23; Gal 1.20; 1 Thess 2.5; 1 Thess 5.27) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left hand on Bible
Tithes and Offerings	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection during service or basket at door (Mk 12.41, 42; 1 Cor 16.1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of electronic means of transferring funds
Lord's Supper	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leavened or unleavened Bread • Common cup or small plastic cups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency (1 Cor 11.26) • Grape juice instead of wine
Fasting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstinence from all food or just bread and water (Dan 10.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency
Baptism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion, pouring, sprinkling • Subjects: infants and adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place (e.g., in a sanctuary or beside a river)
General	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning and evening worship (1 Chron 16.39) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place of worship (Lk 22.11, 12; Acts 1.13; Acts 16.13; Acts 17.10) • Type of building • Layout and type of seating • Time of worship (Mk 1.35) • Length of worship assembly

A challenge, obviously, is to determine what the Bible teaches about the elements versus the modes and circumstances. In meeting this challenge, we must guard against a number of mistaken tendencies:

- Ignoring the importance of having a Biblical warrant, through explicit command or clear apostolic example, for each religiously significant ordinance or act (element) of worship.
- Taking essential (i.e., explicitly commanded) aspects of worship from one covenantal economy (e.g., the use of various musical instruments introduced by David to accompany the sacrifices) and treating them as mere circumstances under another covenantal economy, without Scriptural warrant.
- Minimizing the proper distinction between the aspects of worship that are regulated by direct command or apostolic example and those that are regulated by general Biblical principles.
- Allowing anything into the worship of God as a mode or circumstance of performing the elements of worship that is not consistent with the Word of God.
- Permitting traditions and entrenched attitudes or our own opinions to determine what we consider to be acceptable practices in worship, rather than following Scripture.

It is a significant irony that today differences in the modes and circumstances of worship can cause great conflicts among Christians, yet few in the Church really seem to care whether the elements are what God requires.

73. Authority to Change Worship Elements

In Nehemiah chapter 12, we find the following statements: “... to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God” (Neh 12.24) and “... with the musical instruments of David the man of God” (Neh 12.36). These statements indicate that the worship that Ezra and Nehemiah reintroduced was regulated by the prescription of David. This prescription refers to the form of worship of the temple that introduced and utilized Psalm singing and the use of various musical instruments of praise at the time the sacrifice was being offered.

David had a right to prescribe worship practices because he was acting in the capacity of a prophet. It was not in his capacity as a king that he instituted new worship elements and practices. David’s actions do not give warrant to other civil magistrates (emperors, kings, presidents, prime ministers, etc.) to introduce changes in worship. Constantine, Charlemagne, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I all claimed rights over the order of worship of the Church, because of their royal office. But they were mistaken. David’s authority over worship was attributed to his prophetic office and was not derived from his office of king. Unless these monarchs could have demonstrated that they filled the office of prophet (which they could not have done), they were not qualified to introduce changes in worship.

God delivered every change in the order, or form, of worship recorded in Scripture, through the prophetic office. New forms of worship were delivered by God to mankind at various points, through OT prophets such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David. The introduction of new forms of worship accompanied covenantal administrations (enacted with representatives of the prophetic office), just as each new covenant administration appears to have had new signs associated with it.

When the New Covenant was introduced, changes in worship were also associated with that covenant administration. These changes were introduced by Christ—the great prophet—through the Apostles. The Apostles held the equivalent of the prophetic office in the NT economy and introduced changes in the form of worship under Christ’s authority. Jesus commissioned the twelve as his ambassadors (Mt 10.1-5; Mk 6.7; Lk 9.1-2) and sent them out as his official representatives to establish the NT Church—its doctrine, government, and worship. The apostolic office was unique and remains unique. A foundation is laid only once. A different foundation means a different building. In the NT Church, which is the temple of Christ, many living stones (1 Pt 2.4) have been added over the millennia, but the foundation remains solid and

unmoving with Jesus as the cornerstone (Eph 2.20) that anchors it firmly.

From this brief examination of the connection between the prophetic office, changes of covenantal administration, and the introduction of new elements of worship, we can derive the following conclusions:

- God's regulations for worship were delivered through the prophetic office.
- When changes in the elements of worship are to be instituted, a person holding the prophetic office, commissioned by God, is required.
- In the OT economy when representative individuals took it upon themselves to introduce changes in worship, without the authority of the prophetic office, they were rebuked and punished (e.g., Lev 10.1-3).
- No unauthorized individual has the right to introduce changes in worship (Dt 4.2; Dt 12.32).
- Once a new form of worship was introduced by a person with prophetic authority, the generations that followed continued to observe the form (Josh 8.30, 31; 2 Chron 8.13-15; 2 Chron 29.25-26ff; Neh 12.24, 36).
- Changes in the elements of worship appear to be associated with changes in covenantal administration.
- The latest, and last, covenantal administration was the one introduced by Jesus Christ, directly and through the Apostles.
- There has been no prophetic office since the close of the NT era, with the passing of the Apostles who were part of the prophetic office (Eph 2.20).
- Our worship form must therefore be in accord with, and be based upon, the apostolic form—the latest, and last, formulation of worship under the guidance of a person in the prophetic office and the latest formulation of worship at a change in covenantal administration.
- We have an obligation to do what we can to determine from Scripture what the apostolic form of worship was and follow it.
- The apostolic form of worship was migrated from the synagogue which sang Psalms but did not include the use of musical instruments that were introduced to accompany the sacrifices at the time of David.
- No one in the Church today fills the prophetic office. Therefore, no one has authority to make changes in the elements of worship today.
- Since the prophetic office has ceased to exist and the latest covenant administration is complete, changes in the elements of worship are no longer permissible.

We must ask popes, kings, Anglican liturgists, or 21st century worship leaders, who appointed them to the prophetic office and gave them authority to institute changes in the form of worship? If a person cannot show his commission as a prophet at the time of a new covenantal administration, then his innovations and changes in the elements of worship are not authorized by God—and are therefore manmade innovations, which in the Bible are equated with idolatry (Col 2.23).

74. Mankind's Idolatry, Restrained by God

In Genesis 3.22, Adam recorded God's words and noted that he said, "Behold ..." as he made an observation about Adam's condition. This imperative can be understood as having the sense of 'since' or 'now that'. It is used here as a causal connector. It directs the hearers and readers to consider the reason for God's actions that follow his statement. Thus, what immediately follows, provides a logical connection between the cause—man's sin—and the effect—his expulsion from the Garden. It shows that God's action against Adam and Eve is neither ruthless nor arbitrary, but the just, appropriate, and necessary consequence of man's sin and sentence.

The speaker who said 'behold' in this instance was probably God the Father, who took counsel with the other members of the triune Godhead to address the particular matter of what to do to limit mankind's rebellion. There are debates about whether there are hints of the Trinity found in Genesis 1.2, 26, 27, and

whether God revealed his triune nature in the creation account. There is a similar debate about whether the ‘us’ used here (Gen 3.22) can be understood as a reference to the Trinity. As a continuing part of his progressive revelation of himself to mankind, God revealed his divine nature to exist as a plurality of persons, while existing as only one in his essence. Any other explanation of the use of ‘us’ in this verse (e.g., this statement includes angels, uses the plural of majesty, or can be translated to include Adam such as: ‘the man is like me and we are as one’) results in a speculative and misguided interpretation. Adam may not have comprehended that the divine nature is a Trinity, but this does not rule out the fact that God had revealed himself to be a Trinity before the Flood. Much of the unwillingness to accept the idea that God revealed his triune nature this early in history is the result of accepting the faulty views of anthropologists who hold to a developmental model of religion, rather than to a regressive explanation—mankind rejects God and invents many gods.

God’s concern was that Adam had become like himself in knowing good and evil. This is certainly a difficult statement to interpret. Some suggest that God is speaking sarcastically—Satan had promised Eve that on eating the fruit she would become like God (Gen 3.5)—and rebuking Adam for believing the lie and directing him to consider what a ‘godly god’ he had become—a sorry excuse for godlikeness! While it is true that God laughs at mockers (Ps 2.4; Ps 37.13), it is a stretch to suggest that God is using Adam’s situation as an object for his amusement. God had just delivered the first indictment and sentence against the crime of rebellion, manifested as idolatry; had given hope, particularly through the promise of a redeemer; and had clothed Adam and Eve with garments which symbolized an atonement covering and indicated that they had believed his promises and had repented. Therefore, in this history-changing situation God is speaking with profound sadness. It is also difficult to accept the idea that *by sinning* man had become like God. God does not know evil experientially—he has never sinned. Therefore, the problem was not that man had a perverse appetite for illicit knowledge that only God can have, because this knowledge is knowledge that even God himself does not have experientially because he cannot sin.

The obedience test placed before Adam (Gen 2.16-17), established whether our first parents would be content to allow God to define the standards for right and wrong or if they would attempt to usurp his authority. It seems, therefore, that the way that Adam and Eve became like God, knowing good and evil, was by setting themselves up as gods who thought that they could dispense with God’s standards for morality and usurp God’s prerogative to establish the standards for right and wrong.

Mankind’s attempts to become like God, by knowing (i.e., defining) good and evil according to their own wills and fantasies, is the root of all idolatry, which takes many forms, for example:

- *Images* – The idea that the transcendent, invisible, God can be worshiped through an image; or the worship of an image representing another god.
- *False religions* – Every religion (including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Judaism, Bahaism, and Shintoism) and cult (e.g., Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses) which defines God in a non-trinitarian form.
- *Autonomy* – Rejecting or ignoring God’s law and the just laws enacted by God’s appointed civil magistrates.
- *Materialism* – Philosophical systems (including Confucianism, Buddhism, Evolutionism and Scientism) which deny the existence of an omnipotent Creator and claim that everything that exists is the product of chance events acting on matter through time.
- *Covetousness* – The love of money and the things that money acquires.
- *Narcissism* – Self-worship and the idolization of popular figures in the sports and entertainment industries.

God knew that even though Adam had repented of eating the forbidden fruit, there would be the latent tendency to idolatry resident within him during the remainder of his earthly residency (Rom 7.21-23), and

within all his progeny (Gen 6.5) throughout history. Therefore, God acted to limit mankind's ability to sustain his idolatry by removing from him access to the tree of life. God continues to limit man's resolute pride and associated idolatry through many checks, such as: death at a young age, financial disaster, STDs, social ostracism, and mutiny and coups against tyrants.

75. Worship of God – Modelled in Heaven

John describes the actions and words that are presented to God as elements of heavenly worship (Rev 4.9-11). These should serve as a model for our worship on earth. We observe that the four living creatures and twenty-four elders:

- *Ascribe glory and honour to God.* The representatives of the human and angelic kinds praise God with never-ending (Rev 4.8) words of adulation.
- *Give thanks to God.* Paul declares that pagans do not give thanks to God (Rom 1.21). Not being thankful toward God is as wicked as any of the other sins Paul catalogues, including adultery, murder, kidnapping, or perjury (Rom 1.29-31; 1 Tim 1.9-10). Elsewhere, Paul exhorts Christians to be thankful in all things (Eph 5.20; Col 3.15).
- *Fall down before God.* To fall prostrate before a magistrate (2 Sam 14.22) or elder (Ruth 2.10) was considered a sign of submission and reverence. If this is so in the earthly realm, then it certainly applies in the heavenly. All rational creatures should bow before their Lord (Phil 2.10).
- *Cast their crowns before God's throne.* Whether their crowns are signs of a delegated reign or of a procured victory, the residents of heaven recognize the supreme authority of God and acknowledge that every rule and victory over sin and Satan has ultimately been procured by Jesus.
- *Declare God to be worthy of adulation and adoration.* They worship God because of who he is and what he does in creation and providence. His innate and absolute holiness, infinite power, and eternal existence (Rev 4.8); and goodness displayed toward mankind by providing a means of redemption from sin and Hell; make him worthy of worship and deserving of all adulation and adoration.
- *Acknowledge God as the creator.* We marvel at times at what men can accomplish—building computers, designing cars, or constructing 100-storey buildings. However, these are puny accomplishments compared with what God did when he created the universe from nothing that pre-existed, purely out of his own infinitely innovative mind.

Jesus teaches us to pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6.10). We can assume that in the sinless state in heaven, all that is offered as worship before God is perfect. Thus, this example of heavenly worship informs us how our worship should be ordered and offered up to God from the earth. We can identify a few principles from this example:

- *God should be worshipped.* God is worthy of worship, and all rational creatures should worship their creator. No one is excused from this obligation and privilege. The 'atheist' who claims that there is no God is a fool (Ps 14.1)—an intellectual fool (denying the obvious; Rom 1.19-20) and a moral fool (suppressing the truth; Rom 1.18).
- *God alone is to be worshipped.* There cannot be two objects of worship, or there will be a divided allegiance, with one being loved and the other hated (Mt 6.24). Since there is no other real God and only the I AM is the true God, he alone should be worshipped (Ex 20.3-6; Mt 4.10). A pagan who venerates a created object (celestial, animal, or carved artifact), a natural force or a non-divine person (human, angelic, or demonic) as a god is deluded in his thinking that any of these entities can provide redemption from sin, temporal blessings, or everlasting life. Likewise, the rituals of proponents of false forms of monotheism (e.g., Unitarianism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Judaism) that deny that Jesus is God do not worship the true God, but an invention of their sin-polluted minds.
- *We worship God by praising his attributes.* We honour God when we enumerate his exalted character (e.g., his loving kindness and goodness), names (e.g., the 'The Almighty', 'King of Glory'), and his works of providence. The Psalms are full of examples of praise of God, which we can use to honour

him (e.g., Ps 95-98; Ps 100.1-2; Ps 145-150).

- *Worship directs us to Christ.* Since Jesus is God, the creator, and our saviour, any worship we offer to God edifies the Son of God.
- *Worship should humble us.* The example of the worshippers in heaven falling before the throne and casting their crowns before the throne, indicates that the worship of the true God is to be an act of humility. There is nothing humble about the professed worship of ‘praise bands’ and CCM composers and performers. Their egos are puffed by the adulation of their audiences, despite their protestations otherwise. These performances are not worship of God, but of man, because they are not what God has asked men to do in worship. They do not humble the creature but exalt him. The best way for praise-worship to remove the element of idolatry is to sing only the Psalms (God’s compositions), *a cappella*, in the corporate assembly.
- *Worship should encourage us.* John was shown this act of worship so that he could communicate it to his readers. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, wants us to view the heavenly worship so that we can see that his sovereignty transcends the events that transpire in this spatial-temporal realm. Taking such a perspective enables us to face suffering and persecution knowing that our afflictions are light and momentary (2 Cor 4.17), and that shortly we will pass through the valley of the shadow of death and join the great multitude of grateful worshippers in heaven.
- *Worship opens heaven’s door.* When we assemble with other believers and offer correct worship to God, we open a door into the glories of heaven. With the eye of faith, we see Jesus seated on his throne and we join with the angels and saints in exalting our King.

76. Worshipping the Creator

The foundation of true worship is acknowledging that God is the creator. All forms of false worship and idolatry arise because men do not acknowledge their creaturehood before the sovereign Lord of the universe and believe that their wills are the standard for determining morality. The assembled worshippers in heaven recognize that the worthiness of God to receive adoration and praise rests foundationally on his being the creator (Rev 4.11), and that his will is supreme over the lives of all creatures.

The worship of the Church today, including that of Evangelicals and the Reformed wing of the Church, is often idolatrous because it offers up its own inventions as worship to the holy God. The underlying cause of this idolatry is that men want to play at being God (Gen 3.5-6) and they reject the truth that God is the creator. It is calamitous when professing Christians say things like: “The universe cannot be only 6,000 years old.” “Genesis 1.1-31 is a poetic account, not an historical record of what happened.” “The days in Genesis cannot be twenty-four-hour days.” “There was no single person named ‘Adam’.” Or, “Fossils are from animals that were buried millions of years before Adam sinned and introduced decay and death into the universe; not the result of the Flood.” When professing Christians make such statements, they deny the omnipotence of God, the historicity and truthfulness of the Bible, and the reliability of Jesus and the Apostles (Mk 10.6; 1 Tim 2.13; 2 Pt 3.5). In addition, acceptance of the evolutionary long-ages paradigm espoused by atheistic, secular scientists is no different, in principle, from believing in the Babylonian, Hindu, Greek or Islamic creation myths—for example, the *Rig Veda* says that the universe was created out of the parts of the body of a cosmic man, Purusha, when his body was sacrificed. The *Qur’an* has multiple creation myths, including that the first man was created from a drop of sperm or out of water or clay. Hebrews 11.1-40 begins the account of examples of faith, by stating as a first principle that we are to understand that the universe was created by the word of God, not from anything that pre-existed. Everything in the universe other than Adam and Eve, were created directly from nothing by the word of God—Adam and Eve were each partially created using pre-existing materials (specifically dust and a rib), as we are informed by God.

There are only a few possible ways for explaining the universe’s existence:

- The material realm **doesn't** actually **exist**, and everything is merely a projection of someone's mind. However, no one actually believes that he is only another person's dream.
- The material realm **created itself** or came into existence from nothing without any causal agency. However, it is total nonsense to say that *nothing* generated something.
- The constituents of the material realm are **eternal**. However, this view flounders on the fact that entropy increases as the universe decays and dies. If it were *eternal* it would already be cold dead.
- The material realm was **created** by an eternal, non-material entity, not subject to physical laws, such as the second law of thermodynamics.

The Bible tells us that the entity who created the universe is God, not a force. The fact that God created could only have become known if God revealed it to mankind—it cannot be proven by deductive logic. The account we have in Genesis 1.1-31 had to come from the mouth of God himself. Therefore, the very existence of the first verse of the Bible informs us that the God who created the universe is both a personal being and an intelligent agent—an impersonal, non-intelligent entity cannot create anything and certainly does not determine to communicate anything about its actions.

Because it is impossible to prove that God created the universe, it must be accepted on faith. However, this faith is not naive or blind as some suggest. It is based on the truthful, self-authenticating, revelation of the God who created all things. The fact that knowledge of creation is based on revelation bothers anyone who says that it must be possible to test all claims empirically and provide explanations for how the universe came into existence without intervention of the supernatural. However, the real naivety rests with those who stand above Scripture with their 'scientific' method. They hide behind their supposed objectivity and ignore the fact that all religious, philosophical, and scientific systems must rest on unproven axioms. For example, the idea that only materialistic mechanisms can be permitted to explain ontological causation is an assumption which must be accepted on faith.

The world rejects the fact that God created the universe; not because it is against the idea that someone could be a masterful craftsman, but because of the moral and accountability implications that follow from God being our creator. It is utter foolishness for man, the creature—who cannot *create* an atom or even explain where anything came from without God—to reject the account from God, the creator. God's record of creation stands above man's foolish theories and opinions which rule out God having created the universe in six twenty-four-hour days, about 6,000 years ago.

The first obligation of the worshipping Church is to acknowledge God as the creator. One way to be sure that we worship the creator correctly and reverently is by singing the Psalms, which often declare that God is the creator (Ps 8.3; Ps 19.1-14; Ps 90.2; Ps 95.6; Ps 100.3; Ps 102.25; Ps 104.5-9; Ps 139.13-16; Ps 148.5).

77. Worshipping the Lamb

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that they are worshippers of the true God, even though they deny that God is a Trinity and that Jesus is God. When pressed, for example, to explain how Thomas can declare of Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20.28), they say that Jesus is 'a god' or 'godlike', and thus divine. They tie themselves in definitional knots because they reject the plurality of the persons in the Godhead and have to postulate a polytheistic hierarchy. John illustrates the foolishness of their belief system in Revelation 5.8-14. Jesus said explicitly that the Lord God (that is, Jehovah) alone is to be worshipped (Mt 4.10). Yet, in the heavenly throne room he—as the Lamb—receives worship from the entire assembled creation. Either Jesus is *the* Lord God (that is, Jehovah; not the Father, but as the Son), and worthy of all worship, or he is the most duplicitous hypocrite who ever walked the earth, who deserves only ridicule.

John observes a series of worshipping audiences, in concentric rings, around the Lamb, who is standing

before the Father, who is seated on the throne. First, there are two classes of rational creatures (Rev 5.8), who are the guardians of the throne:

- Four living creatures, who are representatives of a class of angels that includes cherubim and seraphim.
- The twenty-four elders, who are representatives of the two Messianic economies, brought together as one Church.

Then, there are two larger audiences:

- An uncountable host of angels (Rev 5.11).
- The entirety of (or representatives of) the redeemed, physical created order (Rev 5.13).

This vast audience is assembled to worship Jesus as he takes the scroll from the hands of the Father (Rev 5.7) and is prepared to break the seven seals and to open the scroll. By assembling at this time, all classes of the rational created order (angelic and human) acknowledge that the redemptive work of Jesus is the most significant event in history, since the creation of the universe—he has defeated Satan, sin, and death through his resurrection; completed the demands of the Jewish ceremonial system of figures and types; and definitively inaugurated his mediatorial kingdom.

This heavenly worship assembly incorporates a number of dimensions of praise of Jesus, as they:

- Fall down (Rev 5.8, 14) in obeisance before him—as we are told by David Isaiah, and Paul that every knee will do (Is 45.23; Ps 110.1; Phil 2.10).
- Offer up spiritual sacrifices of praise and prayer—typified by harps and bowls of incense (Rev 5.8).
- Reflect on the redemptive work he has accomplished, through his blood and death on the cross (Rev 5.9).
- Sing a ‘a new song’—the song of people who have been redeemed from sin, from every nation, and who have been granted everlasting life and a joint inheritance with him as priest-kings in a new nation (Rev 5.9-10).
- Declare his worthiness to receive by right, all possible honour; identified by a list of seven honours (Rev 5.12-13), including the receipt of the wealth of the nations (Ps 72.10; Is 60.6) and a recognition of his omnipotence and omniscience. The identification of seven honours, prefixed in the Greek with a single article (‘the’), indicates a complete set of honours.

There are some, even among true Christians, who deny that it is proper to ascribe worship directly to Jesus. However, the examples of the NT Church and this heavenly assembly indicate otherwise. The man born blind (Jn 9.38), the women on the way from the garden (Mt 28.9), and Thomas worshipped Jesus (Jn 20.28); and Jesus accepted these acts of veneration. We are to pray in the name of Jesus (Jn 14.13-14; Jn 15.16) but can also pray to him as Stephen (Acts 7.59-60) and Paul (1 Cor 16.22; 2 Cor 12.8) did. And, in the scene in Revelation chapter 5, the vast assembly ascribes the same worship to both the Lamb and to the Father (Rev 5.13). Jesus is the object of universal adoration in heaven, so who would dare to claim that the heavenly host is unenlightened or mistaken in offering praise to him. It is impossible to worship God the Father without worshipping in and through the Son (Jn 14.6), in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2.9). The worship of one is the worship of the other. It is equally impossible to render too much honour to Jesus.

All created beings, throughout all the created realms, are to join with this heavenly choir in harmonious praise of the Father and of the Son. We join them when we assemble for worship on the Lord’s Day and raise our voices in praise through singing of the Psalms. We also participate in this chorus when we offer up our private and corporate prayers (Ps 141.2; Rev 8.3-4), as we thank the Father for loving us from before the foundation of the world despite our sin (Eph 1.4), and as we thank the Son for loving us by enduring the shame of the cross on our behalf (Jn 15.13; Rom 5.8).

When we reflect on what has been done for us by God the Father and God the Son, we should be beyond incredulous that any believer in Jesus could go through a single day without bursting into spontaneous praise of the God who alone is worthy to receive all our worship!

78. The Public Worship of God

In Genesis 4.26 we read that “people began to call upon the name of the LORD”. This does not refer to the first instance of the worship of God. Adam had undoubtedly brought his children to worship God at the gate of Eden and had taught them how to worship correctly. Cain and Abel had also brought, respectively, unacceptable and acceptable offerings of worship (Gen 4.3-5) long before the birth of Enosh. As the human population expanded and dispersed throughout the pre-Flood world, it would no longer have been possible for all people to assemble before the gate of Eden each Sabbath—although some people may have made periodic pilgrimages to the site of the flaming sword and cherubim, where God made his presence known, as Jews would do centuries later when they travelled to Jerusalem and the temple. Thus, this verse is generally understood as referring to the introduction of a new form of worship—what we call *public* worship. The word ‘public’ does not mean open to all (which it is!) but, rather, open to people who are not necessarily connected by immediate family ties. It means assembling to worship corporately with others in a formal and organized fashion—as distinct from personal or family worship. Thus, this verse refers to the introduction of communal or corporate worship, beyond Adam’s immediate household unit.

The mention of the introduction of the public worship of God is associated with the family line of Seth to establish a contrast with the wicked line of Cain. Cain’s descendants went to an extreme, living in affluence and pleasure as they founded the *City of Man*, with no regard for God. Seth and his descendants, traced to Noah (Gen 5.1-32), are portrayed as righteous and stand out as being dedicated to living within the knowledge and fear of God’s presence. They sought the establishment of the *City of God*. The focus of the Cainites was on human accomplishments and man’s glory; the focus of the Sethites was on extolling God’s glory. The true Israel of God, from OT patriarch (Gen 12.8; Gen 21.33) to NT believer (Rom 10.13), traces its spiritual ancestry to Seth.

The worship of the Sethites was formulated around calling on the *name* of the LORD. Calling on this *name* means calling on God as a person with distinct dimensions to his self-manifested nature. For example, they understood God to be the transcendent creator, sovereign Lord, and moral adjudicator; but also, a God with whom they could have personal communion and fellowship. They knew God to be the one who loved them and the one who had made a covenant with them, by which he promised to send a saviour who would redeem believers and the natural world from the clutches of Satan and his spiritual children.

Some interpreters note that in this verse reference is made to calling on the name of the *LORD*, and then claim that God did not reveal himself by that name until much later (Ex 6.2-3). They conclude that the 150+ uses of the name LORD (Yahweh) in the book of Genesis were introduced by Moses (or a later writer) after the fact, and that early believers did not know God’s covenant name. The statement in Exodus could be understood as a rhetorical question “Did I not make myself known?” or, more likely, God tells Moses that the pre-Flood and post-Flood patriarchs had used the name without knowing its full significance until God revealed additional information to Moses.

The introduction of the public worship of the living God occurred about 235 years after the creation of the world. There is no mention in the antediluvian account of the introduction of any false religious system—although there is mention of the unauthorized worship of God (Gen 4.3-5) and the attempted deification of man by Cain and his descendants. The worship of the LORD as the only God (i.e., monotheism) did not develop out of animism or polytheism as many non-Christian anthropologists claim. After the Flood, Noah was in a covenant relationship with God and worshiped him (Gen 8.20-22; Gen 9.9-17). So, the first religion

was that in which men called upon the name of the LORD. All other religions (including, Ashurism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, paganism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism) were founded after the Flood and are perversions of the true worship of God.

These verses state that people began to *call* upon the name of the LORD. This could be a reference to prayer and praise. The Hebrew word that is used here can also have the sense of ‘proclaiming’ (Ex 33.19; Ex 34.5). Therefore, it is possible that the expression ‘called on the name of the LORD’ is being used as a synecdoche (i.e., a part representing the whole), to indicate that the public worship of God, at that time, included proclamation—preaching and recitation (reading) of God’s revelation (the available Scriptures to that point)—by righteous men such as Adam, Seth, Enoch (Jude 14) and Noah (2 Pt 2.5); prayers or petition; praises of thanksgiving; and sacrifice of burnt offerings (Gen 4.4; Gen 8.20). There may also have been a covenant renewal ceremony with a fellowship meal as a reminder of eating from the tree of life (Gen 2.9, 16). If so, the basic elements of the public worship of God were already in place shortly after creation and are still the basic elements of our form of worship today, with bloody sacrifices replaced with the fruit of our lips in praise (Heb 13.15). From the beginning of time all people have known that the living God is worthy of worship as the sovereign creator and loving covenant-keeper, who must be worshiped in the way that he has instituted. All people have known this but all unbelievers in the Messiah, and even some believers, have either rejected the true worship of God or perverted it with the introduction of many forms of false practices which they have invented in self-willed rebellion.

79. Reading the Bible

A missing element during the Sunday morning assemblies in many Evangelical churches today is the reading of a significant portion (e.g., a full chapter) of the Bible. Bible reading has been supplanted by the ‘praise time’ and the extent of the text that is read is often only the pericope upon which the preacher will base his sermon. A cynical observation is that people prefer to hear the words of men than the words of God. This was not the practice instituted by the first few generations of Protestants. They believed that reading of an extended portion of the Bible during the public worship of God should be a key element of the liturgy. For example, the authors of the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* stated,

“Reading of the word in the congregation, being part of the public worship of God, ... and one mean sanctified by him for the edifying of his people, is to be performed by the pastors and teachers. All the canonical books of the Old and New Testament ... shall be publicly read in the vulgar tongue, out of the best allowed translation, distinctly, that all may hear and understand. How large a portion shall be read at once, is left to the wisdom of the minister; but it is convenient, that ordinarily one chapter of each Testament be read at every meeting; and sometimes more, where the chapters be short, or the coherence of matter requires it. It is requisite that all the canonical books be read over in order, that the people may be better acquainted with the whole body of the scriptures; and ordinarily, where the reading in either Testament ends on one Lord’s day, it is to begin the next. We commend also the more frequent reading of such scriptures as he that reads shall think best for edification of his hearers, as the book of Psalms, and such like. ...”

This was not an innovation of the Puritans. It was the practice of the Jews to read through the OT books on a regular basis (Dt 31.10-13; Josh 8.34-35; 2 Ki 23.1-3; Jer 36.5-6; Lk 4.16-21; Acts 13.15; Acts 15.21). Nehemiah and Ezra reintroduced the practice during their reforms (Neh 8.1-8). Paul urged Timothy to be devoted to the public reading of the Word—which at that time would have consisted primarily of the OT (1 Tim 4.13). Elsewhere, he commanded that his epistles were to be read in the churches (Col 4.16; 1 Thess 5.27). John also indicates that the word from Christ is to be read in the churches (Rev 1.1-3). The early Church, into the Middle Ages, appears to have followed the practice of reading through the entire Bible publicly on a regular basis. This emphasis on the public reading of the Bible, was driven by:

- Their understanding of human nature. People tend to be undisciplined and easily fall into the temptation

to skip reading the Bible.

- The reality that many people could not read. The early Church leaders understood that it was their responsibility to ensure that people heard the word of God, and also, where feasible, learned to read it themselves.
- The fact that books were expensive and not as widely available as today.
- A belief that the Bible is not to be confined to scholarly studies. It is not an academic book for university faculties of English or for the seminaries; it is for the people of God.

The *Directory* indicates that the Scriptures should be “read in the vulgar tongue, out of the best allowed translation”. The authors’ concern was that the Bible should be made available in the colloquial language of the people. During the Middle Ages, the Bible became less available as fewer people spoke Latin and the Church hierarchy maintained their controlling hegemony by limiting access to the Bible in local languages. Wycliffe (1320-1384) a professor at Oxford and a diligent preacher had the Bible translated from Latin into English by Nicholas of Hereford and others at Oxford. He emphasized the Bible as the source of religious authority and the importance of its being available for everyone. The Reformers (e.g., Luther, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, Tyndale, and Casiodoro de Reina) continued this initiative, often under threat of persecution and death, to provide the Bible in the common language of the people.

The Jews emphasized the importance of a literate population. Their kings were expected to be able to read and to read the Scriptures regularly (Dt 17.18-20); and at least all males were taught to read so that they could read the Scriptures. The Church, after the Reformation, emphasized the importance of literacy. This is one reason that Sunday Schools were established. Today, congregational ESL programs using the English Bible as their textbooks are a logical extension of this practice.

Not only is the Bible to be brought before the congregation and read to them, but it is also to be read to the nations of the world (Mt 28.19-20). Homosexual activists would like to have the Bible banned as hate literature. Communist China wants to have the Bible redacted. And, some Islamic countries and North Korea have banned the Bible. Christians must push back against these anti-Bible initiatives. Although the text of the Bible is widely accessible now on the internet, the Church should consider how it might be made more visible in the civic arena through the regular reading of it on streaming media or by radio broadcasts.

Every Christian should read the Bible in its entirety and regularly. Suggestions for facilitating the practice of regular private Bible reading are:

- Pray before reading.
- Conduct a disciplined reading program (e.g., at the same time every day).
- Read various translations, with a different one each year.
- Follow an annual Bible reading program.
- Use study guides that work through entire books rather than topical studies.

80. Prayer's Principles

Jesus gives three examples in the first part of Matthew chapter 6 that teach how we are to worship God. The first deals with an outward dimension of worship—*giving* (Mt 6.1-4); and another example deals with an inward dimension—*fasting* (Mt 6.16-18). In between, he deals with an upward dimension of worship—*prayer* (Mt 6.5-15). *Prayer* places us as close to God as we can come in this life. Jesus assumes that every true believer will pray (Mt 6.5), and that we all need instruction in how to approach God correctly. He teaches us about:

- *Prideless Prayer* – As he did earlier in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 5.21-48), he continues to contrast true Christian behaviour with the hypocritical behaviour of the Pharisees (Mt 23.13). They followed

precisely the outward ritual of their ancestors and stopped their work at the set times for prayer. But they didn't follow the example of a true man of God like Daniel who went to his private room to pray (Dan 6.10). Instead, they made sure that their daily activities brought them near the intersection of two main streets at the time of prayer so that they would have to stop their activity and pray in the view of others. They received their reward—the puffing up of their own pride—but their prayers bounced off the heavens.

Today most Christians aren't tempted to pray at the corner of Yonge and Bloor. But that doesn't mean we don't need to heed this instruction. We can just as easily pray to men rather than to God. We can pray out of an attitude of self-confidence, with a desire to be known as a person of prayer, to have our 'piety' in prayer noted, or to have people congratulate us for the elegance of our words. When we pray in the assembly of believers, we must try to shut them out of our minds and turn and face God alone.

- *Private Prayer* – The true measure of our prayers is how we offer them to God in private. The essence of Jesus' instruction is not about the place, but the attitude with which we pray. Do we offer real prayers of sincere passion to God, the only hearer? Do we avoid rushing through our private prayer? Do we focus our minds so that we don't drift away from dwelling on God and his providences in our lives? Then our prayers will be heard and rewarded.

The sincere prayers of God's people will be rewarded through: 1) assurance that God hears them (Jn 1.48), 2) answers in God's time and way (Ps 34.15), and 3) recognition with Christ in a glorious heavenly abode (Mt 25.34).

- *Purposeful Prayer* – True prayer does not consist of verbal formulas like incantations or of words offered as superstitious chants (Jer 7.4; Mt 6.7). True prayer consists of meaningful words offered to God with a purpose. But do not misunderstand the purpose. It is neither to inform God of our needs (Mt 6.8) nor to change his mind about things he has determined in his eternal decrees. The primary purpose of prayer is to honour God, and secondly to humble believers. Prayer proclaims God as the creator and reminds us that we are dependent upon him.

We must not think that we are excused from hearing and heeding this instruction. We may not offer up repetitions to accompany beads on a string. We may not babble like those who claim to be praying in tongues. This does not excuse us. If we use the same 'pious' or trite phrases from one prayer to the next (e.g., before each meal) without consciously thinking about what we are saying, our prayers are no better than those of pagans and they are barren. We should use our natural language, as a son speaking to a father (Mt 6.9).

- *Pointed Prayer* – True prayer does not consist of many words (Mt 6.7). It is clear that we don't have to list every need we have in each prayer. God knows our needs before we ask (Mt 6.8). Consider how short the model prayer is that Jesus gave his disciples (Mt 6.9-13), and yet how much content it includes! It is true that, at times, Jesus prayed all night; and he also repeated his words (Mt 26.44), as do many of the Psalms (e.g., Ps 42.5, 11; Ps 136.1-26). It is *meaningless* repetition that Jesus condemns. However, most of the prayers recorded in the Bible can be read aloud in five minutes or less. Since these should serve as our model, then we learn that our prayers should be short and offered often (1 Thess 5.17).
- *Prayer's Prototype* – Jesus provides a model for prayer (Mt 6.9-13). In our next topic we will consider this model prayer in more detail. For now, we should note that in this model he teaches us about both the form and content that our prayers should have.

- *Powerful Prayer* – If our prayers lack power, it is because we have sin in our hearts that we have not dealt with. We cannot have fellowship with God if we have conflicts with our neighbours. A major challenge for us is forgiving others (Mt 6.14-15). Jesus uses this particular sin as a fulcrum on which he balances prayer. If we want to have our prayers heard and we want them to be effective, then we must come to God with pure hearts (Ps 24.3-4). If we come to him asking for forgiveness, and with a forgiving attitude, this indicates, or symbolizes, that we desire to purge out all sin from our hearts. This is at the root of powerful prayer.

81. Prayer's Prototype

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus provides a model for prayer that teaches us about both the structure and the scope of true prayer (Mt 6.9-13; Lk 11.2-4). Since much has been written about the Lord's Prayer and many sermons have been preached on each petition in it, it is hard for us to do justice to its depth in a short entry in this series. Calvin, for example, dedicates twenty pages of the *Institutes* to a discussion of this prayer. Likewise, the Puritan, Thomas Watson, wrote a book with over 300 pages on the prayer. Among modern authors, R. C. Sproul dedicated a chapter in his book on prayer's power to change things, to the petitions in this prayer. Therefore, with these esteemed witnesses to the importance of this prayer and in the context of our considerations of the second commandment, we can only note a few lessons which it teaches us about how we should pray.

Priorities – The model prayer is structured like the Ten Commandments. It first deals with God's honour and then with man's needs. It puts the things of heaven before those of the earth. In general, our prayers should praise and thank God before they focus on ourselves and our personal needs. In our prayers we remind ourselves that we are creatures dependent on God.

Praise – Within the scope of a few words (Mt 6.9) Jesus teaches us how we are to offer praise to God by declaring him to be the:

- *Transcendent Creator* – God has chosen to make heaven his dwelling place (Ps 103.19; Ps 115.3). Heaven is a created place—and thus neither eternal nor infinite. However, being 'above' or outside of the universe, it stands as a symbol for God's infinity and eternity. God is not just a god of a river, forest, or nation; he is the highest God above all gods who holds together all creation. To our pagan culture we declare that God is the transcendent creator when we call upon him in heaven.
- *Holy One* – God's name stands in the place of God himself. It is holy (Ex 20.7) because everything associated with him is holy. Thus, we desire that his name be proclaimed throughout the world as holy so that all men will know who he is, and reverence him
- *Personal Saviour* – The word 'father' is not being used in the sense of God being the creator of all people (Acts 17.28). This prayer is for believers. God becomes our Father when he adopts us into his household through Christ. When we declare God as our Father it encourages us by reminding us that we belong to an everlasting, perfect family.

We must bow down before the God in heaven with praise and declare him to be the holy creator who saves.

Providence – When we ask God to reveal his sovereign reign among men (Mt 6.10) we do not ask that he *become* a king, he *is* the King! Rather, we confess that no other person's will (whether man or devil) is to be the measure and motive of mankind. Jesus himself desired that only the will of God would be done (Mt 26.42). Our desire is to be the same. So, we ask God to make his laws and worship known on this earth until the day they are fully and correctly observed in his heavenly kingdom.

Provision – Jesus teaches (Mt 6.11) that it is proper to pray for our physical needs as they arise. This is not inferior prayer. If we don't ask for God's provision, we act as if we are independent of him. By asking for

his help we acknowledge that he sustains (Acts 17.28) and cares (Mt 6.25-34) for us, and we learn to trust him more. But we are to pray that our needs are met—the bread we need from day-to-day—not that our desire for luxuries will be satiated. As God supplied manna on a daily basis in the wilderness, so he will supply what is necessary for us. We are to be content with what he gives us. If we are not, then we deny that he knows what is best for us.

Purification – As we are to ask God to sustain us physically, so we are to ask him to sustain us spiritually (Mt 6.12). We need, daily, to go before his throne and confess that we have sinned, and he will forgive us (1 Jn 1.9). However, there is a condition. If we go before him with a bad attitude (for example an unforgiving heart or a pride that holds grudges) he will not hear our petitions. If we cannot forgive others who have hurt and offended us, we have to question if we are truly Christians. It is very sad if we claim to be Christians and are less forgiving than our pagan neighbours. We need to ask God to make us holy, as he is holy.

Protection – God himself does not tempt us to sin (James 1.13) but he does put us into difficult situations to test our faithfulness (Mt 6.13). Satan, his assistants, and the remnants of wickedness in our hearts exploit these situations to pressure us to sin. We need to recognize our weaknesses and ask God to help us avoid temptations and overcome them. When we are confronted by evil, God will protect us if we ask for help (1 Cor 10.13; Jude 24). Our challenge is to put aside pride and admit our need of help.

If we can learn to offer God prayers modeled on this prayer, they will go up as the sweet smell of incense (Ps 141.2; Rev 5.8) and be pleasing to our Father in heaven. They will declare him worthy of all honour, proclaim his sovereign reign and almighty power into the ages, and assist us to know our place as he provides only good things for us (Rom 8.28; James 1.17).

82. Prayer's Purposes

The reasons that Christians are to pray include:

- *Command*. Christians are to pray because they are commanded to do so by God (Lk 18.1; Rom 12.12; Eph 6.18; 1 Thess 5.17). Constant prayer is a duty, not an optional extra, of everyone who professes faith in Jesus Christ.
- *Commendation*. We pray because we wish to give glory to God (Mt 6.9; 1 Cor 10.31) as the creator and sovereign ruler (Rev 4.11; Rev 5.9).
- *Christian*. Prayer is an exclusively Christian activity. Although false religions may include an activity which they call prayer, it is not prayer. True prayer can only be offered by people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit (Ps 34.16; Ps 145.18; Prov 15.8, 29; Jn 9.31) and offer their prayers in the name of Jesus (Jn 14.13). Prayer is a Christian privilege. Private prayer reduces the prevalence of false motives and draws us closer to God.
- *Conversation*. We converse with our friends, telling them of what has been happening in our lives and of our needs and desires. Conversations are bi-directional. So it is in our relationship with God—reading the Bible is the primary means we hear his voice and prayer is a means (the other is praise-worship in song) whereby we can respond to him with our own voices.
- *Confession*. It is through prayer that we confess our sins before the holy and righteous God (Lev 26.40; Ps 32.5; 1 Jn 1.9).
- *Conversion*. Prayer is an essential step in the process of conversion and is necessary for salvation (Prov 28.13; 1 Jn 1.9). There is no other means whereby a sinner can acknowledge his faith in Christ and repent of his sins than by offering a prayer to the Father in the name of Jesus (Rom 8.15).
- *Celebration*. When we are truly thankful, we express our thanks to a person who has given us a gift or helped us meet our need or has demonstrated friendship and kindness toward us. Thus it is with prayer. It is how we offer thanks to the one person who gives us temporal life (Acts 17.28) and everlasting life (Jn 1.4; Jn 3.15-16) and provides us with abundant benefits in this life (Mt 6.32-33; James 1.17) and in

the life to come (2 Tim 4.8). The more we come to know about God and observe how he works out his providences in our lives, the more we should be celebrating with abundant thanksgiving (Eph 5.20) his amazing grace toward us.

- *Comfort.* We receive comfort when we speak with God in prayer because we know that he hears our prayers (Jer 29.12-13; Ps 66.19; 1 Pt 3.12), even ones which we are unable to formulate into coherent words (Rom 8.26).
- *Confidence.* Because we know that our prayers are heard, they are also *always* answered (1 Jn 5.14-15). Of course, this does not mean that every prayer is answered the way that we might wish it to be, because our motives are often wrong (James 4.3) and we do not always acquiesce to the will of the Father, as did Jesus in his prayer in Gethsemane. In our common speech we often imply that God does not answer prayers. For example, a mother might say, “Our prayers have been answered, little Bobby has been healed.” However, if Bobby had not been healed this does not mean that God had not answered her prayers. Paul’s prayer was answered, but not in the way he asked for it to be answered—to have the thorn in the flesh removed (2 Cor 12.7-9). Likewise, Jesus repeated his prayer in Gethsemane three times (Mt 26.42, 44) asking to have the cup of suffering removed (Mt 26.39), if that was the Father’s will. God certainly heard Jesus’ prayer, but he did not answer it by removing the cup. God always answers the prayers of his people. His answer may be “No.” or “Wait.” Or, he might answer in a way that is very different from what we want or wish. But we can be confident that his answer will be for our good (Rom 8.28).
- *Cultivation.* Prayer is like air and water are for a plant. Without these, a plant cannot grow. So it is for the Christian. Where prayer is neglected because of the remnants of selfishness and laziness that still dwell in us (Rom 7.21-24), our spiritual growth will be stunted and laborious. Where prayer is offered often, spiritual growth and fruit are the result.
- *Challenge.* Prayer is a key contributor to our learning obedience. Reading God’s law will give us intellectual knowledge of what he requires of us, but it is only as we pray that that knowledge is converted into action. As we pray, we are challenged to place our dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the world around us, and to divest ourselves of self-dependence, self-confidence, and self-glorification.
- *Channel.* God uses our works as means for accomplishing his purposes. One of the means he uses is our work in prayer. We won’t know how much our prayers have been effective (James 5.16) until we reach our glorious final abode. But that does not mean that we are to give up (Lk 18.1-8). Our prayers for an unsaved relative, for a fellow believer, or for the state of our nation may be the precise means that God uses to produce miracles of conversion, healing, and revival beyond anything that we can imagine. Prayer makes a difference!
- *Change.* That God uses the prayers of his people as a means of carrying out his providences in the world (Ex 32.11-14; 2 Ki 19.14-37) often causes folks to ask, “Does prayer change God’s mind?” Our prayers never change God’s plans which he has predestined from the depths of eternity. Yet prayer changes things. Prayer is the means God uses to change individual hearts when they confess their sins and profess faith in Christ and to effect change in nations and in the course of history.

Christians pray because it pleases God, out of obedience to his commands, to follow the example of their Saviour, because of the benefits it has for their individual lives, and because of the great things that God accomplishes through the prayers of his people.

83. Prayer’s Power

Scientific experiments have been conducted into the power of prayer. For example, one report stated that, “Studies have shown prayer can prevent people from getting sick—and when they do get sick, prayer can help them get better faster.” This conclusion was apparently based on an “exhaustive analysis of more than 1,500 reputable medical studies.” A study conducted by researchers at Brandeis University concluded that, “new research shows that over the last four decades, medical studies of intercessory prayer—the prayer of

strangers at a distance—actually say more about the scientists conducting the studies than about the power of prayer to heal.” And, a report published in the *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, entitled “Prayer and healing: A medical and scientific perspective on randomized controlled trials”, concluded that, “We believe that the research has led nowhere, and that future research, if any, will forever be constrained by the scientific limitations that we outline.” What are we to make of these kinds of studies? Is prayer effective or not? How could we demonstrate its power? A review of the studies conducted on the effectiveness of prayer will indicate that they suffer from problems, such as:

- Some include the “empty phrases” (Mt 6.7) of Hindus, Muslims, and Jews, which are not prayer because they are directed to false gods and are not offered in the name of Jesus and with an express desire to see the will of God administered.
- They often confuse cause and effect and co-variants when considering possible instances of correlation. For example, those who offer true prayers may have better health, but while their health and prayers may be correlated, they are not necessarily causal factors of one another but the result of a true faith that changes how people live and worship.
- They cannot delve into the mysteries of how God works through prayer. Trying to prove, empirically, that prayer works is like attempting to prove the existence or non-existence of God through a physical experiment. This is impossible. God does not subject his glory and power to human tests.

Considerations of the power of prayer are also confused by faulty interpretation of what the Bible teaches about prayer. For example, a book by Bruce Wilkinson called *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (2000), based on 1 Chronicles 4.9-10, encourages a ‘name it and claim it’ approach toward God. It has led to a cult-like and superstitious offering of mantra-like utterances to God. It suggests that God should do what people demand of him—with the ‘prayer’ becoming a limitless credit card—rather than our doing what he demands of us. Without question, the Bible indicates that we are to anticipate answers to our prayers. For example, Jesus states, “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Mt 7.7), “if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (Mt 18.19), and, “whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Mt 21.22). However, Jesus does not provide a systematic analysis of proper prayer in these aphorisms. Rather, we need to consider a complete scope and context of Scripture to establish the conditions that are necessary for experiencing the full power of prayer, such as:

- The statements of Jesus are not absolute, giving us anything we want. If it were the case that Christians should always receive everything they ask for, then none would suffer any illness and would never die because they could continually ask for healing. However, the idea that God always heals is destructive to faith and contrary to the teaching that all men must die and face the final judgement (Heb 9.27).
- Everything that we ask for must be in accordance with the will and plan of God (1 Jn 5.14). For example, Pope Francis made statements indicating that “Poverty is not inevitable!” and calling for the elimination of poverty. Yet, even if he were able to offer a true prayer and ask God to eliminate poverty, this prayer would not be answered in that way, because it is contrary to the will of God who has placed a curse on the earth (Gen 3.17-19) and to the words of Jesus, who says that there will always be the poor (Mt 26.11). To ask God to establish a heaven on this earth is sinful.
- James informs us that it is the prayers of a righteous person (James 5.16) that are effective. Likewise, Jesus states that for prayer to be effective we must be abiding in him (Jn 15.7). Most Christians fail miserably in this.
- Prayers must be addressed to God the Father in the name of Jesus (Jn 14.13). This means that whatever is asked for in prayer must be consistent with God’s character and will and with what Jesus would ask of the Father.
- Prayers must never be offered with the wrong motives such as fulfilling our own desires and passions (James 4.3).
- Prayer is not like getting three wishes from a *jinni*. God owes mankind nothing and does not bend his will to our wills but does as he pleases (Ps 115.3), for his own glory (Rom 11.36; 1 Cor 10.31).

- Effective prayer is conditional on obedience to God's commands (1 Jn 3.22).
- True prayer is willing to acquiesce in the answers which God gives, which may be "No"—as Moses (Ex 33.18-20), Jesus (Mt 26.39-46), and Paul (2 Cor 12.7-9) experienced—or "Wait and see what great things I am doing!"
- Prayers must be offered earnestly and with effort (Lk 18.1-6; Lk 22.44).

Powerful prayer is not mere asking and receiving. It is "an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies" (*Shorter Catechism*, Q98). We must pray because it is powerful and changes things.

84. Prayer's Practice

Many guides have been written on how to pray, some of which are available through sources such as Amazon or Christian publishers' websites. Books on prayer by C. H. Spurgeon, R. C. Sproul, and Derek Thomas are examples. Therefore, today we will only summarize how prayer should be practiced. God-honouring prayer should be:

- *Sanctified*. Prayer addresses the almighty God. Jesus states that when we address God, we are to ask that his name be revered (Mt 6.9). Since 'name' stands for his person, our prayers must be respectful. It would be inappropriate to address the Creator with expressions, like, 'Hey dude!' Yet, this does not mean that we must use 'holy' language. We are invited to come to God as family members before our gracious father, therefore our prayers should be expressed in our natural language.
- *Sensible*. Prayer is voiced praise and petition and should therefore be coherent and understandable; not the incoherence of the empty phrases of 'tongues' (Mt 6.7) or the wails of whirling dervishes. Of course, some things we wish to say to God may not be expressible because we don't know how to formulate them into words; but the Holy Spirit will help us with our groanings that are too deep for words (Rom 8.26).
- *Spiritual*. Proper prayer must begin with adoration of God and be offered for his glory (Mt 6.9-10), before our thoughts and words move to petitions for others and ourselves. We should not just go to God when we want something from him. By starting with adoration, we establish a foundation on which the rest of our prayer can rest solidly.
- *Short*. Invariably it seems that if you give a speaker five minutes, he will take ten. Many people like to hear themselves speak and think that everyone should hang on their words. However, Jesus rebukes those who think that "they will be heard for their many words" (Mt 6.7). The *Lord's Prayer* is brief and most of the prayers recorded in the Bible can be read aloud in five minutes or less. Since these examples should serve as our model, our prayers should be short and to the point.
- *Singular*. True prayer does not consist of verbal formulas like incantations or words offered as superstitious chants (Jer 7.4; Mt 6.7). We should limit the use of repetitive standard phrases, such as using 'Lord' as a filler.
- *Structured*. Our prayers should cover the basics. We cannot go wrong if we follow the structure of the model prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples when they asked him to teach them how to pray (Mt 6.9-13; Lk 11.1-4). Some authors suggest using the structure expressed in the acronym ACTS—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication—which is useful guidance, consistent with the structure of the *Lord's Prayer*.
- *Spontaneous*. During the history of the Church, since the time of the Apostles, there have been debates about how prayer should be formulated, for example, should prayers offered in public worship be written out and read or should they be entirely spontaneous. In general, our private and public prayers should be spontaneous so that they reflect the current state of our hearts. Outbursts of spontaneous prayer (a 'thank you' or a brief petition) should be offered often during our day (1 Thess 5.17). And, our prayers should be our own words, not the words of another person.
- *Scriptural*. However, offering our prayers using words from Scripture—such as the Psalms is highly

appropriate because these words are all Spirit-filled (2 Tim 3.16). Mary's *Magnificat* (Lk 1.46-55) is an example. In every statement she quotes from or alludes to Scriptural passages—and from the Psalms about a dozen times. Our prayers are not addressing an unknown God or directed to a 'Dear sir/madam', but the God whom we should know personally and intimately. The way to get to know this God is to read his letter to us—the Bible. The more we read the Bible, the better able we will be to formulate praises and petitions that are pleasing to him.

- *Submissive*. In the Lord's Prayer (and in the acronym ACTS) confession of sin is a key component of prayer. Therefore, every prayer we offer to God should demonstrate our submission through confession (Mt 6.12) and expression of dependence upon him for our sustenance in life (Mt 6.11). Psalm 51.1-19 provides a clear example of confession of the depravity of sin and Psalm 25.1-22 a model for expressing our dependence upon God.
- *Satisfied*. Prayer should also express our thankfulness to God (Phil 4.6). Paul states that a prevailing sin of the pagan mind is ingratitude (Rom 1.21). When you turn on the shower and hot water pours out, you should thank God for this blessing—always be amazed by God's grace; not just for being set free from sin, but for all the benefits he pours out upon you every day!
- *Scheduled*. Spontaneous prayer is very good, disciplined times of prayer are even better (Dan 6.10; Acts 2.42-47; Acts 3.1).
- *Sustained*. Our prayers should exhibit fervency (James 5.16-18) and earnestness (Lk 22.44) and never falter (Lk 18.1-8). If a human and unjust judge will hear the petition of a fervent woman, how much more will our heavenly just Judge hear our petitions? Listen and watch for God's answer.
- *Suspenseful*. We should pray with expectation that our prayers are heard and answered (Mk 11.24)—waiting to see how God will bless us.
- *Sincere*. If you cannot be honest with God who knows your very thoughts (Ps 139.2-4), you cannot be honest with anyone.
- *Specific*. Jesus says we can ask for anything that is proper and in accord with his will (Jn 14.14). Since nothing is too small to bring before God, our prayers should be specific and not express vague generalities.

85. Prayer's Preclusions

There are certain things that the Bible indicates that preclude the offering of true prayer and that make prayer invalid or ineffective, including:

- *Unbelief*. A person who does not believe in God, as he defines himself in the Bible, cannot pray to God. You will often hear politicians or celebrities say, "Our thoughts and prayers are with you." when they wish to offer a sympathetic condolence to the families of the victims of violence or natural disasters. The insincerity of this politically correct meme has been noted by the cynical media and many politicians and pundits claim that instead of offering platitudes the ones offering the statement should be calling for stricter gun control, financial assistance, or whatever the latest demand for perceived equity is. We of course can wonder if many of the public figures that use these words actually offer a 'prayer'. Likewise, we see headlines such as, "Muslim workers at <fill in the blank> demand more prayer times, less work". Although false religions may include an activity which they call prayer, it is not prayer. True prayer can only be offered by people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit (Ps 34.16; Ps 145.18; Prov 15.8, 29; Jn 9.31) and offer their prayers in the name of Jesus (Jn 14.13). Prayer is an exclusively Christian activity and privilege. To offer prayer to anything other than to the true God is a detestable abomination before him (Prov 28.9). In contrast, even the feeblest prayers of a righteous person—one who is clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Rev 7.13-14)—can accomplish much (James 5.16).
- *Pride*. Prayers offered out of a spirit of pride and self-trumpetry are not heard by God (Lk 18.9-14). God despises actions that are performed by a person to draw attention to himself.
- *Invalid reasons*. Believers' prayers can be tainted by invalid motives—to address our physical and

temporal passions (James 4.3). This kind of prayer is rejected and not heard or answered by God.

- *Non-acquiescence*. Our prayers will not be heard if we do not display a truly submissive attitude that is willing to say, “Not my will but yours.” as Jesus did in his prayer in Gethsemane (Lk 22.42), and Paul did after he had requested that his thorn in the flesh be removed from him (2 Cor 12.7-10). We must be willing to accept the fact that God will not necessarily answer our prayers in the way that we want him to but may give an answer of “No” or one that is surprisingly different from what we might expect.
- *A spirit of non-repentance*. The Psalmist says that if we have unconfessed sin we cannot ascend to God’s holy place with prayer (Ps 24.3-4) and if we cherish iniquity in our hearts the Lord will not listen to our petitions (Ps 66.18). We need to examine our hearts when we come before God in prayer to determine if we are making excuses or rationalizations for repeated sins (Ps 32.5; Prov 28.13). We all sin and need daily to approach the throne of grace (Heb 4.16). If we sincerely confess our sins, God will forgive us (1 Jn 1.9). However, we should not become overly scrupulous about this. There will always be sin present in our lives, and we cannot call to remembrance every way that we have transgressed the precepts of God. If we had to, our prayers would always be deficient and ineffective. So, at times we may have to offer a more generic prayer of confession (Ps 38.18).
- *An unforgiving spirit*. One of the petitions in the model prayer which Jesus gave to his disciples when they asked him to teach them how to pray (Mt 6.7-13; Lk 11.1-4) is “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6.12). It is evident that this petition is conditional (Mt 6.14-15). If we are not being forgiving toward our family members, co-workers, friends, and neighbours, then we cannot expect that God should forgive us, or hear our prayers. Jesus indicates that being forgiving does not come easily to us (Mt 18.21-34) but it is required for powerful prayer.
- *Unresolved conflicts*. If we have unresolved conflicts with fellow believers, we cannot have fellowship with God. Jesus tells us that we need to resolve the conflict—e.g., asking for forgiveness or offering forgiveness—before we approach his altar of grace (Mt 5.23-24). Churches with unresolved conflicts are going through pious motions but are not producing fruit because their prayers bounce off the heavens. People who visit can sense the dissonance and will scurry for the exits.
- *Doubt*. Jesus had to rebuke the disciples often for having doubts and little faith. In one instance he indicated that their inability to cast out demons was because of their lack of faith, but if they had had faith, they could have moved mountains (Mt 17.18-20). In the parallel account in Mark, Mark adds that Jesus stated that this kind of demon could only be driven out by prayer (Mk 9.29), thus equating effective prayer with a strong faith.
- *Formulaic repetition*. Valid prayer is not padded with empty phrases and many words (Mt 6.7). Our prayers should be direct and specific, asking God for things that are agreeable to his will.
- *A lack of discipline*. Because of the remnants of sin, we have a tendency to be lazy and offer perfunctory prayers so that we can get on with the more ‘interesting’ demands of our day. These prayers sink like lead bricks.
- *A lack of persistence*. Jesus told a parable about a widow who sought redress from a judge who ignored her pleas. Eventually, the judge relented because of her persistence. Jesus applies this to prayer and says that God will not be like the judge and refuse our pleas but will bring about justice for those who cry out to him day and night (Lk 18.1-7). The moral of the parable is stated in the opening verse of the section—“to show them that they should always pray and not give up”. Effective prayer perseveres!

86. Prayer’s Postures

Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian, and at one time the prime minister of the Netherlands, noted that the English Puritans abolished the practice of kneeling during prayer in a worship service because of the perceived dangers of a continual tendency toward ceremonialism. He argued that if they had been less extreme in their condemnation of kneeling, they might have retained some of the people who returned to the Anglican Church, but that the “English character did not allow this flexibility” and “whatever the Puritans did, they wanted to do radically.” Kuyper’s observation about the English Puritans strikes one as

having a degree of contempt and even bigotry. However, he is correct when he notes that the English Puritans were against kneeling in prayer. On the other hand, Isaac Watts tried to persuade the Nonconformists of the 18th century to desist from their practice of sitting down at prayer, he assured his readers that there were three permissible attitudes for prayer warranted by the Scriptures: prostration, kneeling, and standing; but that there was no divine sanction for sitting.²² And, Matthew Henry in his *Commentary*, on Matthew 6.5, states, “The posture they used in prayer; they prayed standing; this is a lawful and proper posture for prayer (Mk 11.25, *When ye stand praying*), but kneeling being the more humble and reverent gesture, Lk 22:41; Acts 7:60; Eph 3:14, their standing seemed to savour of pride and confidence in themselves (Lk. 18:11), *The Pharisee stood and prayed*.”

What are we to make of these contradictory directions? On the one hand, the early Puritans condemned kneeling in prayer but Matthew Henry (1662-1714) and Isaac Watts (1674-1748), less than a century later, stated that kneeling was permissible and preferred, and according to Watts sitting to pray was not warranted by Scripture. It is clearly not wrong to *sit* while praying. David sat when he prayed in the tent in which the Ark of the Covenant was kept (2 Sam 7.18). During his time of ministry, Jesus directed the crowds to sit while he prayed (Mt 14.19). During the night after the supper in the upper room, Jesus told the disciples to sit and pray (Mk 14.32, 37-38) while he went aside and prayed prostrate (Mt 26.39).

Solomon and Daniel knelt when they prayed (2 Chron 6.12-14; Dan 6.10) as did Jesus (Lk 22.41). When Jesus prayed during the supper in the upper room before he was betrayed, he and the disciples were lying (reclining) on their sides when Jesus offered a prayer of thanksgiving over the elements (Lk 22.14, 17). Jesus also indicates that standing to pray is a proper posture (Mk 11.25), although he condemns those who pray in a standing position to be seen of men and to draw attention to themselves (Mt 6.5; Lk 18.11). Jesus accepted the prayers of those who fell prostrate (Lk 5.12) or knelt down before him (Acts 7.6). The fact that there are examples in Scripture of prayers by godly men (and by Jesus) to the holy God from a reclining, sitting, standing, kneeling, and bowing prostrate posture indicates that the mode *per se* is not of the essence. If the mode were essential to holy prayer, holy men would have observed only that mode, whether in public or private.

This brief consideration of what the Bible indicates about the proper postures for prayer provides two key lessons:

- We must distinguish among the elements, modes, and circumstances of worship. As we noted previously, the elements of worship require an explicit command to be incorporated into a worship assembly or meeting (e.g., reading the Bible, prayer, singing Psalms), permissible modes of worship can be determined by observing examples from Scripture of how the elements of worship were undertaken by godly men (e.g., the postures permissible for prayer or for reading the Scriptures), and the circumstances of worship are to be defined by applying general principles derived from Scripture (e.g., the places and times for prayer meetings). It is ironic that Isaac Watts expressed concern about the posture of prayer (a mode) when he was the primary one who took the church away from exclusive Psalmody (an element) with his paraphrases and criticisms of the Psalms. His example teaches us not to major on the minors, but to focus on ensuring that what we offer to God in worship, as worship, is proper.
- Congregational standing and kneeling have been the usual modes of prayer throughout the history of the Western Church. More recently, a seated congregation during the time of prayer has become a common practice. However, falling prostrate is a common practice shared throughout the Eastern Christian communities, that predates the advent of Islam and its adoption of the practice of what it calls prayer. In family worship settings it was sometimes the practice that the family would kneel before their chairs and couches while the father prayed. But today the usual practice is for people to remain seated and bow their heads. But ‘usual’ or ‘common’ must not be construed to mean mandatory,

²² Davis Horton, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 52.

especially since Scripture does not give any command about the posture of prayer and gives examples that show that multiple postures are acceptable. Thus, we must not make a rule about whether a person who leads in pray in the public worship assembly or one who is in the assembly as a participant should stand, sit, or kneel. We must be very careful not fall into the trap of the Pharisees and dictate rules for behaviour and practice during times of worship that God does not dictate and make vain the worship of God by “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mk 7.6-8).

87. Prayer’s Proscriptions

Prayers found in the Bible provide examples for us to follow (1 Ki 8.23-53; Neh 9.6-38; many Psalms; Dan 9.4-19; Mt 6.9-13; Lk 1.46-55). However, some of the prayers include imprecations—an invocation of a curse or a request for destruction of an enemy—(Neh 4.4-5; Ps 7.8-9; Ps 35.6; Ps 52.1-5; Ps 55.15; Ps 58.6; Ps 59.5; Ps 69.28; Ps 79.12; Ps 83.9-18; Ps 94.1-3; Ps 109.8, 14; Ps 137.7-9; Ps 139.19-22; Ps 140.5-11; Jer 11.20). This raises a question in the minds of some Christians who wonder how we can reconcile these imprecations with Jesus’ teaching about loving and praying for our enemies (Mt 5.43-47; Lk 6.27-29).

Jesus sets an example for us. He modeled the attitudes of love and forgiveness: (Lk 23.34), yet he cursed and condemned his enemies (Mt 7.23; Mt 10.33; Mt 23.13-36; Mt 24.48-51; Mt 25.41-46; Mt 26.23-24, alluding to Ps 41.8-10). Paul spoke of judgement on the Jews (Rom 11.9-10) yet prayed for their conversion (Rom 10.1); and he invoked curses on God’s enemies (1 Cor 16.21-22; Gal 1.8-9; Gal 5.12; 2 Tim 4.14). Peter quotes Psalm 69.25 and Psalm 109.8, invoking a curse (Acts 1.18-19). And, the saints in heaven pray imprecations on their enemies, asking God to avenge them (Rev 6.10; Rev 19.1-3).

When we consider Jesus’ example, we need to separate Jesus the man as an individual from Jesus the King in a corporate capacity. As an individual he did not take revenge. But as the ruler of the universe, he avenges. Likewise, David did not take Saul’s life (twice) yet he could pray that God would avenge him (Ps 52.5). Thus, we need to consider the difference between personal revenge for personal reproaches—which Jesus speaks about in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 5.38-42). There is no room for personal vengeance (Rom 12.17-21). But it is proper to ask God to avenge us before his and our enemies when his holiness and laws are abused (Dt 32.35). Notice that the verses in Romans chapter 12 are followed by chapter 13. One of God’s instruments of vengeance is the State. It is the duty of the civil magistrate to act in the capacity of an avenger of God’s righteousness and righteous requirements in the temporal realm.

Evil must be repaid. Therefore, it is not wrong to ask God to do what is right. It is a false emotionalism that ignores the retributive justice of God. We need to learn to praise God for his judgements as much as for his mercies. In this regard, Robert Dabney stated (in *Discussions Evangelical and Theological*, 1:709-710), “Righteous retribution is one of the glories of the divine character. If it is right that God should desire to exercise it, then it cannot be wrong for his people to desire him to exercise it. It may be objected that, while he claims retribution for himself, he forbids it to them, and that he has thereby forbidden all satisfaction in it to them. The fact is true; the inference does not follow. Inasmuch as retribution inflicted by a creature is forbidden, the desire for its infliction by a creature, or pleasure therein, is also forbidden; but inasmuch as it is righteously inflicted by God, it must be right in him, and must therefore be, when in his hand, a proper subject of satisfaction to the godly.” Likewise, Calvin preaching his 55th sermon on Deuteronomy (Dt 7.16-19) on August 12th 1555, points out that men want justice but not as God gives it. Men think they are smarter than God. We need to “learn to glory in his judgements.” It is not enough to confess his justice; we must carry it out. But the civil magistrate is to be gentle when executing justice. The judge using rigor should morn and lay aside his passions of revenge and hatred. If man tries to be more merciful than God (“the fountain of all good”) he is lowly blasphemous. When men pretend to be more merciful than God, they are worse than the devil.

The *Shorter Catechism* (Q98) speaks of offering in prayer things pleasing to God's will. Since the punishment of the wicked is pleasing to his will, then it is proper to pray for this. Prayer is more than just an expression of emotion. It is thinking God's thoughts after him. It is a fuzzy thinking that has difficulty with God judging wicked pagans who know but suppress his righteous requirements.

The ultimate purpose of praying the imprecatory prayers, as with singing the imprecatory Psalms, is that God may be glorified. We are to pray that attacks against his Church would be frustrated. We are to ask God to stop those who hate his Church and persecute Christians whether, radical feminists pushing for abortion 'rights', homosexuals demanding sexual 'freedoms', Islamic *jihadists* prosecuting a 'holy war' against the 'Christian West', or evolutionists calling creationists stupid, wicked or insane. We are to ask God to give the wicked no rest in this life until, and unless, they repent of their sins.

We should not forget that the Church is at war (Eph 6.12-17). The Psalms (including the examples of imprecatory prayers) are the War Songs of the Prince of Peace. Our prayers and Psalm singing may warn traitors, deserters, and enemies. (Ps 18.49 with Rom 15.9; Ps 66.1; Ps 99.4-5). Singing and praying this way encourages the saints, they know that God is in control. (Ps 2.1-12; Ps 110.1-7).

We must have a balance between praying for the conversion of the wicked and praying that God's justice would be exercised against wickedness. We should glory not only in the mercy and love of God but also in his justice and judgements. It is never proper to pray out of a spirit of private vengeance. Our objective must be that men will see God in his glory and come to repentance (Ps 83.16-18). If we find it difficult to pray an imprecatory prayer, it is possible that we have lost sight of the God of the Bible, the glory of God that motivated the Reformers, and of how we have been influenced by a weakened form of Christianity that focuses on a faulty definition of the love of God and loses sight of his justice.

88. The Psalter: The Hymnbook of the Church

The Psalter (i.e., the 150 Psalms) is the only hymnbook that the NT Church is authorized to use *as* worship. Singing the Psalms as worship and in a worship assembly pleases God. We know that this is the case, because:

- They are Holy Spirit breathed (2 Tim 3.16) and are therefore the perfect sacrifice of our lips as worship (Heb 13.15).
- The Psalms are quoted more than sixty times in the NT; the next closest book is Isaiah. The book of Hebrews is largely a commentary on the Psalms that teach us about Christ's uniqueness.
- When we sing the Psalms, we worship God acceptably with reverence and awe (Heb 12.28).
- The Psalms themselves speak of using the Psalms (also called hymns and songs) from the Psalter as worship (Ps 40.3; Ps 47.6-7).
- Jesus used the Psalms as worship; we should follow the example of Jesus. The Psalms were often in his mouth, including among his last words on the cross, indicating that he probably had grown up singing them.²³ However, the most telling example of his use is found in the inauguration of the Lord's Supper. Most scholars believe that Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn (Mt 26.30) from the Hallel portion of the Psalter (Psalms 113-118) on the night before his greatest trial—the crucifixion.
- When we sing Psalms, we join the Church in history, through all time and all places. We even join with Jesus and the Apostles in the upper room and on the way to Gethsemane.
- When we sing the Psalms, we encourage agreement among Christians that cannot be obtained by groups that use various hymn books, each containing songs that exhibit a different theological orientation.

²³ For example: the stone builders rejected (Ps 118.22, 23/Mt 21.42); David's Lord sitting at the right hand of the Father (Ps 110.1/Mt 22.44; Mt 26.64); 'you are gods' (Ps 82.6/Jn 10.34); of his betrayal (Ps 41.9/Jn 13.18); hatred of him (Ps 35.19; Ps 69.4/Jn 15.25); words on the cross (Ps 22.1/Mt 27.46; Ps 31.5/Lk 23.46).

The Psalms are the breath of God. They contain the words of Christ, and as he himself says, they speak about him (Lk 20.42). Everything that we need for the praise-worship of God is in the Psalter—the songbook of the Church. We are not to add to it or subtract from it. We should cherish this great gift from God. We have been blessed with the opportunity to learn and sing the Psalms, the word of the living God. What a privilege it is for us to sing these words with Jesus and his Apostles.

In the following entries in this series, we will consider arguments for using *only* the Psalms as worship and address some of the objections that have been raised against the exclusive use of the Psalms in worship since Isaac Watts took the first ‘shots’ at the Biblical Psalter in the preface to his first edition of his ‘psalter’. Most of the objections used today against exclusive Psalmody were raised by Watts, although they have been refined and restated since his day. Watts initiated a process that has undermined, and largely eliminated, the use of Psalm singing as part of Protestant worship.

Two of the objections against singing only Psalms as worship deal with supposed deficiencies with the Psalter—the Psalms don’t meet the needs of the 21st century Church and they are too harsh for the NT era—we will address these. The remainder of the arguments against exclusive Psalmody do not object to the use of the Psalms *per se*, but against the *exclusive* use of the Psalms as worship. However, only a few of the objections against exclusive Psalmody present positive arguments for singing new compositions not found in the Bible. Most of the objections challenge the exclusive use of Psalms through negative arguments and claim to support the use of Psalms *and* other compositions—whether drawn from elsewhere in Scripture or from sources outside the Bible. The irony is, as history demonstrates, the Psalms *and* hymns arguments quickly become an essentially hymns-only position in practice.

One objection against the exclusive Psalmody position is that it is practiced by a micro minority of the Church. There are about 50,000 exclusive-Psalm singers today in the worldwide Church. If there are about one billion Christians, then those who sing Psalms-only as worship, represent approximately .005% of the Church—i.e., almost zero. This is a ‘rounding error’ in most calculations. If truth is determined by majority opinion, then we can conclude that the Psalms-only position is incorrect. But truth is not determined by how many votes it receives. If this were the case, Christianity would have to be considered false, since it receives at best only one out of every seven or eight ‘votes’ throughout the world. When it comes to majority opinion, its consensus is more often wrong than right. The questions of final truth must be determined from God’s teaching in Scripture, not by counting noses.

The arguments in favour of exclusive Psalmody as worship and against the use of mere-human compositions as worship are presented in detail elsewhere²⁴. In this series on Biblical ethics we address the arguments only in summary form.

89. The Psalter: Announcing Christ

A charge has been made that Jesus is not found in the Psalms. This is only semantically correct, since the name of a person named ‘Jesus’ does not appear in them. It is ironic that most of those who use this argument against exclusive Psalmody would be thrilled to sing or listen to Handel’s *Messiah*. In that oratorio the name Jesus appears only once and then only as part of a compound name. As in the *Messiah*, Jesus appears in the Psalms in the form of some of his other names: ‘Lord’ Ps 2.4; Ps 110.1; ‘Anointed’ Ps 2.2; ‘King’ Ps 2.6; Ps 24.8; Ps 98.6; and ‘Saviour’ Ps 25.2; Ps 42.5). Thus, Jesus tells us that the Psalms speak about him (Lk 20.42; Lk 24.44). They are his words (Col 3.16), and he is the speaker in many of them (e.g., Ps 2.7; Ps 22.1, 22; Ps 40.7). What mere human composition can make the claim to be written by God, speak about the Son of God, and to be spoken by the Son of God?

²⁴ James R. Hughes, *In Spirit and Truth: Worship as God Requires (Understanding and Applying the Regulative Principle of Worship)*; available at www.EPCToronto.org.

The Psalms speak about the person and work of Jesus Christ, in terms of his:

- Divinity, eternal sonship and kingship (Ps 2.7²⁵ [Acts 13.33; Heb 1.5; Heb 5.5]; Ps 45.6-7 [Heb 1.8-9]; Ps 72.1-20; Ps 102.25-27 [Heb 1.10-12]; Ps 110.1 [Mt 22.42-45; Heb 1.13]).
 - Prophetic office (Ps 22.22 [Heb 2.12]).
 - Priesthood (Ps 110.4 [Heb 7.17]).
 - Humiliation and incarnation (Ps 8.5 [Heb 2.9]).
 - Compassion, tenderness and comfort (Ps 23.1-6; Ps 27.1-14; Ps 80.1-19; Ps 91.1-16; Ps 121.1-8).
 - Agony in the garden (Ps 22.2 [Heb 5.7]).
 - Betrayal (Ps 41.9 [Jn 13.18]).
 - Trial (Ps 35.11 [Mt 26.59, 60]).
 - Rejection (Ps 22.6 [Mt 27.21-23; Lk 23.18-23]).
 - Suffering, and crucifixion (Ps 16.8-11 [Acts 2.25-31]; Ps 22.1-2 [Mt 27.46], 35; Ps 40.6-8 [Heb 10.5-7]; Ps 41.9 [Jn 13.18]; Ps 69.1-36; Ps 88.1-8; Ps 116.1-19; Ps 118.22 [Mt 21.42; Acts 4.11, 12]).
 - Burial and Resurrection (Ps 16.8-11 [Acts 2.25-31]).
 - Exaltation (Ps 24.1-10; Ps 45.6 [Heb 1.8]; Ps 47.1-9; Ps 68.18 [Eph 4.8]; Ps 89.1-52; Ps 98.1-9; Ps 132.1-18).
 - Ascension and Session (Ps 47.5 [Acts 1.11; 1 Thess 4.16]; Ps 24.7-10 [Rev 5.6-14]).
 - Second coming as judge (Ps 50.3-4; Ps 98.6-9 [Mt 24.31; 1 Cor 15.52]).
- Isaac Watts complained that the Psalms do not provide adequate material to accompany the observance of the Lord's Supper. He said,

I might here also remark to what *a hard Shift the Minister is put to find proper Hymns at the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, where the People will sing nothing but out of David's Psalm-Book*: How perpetually do they repeat some part of the xxiiid (23rd) or the cxviiith (118th) Psalm? And confine all the glorious Joy and Melody of that Ordinance to a few obscure Lines, because the Translators have not indulged an Evangelical Turn to the Words of David: No not in those very Places where the Jewish Psalmist seems to mean the Gospel; but he was not able to speak it plain by Reason of the Infancy of that Dispensation, and longs for the Aid of a Christian Poet. *Though to speak my own Sense freely, I do not think David ever wrote a Psalm of sufficient Glory and Sweetness to represent the Blessings of this holy Institution of Christ*, even though it were explained by a copious Commentator.²⁶ [Emphasis added.]

It borders on blasphemy for Watts to say that none of the Psalms are of sufficient glory and sweetness for use in Lord's Supper, for the following reasons:

- God is no more glorious now than he was in the Old Testament era. The Psalms were sufficient then for the expression of his praise, they are still sufficient.
- Jesus used all or a portion of the Hallel Psalms (Ps 113.1-9 to Ps 118.1-29) when he instituted the Lord's Supper (Mt 26.30).
- Watts effectively accuses Christ of lying when he says that the Psalms speak of him (Luke 24.44). There are many directly Messianic Psalms that speak of Jesus' work of Salvation. These provide appropriate material for the Lord's Supper as they speak of Jesus':
 - Humiliation, suffering, work (Ps 22.1-31; Ps 40.1-17; Ps 69.1-36; Ps 88.1-18; Ps 116.1-19; Ps 118.1-29)
 - Kingship, priesthood, exaltation (Ps 2.1-12; Ps 24.1-10; Ps 45.1-17; Ps 72.1-20; Ps 89.1-52; Ps 98.1-9; Ps 110.1-7; Ps 132.1-18)
 - Compassion, comfort, care (Ps 23.1-6; Ps 27.1-14; Ps 80.1-19; Ps 91.1-16; Ps 121.1-8).

²⁵ Psalms highlighted are usually called "Messianic Psalms".

²⁶ Isaac Watts, "Preface," *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to The Christian State and Worship*, 1719.

If the Psalter were truly inadequate for representing the work of Jesus, God would have had the writers of the NT provide us with a new songbook. The NT writers wrote about Christ's person and work, including about his resurrection. They had a zeal for the glory of Christ and the worship of God, yet they did not give the NT Church a new songbook. They understood that the Book of Psalms is the songbook of the Church and, as shown by the number of times they quote from the Psalms, believed that it adequately represents the work of Jesus with a clear portrait of his person and a prophetic account of his work. To suggest that the Psalter is inadequate for today, shows a distinct ignorance of its contents.

90. The Psalter: Apostolic Command (part 1 of 2)

Under the New Covenant, we have a new form of worship that applies the spiritual equivalents (Heb 13.15) of the forms in the OT economy. The Apostles, under Christ, are the prophets who inaugurated this new form. The Apostles tell us how we are to worship. In Ephesians 5.19 Paul says, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." He says something similar in Colossians 3.16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

The immediate reaction of most people today, when reading these passages is to think of 'hymns' as one of the human compositions such as *Amazing Grace*, and 'songs' as something like a praise chorus. However, we should not assume that the words in the Bible mean what we mean today when we use them. For example, when the word 'hymn' first appeared in early English in about 825 AD, in the *Vespasian Psalter*, it was used to refer to the Psalms in the Psalter. We should notice also that the words 'psalm' and 'hymn' are not translations. They are transliterated Greek words expressed in our alphabet. The word 'song' is a translation of the Greek word for *ode*.

In Paul's day, there was a Greek translation of the OT (called the Septuagint; abbreviated as LXX). Paul quotes the Psalms from the LXX, rather than from the Hebrew, numerous times. The LXX translation used the words 'psalm', 'hymn', and 'ode' to refer to songs in what we call the Book of Psalms; they are used throughout the Psalter in the contents and titles of many of the Psalms. One Psalm in the LXX [Psalm 76.1; Ps 75.1 in the LXX], has all three words in its title. The title reads, "For the end, among the Hymns, a Psalm for Asaph: a song for the Assyrian."

The word translated 'hymn' (in Col 3.16 and Eph 5.19) is also used in Matthew 26.30 where there is little doubt that what Jesus and the disciples sang was a portion of the Hallel (Psalms 113-118). The word 'hymn' is also used in Heb 2.12 in a quotation from Psalm 22.22. Thus, when Paul wrote to the Ephesians and Colossians, he likely had the titles in the Greek OT in mind when he told them to use the 'psalms', 'hymns', and 'odes'. He used the three terms because they are the three terms used in the titles in the Psalter. He also, likely, used the three terms to express completeness. Jewish writers would list three identical or synonymous words or phrases, or list three aspects of a thing to emphasize perfection or completeness. The use of three different terms does not mean that they are three parts that could be easily separated or distinguished to make up a whole. Rather, each of the three terms individually could represent the whole.

Josephus (37-100 AD) who was a contemporary of Paul for about 25 years uses the terms 'psalms', 'hymns', and 'songs' to refer to the Psalms of David in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. Athanasius (c. 295–373), the great defender of Christ's deity against the Arian heresy, wrote a letter to Marcellinus in which he encouraged the young pastor to use the Psalms. In that letter, he uses the terms 'psalms', 'hymns', and 'songs' or 'odes' interchangeably when he refers to the compositions in the Psalter. For example, he says, "Psalms 47 and 64 voice the phrases of a hymn" and "For each advance you may recite the fifteen odes among the gradual psalms". In contrasting the Psalter with other parts of the OT (the law, prophets, and histories) he states, "On the other hand, things are expressed more broadly; of this kind are the phrases of

the psalms, odes, and songs.” Thus, these examples from ancient Greek writers from around the time of Paul demonstrate that the words ‘psalm’, ‘hymn’, and ‘ode’ were used to refer to the 150 Psalms found in OT Psalter.

Paul (in Col 3.16 and Eph 5.19) indicates that the compositions he refers to are not human ‘hymns’ but the God-breathed Psalms since he:

- Refers to them as the ‘word of Christ’ (Col 3.16). All of the compositions (whether ‘psalms’, ‘hymns’ and ‘songs’) that Paul tells the Church to use are the words of Christ. The only songs that can possibly meet that criterion are the songs found in the Bible.
- Tells his readers to ‘be filled with the Spirit’ (Eph 5.18). Non-Biblical hymns or songs cannot fill us with the Spirit, as they are not God-breathed like every portion of Scripture is (2 Tim 3.16).
- Views the compositions referenced by the three titles as ‘spiritual’ (Col 3.16; Eph 5.19). The word ‘spiritual’ is a modifier for all three terms (together and individually). As a modifier, the word ‘spiritual’ means at least that the songs must be appropriate for use in worship, but more likely it means that the songs are *from* the Holy Spirit; which implies that the words to be sung as worship are to be God-breathed. Paul is differentiating the ‘psalms’, ‘hymns’ and ‘songs’ he is commanding the Church to sing from mere human compositions that can also be called ‘psalms’, ‘hymns’ or ‘songs’. Paul was not using the word ‘spiritual’ just to refer to ‘songs’ (‘odes’) but to all three forms of composition found in the Psalter.
- Quotes from the Psalms in Ephesians 4.8 (Ps 68.18; in the LXX 67.19) and Ephesians 4.26 (Ps 4.4; verse 5 in the LXX). These Psalms are called, in the LXX, ‘in the psalms, a song of David’ and ‘of David, a psalm, a song’, respectively. When he tells the Ephesians to use ‘songs’ (in Eph 5.19), he is referring to the collection of songs he has just quoted from earlier in his letter—the Psalter.

Paul commands us through his letters to sing the Psalms *as* and *in* worship.

91. The Psalter: Apostolic Command (part 2 of 2)

Paul intended the NT Church to use the Psalter to make “melody to the Lord with your heart”, to express “thankfulness in your hearts to God”, and to teach and admonish one another (Col 3.16 and Eph 5.19). Clearly, he tells us to sing Psalms to the Lord, *as* worship. In telling us to admonish and teach one another with the Psalms, he is giving us the authorization, actually *commanding* us, to use them in a corporate setting where more than one Christian is present. The Psalms are to be used *as* worship and *in* corporate worship.

Paul also instructs the Corinthians to use Psalms (1 Cor 14.15, 26). All commonly used Protestant Evangelical translations of the NT since 1536, translate the Greek (of 1 Cor 14.15) as “I will sing”. The ESV translates it as ‘sing praises’, adding the word ‘praises’. However, Paul uses a word that is derived from the noun ‘psalm’—i.e., he says “I will psalm”. Wycliffe’s translation (c. 1395) has “I shall sing psalm” following the Latin Vulgate’s verbal form ‘*psallam*’. But since we do not use ‘psalm’ as a verb in English, we should translate it accurately as, ‘I will sing Psalms’. Calvin (in his commentary on 1 Corinthians), notes Paul’s use of ‘psalm’, “When he says, *I will sing Psalms*, or, *I will sing*, he makes use of a particular instance, instead of a general statement. For, as the praises of God were the subject-matter of the Psalms, he means by *the singing of Psalms*—*blessing God*, or *rendering thanks* to him, for in our supplications, we either ask something from God, or we acknowledge some blessing that has been conferred upon us. From this passage, however, we at the same time infer, that the custom of singing was, even at that time, in use among believers, as appears, also, from Pliny, who, writing at least forty years, or thereabouts, after the death of Paul, mentions, that the Christians were accustomed to sing Psalms to Christ before day-break. I have also no doubt, that, from the very first, they followed the custom of the Jewish Church in singing

Psalms.”

James also gives us an instruction to sing Psalms. He says: “Is anyone cheerful, let him sing a psalm” (James 5.13). Notice that he is writing to a Jewish-Christian audience (James 1.1). It is clear that his audience would have understood him to be speaking of the Psalms found in the OT Psalter. The translation “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise”, although it may be technically correct, obscures the fact that James is referring to the Psalter.

Notice also, that when Paul and James instruct the NT Church to use the Psalms, they assume that the songs are available for singing. Paul wrote the books of Ephesians and Colossians around 60 AD. The book of James is one of the earliest books in the NT, probably written before 50 AD. It is clear that the compositions that they are instructing the Church to use were already available at that time. A clear-thinking person realizes that the NT Church was barely organized by 60 AD. It is simply untenable to think that a new collection of sacred songs was already developed and available for use across the scattered churches to whom Paul and James wrote. The songs that they instructed the Church to use were the collection found in the OT Psalter.

Despite the evidence against it, the common view throughout much of the Church today is that the terms ‘psalms’, ‘hymns’, and ‘songs’, as used in Ephesians 5.19 and Colossians 3.16, refer to the OT Psalms, non-Biblical hymns such as *Amazing Grace*, and choruses. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, for example, presents this position in a sermon he preached on Ephesians 5.19. Alternatively, Ralph P. Martin (in *Worship in the Early Church*) suggests that the three words apply to NT Christian writings, where psalms are Christian writings patterned on the Psalms, hymns are longer compositions, and spiritual songs are snatches of spontaneous praise. These suggestions about what Paul means by the words ‘psalms’, ‘hymns’, and ‘songs’ are merely guesses not based on thorough exegetical work. (See the previous entry in this series for more detail.)

It is not sufficient to claim that Paul *permits* the singing of non-Biblical compositions as worship. If Paul is not speaking of only the Psalms in Ephesians 5.19 and Colossians 3.16, then he is *commanding* the use of non-Biblical compositions. This creates major difficulties:

- It requires that we sing hundreds or thousands of different merely human compositions that have been prepared since the fourth century.
- Paul does not give us any guidelines for how to determine which non-Biblical hymns are to be sung and which are to be ignored.
- It binds the conscience of anyone who refuses to sing non-Biblical hymns. If ‘hymn’ in the passages under consideration really means a non-Biblical composition, then a person who refuses to sing a hymn in worship—i.e., he believes that only Psalms are to be offered to God as the sacrifice of Praise—would be disobeying God’s instruction through Paul and the elders, and should be subject to censure. In this instance his conscience is being bound. The authors of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 22.2) were scrupulous in their concern that nothing be introduced into worship that is not required by God. They state: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.”

We cannot go wrong when we obey the apostles and sing the Psalms.

92. The Psalter: Authoritative Catechism

Some people claim that the Psalter does not have a complete theology, particularly with regard to revelation about the Trinity. However, the Psalter was the song book used by Jesus and the Apostles. It therefore must provide the form of praise, with respect to the Trinity, that God requires and delights in. While it is true that in the OT economy God had not *fully* revealed his nature as a Trinity, nevertheless he chooses in praise-song to be worshipped primarily in a general theistic form. Jesus gives us an example of how we should correctly approach worship, with respect to the Trinity, in the prayer he taught his disciples (Mt 6.9-13). In this prayer he did not tell them to pray to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We also never find him addressing his own prayers to the Holy Spirit. Although, for us to direct a prayer specifically to Jesus is valid worship (Mt 14.33; Mk 9.24; Jn 9.38; Acts 2.21; Acts 7.59; Acts 22.16; 1 Cor 1.2). Where God wishes to be recognized explicitly as a Trinity, he makes that clear through the teachings and the example of Christ and the Apostles—i.e., in the baptismal formulation (Mt 28.19) and at times in a benediction (2 Cor 13.14). To state that using only the Psalms truncates worship, is to accuse God of not knowing how he wishes to be addressed and worshiped in praise-song.

We are taught a comprehensive theology in the Psalms. We learn of God's nature, his attributes (e.g., holiness, love), character, government, and providence. For example, in the Psalms we learn about God's:

- Self-existence (Ps 33.11; Ps 115.3).
- Trinity (Ps 2.2; Ps 51.11; Ps 104.30; Ps 110.1; Ps 139.7).
- Omnipotence (Ps 115.3; Ps 145.3; Ps 146.6).
- Immutability (Ps 102.26-28).
- Eternal existence (Ps 90.4; Ps 102.12).
- Omnipresence (Ps 139.7-10).
- Omniscience (Ps 1.6; Ps 94.9; Ps 119.168; Ps 139.1-4).
- Wisdom (Ps 19.7; Ps 104.24).
- Sovereignty (Ps 2.1-12; Ps 47.2, 8; Ps 50.1-23; Ps 95.3-4; Ps 98.3).
- Creative power (Ps 19.1-6; Ps 33.6-7; Ps 136.4-9; Ps 104.1-30; Ps 146.6).
- Providence (Ps 22.28; Ps 104.14 [specific]; Ps 104.1-30 [general]).
- Goodness (Ps 36.6, 9; Ps 104.21; Ps 145.9, 15, 16).
- Love (Ps 6.4; Ps 103.8).
- Holiness (Ps 22.3; Ps 33.21; Ps 51.11; Ps 71.22).
- Truthfulness (Ps 31.5).
- Mercy and patience (Ps 6.2; Ps 78.38; Ps 86.15).
- Revelation in nature (Ps 19.1-2) and through Prophets (Ps 74.9; Ps 103.7).
- Law and our duty toward it (Ps 1.1-2; Ps 19.7-11; Ps 119.1-176).
- Definition of sin (Ps 14.1, 3; Ps 51.3-4).
- Hatred of sin (Ps 5.4; Ps 11.5).
- Righteousness (Ps 1.6; Ps 7.9; Ps 119.137).
- Salvation he provides for mankind (Ps 18.46; Ps 27.9; Ps 43.5).
- Justification by the faith of believers (Ps 32.1-5; Ps 51.7-17; Ps 143.2).
- Forgiveness of sin for the repentant (Ps 103.10-12; Ps 130.3-4).
- Judgement and punishment of the wicked (Ps 1.4-5; Ps 7.11; Ps 9.16; Ps 11.6; Ps 59.13; Ps 98.9).

Some people, such as Isaac Watts (in the preface to his *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to The Christian State and Worship*, 1719) have claimed that the Psalter was developed in a different era than our own and that therefore the Psalms are not suited for worship in our day, or they need to be 'Christianized'. However, this argument against the use of the Psalms as praise-worship can be applied not only against singing the Psalms but also against the instructional value of the entire OT. This is contrary to Paul's statement about the value of all of Scripture (2 Tim 3.16-17) and fits well with modern liberal thinking that classes the OT as antiquated teaching about a different God than the

NT God and written by a tribe of wandering Bedouins. If the Psalms have any value when read as Scripture in public worship, they also have value when they are sung.

God knows what balance we need in our theology and instruction and has provided that balance in the Psalter. The Psalms contain a much greater variety of theological material than *any* collection of mere human compositions. God gave to the entire Church throughout much of its history what it *needs* to sing. We must remember that God doesn't *need* us to worship him as we *want* to. He *wants* us to worship him as we *need* to. We *want* to worship him with our own offerings. We *need* to worship him with the compositions that he has given us.

No collection of mere human compositions contains the balance of theology that God wishes us to have, as does the Psalter. We should sing and admonish one another with the Psalms (Col 3.15-16) to learn about Christ and his work, and how to live lives that will please God.

Since the Psalms were sufficient for Jesus and his disciples, they certainly are good enough for the Church in the 21st century. What can stir the soul more than words written by God himself that speak about Christ? Words written by sinful humans, even with the best of intentions, cannot express the heart and mind of God. To dismiss the Psalms as irrelevant for praise-worship is a travesty and blasphemous! We should sing the Psalms if for no other reason than to proclaim the value of the OT for the 21st century.

93. The Psalter: Absolute Counsel and Assertive Challenge

The Psalms bless and counsel us. They are filled with messages of salvation and comfort, guidance, and direction, meaning and purpose, and encouragement and joy. Therefore, Paul speaks of using the Psalms to encourage one another (Col 3.16), and James tells us to use them for expressing joy (James 5.13). Paul and Silas used them in prison in Philippi at midnight for comfort (Acts 16.25). The Psalms cover every emotion and yearning of the soul, for example:

- Confessions of sin (Ps 19.1-14; Ps 32.1-11; Ps 51.1-19; Ps 130.1-8).
- Prayers to a merciful God (Ps 32.1-11; Ps 51.1-19).
- Our dependence on the Holy Spirit (Ps 30.1-2; Ps 51.1-19; Ps 139.1-24).
- Spiritual desires and affections (Ps 43.1-5; Ps 44.1-26; Ps 63.1-11; Ps 73.1-28; Ps 119.1-176).
- The struggles of faith (Ps 3.1-8; Ps 4.1-8; Ps 73.1-28).
- Thanksgiving (many).
- Concern for, and joy in, the Church (Ps 48.1-14; Ps 95.1-11; Ps 96.1-13; Ps 122.1-9).

As Athanasius said in his *Letter of Marcellinus*, “[The Psalter] possesses ... this marvel of its own—namely, that it contains even the emotions of each soul ... these words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul. ... For I believe that the whole of human existence, both the dispositions of the soul and the movements of the thoughts, have been measured out and encompassed.” We should sing the Psalms for comfort and encouragement in every situation of life.

Paul quotes Psalm 18.49 in Romans 15.9: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” The context of this quotation indicates that the Psalms have a universal witness—to Jew and Gentile. This teaches us that the Psalms are to be used by the Church to offer a challenge to the world since they present God's glory, kingship over the earth, man's lost state in sin, God's judicial office, and the salvation God provides. There can be no better form of evangelism or Gospel call than to use the Psalms along with the preached word.

The Psalms are an appropriate instrument for apologetics (the defence of the Faith) because they:

- *Declare all of God's holy counsel in the balance by which he desires it to be communicated to the world.* When the entire Psalter is sung regularly by a congregation, they receive a diet of doctrine precisely as God wishes it to be communicated.
- *Speak to a post-modern culture with a pre-modern voice.* The Psalms present God's truth in a way that counters the prevailing individualism, anti-rational opinions of our day, and the belief that there is no absolute standard for morality.
- *Describe the Gospel going to the nations.* The authors of the Psalms often assume that their words will be used in evangelism (Ps 66.1-4; Ps 67.1-7; Ps 72.19; Ps 87.4-7; Ps 96.1-10; Ps 98.3; Ps 100.1-5; Ps 148.11-14).
- *Defend God's word as the normative standard for faith and life.* Singing Psalms exclusively as worship teaches the world that God's word is our holy standard.
- *Defend the church against the incursion of error.* Because the Psalms are superior to any merely human composition used for singing, we can be assured that when we sing only the Psalms as worship, we will avoid the possibility of introducing a theological error.

Many people object to the use of some of the Psalms that speak about the destruction of God's enemies or call down curses on them. This type of Psalm is often called an imprecatory Psalm (e.g., Ps 137.1-9). This objection essentially argues that the God of the OT is not the same as the God of the NT, that God has two sets of laws, and that God judges men differently (i.e., less severely) in the NT era than he did under the OT laws. This is a false idea of many in our day who can only espouse the love of God and dismiss the justice of God and the punishment of the wicked. In contrast, Paul in his sermon in Athens presents the truth that God will judge the wickedness of all mankind (Acts 17.30-31) by the standard of his law and the life of Christ.

Anyone who claims that we should not sing the imprecatory Psalms because they don't have a 'Christian tone' must also charge the Apostles and Christ with being unchristian, because they use the imprecatory Psalms (Acts 1.20 with Ps 69.25; Mt 16.27; 2 Tim 4.14; 1 Pt 1.17 with Ps 28.4; Rom 11.9, 10 with Ps 69.22, 23). He must also object to the imprecations of Jesus (Mt 23.1-39), the Apostles (Acts 1.18-20), Paul (1 Cor 16.21-22), and the saints in heaven (Rev 19.1-3). Asking God to avenge abuses of his righteousness and holiness (Dt 32.35; Rom 12.17-21), and even personal affronts (2 Tim 4.14), is different from acting in a personally vindictive manner and taking vengeance into one's own hands. It is a form of false piety to ignore God's retributive justice. The Church in the 21st century is too soft on wickedness. God is not soft against wickedness and will punish those who are not covered with the blood of Christ. It is a glorious thing to ask God to defend his righteousness and holiness.

We must learn the Psalms and sing them, as God's witness to his glorious Gospel. And we need to learn to praise God for his judgements as well as his mercies. We need to sing the imprecatory Psalms precisely because they keep God's hatred of sin and his justice before our minds and the minds of those who come into our midst. Our tone should be God's tone!

94. The Psalter: Ancient Church

Psalm singing was used in temple worship. Some think that only the Levitical choirs performed singing in temple liturgy. However, the entire congregation may have participated—for example, when they went to Jerusalem for the annual feasts (Ps 22.25; Ps 26.12; Ps 35.18; Ps 68.26; Ps 149.1). Regardless, all Jews appear to have learned to sing the Psalms, most likely in synagogue worship. The early NT Church continued the practice of singing Psalms as worship, following the example of Jesus, the Apostles, and the Jewish converts. There is no evidence that the apostolic Church sang anything other than Psalms. In generations immediately following the Apostles, the Church continued to use the Psalms exclusively in worship.

Church historians generally agree that the NT Church took over the practice of singing (chanting) the Psalms from the synagogue worship model. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC - 50 AD), a Hellenized Jew, is one 1st century writer who mentions the use of singing praises (Psalms) in the synagogues. If Jews did not sing the Psalms in their synagogues, one has to wonder where Paul and Silas learned to sing them (Acts 16.25) and where the disciples learned to sing them (Mt 26.30). The disciples were not from Jerusalem, so it cannot be argued that they learned the Psalms just by listening to the Levitical choirs, or possibly participating, a few times a year in the singing at the annual feasts. Also, where did the Ephesian and Colossian congregations made up, at first, primarily of converted Jews learn to sing the Psalms that Paul instructed them to sing (Eph 5.19; Col 3.16), if not from their previous practice in the synagogues? It is more reasonable to accept the obvious and traditional view that the early Church learned the Psalms singing them in the synagogues.

The apostolic Church and the early Church for the first few generations after the Apostles sang only the Psalms as worship. This is demonstrated by early references to liturgical practice and order such as in the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (probably from before 120 AD). Clement of Alexandria (153-217 AD) also speaks of the Psalms being used in worship (*Paedagogus*, 1.4).

When non-Biblical hymns began to enter the Church is unclear. Some claim that non-Biblical hymns were introduced for use in worship during the first century, and even claim, based on mere guesses, that there are snippets of Christian hymns in the NT that were used in congregational worship. But there is absolutely no evidence of any hymns other than Psalms being used in the 1st century Church. It appears from an objective review of the evidence, that heretical movements first introduced non-Biblical hymns for use in worship, during the late second century. Up until the time of Constantine, exclusive Psalmody was the *predominant* practice in the Church, although it was being challenged. We, however, do not accept the practice of the post-apostolic Church as normative. Our standard must be what Christ and the Apostles taught by word and example. However, hymn singing was not a universally accepted practice until well into the 5th century. Athanasius who lived in the fourth century defended exclusive Psalmody in his Letter to Marcellinus on the importance of using the Psalms. He warns the young man:

Do not let anyone amplify these words of the Psalter with the persuasive phrases of the profane, and do not let him attempt to recast or completely change the words. Rather let him recite and chant, without artifice [i.e., without instrumental accompaniment], the things written just as they were spoken so that even the Spirit who speaks in the saints, seeing words inspired by him in them, might render assistance to us. ... [T]hose deserve judgement who abandon them [the Psalms], fashioning phrases meant to be persuasive in the pagan style.

The Church had to speak against mere human compositions that were being introduced for use in worship (such as the *Te Deum*; late 4th/early 5th century). The Synod of Laodicea, held from 343 to 381 AD, concluded, in Canon LIX, the following, “No psalms composed by private individuals nor any un-canonical books may be read in the church, but only the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.” Some writers, influenced by the belief that singing mere human compositions as worship is permissible, focus on the phrase ‘composed by private individuals’ and suggest that this does not *exclude* hymns composed by officials of the Church, or hymns specifically sanctioned by the Church. This is merely an attempt to force-fit an endorsement of hymn singing into the canons of a fourth century Church council. These writers also question the intent of this dictum by noting that it does not speak about what may be sung but about what may be *read*. They forget that in the early NT Church singing was probably not of the form we know it (e.g., four-part harmony with rhymed meter) but rather was conducted as a form of congregational ‘reading’ of the Psalms using a form of rhythm which we call chanting. Ironically, the people who suggest that we must make a distinction in this instance between singing and reading are often the same ones who use the opposite argument when it suits them—i.e., that there is no difference between singing and praying (i.e.,

since we can compose prayers we can compose songs). It seems clear that the Synod's mention of Psalms separately from the other parts of Scripture is to emphasize their use as the only suitable songbook of praise.

Scripture instructs us to sing the Psalms (Col 3.16; Eph 5.19; James 5.13). The overwhelming evidence is that the apostolic Church sang only Psalms as worship, and for the first few centuries most churches sang Psalms exclusively.

95. Non-Biblical Hymns – Alternate Compositions

Only the Psalter provides a songbook written by God. Non-Biblical hymns are not God-breathed. If a pastor were to go into the pulpit of a typical Bible-believing Church and open a copy of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and say, "Hear the word of the Lord" we would hope that the elders would remove him from the pulpit. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is an excellent human composition, but it is only that—a human composition. We are never to elevate it to the same level as the words breathed by God.

In contrast, those same Bible-believing churches take the words of men (often words with suspect theology) every week and raise them to the level of the Psalms. Not only do they put the non-Biblical hymns on the same level as the Psalms, but they often replace the Psalms entirely. You can see this by selecting almost any hymnal used by Evangelical Protestants and counting the number of Psalms included in the collection. In most cases, you will find fewer than ten Psalms. Even in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, the number of hymns used for singing usually exceeds the number of Psalms. The word of God has been replaced by the words of men.

It is often objected that singing human composition, as worship, is not forbidden in the word of God. This argument is presented in at least three forms:

- God hasn't explicitly prohibited non-Biblical hymns.
- God hasn't commanded only the use of inspired compositions. For example, Isaac Watts said, "IF I could be persuaded that nothing ought to be such in worship but what was of immediate Inspiration from God, surely I would recommend Anthems only, (viz.) the Psalms themselves as we read them in the Bible, set to Musick as they are sung by Choristers in our Cathedral Churches ..."
- Non-Biblical hymns are God-breathed compositions on a par with the Psalms. For example, one writer said, "Christians might well ask whether they recognize today that poetic and musical communication may be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and may be one evidence of the Spirit's filling in a believer."²⁷

There are many things not prohibited explicitly in God's word that are not acceptable as worship (e.g., making marriage into a sacrament; juggling in the sanctuary after the sermon and before the Benediction, marching around the sanctuary with models of the 'tree of life', etc.). The principle derived from Scripture, is that if we don't have a command or apostolic example (explicit or derived from principle) to include something in worship, we must not include it. What we offer to God as worship is to be only what he has required; what he has not required is not worship and is not to be offered to him as worship (Dt 4.2; Dt 12.30-32; Is 1.11-13; Mt 15.9). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 21.1) summarizes this: "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture."

To contend that new song compositions can be offered on a par with, or as a substitute for, the God-breathed Psalms is to advocate essentially a form of idolatry. In John 1.14, the living Word—Jesus—is attributed

²⁷ C. Nolan Huizenga, 'A Biblical "Tune-up" for Hymn Singing,' *Christianity Today*, June 27, 1980, pp. 20-22.

with having the glory of God. The written word of God—the Bible, including the Psalms—is the breath of the living Word (2 Tim 3.16) and is therefore glorious (perfect, holy, etc.; Jer 23.9; Ps 18.30; Ps 19.7; Rom 7.12). Paul tells us further that men in sin exchange the glory of God with human substitutes (Rom 1.23). Therefore, with the equivalences between Christ and his word and glory, to substitute human words for Christ’s words in the worship of God, is idolatry and, as Paul says, is the behaviour of fools claiming to be wise (Rom 1.22).

To offer new song compositions in the worship of God requires the belief that normative revelation did not cease with Christ and the Apostles and that the canon of Scripture is not closed. This leaves the Church with a serious problem of knowing what is to be our standard for faith and practice. It is unacceptable to respond that what is sung in worship does not need to be part of the closed canon of Scripture, since what we are *told* to sing by the Apostles—the Psalms (Eph 5.19; Col 3.16; James 5.13)—is part of the canon of Scripture.

Another significant problem with the view that classic hymns or contemporary song compositions can be offered along with, or instead of, the Psalms is that it devalues the Psalms, which are full of the majesty, holiness, and authority of God. It lowers the word of God to the level of human compositions, that at times border on insipid mantras designed to stimulate the emotions but not the mind. It is equivalent to mixing chaff or even sawdust with flour to bake bread and pretending that the concoction will please the palate. The reality is that the Psalms, as God-breathed compositions, are of infinitely more value as an offering to God than the best words that mere humans could ever compose. Only the Psalms offered to God as the fruit of our lips (Heb 13.15) as worship can please him.

96. Non-Biblical Hymns – Adulterated Contributions

In Leviticus 22.20, we read that the people were told not to bring any sacrifices with defects because they would not be accepted by the LORD. The sacrifice we are to give today is to be a sacrifice of praise from our lips (Heb 13.15). It should be unblemished (Mal 1.13-14), or God will not accept it. The only unblemished songs of praise that we can offer to God are those written by him—the Psalms!

If one individual can be ‘credited’ with the introduction of hymnody into the Protestant Church, it is Isaac Watts. He complained, blasphemously, that the Psalter lacked the dignity and grace that should be part of Christian worship. His father responded: “Try then whether you can yourself produce something better.” The product of his efforts was published in 1719 as Psalm paraphrases, the *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to The Christian State and Worship*. Watts went on to produce over 600 hymns and has become known as the “father of English hymnody”.

Many of Watts’ ‘Psalms’ are clearly not translations and not even paraphrases. It is dishonest to present these as the ‘Psalms of David’. They are ‘false fire’ (Lev 10.1-2) and ‘blemished sacrifices’ (Mal 1.6-14) before God. This can be seen by placing side-by-side a rendition by Watts and the original (either in prose or metrical form).

Following the introduction of these imitations into the Congregational churches, it did not take long for Presbyterians to follow suit. In May 1789, at the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the US held at Philadelphia, Adam Rankin raised the question of the propriety of using Watts’ ‘Psalter’. He asked, “Whether the churches ... have not fallen into a great pernicious error by disusing Rouse’s versifications of David’s Psalms, and adopting ... Watts’s imitation?” The General Assembly discussed at length this matter and recommended that Rankin show Christian charity to those who disagreed with him and admonished him to “guard against disturbing the peace of the church on this head.” In time, Watts’ paraphrases became the standard among most Presbyterians in the US.

From the initial deviation from singing only the words of God, brought about by the singing of Watts' paraphrases, it was not long before churches introduced and accepted hundreds of hymns written by Watts and hymns written by others (e.g., Charles Wesley). In the approximately 150 years following Watts the Church experienced a great burst of hymn writing and the replacement of Psalm singing with hymn singing. The process has continued, as even the 'traditional' hymns are being driven out of the Church.

Watts raised the objection that the Psalm translations in meter were at best paraphrases of the Psalms, and therefore this justified the creation of his even more liberal paraphrases. His argument is essentially that if we can sing paraphrased Psalms, then why not hymns that have the essence of the Psalms? It is only a matter of degree between singing a paraphrase of a Psalm and a hymn with the same sentiments.

The version of the Psalter in use in the dissenting congregations in England at the time of Watts was the first complete Psalter in the English language, first published in 1562. It was this version that Watts found unsatisfactory. A comparison of its renditions with the King James Version shows a substantial variation from the translation that was the common version of the Bible in use at the time of Watts. This deviation provides a justification for Watts' contention that the renditions were closer to paraphrases than to translations.

However, the answer to Watts' objection is not to produce renditions of the Psalms like his own that deviate as much, or even further, from the original. The answer is to provide the best possible translations of the Psalms for singing.

Since we are commanded to *sing* the Psalms, we need to put them into a form that can be sung or at least chanted. We should however strive for faithfulness in translation while providing songs that can be sung, rather than forcing our verses to fit a particular rhyme or meter. However, even when the Psalms prepared for singing are not word-for-word translations, they are still the Psalms of God in the same way that a translation of the Gospel of John, even imperfect (as all translations are) is still the Word of God. It is a distinctly different activity to translate a Gospel or a Psalm than to write our own gospel (Gal 1.8-9) or compose our own hymn. A translation of a Psalm is still a Psalm and the word of God.

Although not perfect, some modern Psalters show what can be accomplished to be faithful in translation and yet provide Psalm selections that can be sung easily by congregations. There is no doubt that more could be done to provide accurate translations of the Psalms for singing, and to remove stilted rhythms and rhymes leftover from the attempts to force fit the Psalms to popular Western meters. However, the problems are with the translations and versifications—not with the Psalms themselves. The answer to the objection that some of the Psalm translations are nearly paraphrases, is not to produce compositions that deviate further from the original, but rather to apply the best linguistic, literary, and musical skills to produce accurate Psalm translations for use in the praise of God.

97. Non-Biblical Hymns – Acceptance Challenge

Hymnody presents practical problems that are not present when we use the Psalter for the worship of God. When we review guidelines that have been provided by various authors for selecting hymns for worship, we find that while they may appear to be good and valid criteria, they rarely include Scriptural references to show how their selection principles were derived from the Bible. It seems to be inconsistent to discuss what is proper as worship and not to consider what God might have to say on the matter.

S. M. Houghton, in a (positive) review a new hymnal called *Christian Hymns* published in the *Banner of Truth* magazine asked "How can one select from such a prodigious mass of published verse? Has the criterion to be personal taste, or has attention to be paid to the standards set by the Christian community at large?" Since when is either personal taste or corporate opinion to be our standard for faith or practice?

Where does God's word weigh in?

By what standard are we to judge one person's list of criteria for selecting hymns from another person's? It cannot be the word of God, because the word of God doesn't give the standard. It does not provide guidelines for writing or selecting hymns to sing as worship. If we are to write or select mere-human hymns for congregational worship, then the Bible leaves us without guidance. Therefore, the criteria can be nothing more than human derived and defined. If we do not use the Psalms alone as praise-worship, we are left with a purely subjective approach for selecting among human compositions for our praise of God.

Hymn selection and revision is a recipe for congregational and denominational problems. It is impossible to create a human-authored hymnbook that can be universally and permanently acceptable to the entire Church. Modern hymnal revision committees seem always to have agendas, such as: using 'inclusive' language, supporting a feminist agenda (e.g., emphasizing God's mother-like qualities), pushing a theological perspective, removing perceived prejudices, catering to youth, etc. 'Modernists' and 'traditionalists' seem to clash over the selection of hymns. The favourites of everyone cannot be included in every edition. Also, copyright problems arise, especially when youth groups use new hymns or songs and congregations and hymnody committees want to include them in their collections. Suddenly they discover that "God gave me a song ... copyright restrictions keep it mine!"

The fading popularity of many (the majority) of the 'great' old hymns and the widespread disagreement on what is suitable for inclusion in a hymnal indicates that there is a problem. But the fundamental problem is not with hymns *per se*, but deeper. The problem is that men will never succeed in creating a fully suitable and acceptable hymnal for congregational or denominational worship, let alone for the entire Church, because they are doing what they aren't supposed to do. They are doomed to failure before they even start. This problem alone should show clearly that the right approach is to use God's songbook—*The Book of Psalms*.

Even if a hymnal committee could agree on a standard for including particular hymns, could identify only hymns that had no theological problems, and could assemble them together in a collection, they would still have a fundamental theological problem. That is the problem of not having a hymnal with Biblical balance. We can ask of any hymn selection committee or when reviewing a hymnal:

- Does the collection of hymns deal with God's justice adequately? Does it properly represent his creation, providence, kingship/lordship over the nations, election of believers, history of Israel, etc. along with his love, compassion, mercy, etc. in the balance we find in the Psalter, or the Bible as a whole?
- Does the collection of hymns include imprecations on God's enemies? How many hymns do you know of that include the kinds of imprecations found in the Psalms—e.g., Ps 35.1-18, 19-26; Ps 40.14, 15; Ps 55.9, 15; Ps 58.6-10; Ps 68.1-2, 21, 30; Ps 79.6-12; Ps 83.9-18; Ps 94.1-4; Ps 109.6-19; Ps 137.8-9; Ps 139.19-22; Ps 140.8-11?

If the theological balance in the collection of hymns is not the same as that found in the Psalter, then the collection is theologically faulty. The only way we can be sure that we do not have theological problems is to sing the Psalms, all the Psalms, and nothing but the Psalms! The Psalms alone meet all the objective standards for correct worship as laid out by God.

No other religion has a collection of songs like the Psalms. Singing the Psalms distances us from the repetitive, mindless chants of other religions. Singing the Psalms also keeps us from following the path of other religions and assists us in resisting the lure of the repetitive and mindless choruses that are popular throughout the Church today.

The Psalms alone allow us to speak to God corporately in words that please him. Singing Psalms places us

in true communion with God and enlightens the mind and calms the soul. It is important that we hear the words of Paul speaking about the Psalms: “Let the *word of Christ* dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3.16).

98. Non-Biblical Hymns – Absent Charge

The Psalms are part of the completed Scriptures, delivered through the Prophets and Apostles. In the New Testament, we do not find a ‘Christian Hymnal’ that is intended to replace or augment the OT Psalter. The NT Church has no apostolic example to guide the creation of new songs, nor did the Apostles give instructions to compose new songs for inclusion in the Psalter. Instead, we are given instructions to sing the Psalms from the OT Scriptures as part of worship (Col 3.16; Eph 5.19; James 5.13). The Apostles did not add songs, or direct that songs be added, to the Psalter because they believed that the collection of 150 Psalms was a sufficient and complete songbook for the NT Church.

Since the canon of Scripture is now closed and we have no prophetic office today, we cannot add to the Psalter. There is no one today with the authority required to introduce new or changed elements to the worship that was established by Christ through the Apostles. There is therefore no separate or new songbook for the NT Church and no warrant to add songs for the worship of the NT Church.

Among the gifts given to the NT Church (1 Cor 12.4-11, 28, 31; Eph 4.11, 12), we do not find gifts of music or song composition mentioned, even though in the OT economy the gift was given to the sons of Asaph. To the contrary, the NT tells us to use the OT Psalter, because the Psalter is intended to be the songbook for the NT Church as it was for the OT Church.

Anyone who introduces new compositions into the worship of God is:

- Claiming, by his actions, to have the authority to produce compositions that are equivalent to the words of God in Scripture.
- Claiming, by his actions, to have the authority of an OT Prophet or NT Apostle.
- Usurping the right of only a few Prophets, under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, to make changes in the form of worship to God.

Some people object and claim that we are told to sing a ‘new song’ in the OT. However, Jesus told the disciples that he was giving them a ‘new command’ (Jn 13.34). This command was that they “Love one another” and the essence of this command is found in Leviticus 19.18 and Leviticus 19.34. Jesus did not mean new in essence or even new in form. Rather, he means new in spirit or application. Compare also John’s instructions in 1 John 2.7-8, where he indicates that his new command is not really new. In the same way, the verses that speak of singing a ‘new song’ may be exhorting a renewal of spirit in those singing (Ps 33.3; Ps 40.3; Ps 96.1; Ps 98.1; Ps 144.9; Ps 149.1; Is 42.10; Rev 5.9; Rev 14.3). Even if these references refer to entirely new songs, this does not provide a warrant for people today to compose new songs for use as worship. The writers of all the Psalms and Isaiah were members of the OT prophetic office, wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and were authorized to write new compositions as part of the unfolding revelation of God.

Some claim that restricting ourselves to the Psalms means that we could not sing the new song of Revelation 14.3. Even if the saints in heaven sang (or sing) these exact words as a truly new composition, their example does not apply to us living at the end of the “last days” under the NT apostolic economy. The saints in heaven are under a different covenantal administration (the Eternal Covenant) in the same way that the saints in the OT were under one covenantal administration (Abrahamic, Sinaitic or Mosaic) and looking forward to another (Jer 31.30-34). They would have had no right to introduce elements of the New Covenant

(e.g., the bloodless sacraments) in anticipation of what was to come.

In heaven, we will likely be introduced to a new order of worship as part of the covenant administration of the Eternal Covenant. For example, the Lord's Supper will likely be replaced with the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19.9), and the covenantal signs will once again be the tree of life and a Sabbath. It may be that the songs of heaven will be different from those found in the Psalter (e.g., we will no longer need to ask for cleansing or forgiveness as in Ps 19.12; Ps 25.11; Ps 51.2, 7; Ps 79.9). It is possible that all believers will fill the office of prophet and write truly new songs to praise God continually. But that does not speak to the current covenant administration we are now under. It is a mistake to use the rites described in Revelation to provide guidance for how we should worship today.

Others attempt to justify singing mere-human hymns by pointing to song compositions included in the OT, but not in the Psalter, and to passages such as Ezra 3.11 and Hebrews 2.12, which they claim support singing compositions not found in the Psalter. The fact is that the other songs in the OT were not included in the Psalter, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the correct question to ask is not what songs were sung as worship *before* the Psalter was complete or during the development of the Psalter but, rather to ask what songs were sung in OT worship and by the early NT Church, *after* the Psalter was complete. The answer is, the Psalms, and only the Psalms. Hezekiah's (Is 38.10-20) or Moses' (Dt 32.1-43) songs, even though part of the God-breathed Scriptures, are not included in the Psalter and are therefore not intended by God to be used by the Church as praise-worship in song. The NT Church is told to sing the songs in the Psalter, not Hezekiah's or Moses' song.

99. Musical Instruments in NT Worship: Not to be Used

Musical instruments or singing were not used in the worship of Abraham and the other patriarchs. For the tabernacle system of worship, a trumpet announced the time of the offering of the sacrifice; but no other instruments were used and singing, accompanied by musical instruments, was not included as part of the ceremonial system of worship. The trumpet was used only in the context of the *sacrifice* (Lev 23.24, 25; Num 10.10; Num 29.1-4) and for signalling the times of worship (Num 10.1-9; Num 31.6). The trumpet may have been used to let the people outside the immediate courtyard know when the sacrifice was being offered, since it would have been impossible for all the people in the camp to enter the courtyard at one time. There is no reference in the Bible to singing or instruments accompanying singing in the tabernacle worship, beyond the specific use of the trumpet at the time of the sacrifice, the trumpet.

The nations around Israel used musical instruments in their worship of false gods. The music was meant to ward off the demons and to invite the gods. It would not have been proper for Abraham to introduce the use of musical instruments to accompany the sacrifice, or for Moses to introduce additional musical instruments with singing as a component of the worship of sacrifice. If they had done so without direct revelation from God, they would have been introducing the practices of the pagans. Instead of innovating in worship and introducing the instruments and singing to accompany sacrifices, as did the nations around them, they did exactly what God required (Gen 4.7; Ex 25.9; Num 8.4). Abraham and Moses were both prophets, and they did not do anything in worship that was not explicitly authorized by God. If they could not introduce musical instruments into the worship of God, without explicit warrant, certainly no one outside of the prophetic office could do so.

The context for the use of musical instruments in worship appears consistently in the Bible to be associated with animal sacrifices. Instruments (other than the trumpet) along with singing were only introduced with the express provision of God for the new liturgy that would be associated with the temple sacrifices. Under David, musical instruments were used before the temple was actually built, wherever the sacrifices were offered up (1 Chron 16.37-42). At this time, there were two shrines and (apparently) two high priests. One

of the high priests, Zadok, was with the tabernacle at Gibeon (1 Chron 16.39), the other, Abiathar (1 Chron 15.11), was with the ark in Jerusalem. It appears that David, under the direction of God, introduced the use of additional musical instruments and singing to accompany the worship of the sacrifice offering at both the tabernacle (1 Chron 16.41, 42) and the ark. When the ark was first brought into Jerusalem, it was brought up from Kiriath Jearim where it had been for twenty years (1 Sam 6.21-7.2) and placed near the area of the future temple. While the ark was being moved, there was a continuous offering of sacrifices accompanied by an offering of music and singing as worship (2 Sam 6.2-5, 13-18; 1 Chron 15.14-28).

Musical instruments were used in the temple in Jerusalem built under Solomon and rebuilt under Zerubbabel and Joshua, according to the plan and order of David (2 Chron 5.11-14; 2 Chron 7.4-6; 2 Chron 5.11-14; Is 38.20). Throughout the temple era, the collection of musical instruments (i.e., trumpets, harps, cymbals, lyres, etc.) accompanying singing was used *only* during the offering of animal sacrifices (2 Chron 29.25-28; 2 Chron 30.15, 21, 24). When the sacrifices ended, the music ceased. When musical instruments were used other than to accompany the daily sacrifices in the temple, after the time of David, they were used in conjunction with animal *sacrifices* (2 Chron 7.1, 5-6; Neh 12.36, 40-43). Even when God rebuked the Jews for their misuse of songs and musical instruments, he associated them with the misuse of the sacrificial elements of worship (Amos 5.21-23), showing their intimate connection. Since animal sacrifices have ended with the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus (Heb 7.27; Heb 9.12), the use of musical instruments has also ended.

Many are convinced that the use of musical instruments in worship is required to further evangelism—that the use of special music is one of God’s key means of drawing the unsaved into the Church. Even if some people are saved through a ‘ministry of music’, this argument is a form of pietized pragmatism that says: “If it works, it’s good. If it brings people to Christ, it’s good.”

When we consider the success of evangelism from the perspective of history, we see that musical instruments are not required. The missionaries from Celtic Christianity associated with Columba (521-597) and his followers did not use musical instruments in their evangelistic work. They were instrumental in bringing the truth of Christ to much of Northern Europe. Most of the people reading this series are the spiritual heirs of Celtic Christianity from the sixth and seventh centuries. Columba and his cohorts would frown at the notion that musical instruments are required for evangelism.

It is not the case that the 19th and 20th centuries were so different from the sixth and seventh centuries that only the use of musical instruments could be successful in bringing the Gospel to modern pagans. To the contrary, much of the ‘ministry of music’ ends up being taken over by the world. It is much more an honouring of man than of God. Preaching is God’s chosen instrument for evangelism, not musical concerts (1 Cor 1.18-21; Titus 1.1-3; Rom 10.14, 15; Jn 5.24, 25; Jn 10.3, 16). To deviate from his prescription may produce short-term gains but is guaranteed to be a long-term failure.

100. Musical Instruments in NT Worship: Apparent Exceptions

People who wish to decouple the use of musical instruments from *animal* sacrifices in order to defend their use in the NT context of spiritual sacrifice often point to apparent exceptions. They believe that these examples provide a justification for using musical instruments in worship without accompanying sacrifices, and that this provides a warrant for their use today. The examples are:

- *Exodus 15.20, 21* – This appears to be the only example in the Bible where musical instruments were used to accompany singing in worship in which there is no explicit, or suggested, association with the offering of sacrifices. However, this example of worship must be considered in its historic context. The crossing of the Red Sea was a miraculous event and Moses, a prophet, and Miriam, a prophetess, were the leaders of this act of worship. We cannot rip musical instruments out of their historic context and

argue that this gives us warrant to use them under the NT Covenant economy. We would need a miraculous event and the presence of a prophet to have a similar context. If this reference can be considered normative for teaching the use of musical instruments in NT worship, then it also teaches that dancing women should accompany the singing. To develop a theology of worship based on this example from Exodus could set a very dangerous precedent (e.g., 1 Sam 19.23-24; 1 Cor 15.29).

- *1 Samuel 10.5 [see also, 2 Kings 3.15-16]* – The “high place” implies a place of sacrifice. Regardless, musical instruments did not accompany singing but prophetic utterances. The musical instruments may have been a symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit (e.g., 2 Pt 1.21) and served as an outward sign of the Spirit’s revelation. Even if their actions were representative of typical prophetic behaviour, they have no relevance for singing in NT worship. Since the canon of Scripture is closed and the prophetic office has ended, the activities of these prophets cannot serve as a reference model for any activities in the post-apostolic Church.
- *Ezra 3.10-11* – At the dedication of the foundation of the second-temple musical instruments were used. Note, however, earlier in chapter that the altar and sacrifices had already been restored. There were probably animal sacrifices associated with the use of the instruments at the dedication of the temple foundation. Notice also that in Ezra 3.10 we are told that they did what was in accord with the Davidic prescription.
- *Habakkuk 3.19* (and *Hab 3.1*) – The reference “for the director” puts this song into the liturgical context of the temple worship (see, headings of Ps 42.1, 4; Ps 43.4; and Ps 44.1). This composition may have been used in the temple worship at one time but was not incorporated into the Psalter.
- *Revelation (Rev 5.8; Rev 14.2; Rev 15.2)* – These are the only references to musical instruments used in worship in the NT, we will deal with them as a separate topic.

The Psalms mention musical instruments. However, when we examine the references, we find evidence that the use of the musical instruments was understood to be in the context of animal sacrifices (e.g., Ps 27.6; Ps 43.4). All the Psalms that mention musical instruments were written by David, Asaph, Korah, or Levites at the time of the temple worship, established by David.

Without understanding the temple context for the references to the use of musical instruments, many people suggest that since the Psalms tell the singers to use musical instruments, we should use them. But the Psalms also tell us to:

- Bind a sacrifice to the altar (Ps 118.27).
- Go to the altar (Ps 43.4).
- Offer sacrifices and burnt offerings (Ps 4.5 [command]; Ps 20.3; Ps 51.19; Ps 54.6; Ps 66.13, 15; Ps 96.8 [command]; Ps 107.22 [command]).
- Cleanse/sprinkle with hyssop (Ps 51.7).
- Dance (Ps 149.3; Ps 150.4).
- Offer incense (Ps 141.2).
- Worship toward God’s temple, tabernacle or sanctuary (Ps 5.7; Ps 150.1).

We interpret these aspects of the ceremonial system as types pointing to Jesus Christ. It is the same with the use of musical instruments—they are types for NT worship. When Jesus was crucified as the final sacrifice, the types were replaced with their permanent spiritual equivalents. The Psalms themselves anticipate the symbolical nature of the offering of sacrifices (Ps 43.4; Ps 107.22; Ps 141.2). If the references in the Psalms are used to support the use of instruments in worship, then they also justify the offering of bloody sacrifices. Also, you will never hear anyone arguing that we should inflict vengeance and punishment on pagan nations with the sword and fetters as we sing praises (Ps 149.6-9). Yet people will use the same Psalm to argue for the use of musical instruments to accompany the singing of praises (Ps 149.3). It is clear, that the argument from the Psalms proves too much and is therefore of no value.

Without the temple, the Jews did not use musical instruments to accompany singing in worship, even though

they sang Psalms that called for the use of instruments. For example, the Levites hung up their harps (Ps 137.2)—i.e., they did not perform their liturgical duties—while in captivity in Babylon as there were no sacrifices being offered since Solomon’s temple had been destroyed. When Jews met for worship outside of Jerusalem and the temple, they did not use musical instruments in worship. It is clear that they understood the use of musical instruments to be part of the temple liturgy and did not use them. No Jewish synagogue used musical instruments in their services before 1810.

101. Musical Instruments in NT Worship: Harps in Heaven

Revelation contains the only NT references to musical instruments used in a worship setting (Rev 5.8; Rev 14.2; Rev 15.2). Thus, these verses are often used as justification for the use of musical instruments in the NT Church on earth.

The context of these passages includes incense and references to the altar (Rev 6.9; Rev 8.3, 5; Rev 9.13; Rev 11.1; Rev 14.18; Rev 16.7) and temple (Rev 7.15; Rev 11.1, 19; Rev 14.15, 17; Rev 15.5-6, 8; Rev 16.1, 17). Also, the sacrificed Lamb is present (Rev 5.6). John is using symbolic images taken from his experience in temple worship to portray events in this vision. Since Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, the use of the temple liturgy in symbolical form makes sense. However, later in the book (chapters 20-22), when the new order of the renovated heavens and earth is described, there is no reference to the temple or to musical instruments. In fact, we are told explicitly that there is no temple in the new order (Rev 21.22). The situation described in Revelation cannot be considered normative for us since it uses symbolic images derived from the temple in Jerusalem. With the completion of Christ’s work on the cross and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, we no longer observe any of the specific rituals that went along with the temple liturgy (animal sacrifices, incense, playing of musical instruments), except in their spiritual form. Psalm singing unaccompanied by musical instruments—the fruit of lips—is the form of ceremonial sacrifice appropriate for the NT covenantal economy (Heb 13.15).

We should also note that the reference (in Rev 5.8) to the use of harps is associated with “bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” These bowls are held by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Some have argued from this part of John’s vision that the saints in heaven act as intercessors, taking our prayers before God’s throne—and have extrapolated from that idea to praying through the saints. This faulty interpretation reinforces why we must not assume that John’s vision provides normative guidance for how we are to worship in the NT Church today.

Therefore, we cannot logically infer that because the elders in John’s vision used harps in their worship of the Lamb that there will be actual harps used in heaven, particularly since their use in worship is consistently associated with the ceremonial sacrificial system that has been fully realized in the antitype, Jesus Christ. Nor can we logically conclude that because the saints in John’s vision used harps that this provides a warrant for our use of them.

However, there is a different question that we may consider about the vision of the use of harps in heaven. Classical paintings and sculptures, and modern cartoons, often illustrate heavenly scenes that depict angels or saints playing harps. The idea that when Christians arrive in heaven, they will be assigned harps (or other musical instruments) and will fill their endless time by playing these instruments, is derived from these verses in Revelation (Rev 5.8; Rev 14.2; Rev 15.2). For example, one cartoon shows a middle-aged gentleman in white robes and sandals, with wings and a harp. He says to his companion who looks at him with scepticism, “But this is eternity ... you’ve GOT to have a hobby!” This stereotypical view of heaven leads us to ask the question, “Will we play musical instruments in heaven?”

The first mention of musical instruments is from the period before the Flood, when “the wickedness of man

was great in the earth” (Gen 6.5). The creators of the first musical instruments (lyre and pipe) were the descendants of Jubal (Gen 4.21), who was of the rebellious line of Cain. Thus, musical instruments were invented by the wicked for the purpose of furthering their evil passions. Besides being used for entertainment at their debauched gatherings, they were likely also used in rituals directed toward their false deities, similar to the way Nebuchadnezzar included musical instruments of various types in the idolatrous observance he established on the plain of Dura (Dan 3.5). In the ancient world, after the Flood, musical instruments were also used for entertainment (Gen 31.27), to stir up emotions (Josh 6.4-5), and for soothing a distressed spirit (1 Sam 16.16, 23). They are used in the same way today. God redeemed this human invention and appropriated musical instruments for his own purposes when he directed David to include them in the temple as part of the sacrificial ceremonies.

Therefore, we may be able to make an argument that musical instruments will be used in heaven. The ability to create music is a gift from God (James 1.17), to be used for his glory (Eph 5.19). There likely will be singing in heaven (Rev 5.9; Rev 14.3; Rev 15.3). It is possible that music used to accompany the lyrics of the songs sung in heaven will be composed by glorified humans who will be called upon to exercise their creative gifts to the fullest. We may discover that there will be some who will be given the gift of music and the accompanying ability to craft musical instruments. However, it is not the device that is used to make musical sounds—e.g., a harp versus the human lips—that is essential for the spirit of music to be present in heaven. Music will certainly be present as the fruit of lips that acknowledge God’s name (Heb 13.15).

A lesson we derive from John’s visions is that there is vocalized harmony in heaven, as the vast assembly declares the praises of the Father and the Lamb. When we sing Psalms—perfect words from the Holy Spirit that speak of Christ (Lk 24.44)—in our worship, our voices join the voices of the heavenly choir.

102. Musical Instruments in NT Worship: Not in the Early NT Church

The early NT Church did not use musical instruments in worship. Most of the early congregations consisted of Jews who had learned that they were part of the temple liturgy and associated with bloody sacrifices. The view that musical instruments were part of the OT ceremonial system that was replaced with the final sacrifice of Christ was predominant throughout the Church. It was not until well into the Middle Ages that musical instruments came into the Western Church. Yet their use was not universally accepted. The following examples show the attitude of the Church leaders to the use of musical instruments, from the time of the Apostles until a few hundred years before the Reformation.

- Justin Martyr (—165): “Plain singing is not childish, but only the singing with lifeless organs, with dancing and with cymbals, etc. Whence the use of such instruments and other things fit for children is laid aside, and plain singing only retained.”²⁸
- Clement of Alexandria (153-217): “The Spirit, distinguishing from such revelry the divine service, sings, “Praise Him with the sound of trumpet;” for with sound of trumpet He shall raise the dead. “Praise Him on the psaltery;” for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. “And praise Him on the lyre.” By the lyre is meant the mouth struck by the Spirit, as it were by a plectrum. “Praise with the timbrel and the dance,” refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the dead in the resounding skin. “Praise Him on the chords and organ.” Our body He calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings, by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit, it gives forth human voices. “Praise Him on the clashing cymbals.” He calls the tongue the cymbal of the mouth, which resounds with the pulsation of the lips. ... We no longer employ the ancient psaltery, and trumpet, and timbrel, and flute, which those expert in war and contemners of the fear of God were wont to make use of also in the choruses at their festive assemblies; that by such strains they might raise their dejected minds.”²⁹

²⁸ Quoted in, John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, cited above, p. 157.

²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, “How to Conduct Ourselves at Feasts,” in *The Instructor* [Paedagogus.], *Book I, Chapter IV* in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

- Eusebius (c. 325): “Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshiping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and kithara and to do this on Sabbath days ... But we in an inward manner keep the part of the Jew, according to the saying of the apostle ... (Romans 2.28ff). We render our hymn with a living psalterion and a living kithara, with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly in all the churches of God, united in soul and attitude, with one mind and in agreement of faith and piety, we send up a unison melody in the words of the Psalms.”³⁰
- Athanasius (c. 295–373): “Indeed the melodic reading is a symbol of the mind’s well-ordered and undisturbed condition. Moreover, the praising of God in well-tuned cymbals and harp and ten-stringed instruments was again a figure and sign of the parts of the body coming into natural concord like harp strings, and of the thoughts of the soul becoming like cymbals ... Do not let anyone amplify these words of the Psalter with the persuasive phrases of the profane, and do not let him attempt to recast or completely change the words. Rather let him recite and chant, without artifice [i.e., instruments], the things written just as they were spoken ...”³¹
- John Chrysostom (347–407) “David formerly sang songs, also today we sing hymns. He had a lyre with lifeless strings, the church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone indeed but much more in accordance with piety. Here there is no need for the cithara, or for stretched strings, or for the plectrum, or for art, or for any instrument; but, if you like, you may yourself become a cithara, mortifying the members of the flesh and making a full harmony of mind and body. For when the flesh no longer lusts against the Spirit, but has submitted to its orders and has been led at length into the best and most admirable path, then will you create a spiritual melody.”³² “It was permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn off from idols; but now instead of the instruments we may use our bodies to praise withal. Again, let no man deceive you, these [instruments] appertain not to Christians; these are alien to the Catholic church; all these things do the nations of the world seek after.”³³
- Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274): “Instruments of music such as harps and psalteries, the church does not adopt for divine praises, lest it should seem to Judaize.” (*Summa Theologica*, 2.2.91).

103. Musical Instruments in NT Worship: Not Used Universally

Most people in churches today assume that everyone uses musical instruments in worship, and since God blesses congregations that use musical instruments, their use must be proper. Because ‘everyone’ does something in worship does not make it right. Majority opinion among unbelievers and Christians does not establish right or wrong and is often far from being correct. If majority opinion were right, Christianity would be a falsehood, evolution would be true, and everyone in the Church would be an Arian and believe in transubstantiation and the veneration of Mary. If majority opinion is right, then the Church did the right thing when it exiled Athanasius multiple times because of his insistence that Jesus was truly and fully God; Wycliffe and Tyndale deserved censure because they insisted that the Scriptures should be made available to the common people in the ‘vulgar’ tongue (in common English rather than in Latin); and Luther should have stopped his preaching when Eck reminded him that everyone else disagreed with him. In addition, God may, at times, bless the work of the Church despite its sinful behaviour (Phil 1.18).

The truth, however, is that not ‘everyone’ has used, or does use, musical instruments in worship. An

³⁰ Eusebius, “Commentary on Psalm 91.2–3 [92]”, *Patrologia Graeca* 23, 1171.

³¹ Athanasius, “Letter to Marcellinus,” in *Athanasius – The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus* (Translation and Introduction by Robert C. Gregg) (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 125–127.

³² Chrysostom, “Exposition of Psalms 41,” *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. O. Strunk, (New York NY: W. W. Norton and Co., 1950), p. 70.

³³ Chrysostom, “Homily on Psalm 149.1–9,” *Patrologia Graeca* 55, 494.

objective review of the history of the Church shows that musical instruments were not first used in the Church (and then only part of the Church) until around the middle of the eighth century:

- “Coptic music is above all considerations vocal; and the use of cymbals and triangles in churches was certainly introduced in the course of the Middle Ages long after the era of primitive Christianity.”³⁴
- “In the Greek Church the organ never came into use. But after the eighth century it became more and more common in the Latin Church; not, however, without opposition from the side of the monks. Its misuse, however, raised so great an opposition to it that, but for the Emperor Ferdinand, it would probably have been abolished by the Council of Trent. The Reformed Church discarded it; and though the Church of Basel very early reintroduced it, it was in other places admitted only sparingly, and after long hesitation.”³⁵
- “The use of organs is ascribed to Pope Vitalian (657-672). Constantine Copronymos sent an organ with other presents to King Pepin of France in 767.... The attitude of the churches towards the organ varies. It shared to some extent the fate of images, except that it never was an object of worship.... The Greek church disapproves the use of organs. The Latin church introduced it pretty generally, but not without the protest of eminent men, so that even in the Council of Trent a motion was made, though not carried, to prohibit the organ at least in the mass. The Lutheran church retained, the Calvinistic churches rejected it, especially in Switzerland and Scotland; but in recent times the opposition has largely ceased.”³⁶

Reformed and Puritan congregations from the 16th century until about the mid-19th century discontinued the use of musical instruments. They understood their use to be invalid under the NT covenantal economy. For example:

- Calvin (1509-1564) on Ps 71.22: “To sing the praises of God upon the harp and psaltery, unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law and of the service of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures, but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving.”
- “Whatever may be the practice in recent times of the churches of Holland, the Synods of the Reformed Dutch Church, soon after the Reformation, pronounced very decidedly against the use of instrumental music in public worship. The National Synod at Middleburg, in 1581, declared against it, and the Synod of Holland and Zeeland, in 1594, adopted this strong resolution; “That they would endeavor to obtain of the magistrate the laying aside of organs, and the singing with them in the churches....” The Provincial Synod of Dort also inveighed severely against their use.”³⁷

It was during the 19th century that musical instruments were reintroduced into the Protestant churches from which are descended most of the Evangelical churches of today. “The nineteenth century and its mentality and outlook is responsible for most of our troubles and problems today. It was then that a fatal turn took place in so many respects, as we have been seeing, and very prominent among the changes introduced was the place given to music in various forms. Quite frequently and especially in the non-episcopal churches, they did not even have an organ before that time.”³⁸ People today cannot see beyond their current practice of using musical instruments in worship because they are ignorant of the vast sweep of the historical practice in the Church. The Church in the 21st century does not have the monopoly on valid beliefs and is not the standard or measure for proper practice.

³⁴ Aziz S. Atiya [former President of the Institute of Coptic Studies, Cairo], “Coptic Music,” *Coptologia: Journal of the Copto-Pharaonic Society*, Vol 6, 1985, p. 10.

³⁵ Albert Hauck (professor of theology, Erlangen, Germany), “Organ” in *A Religious Encyclopaedia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology* [i.e., Schaff-Herzog] (1883).

³⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (1885), Vol. 4, chap. 10, sect. 98, www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/4_ch10.htm.

³⁷ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, Havertown, PA: New Covenant Publication Society, 1980 [1888]), p. 170.

³⁸ Dr. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), p. 267.

104. Musical Instruments in NT Worship: Six Challenges

An advocate for the use of musical instruments in worship must face and address six challenges:

- *Consent* – The evidence from the Bible shows that musical instruments in worship were only used with the presentation of animal sacrifices. The proponent of their use in worship today must provide a warrant for their use, derived from Scripture, which overrides the arguments showing their typical nature. It is necessary that he demonstrates that musical instruments can also be used in worship contexts other than in the sacrificial ceremonial pre-Messianic typical covenantal administration. It is also necessary to explain why instruments were not used in the patriarchal, pharisaic, and patristic worship contexts. “Their only hope would be to prove from the synagogue worship that instruments also had a non-ceremonial worship function or to find warrant for musical instruments in public worship in the New Testament. The synagogue worship ... did not involve any musical instruments at all. The New Testament does not authorize the use of musical instruments in Christian public worship.”³⁹
- *Contrast* – If he uses musical instruments in worship, then he must demonstrate why he does not also introduce the other aspects of the *sacrificial* ceremonial system—‘holy’ days, burning incense, offering animal sacrifices, priests, wearing vestments, burning olive-oil lamps, etc.—which were reintroduced during the Middle Ages, purged during the Reformation, and are being progressively reintroduced into Protestant churches today. He needs to show why musical instruments should be treated differently, and on what grounds he makes the distinction, when God clearly associated musical instruments with the sacrificial system.
- *Circumstance* – Some argue that musical instruments are just an aid to worship and not of the essence of worship. The same type of argument is used to defend the use of icons and images by the Eastern and Roman Catholic churches. The advocate of musical instruments must show how the use of musical instruments is incidental to—i.e., a circumstance—and not of the essence of, worship—i.e., an element or mode. Musical instruments were introduced into temple worship under God’s direct revelation and were not introduced without his warrant. Only priests and Levites were authorized by God to play musical instruments in the context of worship (1 Chron 15.16-24; 2 Chron 5.12, 13; Ezra 3.10; Neh 12.35-36). The use of musical instruments is, therefore, more than a circumstance or worship. This is clearly demonstrated by their use in modern worship settings where they do not just accompany singing of praise but often are used without singing (e.g., during collection of the offering) and also often overwhelm the singing so they become a dominant feature during the worship service. Circumstances do not require God’s explicit command or apostolic example. If the use of musical instruments in worship were only a circumstance of worship such explicit warrant would not have been necessary for their introduction.
- *Convention* – One writer has said that, “Instrumental accompaniment is not necessary; its use is largely a matter of taste.”⁴⁰ The implication is that matters of worship are merely determined by human convention and traditions. The proponent of the use of instruments in worship must face the practical questions of determining what practice is right or wrong. For example, should instruments be used only to accompany singing, or is it appropriate to use them as a prelude to the preaching? Can acoustic and electric guitars along with pianos and organs be used? Should there be a single instrument, a few musicians, or an entire orchestra? Since the Bible gives no warrant for the use of musical instruments in NT worship, the answer to these questions can be derived only from personal opinion. However, God is not the source of the chaos and confusion (1 Cor 14.33) in the worship practices that challenge many congregations and denominations; it is human pride and selfishness which predominate in the ‘worship wars’.
- *Confession* – The first congregations formed primarily from converted Jews and the early congregations composed mostly of Gentiles were modeled on synagogue worship, and for the first seven to eight

³⁹ Brian Schwertley, *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God*, reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/music.htm#r87

⁴⁰ Massey H. Shepherd Jr., *The Psalms in Christian Worship, A Practical Guide* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), p. 88.

centuries did not use musical instruments. We must not ignore the conclusion of the Church Fathers and of the elders who attended the early councils who challenged the introduction of musical instruments in the worship of God because they believed that this was an attempt to re-introduce the shadows and types that pointed to Christ, which Paul calls “worthless elementary principles” that enslave the Church (Gal 4.8-10).

- *Cacophony* – Experience shows that the use of musical instruments in many modern worship settings can negatively affect the degree of participatory congregational singing. The drums and multiple instruments used in many congregations are so loud that a person cannot hear himself singing let alone his neighbour singing. This is a direct challenge to what Scripture teaches about our voices being heard in praise (Ps 130.2; Heb 13.15).

105. Of the Times and Places for Worship

Where and when *can* we worship? Where and when *should* we worship? The Biblical answer to both questions is anywhere and everywhere. We can and should worship God on our beds (Ps 63.6), in our living rooms (Rom 16.5; 1 Cor 16.19; Col 4.15), at work (Dt 11.18, 19; Ruth 2.4), sitting in a field or garden (Gen 24.63; Mt 26.36; Jn 1.48), and in the public (i.e., corporate) assembly of the saints (Ps 107.32; Ps 111.1). God is pleased with private worship (Mt 6.6) and with corporate worship (Lev 23.2; Ps 87.2). What makes worship *worship* is not where or when it is performed, but what correct acts of worship are performed with a proper attitude. An anti-liturgist who feels that the organized Church is too stuffy might respond with an ‘Amen!’

A traditional defender of the Regulative Principle of Worship will likely feel uneasy with the idea that worship is not defined by time or place. He makes a distinction between regulated and unregulated worship by the time and place in which it is performed. His usual assertion is that God regulates *public* (formal) worship, implying, if not explicitly stating, that God does not regulate private or ‘casual’ worship. For example: “The regulative principle (we do only what God explicitly commands) applies only to what we call public worship. Life would be absurd if we applied the same principle to other areas of life.”⁴¹ This notion is invalid. First, because we are not to offer false worship to God in the corporate assembly or in private (Dt 27.15; Ezk 8.7-12; Ezk 14.4). Second, it is invalid because God regulates worship at all times and in all places.

The valid elements of worship (e.g., prayer, reading the Bible, singing Psalms) are *the* acts of worship, if they are performed with a proper attitude to honour God, regardless of where they are performed. It is not the performance of the acts of worship at a particular time or in a particular place that makes them worship or makes them acceptable to God. The performance of the valid acts of worship *is* worship. The authors of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* understood the fact that the acts of worship are not dependent on time or place and can be performed privately or corporately. The *Confession* (chapter 21.6) says:

Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the Gospel either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed: but God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so, more solemnly, in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence, calleth thereunto.

Too much emphasis has been placed on the time and place of worship by many of the defenders of the *a cappella* Psalmody position who argue that they are not against the use of hymns *per se* and are certainly not against the use of musical instruments. They claim that it is only in public (corporate or formal) worship that the use of hymns and instruments are excluded. They allow that young people sitting around a campfire

⁴¹ Alex J. MacDonald, “Upfront: All truth is God’s truth”, *The Monthly Record* (The Magazine of the Free Church of Scotland), February 2004, p. 3.

can sing hymns and choruses and even sing Psalms to guitar accompaniment. However, it is nearly impossible to convince any intelligent young person that the distinction between time and place is valid. What exactly is the line of demarcation? Is it a meeting called by the elders, any meeting on Sunday, or only on a Sunday morning, in which the rules apply? Time and place are irrelevant for *defining* true worship. That does not mean that time and place are unimportant. We will consider the importance of time and place from a different perspective as our next topic. However, the view that time and place, *per se*, determine what is true worship and provide *the* differentiation between what God regulates and what he does not regulate in worship is both misguided and wrong.

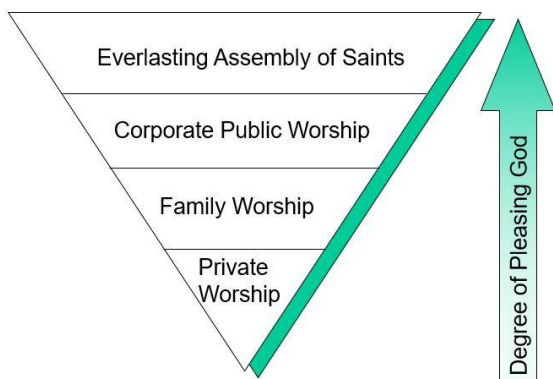
There is no problem, in principle, with someone singing *Amazing Grace* or any similar hymn. The problem is with claiming that it is worship of God. By God's definition, singing Psalms, with the right attitude, is worship. Consider a parallel example: There is no problem with reading the *Westminster Confession of Faith* or Calvin's *Institutes*, but no matter how sincere our devotion is, reading them is not worship. Reading the Bible with an attitude of reverence is worship, whether done from the pulpit or in a private study.

There is no problem, in principle, with young people sitting around a campfire and singing songs to guitar accompaniment. However, just because a particular song has the name Jesus in it, or even addresses God, this does not make it worship. In the same way, singing *Amazing Grace* in the public (corporate) assembly of the saints does not make the action worship, any more than riding a donkey through the sanctuary would be worship. The following table may help to illustrate the distinction:

Representative Places of Singing	Subject Song—Worship?		
	Psalm	Hymn	Pop Song
Private or Family <i>designated</i> time of worship	Yes	False	False
Campfire youth <i>designated</i> 'praise time'	Yes	False	False
Folks in a casual setting singing favourites	Yes	Not	Not
Concert Hall	Possibly	Not	Not
Public (corporate) Assembly of the Saints at a <i>designated</i> time of worship	Yes	False	False

106. The Assembly of the Saints

Private worship is pleasing to God. A person who prays, reads the Bible, or sings a Psalm before heading off to work or to bed, has offered God worship that pleases him. While private worship is good, Christians assembling to worship God is more pleasing to him. Worship by oneself is good, worshipping together is better. God is most pleased when his people assemble for worship. God will be supremely pleased when all of the saints assemble before his throne in perfect harmony and joy in the final heaven. The diagram below illustrates this principle.



In private worship, some of the elements of worship are enjoyed without distraction. Also, some elements are essentially private (e.g., fasting and personal prayer). However, some of the elements of worship cannot be performed privately. For example, in private worship there is no prophetic preaching, no public reading of the Bible, and no administration of the sacraments. Private worship, while good, is not complete. Worship is more complete, and therefore more pleasing to God, when the saints assemble and participate. This is one of the reasons why the Psalmist encourages us to participate

in the public assembly (Ps 22.25; Ps 26.12; Ps 35.18; Ps 40.9, 10; Ps 68.26; Ps 122.1). The primary difference between private and public worship is not the presence of God, or even the elements performed, but the presence of the assembled saints. Public worship is where the saints worship *with* others. Public worship is the junction point of all the dimensions of worship—downward, upward, outward, and inward—where we come to meet with God and our fellow saints (Acts 2.46; Heb 10.25).

In the OT economy, the people of God were to assemble regularly at the tabernacle, or later at the temple in Jerusalem (Zion), for corporate worship activities. This assembly was most pleasing to God (Ps 87.2). In this sense, worship was to be conducted in a *place*—the place where God made his presence known. Only at this place were the worshipers able to observe and participate in all the elements of worship of the OT ceremonial system, including the sacrifices with their accompanying music and songs mediated by the priests and Levites. In the NT economy, all believers are also to assemble where God reveals himself—i.e., in the assembly of the saints (1 Cor 3.16; Heb 12.22-23). Under the NT economy, all believers, as God’s covenant people, are priest-kings (Ex 19.6; 1 Pt 2.9; Rev 1.6; Rev 5.10; Rev 20.6) and participate in the corporate sacrifice of praise (Heb 13.15). We are to be present at the public worship of God—where God makes his presence known in a special way.

Worship is an innate impulse in man. However, because of sin, true worship of God is not a natural or ordinary behaviour. When the saints assemble for worship, they do something that is extraordinary. “To assemble the people of God is to have them stand before the Lord. ... Just as Israel was called out of Egypt to Sinai, so the church is the gathering of God’s people, out of the world and into fellowship with God. ... [T]he contrast, between the church and world will be most obvious when the church is at worship.”⁴² The fact that worship is otherworldly is one of the main reasons why it must be performed as God dictates and not as man desires. It is also one of the reasons why it is inappropriate to reshape worship to be ‘user-friendly’ or ‘seeker-sensitive’. Natural man, born in sin, cannot understand or appreciate worship so it is wrong to adapt worship to his needs or desires. The assembly of the saints is for God’s covenant people to worship their God and commune and fellowship with one another. The assembly of the saints for worship not only distinguishes them from the world, it brings them together for participation in the communal elements of worship.

As with the place of worship, so with the time of worship; as it is better for saints to assemble for worship than to worship alone, so it is better to worship on the Lord’s Day than on any another day of the week. It is a good thing when Christians get together during the week to pray and read and study the Bible. But it is better for them to assemble on the Lord’s Day for worship. In anticipation of the everlasting Sabbath, when the saints assemble on the Christian Sabbath—the Lord’s Day—they honour that day and are blessed through their observance of corporate worship on God’s holy day (Acts 20.7; 1 Cor 16.2; Rev 1.10). Some people would argue that there is a crisis in worship because people in the Church have a diminished attitude toward the Sabbath and don’t see the importance of the corporate assembly of the saints. This correlation is undoubtedly true. But there is probably an equally strong correlation between diminished attitudes to corporate worship and Sabbath observance. Because worship is no longer considered a special act performed ideally by the corporate body of Christ, the Sabbath is no longer considered a special day reserved for the Lord.

107. Categories of Actions and Thoughts and the Second Commandment

Everything that we do in life—all of our actions and thoughts—fall into one of two categories; they are either non-worship or worship. Likewise, all actions and all thoughts are either inherently God-honouring or sinful. Thus, everything we do falls into one of the categories identified in the following table:

⁴² D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), p. 27, 33.

	Worship	Non-Worship
God-honouring	God-ordained elements of worship performed with a proper attitude (Jn 4.24)	Any legitimate, non-worship action performed for the glory of God (1 Cor 10.31)
Sinful	Any unauthorized act of worship to God, or devotion or offering to anything other than God (Ex 20.3-6)	Any wrong action (Ex 20.3-17), or right action performed for the wrong reason (Prov 15.8)

- *God-honouring/Worship* actions include offering one of the elements of worship authorized by God (e.g., reading Scripture, praying, singing Psalms, giving tithes and offerings), regardless of where or when it is offered (e.g., in a Sunday morning worship service, in private time of devotion, or in an informal gathering of believers), in a form that is reverent and intended to bring glory to God and not to men.
- *Sinful/Worship* actions include offering any form of worship (e.g., through the use of images or idols or by bringing tainted offerings such as mere human compositions) to God that has not been authorized by him, offering proper acts of worship for the wrong motives (i.e., for the glory of self or other people), or offering worship and obeisance to a false god.
- *God-honouring/Non-Worship* actions include everything that we do that is not intrinsically sinful and is not specifically an act of worship. This includes activities that we perform for the advancement of Christ's kingdom (e.g., providing counselling in a pregnancy care centre or teaching in a congregational ESL program), performing our school or work obligations, working in a charity, or engaging in a recreational activity such as watching a hockey game.
- *Sinful/Non-Worship* actions include everything that we do that is sinful, such as lying, coveting, filling our minds with lustful thoughts, or engaging in commercial activities on the Lord's Day.

This simple categorization of all the actions that we can perform can be helpful when we are dealing with questions about the propriety of undertaking actions that are related to the second commandment and worship, for example:

- There is a small, grassed area near the Toronto Stock Exchange surrounded by the tall buildings of the financial district. In this 'park' lie several full-sized bronze cattle. The image of these cattle provides a visual statement of contrast between the aggressive 'bull' markets and the pastoral pace of an agrarian society. They speak against the idolatry of our age. Ironically, a bronze image in this case is not only art but also serves to condemn idolatry. Making these representations of cattle is clearly not what God was speaking about when he condemned making images for the purpose of worship (Ex 20.4-5; Lev 26.1).
- Writing a poem about God's providence or Christ's death and resurrection, and even putting it to music and singing it, are not what God objects to. What he objects to is our claim that such human compositions are worthy of being offered to him as a sacrifice of praise-worship (Heb 13.15). When they are brought to him as worship, they are equivalent to the false coals that Nadab and Abihu attempted to offer to God (Lev 10.1-4) or bringing a defective sacrificial animal (Lev 22.19-25). The problem with hymns and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) is not their use *per se* or necessarily their theology; but that they are considered adequate for use in worship of the holy God. Composing or singing them, in non-worship settings, are legitimate exercises of our artistic gifts. However, when brought into a worship setting, they are false worship and therefore an abomination. This distinction may appear to be subtle and artificial to some Christians. However, as John Murray said, when speaking of the sanctity of truth, "At the point of divergence between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, is not a chasm but a razor's edge. And if we do not appreciate this fact then certainly we are

not sensitive to the biblical ethic.”⁴³ We must be careful not to allow pragmatism and subjectivism to be our standards. Pragmatism argues that since there is a great need for people to hear the Gospel, any approach that brings sinners in contact with the truth is good. Subjectivism argues that if we feel the presence of the Lord by his Spirit when we sing these compositions, then he must be blessing their use. There are many forms of religious observation about which men can say: 1) it works, and 2) it feels right. The fact that God, at times, uses man’s invalid methods for the expansion of the Church does not mean that he endorses the means we use. God uses our sinful methods despite our sin.

- Some congregations read a portion of a historic confession or catechism during the public worship. This practice places them on the same level as Scripture. As much as they are worthwhile, they are human compositions and the reading of them should not be equated with the God-ordained elements of worship. Reading a confession or catechism falls into the category of God-honouring/Non-Worship; but it is not worship, any more than rescuing a drowning child or planting tulip bulbs are acts of worship.

108. Forgiveness and Worship

In the Prophets (Is 1.10-17; Is 66.2-4; Mic 6.6-8) we learn that God despises a person who offers polluted sacrifices. A spiritual equivalent of offering sacrifices of pig meat or crippled sheep is going to the worship of God with a heart that holds a grudge against a neighbour, harbours resentment, or is unwilling to forgive a brother in Christ (Mt 6.12, 14-15). God requires that our worship be accompanied by mercy (Hos 6.6; Col 3.13-14) or it is not true worship.

We cannot draw close to God through the upward forms of worship—prayer and praise—if we are dragging a 50-tonne weight. We must cut the chain that ties us to our bad attitudes and leave behind our grudges, anger, hate, and self-righteousness. This is one of the reasons why Jesus adds an ‘appendix’ (Mt 6.14-15) about forgiveness to his instruction about prayer (Mt 6.7-13).

Jesus does not list the specific sins that we are to forgive. This implies that forgiveness must include all sins against us. We can classify all sins that we are to forgive into three categories; they are sins against our:

- *Person* – People attack us and cause personal physical injuries, or through their wilful neglect (e.g., drunkenness or inattention) they hurt us.
- *Pride* – We are offended when men say unkind things to our faces or spread gossip about us or slander us behind our backs.
- *Property* – Someone forgets to repay a small loan or to return a book, or he steals from us or maliciously destroys our property.

In all these instances we must be willing to forgive. But what does it mean to forgive those who have sinned against us? This is one of the most difficult questions to answer in the area of Biblical ethics. Does it mean that we are to let someone take all our possessions and leave us destitute? Does it mean that we are to become pacifists and ignore a madman who threatens to kill our children? Does it mean that we are never to take legal action, even in clear cases of negligence by another person?

We cannot develop a complete ethic of forgiveness under a single topic in this series on Biblical ethics. However, we can consider a few principles that might help us understand our duty to be forgiving:

- *Forgiving is not abdicating* – We have a responsibility to stop people from sinning where it is in our power. Having a forgiving attitude does not mean that we will permit people to plunder our possessions or destroy our families (1 Tim 5.8) or to commit grievous sins or crimes when we have the power to stop them (Is 21.6; Ezk 33.9; James 5.20; 1 Jn 5.16).
- *Forgiving is not approving* – If God could have forgiven sin without dealing justly with it, there would

⁴³ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 141.

have been no need for Jesus to die. We are to overlook personal insults, but when truth or justice are assailed, we have an obligation to act, as Jesus did when he confronted injustice (Jn 18.22-23). The challenge for us is to maintain a balance. We have an obligation to seek justice, but we must never be vindictive.

- *Forgiving is patient* – Jesus tells us that we are to be willing to forgive not just once or twice, but continually (Mt 18.22; Lk 17.3ff). This makes forgiveness a significant challenge, especially when a person commits the same sin against us a second or third time.
- *Forgiving is impartial* – Whether the sin committed against us is wilful or done in ignorance, committed by a friend or an enemy, or the person asks for forgiveness or does not, we are to forgive everyone who sins against us. Jesus established the precedent by forgiving those who were unlawfully putting him to death (Lk 23.34).
- *Forgiving is generous* – God has forgiven us for far greater sins than we will likely ever be required to forgive of others (Eph 4.32). Our sins are capital crimes (Ezk 18.20), the sins against us are mere infractions. We must be willing to forgo our rights (1 Cor 6.7) to bear witness to the Holy Spirit living in us.
- *Forgiving is forgetting* – Many people say, “I will forgive you, but I cannot forget the hurt.” This is not forgiveness; it is a shallow excuse for holding a grudge or for revenge. True forgiveness forgets the sin and never dredges it up again (Job 14.16, 17; Ps 51.9; Ps 103.12; 1 Cor 13.5; 1 Pt 4.8).
- *Forgiving is grace induced*. By nature, we are selfish and vengeful. The only people who can be truly forgiving are those who have been forgiven by God and live with the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

Jesus tells us that we must have a forgiving attitude in order to approach God correctly in prayer. Likewise, he teaches that if we have a bad attitude toward our brother, then we should not approach God in worship until we have resolved the issue (Mt 5.21-26). Thus, there is a causal relationship between our attitudes and our ability to worship God correctly. If we forgive others, God will forgive us. If we are unforgiving and hold a grudge, then God will not accept our worship. This may seem to imply that a person can earn merit with God. We know that elsewhere (Eph 2.8-10) the Bible teaches clearly that we cannot earn our salvation. However, in the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus teaches how to live the Christian life; not how a person may become a Christian. If we are Christians and are truly forgiving, then we can walk in communion with God and display evidence of true conversion. If we are unforgiving, we wallow in our sin, are out of fellowship with God, and cannot expect God to forgive us or to accept our worship—he will not hear our prayers or receive our praises.

109. Religious Fasting

Other than when folks are raising money for a charity through a day of fasting, (religious) fasting has essentially disappeared from Evangelical worship. One reason may be because we live hedonistically, like the world, and cannot give up our creature comforts. Most people would be surprised if the elders of their congregation called for a day of fasting. About the only place we find fasting is in the liturgical churches (Eastern, Roman Catholic, Anglican), and even among their adherents it is rarely practiced. The Westminster Assembly’s *Directory for Public Worship* includes a section concerning public solemn fasting to be observed “when great and notable judgements are either inflicted upon a people, or apparently imminent, or by some extraordinary provocations notoriously deserved; as also when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained, public solemn fasting (which is to continue the whole day) is a duty that God expects from that nation or people.” The *Directory* goes on to provide procedures for how to conduct a fast, including abstinence from food and cessation from work, and how the elders should conduct the call for a fast in a public assembly.

There was no explicit requirement in the Mosaic law for fasting. Fasting became associated with the Day of Atonement as an application of ‘afflicting oneself’ (Lev 16.29, 31; Lev 23.27; Num 29.7). However, the

Septuagint translation of the Leviticus passages does not use a Greek word for fasting, but a word associated with humbling oneself. The Jews appear to have added other annual fasts (Zech 8.19). In addition, special times of fasting were called during national emergencies (Judges 20.26; Joel 1.14), and individuals fasted at times of personal distress (2 Sam 12.22; Neh 1.4). The Pharisees went beyond the requirements of Scripture and required fasting twice per week (Lk 18.12). They changed the observance of fasting from a time of intense worship associated with the confession of sin or a special call for God's help into a hollow ritual of sanctimonious outward display. Jesus provides guidelines about the proper way to fast (Mt 6.16-18). But it is irrelevant for us to consider *how* to fast if we don't practice fasting. Therefore, we should first consider the purpose of fasting.

There is no specific command in the New Testament that states that we must practice fasting. Therefore, we could conclude that since Jesus says he will never leave us (Jn 14.15-21) there is no need for us to fast (Mt 28.20; Mk 2.19). However, Jesus assumes that his disciples will fast ("when you fast"; Mt 6.16), and he says that there will be a time for fasting (Mk 2.20). Also, we are provided with examples of fasting in the NT. Jesus fasted (Mt 4.2) and so did the NT church (Acts 13.2-3; Acts 14.23), which indicates that it was an accepted practice among the Apostles. Their practice in worship is to be a standard for us. The *Larger Catechism* (Q108) includes it as a duty under the second commandment.

Even if fasting is not *required* of Christians, it nevertheless pleases God when it is offered as a special offering of private worship and should be highly recommended for all Christians (1 Cor 7.5). We should consider fasting when we are in any of the following circumstances:

- To facilitate grieving over personal or national sin and (personal or corporate) confession (Judges 20.26; Neh 9.1-2; Ps 69.5-12; Jer 14.10-12; Joel 2.12-18).
- To obtain guidance and help from God (Ezra 8.21-23; Neh 1.4; Est 4.16).
- To heighten our appeal to God, for example, asking him to save a friend; or when we are setting out on something new and extraordinary (Ps 35.13; Mt 17.21; Acts 13.2-3; Acts 14.23).
- To remind us that man does not live only on natural bread (Mt 2.1-4).
- To curb the desires of the sinful nature (inference from Titus 2.2).

Fasting is not to be performed as a duty for its own sake but as an inward (silent, personal, private) form of worship that advances our outward, corporate worship and our visible walk of obedience before God. It is a humbling of the soul that helps us desire to obey God and follow the example of Jesus (Is 58.6-14).

In most instances in the Bible fasting appears to consist of complete abstinence from food and drink (other than water) for an entire day. But sometimes a fast may have consisted of taking only a small amount of bread and water (Dan 10.3) so as to abstain from legitimate physical pleasures for a time. The fast that God delights in is the one that raises our souls to heaven, not one that causes physical pain (e.g., a headache) and makes us irritable (Is 58.4-5).

Fasting is an inner act of worship that is not to be made visible to others. It is a private matter between a Christian and God. We cannot, and should not, know if another person is fasting. Therefore, we must never judge the apparent behaviour of others when it comes to the matter of fasting. Nor can we assume that if there are no signs of fasting that our fellow Christians lack sincerity or commitment to Christ. Our own views about the frequency or 'proper' manner of fasting are not God's standard. What others do about fasting is simply not our concern. Nor should we ever feel that we are more righteous than other Christians if we do fast regularly. The false righteousness of the Pharisees is shown by the irony of their denial of the flesh so that they could glory in the act of fasting by drawing attention to themselves.

Public or private fasting is a neglected aspect of worship. Many of us probably need to think seriously about what place fasting should have in our worship and how we should apply the teaching of Jesus in our lives

so that we can honour God through fasting.

110. Portrayals of Jesus

We should not use portrayals of Jesus in art or in our Sunday School material, or watch them in live dramatic productions or in movies because:

- **The Written Word** – God, in his providence, chose to communicate the life of Jesus through the written word of the Scriptures. He could have sent Jesus to earth during a technologically advanced age in which there would have been TV crews covering the events of his life. But he chose to send Jesus at a time when there were no cameras. His timing was right (Rom 5.6; Gal 4.4). We have no idea what Jesus looked like as a man and no written or visual record has been preserved of his physical appearance. God had a purpose for keeping that information from us. We overstep the bounds of propriety before God, and present a false statement about Jesus, when we presume to communicate the life and crucifixion of the Son of God with a visual representation.
- **The Preached Word** – God has chosen preaching as his primary means of presenting the Gospel to the lost. This God-appointed means is being undermined everywhere today—in the Church and society. Supporting a play or movie about Jesus reinforces this trend. Also, the message of truth should be free, not at the cost of a movie ticket at a commercial theatre.
- **The Living Word** – Jesus is the visible representation of the eternal God (Jn 1.14; Col 1.15; Heb 1.3). It is wrong for us to make representations of God in any form (Is 40.18; Acts 17.29)—whether a stone carving, a Renaissance painting, or in a movie. In addition, it is wrong for a sinful person (an actor) to portray the sinless Christ. We need to consider why the Council of Constantinople in 753 AD reinforced the position of the early NT Church against the use of images and why the 16th century Reformers were against visual representations of Jesus. They understood that God is not pleased with having men create images of the Living Word, separating his physical nature from his divine nature.

A pragmatic response often is, “But many people will hear about Jesus and be converted.” It is possible that some people will begin to consider Jesus, and thus receive salvation, through attendance at a movie portraying him. We should thank God that he uses means such as this as an instrument for the salvation of souls. However, we should not approve of an incorrect means because it produces good results. Some people were probably saved by considering their future destiny when they were on the sinking Titanic. But we wouldn’t sink cruise ships to bring people to consider the meaning of life. Some people are saved when they exit from a drug-induced stupor. But we wouldn’t push drugs so that someone would be saved. Paul answers the pragmatist’s arguments with an emphatic ‘no’ (Rom 6.1-2). Some may say that these examples are overstated. After all, making a movie is not like sinking a ship or pushing drugs, it can be a good thing. Assume that, in general, a dramatic production can be a good thing. Likewise, the resurrection of a dead person is a good thing. Yet, Jesus responds to the suggestion that a resurrection could be used to bring people to consider their future destiny, “He [Abraham] said to him [the rich man], ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” (Lk 16.31) So, because something is good in itself does not mean that it is what God wants us to use to portray his Son even if it can present the Gospel.

Nevertheless, God in his mercy saves some people through means that are introduced by men without his authorization or are improperly used (Phil 1.17-18). For example, he used the movie *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) to remind the world that Jesus is the Christ, whom Paul preached: “Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” (1 Cor 1.23).

- **Stumbling Block** – Some people complained that the movie was anti-Jewish. Mel Gibson was called a ‘sadist’ (by *Newsweek*’s David Ansen) for stirring up hatred against Jews. *The Passion* is no more ‘anti-Jewish’ than the Gospels. Jesus was a Jew, Mary at the foot of the cross was a Jewess, three of the Gospel writers were Jews, and the thief on the cross who repented of his sins was a Jew. The reason

that Jews don't want to hear the Gospel's message is because it presents the truth. It reminds them that their ancient leaders and many of the Jewish people at the time of the crucifixion rejected Jesus. Jews do not want to hear that Jesus is the true Messiah and do not want to be reminded that *they* have rejected him.

- **Foolishness** – Non-Jews criticized the movie for its violence, or as just a money-grab by Mel Gibson. Who would have predicted that an R-rated movie about Jesus, in Aramaic and Latin with English subtitles, could be a viable commercial venture? These very critics turned a small-scale niche movie into a 'blockbuster' by their free publicity. God overruled their belief that Jesus of Nazareth is foolishness and slapped them in the face with the reality that an event that happened outside a city wall in an obscure province of the Roman Empire about two thousand years ago is the most important event in the history of the world.

We need seriously to rethink many things: Where do the media fit in a Gospel presentation? What are Biblical principles guiding their use? What is preaching? Why does preaching seem to be ineffective at reaching the lost today? Is the problem with preachers or our lack of prayer? However, there is one thing we don't need to rethink: the horror of the Cross of Jesus Christ continues to offend both Jews and Gentiles (Gal 5.11). God is never going to let men forget that on the cross Jesus Christ bore our sins and the punishment we deserve.

111. Drama Productions in Worship

In the previous topic we considered whether it is right to use portrayals of Jesus in art (e.g., in drawings, paintings or sculptures, or with actors portraying him). Beside the fact that any attempted portrayal of Jesus is dishonest, since no one today knows what Jesus looked like, God chose not to leave a visual record of what Jesus did or looked like during his time on earth, and Jesus is the visible representation of God of whom no image is to be made (Ex 20.4). Any portrayal of Jesus is a form of idolatry and is prohibited by the second commandment. Thus, a series called *The Chosen*, that began streaming in 2017, with additional episodes appearing in subsequent years, regardless of its excellent ratings and the high praise it received for its production quality, is blasphemous. Christians who take the second commandment seriously should not watch it.

This emphatic declaration of the sinfulness of portrayals of Jesus will rile many Christians who will argue that such a production can be used for evangelism—to present Jesus to people who would not normally read the Bible. Thus, someone will ask, can we perform a 'Christian' play? If by 'Christian' the inquirer means one that is written or produced by a Christian, the answer is 'yes'. If, however, the inquirer means perform a skit or dramatic production and present it as an act of worship during a worship service, the answer is 'no'.

During the early centuries after the ascendancy of Constantine, mystery/miracle plays based on themes found in the Bible began to appear in Europe as a means of communicating Bible truths to the illiterate populous (e.g., the creation, temptation, and fall of Adam and Eve; the murder of Abel by Cain; and scenes associated with the final judgement). As early as the 5th century, some of the simpler forms (mainly dramatic readings of the Biblical text) were being presented during worship services. By the late Middle Ages these productions became more elaborate and developed into liturgical drama productions and were presented by travelling companies of actors. By the 15th century, these had been transformed into morality plays which used allegorical forms in which a protagonist ('everyman') was met by personifications of positive or negative moral attributes. How the protagonist dealt with the moral challenges would determine his post-death fate.

As the Protestant Reformation returned worship practices to the apostolic form during the 16th and 17th

centuries, the use of dramatic productions to illustrate Biblical passages or to expound moral truths declined. However, today the use of drama productions during stated times of worship has become increasingly common in Protestant churches, and many incorporate children's pageants into their Sunday liturgy at Christmas and at Easter. For example, one website presents ideas for how churches may have a Easter Sunday impact on outreach, and states, "Never underestimate the power of a children's musical or drama. Not only are children remarkably capable of presenting the Gospel in a compelling way, but parents, grandparents and friends who might otherwise never set foot in a church will come with cameras in hand." Another website offers two one-rehearsal Easter pageants for \$9. Many other websites offer guidance on how to incorporate dramatic productions into worship such as: *Types Of Drama For Use In Worship*, *The Use of the Theatrical Arts in Worship*, *How to Prepare Drama Productions for Your Church*, and *A Dramatic Addition to Worship*. The last site (from *Christianity Today*) states, "Today, dramatic presentations in Sunday morning worship services are becoming as common as praise choruses or keyboards. Crossing geographical and doctrinal boundaries, the use of drama has mushroomed in recent years. ... Drama is one of those "cultural cues" the church needs to read and take advantage of in reaching people. It has become an attractive option to those asking, "How can we do a better job in reaching people, both the church and the unchurched, in a creative fashion, without compromising the gospel?" For too long the church has relied on talking ...' It is ironic that this article says that the church has relied on 'talking', as if talking is not effective for presenting the Gospel. However, God's chosen means for reaching the lost with the Gospel are the written word (the Bible) and the preached word (talking!)—not drama productions or musical concerts.

Some people argue that the dramatization of the word is just a logical extension of reading the Bible or preaching. They claim that there is only a difference in degree and not in kind between a preacher reading the Bible with emphasis; a trained actor using voices, costumes, and props as he reads the Word; and a team of 'readers' dramatizing the Word. The only arguments they will be able to use to defend their view are pragmatic ones (e.g., drama works, so it must be right), emotional ones (e.g., people enjoy drama productions more than hearing stuffy preaching), and indirect ones such as, temple rituals were a 'drama' and the people need to observe the rituals to draw near to God, or God instructed some of his Prophets to use visual allegories (Is 20.3; Ezk 4.1-17). However, it is unlikely that proponents of using drama in worship can find any arguments based on Scriptural precept which can be used to defend their beliefs and practices.

It is also argued that Jesus appears to have used 'props' to illustrate some of his lessons (Lk 20.24). This may give preachers warrant for using objects to illustrate a point—for example, in a Children's message. There is, however, no Biblical example, or warrant, for dramatic re-enactments of a passage of Scripture. Drama productions should not have a place in a worship service. However, Christians may use drama productions, illustrating passages of the Bible, in non-worship settings, as long as there are no portrayals of Jesus.

112. 'Holy' Days

Convincing Christians that the observance of Christmas and Easter by churches is idolatry is a significant challenge. Most readers of this series on Biblical ethics will conclude that this entry was written by a raving fanatic or a lunatic.

However, the authors of the Westminster Standards were no fools, and in their *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, they provide no guidance for the observance of the regularly occurring 'holy' days which had been observed by the Church for centuries, such as Christmas, Lent, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Ascension Thursday. Instead, they give a direct prohibition against the observation of 'holy' days, which is ignored, even by most churches that claim adherence to the Westminster Standards:

THERE is no day commanded in scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called Holy-days, having no warrant in the word of God,

are not to be continued.

Most people in the Evangelical Church would reject the idea that Christians could observe Diwali, the Hindu festival of light; also observed by Sikhs, Jains and some Buddhists. Diwali is based on the myth of the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon Narkasura—life and light over nefarious evil forces. Yet, there are some Christian pastors who claim that the observance of Diwali can be used as an opportunity to present the Gospel and of the message of the true Light of the World to Hindus. This argument is like that which appears to have been used during the early Middle Ages, when some in the Church associated ‘holy’ days with pagan festivals or substituted ‘holy’ days for pagan festivals in an attempt to make the transition from paganism to Christianity easier for the new adherents.⁴⁴ This association appears to have been the case with the introduction of Christmas and Easter.

There is no evidence that Jesus was born in December. Calculations indicate that it is more likely that Jesus was born in the spring of 4 BC (see, *When was Jesus Born?*). Nevertheless, December 25th appears to have been proposed as the date of his birth by Hippolytus (d. 235). The observance of December 25th as the date for observing the birth of Jesus served as a substitute for the festival celebrating the birth of Zammuz the sun-god (celebrated in mid-December around the time of the winter solstice) that, in the Roman Empire, became known as Saturnalia and was held in honour of *Natalis Sol Invicti* (birth of the unconquered sun-god). The juxtaposition of the dates for the birth of Christ and the rebirth of the sun-god allowed the Church to adapt the pagan festival of the ‘yule’ (probably from an Aramaic name for an infant) by replacing the pagan deity with the Christ-child. Much of the Western Church adopted December 25th as the date for the observance of the birth of Christ, but this was not accepted by the Eastern Church, which observed January 6th. Christmas, as a ‘holy’ day, was adopted only in the fourth century during the time of Emperor Constantine, which indicates that it was not of apostolic origin. Chrysostom of Antioch preached a Christmas sermon in 386 in which he argued that the recently introduced ‘holy’ day had faced much opposition, but was, nevertheless, of value for Christians—sadly, a form of pietized pragmatism.

Some Christians who are aware of the association of Christmas with pagan festivities argue that it long ago lost its pagan connotations and has now become an exclusively Christian festival. Regardless of the source of the holiday, its observance as a sacred day of worship and much of what goes on in churches on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day (pageants, singing carols, lighting candles, special music, remembrance of a patron saint named Nicholas) is contrary to the principles for worship that we have developed thus far in our study of the second commandment.

Easter appears to have been associated with the fertility rites of Astarte or Astaroth, the Queen of Heaven (Jer 44.19) that came into Germany as Eastre (Ostara or Oster), and that were celebrated at the time of the spring equinox. As the Germans were Christianized, their Easter rituals became mixed with the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. The observance of Good Friday and an annual celebration of Easter is a human invention. Each Lord’s Day is to be a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

The primary reasons for not celebrating ‘holy’ days are the following:

- Scripture indicates that we are not permitted to establish our own ‘holy’ days (1 Ki 12.33, compared with chapter 13; Is 1.13-14; Gal 4.9-11).
- God has appointed one perpetual holy day, the Sabbath (Gen 2.3), which in the NT economy is the Lord’s Day and a commemoration of Jesus’ resurrection. Ironically, as the celebration of ‘holy’ days by the Church has become more widespread and intense, the observance of the Lord’s Day (the Christian Sabbath) has taken on a diminished importance within the Church—to such an extent that other than for one hour on Sunday mornings, the Lord’s Day is treated as any other day of the week.

⁴⁴ See for example: Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Volume 1 Beginnings to 1500* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), p 76.

- God has not given authorization, explicitly or by apostolic example, for the celebration of ‘holy’ days other than the Lord’s Day in the NT Church.
- Christmas and Easter were associated with pagan activities. Both Christmas and Easter celebrations bring along pagan elements (e.g., trees, lights, mistletoe, sunset and sunrise observances, fertility rabbits and eggs, sacred buns).

113. The Civil Magistrate’s Role Regarding Idolatry

The original *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) makes a statement that is, viewed as heresy by Western secularists and Christians, “The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed.” (Chapter 23.3). The American revisions to this chapter emphasize the concept of freedom of religious practices (i.e., Christian denominational differences), supposedly incorporated into the *First Amendment*, by replacing the duty of the civil magistrate to suppress blasphemies and heresies with the idea that he should protect people from suffering based on their “pretense of religion or infidelity”.

We live in a different age than when the original *Confession* was published. It is an age that claims to cherish religious pluralism and eschews the imposition of any religion’s moral system on everyone. However, religious pluralism is a chimera that cannot be achieved. Islamic, Hindu, communist, and Western secular governments often impose their religious systems on the populous and prohibit the overt practices of Christianity—e.g., assembling for worship on the Lord’s Day or distributing Bibles. In the West, people believe that governments can define moral standards that apply to everyone without reference to Christian (or other) religious moral systems and at the same time can permit practices from various religious systems. However, the foolishness of the notion that a plurality of religious practices can be supported is demonstrated by the inconsistencies of enforcing laws that have defenders and antagonists from different religious persuasions, dealing with matters such as abortion, divorce, polygamy, same-sex ‘marriage’, blood transfusions, adoption, gender transitions, eating meat, animal sacrifices, immunizations, and sound volumes emanating from buildings.

Many Christians today have fallen for Satan’s ‘freedom of religion’ and ‘religious pluralism’ deceptions and claim that the civil magistrate does not have a role in controlling or punishing the exercise of false religious practices. For example, Grudem states, ‘However, because I believe that “Caesar” should not have jurisdiction over “the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21), I do not think that civil governments should enforce laws concerning religious beliefs and practices, but should protect freedom of religion.’ (*Christian Ethics*, p. 292). Under the fifth commandment we will consider two topics: the claimed *Freedom of Religion**** and the challenges that would be associated with attempts *Establishing a Christian Civil Government****. Today, we will consider only the narrow question of whether the civil magistrate has *any* role, as the *Confession* states, in suppressing heresies and preventing “corruptions and abuses in worship”; and as the *Larger Catechism* states, “The duties required in the second commandment are ... opposing all false worship; and, according to each one’s place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.” (Q108).

Contrary to the naivety of proponents of religious plurality and religious freedom, people agree that at least some ostensibly religious practices should be prohibited—for example, human sacrifices, female genital mutilation, forcing girls to convert and marry, ‘honour’ killings, sacrificing a thousand sheep in a municipal park, or blocking a national railroad line with a peyote smoking ceremony. So, most people would agree that *some* religious practices should be prohibited. Thus, the debate about the role of the civil magistrate is

not over ‘if’ but ‘which’ and ‘how’ religious practices should be curtailed.

From God’s perspective, idolatry is a great wickedness that must be prohibited and punished if the prohibition against it is not observed (Dt 17.2-5); as are sorcery and false prophecy (Ex 22.18; Dt 18.10-14, 20). God hasn’t changed his hatred of idolatry (1 Cor 6.9; 1 Cor 10.7, 14; Eph 5.5; Col 3.5; 1 Jn 5.21) and his laws against it have not changed (Mt 5.17-20). The only debatable point can be whether civil magistrates today should legislate and exercise prohibitions against idolaters. God will not hold guiltless a civil magistrate who disobeys any of the Ten Commandments or encourages breaches of any of them—the Psalmist indicates that kings are to obey God’s law (Ps 2.10-12), John the Baptist held Herod accountable for obedience to God’s laws (Mt 14.3-5), and Paul addressing the Athenian council told them that they were to repent of their disobedience to God’s law (Acts 17.30). Therefore, civil magistrates have an obligation to God to enforce the Ten Commandments, including the first four.

Historical examples within Christendom (e.g., the Inquisition, the English Reformation’s Religious Test, and New England’s Half-Way Covenant), demonstrate the difficulties and dangers of enforced compliance with religious practices. Only a converted person, living for the glory of God can come even remotely close to compliance with Christ’s commands. Nevertheless, God requires civil magistrates to legislate against the *overt* practices of idolatry and support Christianity—e.g., require stores to be closed on the Lord’s Day; reject permit requests for pagan religious festivals and parades on public property; prohibit the construction of mosques, temples, or synagogues; prohibit the erection of images of Baphomet (goat idols); and endorse the offering of prayers by Christians in public settings (e.g., before a legislature sits). However, they must not attempt to judge the thoughts of pagans or require them to espouse the Christian religion. Admittedly, suppression of idolatry is very difficult to put into practice and unlikely to happen in a society which is so virulently anti-God. But the secularists’ advocacy of religious pluralism is equally unsustainable.

Biblical Ethics – Do Not Take the LORD’s Name in Vain

114. Protecting God’s Name

The ‘name’ of God mentioned in the third commandment (Ex 20.7) is a synecdoche that includes God’s character, attributes, words, and works. It is used in a similar way as when we say, “check out my new wheels”, where ‘wheels’ refers to an entire car; or when Jesus says, “you will ask in my name” (Jn 16.26), which means when we ask for something in prayer in accordance with God’s will (Mt 26.39) and his eternal decrees. Thus, the commandment, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” includes not abusing his, “titles, attributes, ordinances, the Word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, ... works, and: Whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known” (*Larger Catechism*, Q112).

The Hebrew word translated ‘vain’ has a breadth of meaning. For example, in the ESV it is translated as ‘false’ (Ex 20.16), ‘falsehood’ (Ezk 13.8), ‘lies’ (Is 59.4), ‘empty’ (Hos 10.4), ‘destruction’ (Is 30.28), ‘nothing’ (Hos 12.11), and ‘worthless’ (Ps 31.6). Thus, to take the name of God in vain means treating him and everything associated with him as if it is a worthless falsehood that is good for nothing. So, from this we understand that the third commandment prohibits:

- *Blasphemy*. This is an act of speaking sacrilegiously about God or things which he has declared to be holy, and includes misusing any of the words that refer to God or his person (e.g., ‘God’, ‘Lord’, ‘Jesus’, and, ‘Christ’) as expressions of shock or surprise, or as swear words or curses; and includes using euphemisms for God’s name such as “OMG” or “Oh my gosh”.
- *Cursing God*. This is an evil misuse of God’s name and his person.
- *Disrespect in prayer*. Proper prayer should be respectful—after all it is to be addressed to the sovereign over the universe. But this does not mean that valid prayer must be stiff and use churchy language. However, we should not use ‘Lord’ as a punctuation mark in prayer or address God as ‘she’ or ‘her’,

or use non-Christian alternative names for God.

- *Disrespect for Jesus*. This includes blasphemous portrayals of the person or life of Jesus, particularly to invoke laughter.
- *False attributions of causation*. The world attributes causation in nature and in the daily lives of people to sources other than God (e.g., chance-based evolutionary processes, animistic forces, *karma*, human free will, or astrological phenomena). This also is blasphemy, since God is both the creator and providential governor of his creation, and to attribute ultimate causation to anything other than God detracts from his glory.
- *Complaining*. Complaining about how God operates the universe and how his providences unfold in our lives is also a form of blasphemy.
- *Disrespect for the Sabbath*. Since God declared the Sabbath to be holy (Gen 2.3), to show disrespect for the Lord's Day by working at commercial pursuits, participating in sports, or attending or watching sporting events is equivalent to showing disrespect for God's name and for his person.
- *Heresy*. This includes misapplying God's decrees and providences such as blaming God for events; misinterpreting, misapplying, or perverting God's word by casting doubt about the plain sense meaning of what he says; maintaining false doctrines; maligning, scorning, or reviling God's truth and grace, by claiming that our works can earn us merit with God; and making hypocritical professions of holding to the true religion.
- *Sinful cursing*. This is uttering solemn words of judgement or reproof, often invoking a supernatural entity (a god or God himself) and asking or wishing that the person being cursed would be harmed with an injury or a personal disaster or even with everlasting damnation.
- *Using foul language*. Paul connects sound speech with God's name when he says that whatever we do in word (or deed) should be done in the name of the Lord (Col 3.17). Thus, a prohibition on the use of explicit sexual terms or scatological terms as expletives falls within the scope of this command.

A reason is annexed to the third commandment that warns mankind that, "the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Ex 20.7). This statement reinforces the importance of avoiding the use of any form of disrespect for God in our thoughts, words, or actions. Even if the world ignores the misuse of God's name and blasphemers escape the censures or punishments of men, God does not acquit those who continue to transgress this command and will not allow them to escape his righteous judgement on the last day.

Many Christians today claim that the civil magistrate does not have a role in controlling or punishing the blasphemy of God. For example, Grudem states 'However, because I believe that "Caesar" should not have jurisdiction over "the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21), I do not think that civil governments should enforce laws concerning religious beliefs and practices, but should protect freedom of religion. Therefore, I do not think that any civil government today should make laws against such public swearing or "blasphemy" against God.' (*Christian Ethics*, p. 292) This is an ironic and inconsistent statement, since in our culture it is a crime to make a false statement about a person's beliefs, character, words, or practices in a verbal communication (slander) or in writing (libel)—and Grudem would agree that it is Caesar's role to make laws against slander and libel and to punish those who commit these crimes. Since we take slander and libel of a human person seriously, then we should also take seriously misuse of God's name and person. God will not hold guiltless civil magistrates who permit their citizens to take the name of God in vain through the use of blasphemous and foul words and the propagation of the teachings of false religions that ridicule the Bible and Christ.

115. Honouring the Name of God

The first petition of the model prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples says, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Mt 6.9). People who have a church connection have heard the word 'hallowed' and have a

sense about what it means because they have some familiarity with the *Lord's Prayer*. However, most people in our society likely do not know what the word means. Ironically, they use the word 'hallow' without having any idea about its meaning. For example, it appears in the word 'Halloween'—which is anything other than a holy evening, with children dressed as devils, ghosts, witches, or zombies. And occasionally it will be used in expressions such as, 'in these hallowed halls'. Because of the declining familiarity with the word 'hallowed', some modern translations substitute a different word when translating the Greek. A search on [Bible Hub](#) on Matthew 6.9 listed twenty-eight entries, of which twelve use an alternate translation—e.g., 'holy', 'kept holy', 'sanctified', 'honour/ed', 'honoured as holy'. These help us to understand the meaning of the word. One Greek lexicon indicates that it is difficult to translate the expression "hallowed be your name" into some languages because they do not employ an expression such as 'your name'. Thus, it may be necessary to translate it as 'may you be acknowledged as holy'. This is also a helpful translation, even in English, since it provides insight into what is meant in the first petition of the model prayer.

When we read the expression "hallowed be your name" we may wonder how God's name could be hallowed more than it is. It is impossible to make his name any more holy than it is already and for anything to contribute to God's holiness. It has been observed that the verb in the Greek is in the passive form. Thus, the expression "hallowed be your name" is not giving a direct command to God but is asking that God would cause his name to be hallowed as sacred. So, we need to understand what Jesus and the Holy Spirit are communicating to us about the name of God.

The word 'name' as used in the *Lord's Prayer*, is a synecdoche, which is a figure of speech that uses a single word to represent a whole. For example, when we say that a teenager purchased his first set of 'wheels' we mean that he bought a car, not new rims and tires. Thus, the 'name' (names) of God is an expression of who he is and what he does, and we are to understand that every aspect of the person and character of God is to be revered by mankind and that Jesus wants us to pray that God would be honoured as holy throughout the world. Following the exhortation of the model prayer, our prayer should be that God would:

- Confirm his uniqueness before mankind, by showing them the foolishness of their belief that they are the product of random evolutionary events, but instead believe that they are the work of the Creator-God who made all things out of nothing pre-existing (Heb 11.3).
- Convict people of their sins of idolatry—the worship of self or anything other than the one true God (Lev 20.3; Ezk 20.39)—and of their foolish notion that they are masters of their own destinies (Acts 17.23-28).
- Challenge mankind to believe his Word and acknowledge the evidences of his presence and governing providences throughout history and continuing today (Ps 19.1-6; Rom 1.20).
- Conform mankind to his revealed will. God expresses his will for mankind through the revelation of his law. Every person is command to obey the law with conscious obedience out of thankfulness to God, a love for God, and a desire to bring glory to him.
- Convert men and women so that they will confess their sins and repent of them (Acts 17.27) and declare their allegiance to God's anointed, Jesus.
- Constitute his kingdom. In the model prayer, immediately following the expression "hallowed be your name", are the words, "your kingdom come" (Mt 6.10). This implies that one of the ways that God will establish his rule on earth and his eschatological kingdom is through bringing men to hallow his name by having his will done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6.10).
- Charge mankind with misuse and abuse of his holy name, and instead to sanctify in their hearts and on their tongues the name of God—as they use any of the names by which he reveals himself (Is 47.4). God demands that his name be treated as holy because he and everything associated with him is holy and he must jealously guard his holiness (Lev 22.32; Ezk 36.20, 22; Ezk 39.25). God first revealed the holiness of his name when he met with Moses in the wilderness (Ex 3.13-15) and Moses was required

to remove his sandals to acknowledge that he was standing before the holy God (Ex 2.5). We must strive to see God's name revered by:

- Taking oaths and vows in the name of God seriously and solemnly.
- Confronting those who use his names blasphemously or casually in jest.
- Call all people to come before him with the communal worship of his great name upon their lips (Ps 103.1; Ps 145.21). We must approach God with a balanced understanding that we are coming to a loving father (Mt 6.9; Rom 8.15; Gal 4.6) but are also approaching a great king who is to be revered for his august majesty (Is 6.3, 5). No matter how close our fellowship is with God, there is still an infinite distance between him and ourselves—he is not our 'buddy' but our God, who is infinitely other than we are.

Where the name of God is not honoured, it is inevitable that his image-bearers will become the subjects of abuse and disrespect. Where his name is truly honoured by believers, we can expect that he will pour out the blessings of spiritual revival and temporal blessings on society.

116. Blasphemy

The most obvious way by which people take the name of the LORD God in vain, and break the third commandment, is by using blasphemous expressions. Blasphemy is an act of speaking sacrilegiously about God or about things which he has declared to be holy, such as his name or his Son. Some of the ways that men blaspheme God are through:

- *Misusing God's name.* It is almost impossible to avoid hearing misuses of God's name everywhere in our society today (e.g., in the media, work environments, commercial establishments, entertainment venues, or public forums). The words, 'God', 'Lord', 'Jesus', and 'Christ' often flow disrespectfully from people's mouths. They are used as:
 - Expressions of shock, surprise, or happiness; for example, when the reveal occurs at the end of a home renovation show.
 - Swear words. For example, in a police drama where the detective finds another dead body or when the protagonist wishes to express surprise.
 - Curses. For example, when a person expresses anger by voicing an imprecation against someone who cut ahead of him on the highway.
- *Using euphemisms for God's name.* Some Christians attempt to excuse the use of "OMG" or "Oh my gosh". They argue that these substitutes are either so mild as not to be blasphemous or that they show a measure of respect for God since they avoid direct references to his name. However, these euphemisms are a false attempt at reverence for God and are a form of blasphemy.
- *Cursing God.* Intentional cursing of God (Job 2.9; Prov 30.9; Rev 16.9-11, 21) is an evil misuse of God's name and person.
- *Disrespect in prayer.* Proper prayer should be respectful—after all it is to be addressed to the sovereign over the universe. But this does not mean that valid prayer must be stiff and use churchy language. However, prayer heard in some Christian assemblies today is disrespectful of God in its use of casual language—e.g., referring to God as the 'big guy' or through its use of 'Lord' as a punctuation mark. In liberal or syncretistic religious settings, what is purported to be prayer is disrespectful because it addresses God as 'she' or uses non-Christian alternative names for God.
- *Disrespect for Jesus.* In 2019, Netflix streamed a comedy in Brazil which depicted Jesus as a 'closeted homosexual'. Within days, almost 1.5 million people had signed a petition calling for Netflix to remove the offensive 'Christmas special'. Similar blasphemous shows have appeared in the past, such as *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*.
- *False attributions of causation.* The world attributes causation in nature and in the daily lives of people to sources other than God (e.g., chance-based evolutionary processes, animistic forces, *karma*, human free will, or astrological phenomena). This also is blasphemy, since God is both the creator and

providential governor of his creation, and to attribute ultimate causation to anything other than to God detracts from his glory.

- *Complaining.* Complaining about how God runs the universe and how his providences unfold in our lives is also a form of blasphemy. A movie called *Bruce Almighty*, starring the Canadian actor Jim Carrey, about a guy who complains about God's way of doing things and is given powers to teach him how difficult it is to run the world, is an example of this form of blasphemous disrespect for God.
- *Disrespect for the Sabbath.* Since God declared the Sabbath to be holy (Gen 2.3), to show disrespect for the Lord's Day by working at commercial pursuits, participating in sports, or attending or watching sporting events is equivalent to showing disrespect for God's name and for his person.

Ways that we can avoid blasphemy are to:

- *Praise God's name.* The praise of God should constantly be on our lips through singing the Psalms (Col 3.16) and offering up prayers of adoration and thanksgiving (1 Thess 5.17).
- *Profess God and the true religion.* When we openly profess that we are Christians and our allegiance to Christ, and are prepared to give an answer to those who ask us about the hope we have (1 Pt 3.15), we glorify God.
- *Encourage one another.* Christians are to encourage one another to spur us to hold firmly to the faith and into doing good works—this includes prodding one another to use our tongues wisely in the praise of God and not to blaspheme him.
- *Make proper oaths and vows.* When important situations arise, requiring that we make a formal oath or vow, or to make a covenant, then we should do so with solemnity and respect before the God to whom we are ultimately accountable (see, *Lawful Oaths and Vows – Biblical Principles****).
- *Keep the Sabbath holy.* When we apply discipline in our lives and attend the stated worship services of the congregation and avoid doing as we please on God's holy day (Is 58.13-14), we show a true reverence for God's name.

A reason is annexed to the third commandment that warns mankind that, “the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (Ex 20.7). This statement reinforces the importance of avoiding the use of any form of blasphemy in our thoughts, words, or actions. Even if the world ignores the misuse of God's name (e.g., blasphemy laws are repealed) and even encourages it (e.g., through continual bombardment in entertainment media), God will not. He does not acquit those who continue to transgress the third commandment and will not allow them to escape his righteous judgement on the last day.

117. Heresy

In our culture, it is a crime to make a false statement about a person or corporate entity's beliefs, character, words, or practices in a verbal communication (slander) or in writing (libel). For example, in 2012 ABC News claimed that Beef Products Inc. packaged meats contained ‘pink slime’. In 2017, ABC News paid Beef Products \$177M to settle the defamation lawsuit. In another case, a UK diver who was part of the team that rescued the boys trapped in a Thai cave sued Elon Musk for \$190M because Musk had issued a tweet calling him a “pedo guy”.

If we take slander and libel of humans so seriously, then we should imagine how God must view matters when his name, character, words, or works are taken in vain. Thus, the *Larger Catechism* (Q113) includes under the sins forbidden in the third commandment:

- “Curious prying into, and misapplying of God's decrees and providences.” The primary way that people sin in this manner is by blaming God for sending events into their lives that make them unhappy. For example, if their child dies prematurely, they get cancer, or a spouse dies and leaves them without a source of income, they angrily accuse God of being unfair. Christians sometimes react in the same way, and they ignore God's promises that all that transpires works out for good (Rom 8.28), that he will

provide from their needs (Mt 6.8), and that he will not abandon them (Heb 13.5). Jesus rebuked his disciples when they displayed weak faith (Mt 6.30; Mt 8.26; Mt 14.31; Mt 16.8; Mt 17.20).

- “Misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it.” Satan initiated this practice in the Garden of Eden, with his opening words to Eve, “Did God actually say?” and “You will not surely die.” (Gen 3.1, 4). Since then, men have questioned, twisted, disavowed, and ignored God’s word. Examples abound in the Church, and include claiming that:
 - God did not create the universe in six natural days, as he states in Genesis 1.1-31, and instead claiming that the account is a myth, a moral tale, or a literary framework; or by attempting to contrive another way to create a syncretistic amalgam between God’s word and human origin myths.
 - There was not an historical Adam—a unique creation (Gen 2.7)—but a man who arrived after millions of years of an evolutionary process.
 - God did not create the universe about 6,000 years ago, as can be calculated from dates he provides in his Word (e.g., Gen 5.1-32; Gen 11.10-26).
 - The Flood recorded in Genesis 7-8 was not a worldwide phenomenon.
 - Women may be elders or preachers, contrary to Paul’s clear instruction (1 Cor 14.34; 1 Tim 2.12).
 - Same-sex sexual relationships are permissible, contrary to the Word of God (Lev 18.22; Lev 20.13; 1 Cor 6.9; 1 Tim 1.10).
- “Maintaining of false doctrines.” Since the time of Christ, numerous heresies have appeared, that have questioned the deity or the human nature of Jesus such as, Arianism, Adoptionism, and Docetism; and have reappeared in the form of Mormonism or Jehovah’s Witnesses. The erosion of the historic Reformed confessional faith has been evident in Protestantism with prominent theologians defecting to Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism and even into liberalism. For example, Clark Pinnock who at one time defended Biblical infallibility, changed his views and taught that God has limited knowledge and is neither omniscient nor infinite and that the Bible contains errors.
- “Maligning, scorning, reviling, or anywise opposing of God’s truth, grace, and ways.” At least half of the world’s population engages in this sin by rejecting Christ’s deity, and the truths about his birth, cross, resurrection, and sovereign reign. By holding to the beliefs or engaging in the practices of any non-Christian religion, men malign, scorn, and revile God’s truth. Many professing Christians also oppose and abuse God’s grace when they think that somehow their works can earn them merit with God.
- “Making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends.” In the US, but not as much in Canada, candidates for political office will often make a pretense of being religious to appeal to professing Christian voters. They will use Biblical language or quote texts in their speeches or call for prayers for the victims of a mass shooting. But their hearts are far removed from true faith and repentance for sin (Is 29.13). For example, a 2020 Presidential candidate from Indiana who was ‘married’ to his male partner in an Episcopal church ceremony in 2018 and entered the 2020 US presidential race as a Democrat, claimed to be a devout Christian, and quoted the Bible to defend a \$15 minimum wage. At another time he referred to Matthew 25.42-43, “In our White House, you won’t have to ask ‘Whatever happened to I was hungry and you fed me, I was a stranger and you welcomed me?’” The crowd applauded even as they recognized that he made a reference to a book that they don’t believe has any authority for their daily lives or for the operations of human governments.

Church officers should be disciplining heretics—with excommunication when they show no sign of true repentance. The civil magistrate should also have a role in the discipline of overt falsehood. Immediately the hackles of many will be raised over a statement like this. While it is correct to conclude that the civil magistrate should not attempt to adjudicate between doctrinal differences or compel by force people to believe in a particular religion or doctrine, yet there is an obvious irony in the belief that the civil magistrate should play a role in adjudicating and punishing those who libel or slander a human person, but not those who libel or slander the person of the only God, the sovereign creator.

118. Sinful Cursing

Definitions of cursing include the act of uttering solemn words of judgement or reproof, often invoking a supernatural entity (a god or God) and asking or wishing that the person being cursed would be harmed with an injury or a personal disaster or even with everlasting damnation. Cursing may be done casually, with little thought, as is often the case when someone who is angry with another person utters the words, “Damn you!” However, cursing does not require the explicit use of terms of damnation. For example, someone can curse another person with words such as these relatively minor statements (or equivalent ones which may be considerably more obscene): “I hope that that jackass suffers defeat.”, “I wish someone would beat the crap out of him.” Also, the Bible equates flattery with a lying tongue that exudes hatred and brings ruin (Prov 26.28). Thus, flattering a person, which may appear to be harmless, is equivalent to invoking a curse on him.

The *Larger Catechism* includes cursing as a forbidden sin under the third commandment. However, the authors prefaced the word ‘cursings’ with the word ‘sinful’—making a distinction between baseless curses (Prov 26.2) and legitimate ones. This distinction is necessary because there are valid situations in which cursing can be applied against others. For example, the Psalmist asks God to put to shame those who are wicked and to send them to sheol—the place of the dead—(Ps 31.17). And Paul uses strong invectives against those who do not love the Lord (1 Cor 16.22) or who preach a message that is contrary to the Gospel he had proclaimed, declaring that they should be cursed by God (Gal 1.8-9). However, neither the Psalmist nor Paul invoked the curses directly but asked God to take action to defend his cause and purposes.

The Psalmist indicates that the mouth of the man who is born in sin is wicked all the time (Gen 6.5) because it is full of curses (Ps 10.7). Paul quoting from that Psalm (Rom 3.14) includes the cursing by the wicked in a list of other sins that show that, by nature, no one is righteous and understands, or seeks after or fears the true God. This is because men are morally worthless, bitter, deceptive, destructive, murderers who cannot do anything good (Rom 3.10-18). Thus, cursing is a sin because:

- If a curse is directed specifically against God, it is equivalent to blasphemy; as such it is a crime that should be punished with death (Lev 24.15-16).
- If a curse is directed at another person, it is also a form of blasphemy against God, because mankind was created in the image of God. A curse against a person is indirectly a curse against our creator (James 3.9).
- Cursing is a form of hatred against our neighbour, which is equivalent to murder (Lev 19.16; Lev 20.9; Mt 5.21-22). Anyone who unjustly curses another person shows that he wishes that person to receive (in this instance) undeserved judgement and to be condemned by God to destruction.

The Bible identifies specific classes of persons that we are not to curse, such as:

- *God* (Ex 22.28). After Job had experienced devastating disasters, his wife questioned his integrity and suggested that he curse God and die. However, Job responded by calling her foolish and indicated that it is wrong to curse God even when we receive evil (i.e., ‘bad’ or unpleasant things) from his hands (Job 2.9-10).
- *A ruler* (Ex 22.28). Rulers—i.e., any civil magistrate—stand in the place of God (Rom 13.2), with delegated authority to exercise justice against criminal activities (Rom 13.3-4). It is for this reason that the authors of the *Larger Catechism* (Q128) include cursing, mocking, and other scandalous carriage (i.e., behaviour) under the category of sins which inferiors commit against their superiors as a breach of the fifth commandment. An example of cursing a ruler is provided in a report that indicated that cursing sessions (e.g., by covens of witches) were scheduled to cast spells against President Trump to stop him from ‘doing harm’ and if possible, to banish him from office. The author of the report said that there was no word about Mr. Trump being turned into a toad or developing warts. Their actions showed the foolishness of mankind steeped in sin.

- *Parents* (Prov 30.11). Like civil magistrates, parents stand in the place of God with respect to their children, with delegated authority over them to execute discipline and, when necessary, punishment. Thus, cursing a parent is designated as a capital crime deserving of death (Ex 21.17; Lev 20.9).
- *The deaf* (Lev 19.14). Those who are deaf might be subjected to cursing by others because of the challenges those persons have communicating with them or because it might be considered a perverse game to mock someone who cannot hear the words of ridicule. People are often cruel and make fun of those with disabilities.

In an ironic twist, those who curse God or others unjustly, will be subjected to God's curse—which is everlasting damnation—because they have not obeyed the commandments of the LORD God and have forsaken him (Dt 28.15-20). God, who is perfect, cannot curse someone unjustly—everyone who is cursed by God deserves what he receives. Likewise, anyone who persecutes God's covenant people will be cursed (Dt 30.1). Therefore, Christians are not to take vengeance into their own hands since God will avenge their case (Rom 12.19). Instead, of cursing other people, repaying reviling with reviling, we are to bless (Rom 12.14; 1 Pt 3.19). We can bless those who curse us by demonstrating loving concern when they are in need, such as Chick-fil-A employees did in 2016 after a shooting at an Orlando nightclub catering to homosexuals.

119. Blaspheming God Through His Image-Bearer

In our culture, it is a crime to make a false statement about a person's beliefs, character, words, or practices in a verbal communication (slander) or in writing (libel). Why are slander and libel wrong? One reason is because they bear false witness and are a breach of the ninth commandment. However, we make a distinction between lying and slander and libel. The reason is that slander and libel go beyond a misstatement of the truth, and they cause harm to another person. For example, a person may falsely claim that he has climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro or that he once owned a Triumph motorcycle, but those claims do not have any adverse effect on another person. Thus, a second reason why slander and libel are immoral is because they break the third commandment.

How do slander and libel of a human being contravene the third commandment that speaks about the misuse of the name of God, not of man's? The *Shorter Catechism* (Q55) states, "The third commandment forbids all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God makes himself known." And, the *Larger Catechism* (Q113) states, "abusing it [the word of God], the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God". The authors of the Catechisms applied the third commandment to the verbal or written abuse of men because mankind is one of the means whereby God "makes himself known" and because Christians are "contained under the name of God" in Christ.

God reveals himself and his law through various means including, nature (Ps 19.1; Rom 1.20); an innate sense which all men have (Rom 1.18-21); voice, visions, or dreams (Mt 1.20; Mt 3.17; Acts 9.4; Acts 11.7-9); miracles (1 Ki 18.36-39); Jesus who is the truth (Mt 5.38-39; Jn 1:9; Jn 14.6); Scripture, God's breathed out word (2 Tim 3.16-17); and the Holy Spirit who speaks directly to the minds of those being saved (Jn 3.3-5; Jn 16.8-11; Titus 3.5). Some of these forms are no longer used by God because they are no longer needed since the arrival of the Son of God (Heb 1.1-2) in the flesh and the completion of the NT.

God also reveals himself through mankind who is his image-bearer, created in his likeness (Gen 1.26-27; Gen 5.1). This declares that man is unique from the rest of creation. It is suggested that the two terms 'image' and 'likeness' are synonyms, one may be an adjectival modifier of the other (e.g., 'likeness of image'; meaning something like 'nearest resemblance' of God), that the second term intensifies the first (e.g., 'an image which is like us'), or that the second term helps to explain the first. It is probably best to conclude that there is no significant difference between the two terms, but to view them as intensifying one

another—man is as close to God as anything created can be.

Some interpreters suggest that the image of God deals only with the rational and moral dimensions of man. Some even add that man's body was created in the image of the animals. However:

- Man, in his entire being, spirit and body, was created in the image of God.
- Angels are spiritual beings who have personalities, think rationally, can communicate, are holy and sinless, are assigned duties of service, and worship God. Yet angels were not created in the image of God. Therefore, whatever is included within the definition of 'image of God', must be something other than, or more than, rationality and a moral conscience.
- Man's spirit is as far from being innately God-like as is his body. God is eternal and infinite; we are temporal and finite. Also, God is a self-existent being. In contrast man's second-by-second existence, depends on the ever-present breath of God. And our rational capacities are mere shadows compared with the omniscience of God.
- It is a mistake to say that God does not have a body. He does. Jesus is God and is in heaven with his resurrected body. Paul says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col 1.15). He cannot mean that only in his rational or spiritual dimensions Jesus is the image of God—for in these ways Jesus *is* God, not 'image of God'. Rather as the visible God-*man* he is the image of the invisible God. The incarnation of Jesus, and his post-resurrection glorification, shows the potential of what humanity can be. It is what God ultimately means by 'image and likeness' of God. Adam was the image of God, unblemished, until he sinned. We reach our full potential when we are transformed into that image by the Gospel (Col 3.10; Eph 4.23-24).

To be in the 'image of God' is not so much to possess a set of attributes—such as rationality or a moral consciousness. Rather it is who, or what, we are. In the immediate context of the creation account, there appears to be at least three things which distinguish human beings from the rest of creation, they are:

- *Creativity* – Man has been endowed with an amazing ability to conceive and create something new. While we cannot create material things out of nothing pre-existing, our abilities in engineering, music, literature, and art make us stand out from all the rest of creation (including the angels).
- *Sociality* – Man is a son of God (Lk 3.38) and part of the family of God (Acts 17.29), and is given the privilege of forming loving families (Gen 2.24), and to create new life in his own image (Gen 1.28; Gen 5.3).
- *Dominion* – Man has authority over the rest of creation, including the inanimate entities (Gen 1.28), plants (Gen 2.15, 16), all animals (Gen 1.26; Gen 2.20); and even over angel-kind (1 Cor 6.3). This dominion allows us to fill and subdue the earth as we act responsibly for, and before, God.

Man is the preeminent exhibition of God's creative wisdom and goodness. Therefore, to curse another person, slander or libel him, say hurtful words or gossip about him, is an attack against God, whose image mankind bears.

120. Foul Language

Uttering blasphemous or slanderous words against God is clearly forbidden by the third commandment; as is slandering or libeling his image-bearers (i.e., mankind). However, the third commandment covers more than the specific sins of blasphemy, slander, and libel. It also includes prohibitions against the use of foul language. Paul connects sound speech with God's name when he says that whatever we do in word (or deed) should be done in the name of the Lord, with thanksgiving to the Father (Col 3.17). And, the *Larger Catechism* (Q113) hints at this with its statements such as, "abuse of it [God's name] in an ignorant, vain, irreverent, profane, superstitious, or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using his [God's] titles, attributes, ordinances, or works", "profane jests", "abusing ... the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God", and "unconformable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking".

There are many ways that our culture breaks the third commandment through its use of foul language, innuendo, and despicable verbal constructs, including:

- *Using explicit sexual terms as expletives.* It was once the case in North America that explicit sexual terms were not heard in mainstream movies, in TV shows, or in public forums. For example, in February 1971, a minor scandal occurred in Canada when the then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, mouthed unparliamentary language in the House of Commons toward the opposition MPs. Afterwards, he used the words “fuddle duddle” in his ambiguous answer to reporters’ questions about what he had said and only admitted that he had “moved his lips”. In contrast, in January 2019, shortly after her induction into office, congresswoman Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, speaking about President Trump said, “Impeach the <sexual term>.” She showed disrespect for the office of the President (breaking the fifth commandment). Her use of a blatantly offensive expletive in a public forum indicates the extent to which our culture had deteriorated in just fifty years. Likewise, movies oriented to teen, and often pre-teen, audiences use expletives with abandon—not only to emphasize a point (such as a coach rebuking a bad play) but to appear to be ‘cool’.
- *Using scatological terms as expletives.* Likewise, the media contain numerous examples of the use of scatological terms and colloquial and crude terms for other body functions. Children in the playground use the same terms without any reserve. In addition, it is almost assumed that a comedic movie oriented to children must include at least one example of a bodily function (e.g., nose picking or flatulence) displayed for a ‘laugh’.
- *Discussing topics that should be kept private.* It is common practice for the media to discuss openly or to display discussions about actions which should be reserved for the bedroom between a husband and wife or with a doctor. However, given that our society is obsessed with openly advocating forms of aberrant sexual practices and displaying them, discussions about them are ‘mild’ in comparison to what is often displayed.

Paul indicates that this form of immorality is unacceptable. For example:

- He says, “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking ...” (Eph 5.4) The ‘crude joking’ which should not be heard includes telling a joke based on a sexual impropriety or one that uses foul language.
- In the same letter he says, “Let no corrupting [unwholesome] talk come out of your mouths” (Eph 4.29).

Instead, the words that proceed from our mouths should be those which:

- Build up others and gives grace to them as hearers (Eph 4.29).
- Provide healing (Prov 12.18).
- Commend knowledge, rather than gushing folly (Prov 15.2).
- Are the words of Christ (the Psalms) that should dwell in us richly and be used for teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom (Col 3.16).
- Originate from and are consistent with thoughts that are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil 4.8).

We are not to be conformed to the pattern of this world but are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12.2). Thus, our speech should be clearly distinct from the foul language used by those around us in our neighbourhood and work environments. So, we must work at keeping our language pure. To do this we need to:

- *Avoid becoming immune.* It is easy to become immune to the constant bombardment of sin. This is one of Satan’s tactics in his war against Christ and his Church. We need to preserve a measure of appal and not allow ourselves to become complacent and accepting of foul language.
- *Control our tongues.* It can be difficult at times to control the tongue—e.g., when cut off by an uncourteous driver—and not to expel an expletive. However, if we are not able to keep a tight rein on our tongues and claim to be believers, then our religious profession is worthless (James 1.26).

- *Apply vigilance.* Read the parental advisory comments before watching movies or select those which have, for example, the Dove seal of approval.
- *Control downloading.* Likewise, control what children watch and listen to.
- *Rebuke gently.* When opportunities arise to speak with neighbours or co-workers without embarrassing them in front of others, suggest that they don't need to use foul language.
- *Set an example.* Use mature, precise, wise speech in every setting, rather than colloquial language that can easily flow into the gutter.

121. The Place of Humour

Picture a puppy with a leash attached to its collar. The extension of the leash wraps around the base of a tree. The puppy sees the loose end of the leash and lunges for it, but as he moves to catch it, it pulls away from him. He continues to chase the leash around the tree until he collapses in exhaustion. And picture a monkey who puts its hand into a glass jar with a narrow spout to retrieve a peanut. When he grasps the peanut and forms a fist, he is unable to retract his hand. Finally, picture a Great Dane jumping onto a sofa as he flees from three tiny kittens that are hissing at him. Without a doubt if you saw any of these animal antics you would smile and even laugh. Likewise, God endowed many of his lesser creatures with attributes that cause mankind to laugh. Conduct an internet search on one of these funny looking critters: Tarsier, Dumbo Octopus, Mudskipper, Bald Uakari, or Emperor Tamarin. It will be hard not to chuckle.

Humans have a sense of humour. This indicates that God also has one, since we are made in his image (Gen 1.27). Lest someone doubt this, and think that all forms of humour are sinful, consider the evidence that God himself has a sense of humour, which he endowed on mankind:

- God created funny looking creatures (e.g., a Duck-billed Platypus), that he declared to be good (Gen 1.25).
- He enjoys irony (1 Sam 5.1-5; Est 6.4-11; Prov 26.27; Heb 11.12) and even laughs (Ps 2.4; Ps 37.13).
- He declares that it is good for men to laugh (Eccl 10.19).
- He gives laughter to those who are saddened by their circumstances or situations (Gen 21.6).
- Jesus, while he is God, is a man, who shared in the full human experience, yet without sinning. To declare that Jesus never smiled (e.g., at the happy occasion of the wedding in Cana) or laughed at the antics of a child would be a denial of the fullness of his human nature.
- Jesus used comical illustrations (Mt 7.3-5-6; Mt 19.24).
- God, speaking through the OT prophets, used comical illustrations (Prov 11.22; Prov 21.9; Prov 26.13).
- God says, through Solomon, that there is a time to laugh (Eccl 3.4).
- Jesus says that those who weep now will laugh (Lk 6.21).

Humour produces smiling and laughter, which are blessings from the Lord. However, just as other good things (e.g., food, sleep, music, etc.) provided by God can be abused by sinful men, humour can be abused. The Bible provides limited direct guidance for how humour should be used. The only explicit statement appears to be what Paul says, "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking ..." (Eph 5.4). This is the only place that the Greek word translated 'crude joking' is used in the NT. However, it appears to have the idea of indecent or vulgar content, such as telling a joke based on a sexual impropriety or a person's disability, or one that uses foul language.

Possible guidelines for the use of humour, based on general principles of Biblical ethics, include the following:

- No form of humour (e.g., a joke, cartoon, or skit) should misuse God's name or make fun of his character.
- All people are image-bearers of God and to deface that image in a person is offensive to God. Therefore, humour should not make fun of a person. This is often the basis of many political cartoons—for

example, showing a candidate or elected official as a fool. Political cartooning should focus on the foolishness of faulty ideas rather than use *ad hominem* attacks.

- Humour should not hurt or offend a person or make fun of a person's suffering. There used to be a TV show called *America's Funniest Home Videos*. Some of those videos were inappropriate because a person was hurt when the recorded incident occurred. Sometimes people excuse this kind of humour by saying, "we are not laughing at you, but with you".
- Disparagingly presenting an ethnic, cultural, or physical (e.g., disabled persons) group should also be avoided. Every group of people seems to look down on another group. This was even the case among the disciples of Jesus before they had been trained by him (Jn 1.46).
- Much humour today is focused on sexual intercourse and is simply filthy. It is certainly included in what Paul says that Christians should avoid.
- Foul and crude language (e.g., blasphemous words, scatological terms, or expletives) should never be used (Eph 4.29; Phil 4.8).
- There is a proper time and place for laughter (Eccl 3.4; Eccl 7.3). For example, during a graveside eulogy it is inappropriate to ask "How many dead people are in this cemetery. All of them!" or to crack jokes while people are mourning over the loss of a loved one. Likewise, the amount and form of humour used in sermons and congregational teaching sessions must be judicious and serve a true didactic, rather than entertainment, purpose.
- Paul states that everything we do should be edifying, encouraging, and for building up the people of God (Eph 4.29; Col 3.16; 1 Thess 5.11). And we are to think about things that are excellent and praiseworthy (Phil 4.8). This should govern our use of humour in speech or art.

These guidelines may seem to be restrictive, and someone might think that all uses of humour by Christians will be suspect. This is a faulty conclusion. Rather, they encourage us to be creative in how we formulate and apply the gift of humour with which we have been endowed by the Creator.

Biblical Ethics – Remember the Sabbath Day as Holy

122. Protecting Holy Rest

It was reported that a New Zealand congregation cancelled its Sunday service and offered instead a televised show of a key rugby match. The pastor said that the members of his congregation were going to watch the match anyway, so it wasn't worth the effort to resist. In a similar way, the Super Bowl in the US is a big draw and many Christians, if they have any interest in football, will pull up their easy-rockers and tune-in on that Sunday afternoon in February. Christians, from almost every denominational background, will stop at the all-you-can-eat buffet after the Sunday morning service or drop by Walmart to pick up a few household supplies. If someone proposes today that these actions are improper for Christians, he is considered incredibly odd or old fashioned. Yet, it wasn't too long ago that Christians of almost every denominational persuasion viewed Sunday as a sacred day and expected sports teams to rest and restaurants and stores to be closed. What happened? Has God's word with respect to Sunday observance changed? Did Christians in the past have the wrong interpretation of the Bible, and have we finally gotten it right? Or have we changed the way we understand and apply the Bible to accommodate personal desires?

Observing Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, and as a holy day, by putting aside secular pursuits is a foreign idea to most Christians, let alone to members of society as a whole. Christians certainly do not find the topic of the Sabbath to be a very exciting one, nor do they consider it to be particularly important. Sabbath observance for most Christians today is one or more of the following:

- An exclusively Jewish ritual that is obsolete in modern society.
- A religious practice of some Christian traditionalists.
- A day for worship, when and if we feel like it.

- A legalistically burdensome observance that elders of strict Puritan or Presbyterian churches impose on members of their congregations.
- An historical curiosity that has no relevance today.
- Not a topic worth getting too distressed or worked up about.
- Not a required day for worship since any day will do.

In contrast to the prevailing views today, the Puritans and early Presbyterians viewed the Sabbath with great reverence. For example, in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 21.7-8) the authors wrote:

As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts. and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments, and recreations, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

There is a major disconnect between these statements about the Sabbath and the view of most Christians today. It would be interesting to consider how this change came about over the past 375 years, since we might be able to learn from the lessons of history, more about the process of secularization and gain insights into how to prevent it from occurring. However, we live now in such a secularized society that Christians are hard-pressed to maintain even basic rights such as the right of public assembly and the right to proclaim freely the truths of the Bible. A review of historical causes of the change away from Sabbath observance seems less important, today, than considering the reasons why Sabbath observance is important. Reasons why we should spend time in careful thought about the Sabbath include the following:

- The Bible may teach that God requires mankind to observe a holy Sabbath. If so, Christians should want to please God by doing what he commands.
- The *Confession's* authors may have been right. The Sabbath may in fact be a perpetual and universal requirement of God. If that is the case, then we should understand why and call for the Church and society to repent.
- The Sabbath doctrine affects many areas of theology and practice including, hermeneutics (e.g., the nature of the Covenants and the covenantal model for interpreting Scripture), ethics (e.g., what is permissible and required), worship (e.g., the day of the week) and law (e.g., the binding universality of God's commands). It may be the case that we cannot have a proper theology if we don't have a proper understanding of the doctrine of the Sabbath.
- Within Christendom there is a diversity of perspectives on the Sabbath. The topic has been divisive in the past. Even today, most people who claim to be Reformed and to honour the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, do not agree (at least in practice) about what the Bible teaches about Sabbath observance. We should have a desire to understand the Bible's teachings clearly so that we can come to a unity of mind.
- We should be interested to know why (almost) everyone in the world observes a seven-day week. Where did the week come from? Why do we have the concept of a week at all? The answers to these questions have a direct bearing on the topic of the Sabbath.

123. When the Sabbath was Instituted

The Sabbath day was instituted on the seventh day (Gen 2.2-3), at the end of the creation week. Although these verses do not mention the Sabbath day specifically (the seventh day is not called the Sabbath until

Exodus 16.23), God intended for the seventh day to be the Sabbath since he *sabbathed* (translated ‘rested’) on the seventh day and he blessed it. In his resting, he contemplated the creative attributes of the Godhead while he appraised what he had done in the acts of creation, which he declared to be very good (Gen 1.31).

God blessed the seventh day—that particular day, and all seventh days from then on. This continued until the resurrection of Jesus, which moved the sabbath to the first day of the week as a memorial of his resurrection). In blessing that day, he gave it special merit above the other days of the week, and thereby declared it holy. By blessing that day, he set aside the seventh day, of every seven days, as a holy day. It is interesting to note that he had performed great and majestic creative works on the other days of the week, yet he did not bless any of those days. It was only *after* he had completed the amazing display of his power that he blessed a day. That day had a special meaning above all other days.

The seventh day became a holy day because God ceased from his creative work and *sabbathed* by taking up a different form of activity—meditating on the glory of the work that he had completed. Mankind was already on the scene at the time God rested, so the day must have been sanctified (set-apart and made holy) for Adam and Eve, created in God’s image (Gen 1.27), as well as for God. Mankind was created on the sixth day after the animals. Therefore, the seventh day was the first full day that mankind (Adam and Eve) lived through. Considering the seventh day from that perspective, the Sabbath was actually the first day for mankind. The *Palestinian Talmud* says, “Man was created on the eve of the Sabbath in order that he might begin life by a religious practice.”

At the very edge of time-past, God established the principle of sabbath rest in the order of the universe. Mankind in Adam, not the Israelites in Moses, was given the Sabbath, long before there was any such person as an Israelite. The Israelites were required to keep the Sabbath (Ex 16.23) before the Ten Commandments were formally given to Moses (Ex 20.1-20), and they were instructed to *remember* the Sabbath and to keep it holy (Ex 20.8)—implying that it was a required institution, and possibly one that had been neglected during their 400 years of affliction in Egypt (Gen 15.13). Adam did not need to rest from his labour—at this point labour had not been cursed and was not wearying. Nor was this day of rest (the Sabbath) a time of enforced idleness. Yet, the observance of the day as a holy day was still necessary for mankind. It was to be set aside for reflection and contemplation on, and for praise and worship of, the great Creator. It would become the special day for man to cease from his work of tending the garden and to spend time worshipping God.

Since Adam was the federal representative of all mankind (Rom 5.12; 1 Cor 15.22), the Sabbath-keeping obligation was established for all mankind. Thus, the Sabbath applies to every man descended from Adam (Ex 20.10; Neh 13.19-21; Is 56.6; Mk 2.23-28). As a creation ordinance, it cannot be designated as a Jewish or Mosaic law. And, as a creation ordinance, it has the same perpetual applicability as do other creation ordinances, such as marriage between one man and one woman (Gen 2.24; Mt 19.4-5), male headship (1 Tim 2.11-14), and work (Gen 2.15; 2 Thess 3.10). As work is a standing ordinance, so also, by inference, is the requirement to rest (ceasing from our work to contemplate God’s work). As the other creation ordinances have inherent universal ethical obligations built into them, so does the Sabbath, reinforcing the on-going responsibility of mankind to observe the Sabbath.

It would be later in the history of God’s dealings with his covenant people that the Sabbath would take on additional temporal and symbolic dimensions. After man’s sin and the curse on creation and work, the Sabbath was to be remembered since it would provide relief for man and beast from the labours of the week (Ex 20.9-11). It became the sign of God’s covenant enacted at Sinai (Ex 31.13, 17). It would also become a memorial of the Israelite’s redemption from slavery (Dt 5.15), which in turn was a symbol for the everlasting redemption procured by Christ on behalf of his people. As we noted above, man’s first full day of existence was on the Sabbath. This may point to the time when the Lord’s Day—the Christian Sabbath—would be established on the first day of the week. It may also point to the everlasting Sabbath (Heb 4.9-10)

which will begin on a new first ‘day’—a day that will never end because time as we now know it will have ceased. Believers in Christ are destined for an everlasting rest contemplating the glory of God.

Today, most non-Christians, and many Christians, do not believe that man is obligated to keep the Sabbath holy by ceasing from the labour of livelihood and dedicating it to worship and contemplation of God’s majesty. They have been fooled by interpreters who say that the Sabbath was merely a Jewish ordinance that was abolished by the coming of Christ. What Christ fulfilled with respect to the Sabbath were the ceremonial rituals of the day that had been added during the enactment of the Mosaic covenant and subsequent covenants and the figurative aspects that were associated with the spiritual rest which he would procure. The requirement to keep the Sabbath day holy—now observed on the Lord’s Day to commemorate the resurrection—is a creation ordinance that will not be abolished as long as this world and time exist.

124. Sabbath-Keeping – An Enduring Creation Ordinance

There are a number of passages in the Bible that deal with the Sabbath. Some of these passages (e.g., Jer 17.19-27; Is 58.13, 14; Mt 12.1-14) seem to be very clear about how the Sabbath is to be observed, but most opponents of Sabbath-keeping under the NT economy dismiss them because they do not believe that they apply beyond ancient Israel. So, it is necessary that we review the key passages that speak of the Sabbath to determine if they state or imply the perpetual and universal obligation to observe the Sabbath and determine what inferences and applications we can draw from them. We will consider Genesis 2.2-3 today and then passages from the Pentateuch, Nehemiah, the Prophets, the Gospels, and Hebrews in subsequent meditations.

In Genesis 2.2-3 we read, “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” This is the record of the institution of the Sabbath in the account of creation.

We observe from this account that:

- God rested from all his work (of creation). He did not rest because he was wearied. It is impossible for God to become tired. Rest is more than just recovering from weariness. God’s resting has a sense of action (‘he rested’) that encompasses more than just the idea that ‘he ceased from his work’. In his resting he contemplated (meditated) on the creative attributes of the Godhead and he appraised (looked at and considered) what he had done and found that it was very good.
- God blessed not only the first seventh day but all seventh days thereafter (Ex 16.23-30; Ex 20.8). He set aside one day out of every seven days, as a holy day by blessing it. In blessing the seventh day he gave it special merit above the other days of the week.
- God made the seventh day holy. He set it apart from the other days of the week as a holy day (Ex 16.23; Neh 9.14). It became holy by his action of resting from his creative work. On that day he didn’t continue the same activities that he had been performing on the first six days but set it apart for a special purpose—for his own contemplation of his creative work, but also for man to contemplate and reflect on God’s attributes, character, and works, i.e., to worship. The blessing of the day, the declaration of it being a holy day, and the action of resting (and requirement to rest on that day) applied to mankind, is implied since:
 - Man was already present on the earth (Gen 1.27, 31) at the time God blessed the day, and Adam and Eve saw God rest and they would have been invited to rest in communion with their creator in a theophanic appearance (Gen 3.8). So, the day must have been sanctified (set-apart and made holy) for Adam and Eve, our first parents, as well as for God.
 - There is no meaning in the words of Scripture if this account does not establish a principle regulating *man’s* use of time. Later passages in the Bible show that people were to remember the

Sabbath (Ex 20.8) and its use is regulated by God for the benefit of mankind (Mk 2.27).

- At the beginning of time God established the principle of a Sabbath rest to govern mankind's pattern of life. The day of rest (Hebrew: *sabat*) was not a time of enforced idleness; it was set aside for reflection and contemplation, and for praise of the great creator in worship. It became the special day for man to worship God. Adam didn't need a day of rest from labour, as labour at this point had not been cursed and was not wearying. Yet, the observance of the day as holy was still necessary for him.
- As we noted in the previous topic about when the Sabbath was instituted, the Sabbath (the last day of the creation week) was the first full day for man. Mankind's first full day of his new life was one in which he could worship God and reflect on the great works he had done. Thus, this could point to the Lord's Day, or the Christian Sabbath which is on the first day of the week and is a memorial of the new life believers have in Christ, and a symbol of the everlasting Sabbath that will begin on a first 'day' of a new order of life for believers that will never end.
- Adam as the first man, and the federal representative of all of humanity (Rom 5.12; 1 Cor 15.22), was given the Sabbath, which he was expected to observe as a means of providing tribute to his sovereign creator and having fellowship with him, and (later) for refreshment of his body and spirit. The Sabbath was given to mankind in Adam, not to the Jews in Moses, before there was any such person as a Jew. Thus, the Sabbath was instituted as a creation ordinance, and the Sabbath-keeping obligation was established with all mankind. The Sabbath applies to all mankind descended from Adam. As a creation ordinance it cannot be called a Jewish or Mosaic law. Other creation ordinances inherently have a universal ethical obligation built into them, implying the on-going responsibility of man to observe the Sabbath:
 - Marriage (Mt 19.4-8; Mk 10.6-9) and male headship (1 Cor 11.3).
 - Orderliness and male headship in worship (Gen 4.2-7; 1 Tim 2.11-14), with the Sabbath being the appointed day of worship.
 - Work (Gen 2.15; 2 Thess 3.10). Since work, on six days (Ex 20.9), is a creation ordinance; so, by inference, is rest.

The institution of the Sabbath at the end of the creation week before sin entered the world, and not at another point such as when typical offerings were defined, implies the universality of the requirement for all mankind to keep the Sabbath day holy, in all generations, regardless of their ethnic or national affiliation.

125. Sabbath-Keeping – Mosaic Observance

Less than a month after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt and had crossed the Red Sea (Ex 12.18; Ex 16.1), God provided bread from heaven (manna) as the food which would sustain them for forty years. In Exodus 16.22-30, we read:

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' " So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." So the people rested on the seventh day.

This is the second reference in the Bible to the Sabbath. But it provides the first recorded instructions for how the Sabbath is to be kept holy by man, through the application of the rules for gathering the manna on

the first six days of the week and a prohibition on the collection of manna on the seventh day of the week. We can observe from this account that:

- Moses makes reference to the Sabbath. He was not issuing a new law or instituting a new principle; he was just reminding the people that they were not to look for manna, because the next day was a holy day set apart (from work) to the LORD—a sabbath. They were reminded of a principle that had been established before there was a distinction between the Hebrews and the Gentiles.
- At this point in their journey from Egypt to Canaan, Moses had not yet delivered the Ten Commandments (summary moral laws) from Sinai or the associated case laws that illustrate how to apply the Ten Commandments, the ceremonial laws, or holiness and separation laws. Thus, this instruction precedes the deliverance of the Mosaic Law. This demonstrates that the requirement for Sabbath observance—to keep the day holy—is not part of the Mosaic covenant administration. Even if the Mosaic laws have been annulled with the introduction of the new covenant in Christ, as many people today incorrectly argue, the requirement to keep the Sabbath holy stands outside of the Mosaic covenant, because it is a creation ordinance.
- The passage probably also refers to the reinstitution of the practice of weekly Sabbath observance. During their stay in Egypt, the Israelites may have forgotten to observe the Sabbath, thus the later command to remember it (Ex 20.8). Even if they had not forgotten about the weekly Sabbath, they may not have been able to observe it under the repressive regime of slavery. Thus, they may have even forgotten the proper day on which the week began and ended and may not have known the correct reckoning for a week of seven days since the Egyptians appear to have observed a ten-day week during that period. A new calendar was instituted by Moses that measured seasons from the date of the Passover in Egypt, and the Sabbath principle was reinstituted to occur one day in seven.

When the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai, Moses went up the mountain to receive instruction from God. On his return, he first delivered the Ten Commandments followed by detailed case laws showing how to apply them, and other classes of laws. Within the Ten Commandments, the fourth (Ex 20.8-11) states:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

We observe in this portion of the Ten Commandments, delivered by God through Moses, that it gives directions for Sabbath-keeping:

- The ‘remember’ of verse 8 points back to the creation ordinance. The creation ordinance is specifically referenced in verse 11.
- The fourth commandment is not the institution of the Sabbath (nor is the instruction given in Exodus 16.23-26 instituting the Sabbath), since it refers to the Sabbath as a memorial of creation. Exodus 20.8-11 does not impose a new institution; it reiterates one that can be traced from the beginning of time.
- Aliens are required to keep the Sabbath. It cannot be inferred that this was because they were resident under a Jewish theocracy. There are other laws which aliens were not required to keep—for example, circumcision and food prohibitions (Dt 14.21), and they were not permitted to eat the Passover or participate in the sacrificial system (Ex 12.43, 45), but they were required to keep the Sabbath law because it is a universal command.

Man is to imitate his maker by observing a day of rest. Mankind, Jew and Gentile, is created in the image of God. Mankind, not just Jews, is to imitate God as he bears the image of God.

126. Sabbath-Keeping – Nehemiah’s Example

Nehemiah, a Jew, tells us that he was the wine steward for the Persian king (Neh 2.1), Artaxerxes I (464-424 BC). In this role he was a close confidant of the king and responsible for protecting the king's life by ensuring that no one poisoned the king's wine. On hearing about the devastated condition of Jerusalem from his brother, he asked the king for permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. The king granted his petition and also appointed him as governor of Jerusalem and the surrounding territory of Judea. After rebuilding the city wall and re-establishing an administration in the city, Nehemiah returned to Persia to be with Artaxerxes (either to Persepolis, the capital, or to Susa, probably in 433/432 BC). Sometime later (traditionally believed to be about 429 BC) he asked to return to Jerusalem to put in place some additional reforms. We pick up his account:

In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. But I warned them and said to them, "Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love. (Neh 13.15-22).

Nehemiah the repairer, restorer, and reformer of the city of Jerusalem, believed that Sabbath-keeping was a critical component of a successful reconstruction of the community. He required even those who were not part of the returned Jewish community (the merchants from Tyre) and conducting trade within the bounds of his jurisdiction as governor of a province within the Persian Empire, to observe the Sabbath. We can infer from his instructions that:

- Sabbath-keeping is a significant principle, based on God's law, which must be observed as part of man's duty to God.
- Sabbath-keeping is not a ceremonial activity that applied only to Jews, or Nehemiah would not have imposed restrictions on the merchants from Tyre who were (likely) uncircumcised pagans.
- The requirement to keep the Sabbath applies not only to those who are within the bounds of the covenant community; it also applies to those outside of the covenant community, including those from pagan societies. Nehemiah would not have imposed Sabbath keeping on the merchants if he held to the modern *laissez-faire* attitude of people who argue that in a pluralistic society everyone should be allowed to do his own thing with respect to religious practices. Also, he did not take the modern view heard so often from the mouths of political leaders and even many Christians: "I believe it is wrong to <fill in the blank—have an abortion, or conduct commercial activity on the Sabbath, or whatever else> but I can't impose my morality on other people." Nehemiah held the view, that in the area of morality, either an action is right, or it is wrong. If it is wrong, then it is wrong for all people, regardless of what they may believe.
- People fall into Sabbath-breaking very easily. The people had repented of their sins of breaking God's law and had made a covenant (Nehemiah, chapters 9 and 10) "to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes" (Neh 10.29). Nehemiah was away only for a few years, yet the people fell quickly into practices that they knew that they were prohibited from doing and had promised not to do.

- Commercial activities are not to be practiced on the Sabbath and the city administrators (civil magistrates) are to shut down the city so they cannot be undertaken. Sabbath-keeping is to be legislated and enforced by the civil magistrate, even within the bounds of governments that do not explicitly endorse God's laws as the basis for civil polity. Nehemiah did not consider it inconsistent to apply the power of the civil magistrate on those who did not agree with the Sabbath law. He did not consider it necessary to tolerate, and permit, contrary opinions and the beliefs of other religions or the irreligious, when it came to demanding obedience to God's law.
- Sabbath breaking is a great evil worthy of severe punishment.
- Proper Sabbath-keeping is a key component of societal reformation. As long as people in the Church adhere to the false view that they can treat the Christian Sabbath (the Lord's Day) as any other day, we should not expect to see God send revival.
- Nehemiah understood his role in a prophetic context. Isaiah had prophesied earlier (Is 58.12) that the "Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (NIV) would view Sabbath-keeping as an important principle of godliness (Is 58.13-14).

127. Sabbath-Keeping – The Prophets

Isaiah says,

Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

"And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered." (Is 56.1-8).

From this passage, we learn that:

- God, through Isaiah, is speaking of the salvation for the Gentiles that would occur with a broadened scope once the Messiah arrived (Is 42.6; Is 60.3; Lk 2.32; Eph 3.6). The passage is not to be understood as indicating that the Gentiles must become Jews by being circumcised and embracing the ceremonial practices such as abstaining from leavened bread. Otherwise, the references to "foreigners" in verse 6, "all peoples" (the nations) in verse 7, and to the "others" in verse 8, would not make much sense.
- It is through observing the moral law (doing righteous acts and keeping one's hands from doing evil), that people are recognized as being part of the covenant community. God specifies one commandment as the evidence that the foreigners have demonstrated allegiance to him and have aligned with the covenant community—keeping the fourth commandment.
- Foreigners who keep the Sabbath without profaning (breaking) it (Is 56.6) are those who will be acceptable to God. Thus, Gentiles, not just Jews, must keep the Sabbath if they wish to enter into God's house with clean hands.

Although Jeremiah 17.19-27 does not explicitly identify Sabbath-keeping as a principle that applies to all peoples, as does the preceding passage we have just considered, it is still a key passage that we must consider. Jeremiah says,

Thus said the Lord to me: “Go and stand in the People’s Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, and say: ‘Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. Thus says the LORD: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers. Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction.

“But if you listen to me, declares the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And this city shall be inhabited forever. And people shall come from the cities of Judah and the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. ²⁷ But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter by the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.”

From Jeremiah 17.19-27, we learn that:

- Work and commercial activities, such as transporting products for sale, are not to be performed on the Sabbath.
- People within the covenant community become stiff-necked and forget the command to keep the Sabbath holy.
- When the covenant community keeps the Sabbath holy, calling it a delight, and not doing as they please (Is 58.13), then the Church will prosper and the inhabitants of the people groups around it will be attracted into it. Sabbath-keeping is a key visible differentiator of Christians from pagans—not circumcision, clothing styles, or dietary restrictions as with false religions.

The OT Prophets denounce formalism in ceremonial observances (Is 1.11-13; Jer 6.20; Mal 1.10) and predict the end of the particular forms of the ceremonial system that were typical, but nowhere does a Prophet denounce the observance of the Sabbath or predict its discontinuance. To the contrary, the Prophets are explicit in their reverence for the Sabbath (Is 56.2-6; Is 58.13; Jer 17.19-27; Amos 8.5) and indicate its enduring relevance and importance.

128. Sabbath-Keeping – Jesus’ Teaching and Example

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus makes an important statement about the OT law. Although he does not mention the Sabbath commandment specifically, his teaching applies to all of the OT law.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5.17-20).

Jesus teaches, that no class of law of the OT has been abolished, not even the ceremonial laws or the holiness and separation laws.

- However, the *form* of how some of the laws are to be observed has been changed. For example, how the ceremonies are observed has been changed since the death and resurrection of Christ, but the intent

and principles still abide. This is illustrated by incense and animal sacrifices. Besides having typical aspects, pointing to the work of Christ the offering of incense was an outward accompaniment of prayer (Ps 141.2; Lk 1.9-11; Rev 5.8; Rev 8.3-4) and the enduring aspect of tribute worship associated with animal sacrifices has been replaced with the fruit of our lips (Heb 13.15-16).

- Individual OT commands continue to apply unless they have been expressly set aside. For example, Acts 10.9-16 informs us that the requirement to eat meat only from particular classes of animals is no longer required of believers; but the holiness principle symbolized by the dietary restrictions continues to be a requirement (2 Cor 7.1; Eph 4.24; 1 Thess 4.4, 7).
- The *form* of the Sabbath has been changed. It is now observed on the first day of the week, not the seventh. Also, the Sabbath now includes a new dimension—it is a memorial to Christ’s resurrection.
- The Sabbath commandment is part of God’s great moral law that is given in a summary form in the Ten Commandments and defines the duties God requires of mankind (not just of Jews or Christians). We have not been given nine summary commandments; we have been given ten.
- Our keeping of the law must be more precise than (it must exceed or surpass) that of the Pharisees or we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. This is an impossible task. However, those in Christ who have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are enabled to obey God. Our obedience must include keeping the commandments which Jesus delivered to mankind on Mt. Sinai.

Mark recounts an incident in the life of Jesus,

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mk 2.23-28),

We learn from this account that,

- By using the term ‘man’ Jesus implies that the Sabbath was made not just for people from Israel (the Jews) but for all mankind.
- Jesus appeals to the time of creation (by speaking of the Sabbath and of man who were made during the creation week) as the origin of the Sabbath, rejecting the idea that it is only a Jewish or typical ceremony from the time of Moses.
- The Sabbath is not under man’s control to do as he pleases. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. However, being made for man, the Sabbath was instituted for man’s benefit, good, and welfare. When men observe the Sabbath as the Lord of the Sabbath intended, they receive blessings and great benefit.
- Jesus also challenges the Pharisaic traditions that had turned the Sabbath into a legalistic parody of its original purpose.

Jesus kept the Sabbath holy while he walked among men. He demonstrates by his practice on the Sabbath his attitude toward the Sabbath. And by his teachings about the Sabbath, he indicates that he viewed the Sabbath to be an important institution that is to be kept holy (Mt 12.1-14; Mk 2.23-3.6; Lk 6.1-10; Lk 13.10-16; Lk 14.1-5; Jn 5.8-15; Jn 9.13-16). No one was ever able to charge him with breaking the law (Jn 8.46a). As the Last Adam he fulfilled all righteousness (Mt 3.15; compare with, Rom 5.12-21), in active obedience to the law. In addition, it is clear from the examples where Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath that he is teaching both that it is to be observed and how it is to be observed. Some Christians ask, “What would Jesus do?” We should need no other witness than what Jesus did, to confirm that Sabbath-keeping is a principle that continues into the NT economy.

On the Day of Judgement, God will hold men accountable who have not kept the Sabbath holy—because

they have ignored his commandment and the example of his Son. A person who denies the standing requirement to keep the Sabbath holy must hold the view that God's standard for holiness has changed from the time of creation and that therefore God's character has changed.

129. Sabbath-Keeping – The Sabbath Rest in Hebrews

Paul, who is most likely the author of Hebrews, speaks about the Sabbath in a different sense than the passages we have considered previously. He says,

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,' " although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest."

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. (Heb 4.1-11).

According to this account the Sabbath day not only looks back to creation but also forward as a promise of salvation, resurrection, and everlasting rest (Heb 4.9). It is a memorial of God's work in creation, of a spiritual recreation through salvation in Christ, and of a material recreation (resurrection and glorification of believers and the new heavens and earth) at the end of time. We find in Scripture multiple covenant administrations associated with the institution of the Sabbath:

- *Creation Sabbath* – A weekly holy day (the seventh day of the week) allocated for worship and reflection on the greatness of the creative power of God. In this observance, there was no element of confession of sin or a need to rest from weariness (Gen 2.2-3) since there was no sin and work had not yet been cursed with painful toil.
- *Commandment Sabbath* – A day of worship with the addition of rest from the weariness of hard labour (Ex 20.10) resulting from the curse on work (Gen 3.17-19) that pointed to the hope of rest from sin in Christ (Dt 5.15; Heb 3.18-4.6). Note that Hebrews 4.6 indicates that it was sin that kept the Israelites from experiencing this rest. The implication being that they needed salvation by faith in Christ.
- *Christian Sabbath* – A day of worship and rest with a memorial reflection on the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 20.7) and the procurement of spiritual rest in Christ (Mt 11.28; Is 48.17-18; Jer 6.16), and an anticipatory foretaste of the Consummation Sabbath in the recreated new heavens and earth which is to come. God's eighth day (Lev 23.36, 39; Num 29.35; Neh 8.18) has broken through in the Christian Sabbath and looks forward to the everlasting eighth day. This is consistent with the 'already but not yet' theme we find running through salvation theology (e.g., sanctified, but being sanctified; declared sons, but waiting for our inheritance).
- *Consummation Sabbath* – An endless 'day' of worship (Rev 4.10; Rev 5.11-13; Rev 7.15). Resting from weariness will be removed from the purpose of the Sabbath (as it was not required at creation) since there will not be any sin or the consequences of sin (Rev 7.16; Rev 21.4). There will be, however, an everlasting reflection on what Christ has accomplished in procuring salvation for his people (Rev 5.9-10) and providing a restored creation (Rev 21.1-3; Rev 22.1-5) and everlasting spiritual rest (Heb 4.1; Rev 14.13). The everlasting 'eighth day' of rest will become a present reality when believers join their Lord in heaven (Heb 4.6-11).

All four of these administrations of the Sabbath have different aspects, but they are all instances of fulfilling the same Sabbath principle:

- *Requirement.* In each case, the requirement to keep the Sabbath holy, by ceasing from labour, remains inviolable.
- *Reflection.* In each case, the Sabbath day is sanctified and set apart for worship of the Creator, with the later addition of worship of the Saviour.
- *Rest.* In the garden, Adam and Eve rested with God; not from hard labour, but from the lawful pursuits of other days (caring for God's creation and tending to their needs). The subsequent two administrations added weekly rest from *hard* labour. The Consummation Sabbath provides everlasting rest from all labour in a restored paradise as it lifts the curse on sin.
- *Rescue.* In ancient Israel, the Sabbath provided a memorial that pointed to their rescue from slavery in Egypt (Dt 5.15). In the New Covenant the Christian Sabbath points to the spiritual rescue from sin that was procured for believers by Christ on the cross by its observance on the day of his resurrection—the first day of the week.
- *Regularity.* The first three administration of the Sabbath were to occur weekly as long as this realm endures; the last is continuous and everlasting.
- *Recognition.* The first two administration of the Sabbath recognized the last day of the week as holy. However, for Adam and Eve, the Sabbath was their first full day of existence. The third administration moved the day to the first day of the week, the 'eighth day'. The final administration will put in place an observance on an everlasting 'eighth day'.

130. Covenant Accountability

Nehemiah calls the people's Sabbath-breaking an evil action (Neh 13.17). He uses the same word that is used to describe the lifestyle of pre-Flood humanity (Gen 6.5). This implies that he uses God's standard for judging actions, not his own opinion. He puts Sabbath breaking in the same context as idolatry (1 Ki 14.9), divination (Gen 44.5), and adultery (Hos 3.1), which are all called evil. According to Nehemiah, the consequence of this wickedness is (Neh 13.18):

- Stirring up God's wrath against the people performing the wickedness.
- Making the people liable to punishment.
- Asking for a punishment by exile (Jer 17.19-27).

He compares their actions with those of their forefathers and suggests that their actions could bring more wrath on the nation. By implication, as individuals they have corporate responsibilities and their actions have corporate consequences. He views Sabbath breaking as a corporate sin, because collectively they are operating within the context of covenant obligations and responsibilities. There is a connection between corporate responsibilities, Sabbath-keeping, and the Covenant because the Sabbath is a sign of the Covenant.

Nehemiah and the people, understood Sabbath-keeping to be associated with covenant keeping:

- They promised to keep the Sabbath as part of their vows of covenant renewal (Neh 10.31).
- They resolved not to carry out commercial activities on that day (Ex 20.8-11; Dt 5.12-15) and not to carry out agricultural activities during the Sabbatical year (Ex 23.10-11; Lev 25.2-7, 20-21). In listing these two classes of work performed in ancient Jewish daily life they cover all forms of work—for farmers, merchants, and craftsmen, for rural and city dwellers—to ensure that all people were able to participate in the Covenantal Sabbath observances in a meaningful way.
- The Sabbath is a holy day (Neh 9.14). Holy days such as the festival days and the Passover were associated with Covenant observance.
- Nehemiah specifically rebuked the nobles (Neh 13.17) who represented the people of their day. Covenants are administered federally through a representative or mediator (compare, Dt 5.2-3 with Dt

2.14-15 and Num 14.28-35; Num 26.63-65). As representatives of the community, they were:

- Held to a higher standard.
- Expected to set an example for those under their authority.
- Expected to ensure that those under their authority consistently maintained adherence to God's requirements.
- Acting on behalf of future generations. Covenants are perpetually applied to subsequent generations (Dt 7.9; Ps 105.8-10).
- The ones, or representing those, who had signed the covenant renewal.
- The ones who stood in the place of those who had been leaders at the time of the captivity. Generational connectivity under covenants is alluded to by Nehemiah's reference to their forefathers (Neh 13.18).
- Nehemiah set an example with the 'greatest' in society by holding them responsible for actions that were to be observed by all the people. If leaders are held accountable for their actions, then all in the society are viewed as being accountable under the representation of a covenant mediator.

The Sabbath was first introduced as a sign of the Covenant when the Covenant of Creation was instituted in the Garden (Gen 2.3). The Sabbath appears to have also been a sign under the Noahic Covenant (Gen 8.10, 12). When the Mosaic administration of the Covenant was instituted, the Sabbath continued to serve as a sign of the Covenant (Ex 31.12-13, 17; Ezk 20.12, 20). The Sabbath continues to be a sign under the New Covenant, as the Lord's Day (on the first day of the week) and as a commemorative of the resurrection (Acts 20.7). Finally, the Sabbath is a sign of the Eternal Covenant (Heb 4.9). The Sabbath is the one timeless sign that applies across *all* covenant administrations.

Even though other signs were added to the Covenant, or replaced existing signs, through the various administrations (e.g., rainbow, circumcision, Passover, baptism, Lord's Supper) the Sabbath is the *only* perpetual sign of the Covenant. Being a sign, however, does not make it a type that would pass away or be replaced when Christ came to fulfill all righteousness. Because it is a sign, it does not necessarily mean that it is replaceable any more than the law of love, which itself was a type, can be replaced. In Deuteronomy 6.5-8 Israel is instructed to make the law of love into a sign. Jesus shows that the law of love continues under the NT economy (Jn 13.34).

God considers a breach of the Sabbath to be a serious offence, because the Sabbath is the *key* sign of the Covenant that is timeless and applies across *all* covenant administrations. To break the sign is to say, "I will not keep your covenant!" Breaking the sign (the Sabbath) is equivalent to rejecting the whole covenant (Ezk 20.12, 13, 16, 21, 24). This is probably the reason why Sabbath-breaking is a capital offence (Ex 31.14; Ex 35.2; Num 15.32-36).

Sabbath breaking has always been, and continues to be, a serious evil in God's eyes. Because we don't perceive any immediate or direct consequences for a society and a Church that engage in flagrant Sabbath breaking does not mean that we should take lightly the seriousness of the offence. Rather, we should be thankful for God's enduring patience with the Church and society in the face of blatant disregard for his holy day.

131. The Importance of Keeping the Sabbath Command

When you look at the structure of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20.1-21; Dt 5.6-21) you find that the Sabbath command is the longest of the commands. It is also found in the centre of the written form of the commandments. Apparently, in covenant documents in the ancient Near East the most important obligation was placed in the centre of the covenant document. In addition, the Sabbath command is unique because it straddles both our duty to God and our duty to our fellow men. The first three commands are specifically

related to the worship of God and do not have a direct impact on our fellow men. The latter six commandments (at least commandments five through nine) have a direct impact on our neighbours (i.e., they are the summary laws relating to our duty to man); the tenth commandment is different in that it applies to our inner being. The fourth commandment straddles our duty to God and our duty to man. It has religious ceremonial and worship elements, but it also has direct consequences for those around us and for our own wellbeing. To the extent that we keep this command, to that extent we allow our co-labourers (and animals) to rest with us.

In Nehemiah 10.31 only the Sabbath command, from the Ten Commandments, is referenced in the covenant renewal ceremony. The reason appears to be because the Sabbath command is the representative command for the rest of the Ten Commandments. Keeping the Sabbath is, as we have seen, a key sign of covenant faithfulness (Ex 31.15-17; Is 56.4-8). If we want to be faithful to the Covenant, then we will keep all of God's commands, but in particular we will be especially careful to keep that one command of the Ten Commandments that is the sign or symbol of the Covenant—the Sabbath.

In Nehemiah 9.14, Nehemiah calls the Sabbath holy. This is significant because holiness is God's supreme attribute. Holiness is the only attribute of God that weighs in with a three-fold emphasis (Is 6.3; Rev 4.8). The Sabbath was blessed (set apart, sanctified, made holy) on the last day of creation (Gen 2.3; Ex 20.11) and declared to be holy by God (Ex 16.23; Ex 31.14), and is to be kept holy (Ex 20.8; Is 58.13; Jer 17.22, 24, 27). The Sabbath is holy because it is a symbol of God's holiness and separation from sin. The people in Nehemiah's day promised to be separate from the nations around them (Neh 10.30). So, it is fitting that the command of separation be the one that they emphasized in their promise to be faithful to the Covenant.

In the Bible, various things are blessed by God, such as the priests and Levites (Ex 32.29), and the people of God and their wellbeing, if they worship correctly (Ex 23.25). We also find that the Sabbath (Gen 2.1; Ex 20.11) is blessed by God. The Sabbath is special because it is an object of direct blessing from God.

The Sabbath command is also *the* command of faithful trust. In Nehemiah 10.31 the people promise to rest from commercial activities for a day per week and from agricultural activities for a year out of every seven. In contrast, the average merchant today feels that he will only be successful if he opens on Sunday. Most merchants today would view Sabbath-keeping as giving up a seventh (or more) of their potential income. We must believe whole-heartedly that God will take care of us when we cease from work activities on the Sabbath—that is commercial and agricultural work, or all normal work that is not emergency related or is not truly necessary.

The Sabbath command has a positive component to it that is clear and visible in its observance. It is the only command, of the Ten Commandments, which is clearly visible when it is kept. The other commands are largely observed in their negative aspect—i.e., *not* doing something. Although each of the negative commands also includes an implied positive obligation. For example, the command not to steal implies that we are to look out for the welfare of our neighbour, and the command not to commit adultery implies that we are to encourage sexual purity and chastity. However, the keeping of the other nine commands is largely observed by the absence of overt sin. For example, everyone expects his neighbours not to murder other people. It is out of the ordinary when murders occur, and there is great concern and visibility when the command against murder is broken. In contrast, the Sabbath command is kept positively (by doing something) as well as negatively (not doing something). When men don't work on the Sabbath, it is clear what they are *not* doing. And it is even clearer that the Sabbath command is being observed when Christians (believing Jews in the OT economy) keep the Sabbath command in a pagan culture by attending the public assembly of worship. Sabbath-keeping is a visible witness to God's Law.

Finally, the Sabbath is the day for the standing or falling of the Church. It is the day set aside specifically for the corporate worship of the Church. To the extent that Christians keeps the Sabbath holy, to that extent

the Church and Christianity move forward with strength. “The law of the sabbath was very strict and much insisted one, and with good reason, for religion is never in the throne while sabbaths are trodden under foot.”⁴⁵ It is hard to imagine why God would bless his people and the Church today while we are blaspheming the Sabbath.

132. Reasons Annexed to the Sabbath Command

The fourth commandment is one of the three commands that includes a reason for obedience (the others are the second and the fifth). The *Larger Catechism* (Q120 and Q121) comments on why this command has reasons annexed to it. Reasons for the additional information may include the following:

- *Reinforcement.* The *Catechism* indicates that the reasons annexed to the command are provided to reinforce the importance of the commandment. The fourth commandment is the longest among the Ten Commandments. It incorporates one-third of the words (41 of 132) in the Hebrew text (98 of 303 words in the ESV’s English). And it consists of slightly more words than the second commandment. The allocation of this amount of the text filling the tablets of stone (Dt 4.13) may indicate its relative importance among the Ten Commandments. The reason annexed to the command helps ensure that we understand its importance.
- *Reasonableness.* The commandment lays out the equity of the requirement to allocate one day out of seven to be kept holy to the Lord. It indicates that we are provided with six days out of every seven for our own affairs and only one day is reserved by God exclusively for his interests (Ex 20.9-11; Dt 5.12-14). God could rightly have demanded that we dedicate half of our time to holy rest and worship. But he did not. Thus, no person can accuse God of being unreasonable.
- *Replication.* God specifies a pattern in the command for work and reflective rest that was built into the structure of the week from the beginning of time and into the governance of the animate created order. Universally, men observe a seven-day week because of God’s activity during the creation week. God indicts in this commandment that all his image-bearers are to replicate that pattern (Ex 20.11), as we imitate him (1 Cor 11.1).
- *Relief.* God blessed the Sabbath day (Ex 20.11). According to the thinking of sinful mankind, and many professing believers within the Church today, the idea of a Sabbath day’s observance presents a burden that would prevent them from doing as they please. However, to the contrary, observance of the Sabbath is not a burden but a great blessing. The day itself is blessed (Gen 2.3; Ex 20.11) and those who observe it faithfully are blessed (Is 58.13-14). The blessings that flow from faithful observance of the Sabbath include a tightening of the bonds of love between man and God and a liberation from the pressures to conform to demands from the world.
- *Rest.* The command explicitly calls for a cessation of all normal lawful work that may legitimately be performed on the other days of the week. This cessation applies not only to us but to all those who work for us or provide services to us (Ex 20.9-10; Dt 5.14) and to working animals. If the Sabbath were observed properly in our entire society, we would take our focus away from consumerism and the worship of material objects, step aside from a depressing urgency to stay informed of inconsequential trivia, and step off the hamster-wheel of trying to ‘get ahead’.
- *Renewal.* The Sabbath provides physical rest but also renewal from spiritual weariness. Through private worship the Holy Spirit strengthens our union with Christ, and through public worship he tightens the bonds of fellowship with the saints. A focus on Sabbath worship helps us to see the silliness of pop culture and to look to realities that have ultimate meaning.
- *Retreat.* A commitment to Sabbath-keeping allows us, in good conscience, to say “No!” to the pressuring demands of the commercial world. We can shut-off our electronic devices and ignore e-mail or text messages from our bosses and co-workers and retreat into a God-blessed meditative mode.
- *Reflection.* God introduced the Sabbath before sin entered the world. Thus, a purpose for his declaring

⁴⁵ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible* (on Nehemiah 13.15), (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

it to be a holy day was so that he along with mankind could reflect on what he had accomplished as the creator (Gen 1.31). As we observe the Sabbath, we should thank him for creating us and all the wonders we see around us.

- *Redemption.* The restatement of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy (Dt 5.15) adds redemption from slavery as a reason for observing the day. This was a type for the spiritual redemption provided by Christ through his death and resurrection. Thus, the Lord's Day Sabbath is the day on which we declare "He has risen!" "He has risen indeed!" (Luke 24.6, 34).
- *Reminder.* The first word of the fourth commandment is, "remember" (Ex 20.8). This imperative to remember the Sabbath day indicates that people have forgotten and will forget to keep the day holy. The Israelites had forgotten the Sabbath during their time of slavery in Egypt and they had to be reminded of the enduring creation ordinance (Gen 2.3; Ex 16.22-30). Likewise, our society and many in the Church have willfully suppressed this command. The word 'remember' also indicates that mankind is always ready to forget the command and to allow the business of the world to encroach on the Sabbath. Satan's tactic is to use small incremental steps to dull us into handing the day over to him and to blot out the glory and memory of the day and replace it with the observance of manmade days. We must be ever vigilant to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."
- *Relevance.* The fourth commandment provides benefits beyond rest and relief. Through Sabbath-keeping we can become more disciplined by completing our work in six days and preparing to desist from work on the seventh. Also, through worship on the Sabbath our minds are drawn to the word of God and to his righteous requirements. A society that diligently observes the first-day Sabbath will prosper.

133. Why We Should Want to Keep the Sabbath Holy

Because the Sabbath is a special command, Christians should strive to keep the day holy. However, keeping the Sabbath should not be a burden. We should want to keep the Sabbath holy. As one writer has stated:

The true Christian does not observe the Sabbath because he is forced to do it ... John Angel James said that 'The heart of a believer would claim it as privilege to keep holy the Sabbath day even if his conscience did not dictate it as a duty'. The believer, according to [Isaiah 58.13-14] calls the Sabbath 'a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable'. A heart without the grace of God finds the Sabbath irksome and tedious, but the fault is not in the day but in itself. But to the Christian the Lord's day is what the sun is to the day, what the oasis is to the traveler, what the dew is to the grass, what water is to the thirsty and bread to the hungry, what wings are to a bird, what a home is to the orphan, and what rest is to the weary. ... The Lord's day to the Christian is not only a sanctified day but a *sanctifying* day.⁴⁶

We should want to keep the Sabbath because it pleases God (Is 56.6). Matthew Henry said: "Those that are jealous for the honour of God cannot bear to see his sabbath profaned." And Robert Murray McCheyne said:

All days of the year are Christ's, but He hath marked out one in seven as peculiarly His own. ... This is the reason we love it, and would keep it entire. We love everything that is Christ's. We love His Word. It is better to us than thousands of gold and silver. "O how we love His law! it is our study all the day." We love His house ... where He meets with us ... from off the mercy seat. We love His table. It is His banqueting-house, where His banner over us is love—where He looses our bonds, and anoints our eyes, and makes our hearts burn with holy joy. We love His people, because they are His, members of His body, washed in His blood, filled with His Spirit, our brothers and sisters ... And we love the Lord's Day, because it is His. Every hour of it is dear to us—sweeter than honey, more precious than gold. It is the day He rose for our justification. It reminds us of His love, and His finished work, and His rest. And we may boldly say that that man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ who does not love the entire Lord's

⁴⁶ D. MacDonald, "How to Spend the Sabbath Profitably," *The Banner of Truth*, Dec. 1975.

Day.⁴⁷

It is a sad irony that most people in the Church love human-appointed days like Christmas and Easter more than the Sabbath. They make these days more important than the Lord's Day because they are not focused on pleasing God.

As Charles Hodge said, we should want to keep the Sabbath holy because of what it accomplishes:

Far more importance is attributed to [its] observance than to any merely ceremonial institution. [It] was designed to arrest the current of the outward life of the people and to turn their thoughts to the unseen and spiritual. Men are so prone to be engrossed by the things of this world that it was, and is, of the highest importance that there should be one day of frequent recurrence on which they were forbidden to think of the things of the world, and forced to think of the things unseen and eternal. ... By the prohibition of all servile labour, whether of man or beast, it was designed to secure recuperative rest for those on whom the primeval curse had fallen ...⁴⁸

The Sabbath serves our whole being. It reminds us that we are not purely temporal and physical (Ex 20.9; Ex 31.15). It serves society by providing rest for all people. It slows down the pace of society (Ex 20.10) and serves as a sign of grace that demonstrates that we are not slaves to our employers or to our work (Ex 23.12). When a society or nation keeps the Sabbath, it changes the outlook of that society or nation from being driven by the moment and immediate pressures, to living with a focus on the future (Ex 16.26-28). In addition, keeping the Sabbath strongly works against avarice and greed (Is 58.13-14).

We should want to keep the Sabbath because it reminds us that we are freed from sin (Dt 5.15) and provides a symbol of hope in the everlasting Sabbath we will enjoy with God in heaven. Keeping the Sabbath points us to heaven (Heb 4.9-10). Robert Murray McCheyne said that the Sabbath is: "a relic of paradise and type of heaven".⁴⁹ Another writer summed up the future focus of the Sabbath:

The Sabbath ... gives purpose to the six days of work ahead—that the work has a culmination not in death, not in a bulging bank account, not in a fancy car and status symbols but in the final rest that ushers in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. ... the main significance ... is not in advancing the cause of religion or devoting the day to the promotion of religious interests, but rather in pointing us forward to the eternal issues of life and history.⁵⁰

We should also want to keep the Sabbath because it reminds us that we need each other (Heb 10.25; Col 3.16). If all we had to do was set aside some personal time with God, we would miss the collective togetherness. The *day* not just the *time* is holy. The Lord's Day is *the* day under the NT economy for the assembly and fellowship of the saints in the spiritual house of God (Ps 35.18; Ps 68.26; Ps 149.1), to meet with the triune God (our Father, our Brother, and our Comforter) and with fellow Christians (our brothers and sisters in Christ).

134. Responding to the Anti-Sabbath Arguments (part 1 of 7)

A review of what the Bible says about the Sabbath indicates that all mankind, in all ages, are to keep the Sabbath. However, this is a fact that is accepted by only a small minority today—in the world and in the Church. Within the Church in its broadest sense, many Evangelicals and even many in the Reformed and Presbyterian 'camp', and most dispensationalists, antinomians, liberals, and Roman Catholics, disagree with the idea that we are required to keep the Sabbath. They raise objections against the continuing

⁴⁷ "I Love the Lord's Day," Bible Message by Robert Murray McCheyne.

⁴⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, In Three Volumes. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted, May 1997), Vol. III, p. 322.

⁴⁹ "I Love the Lord's Day," Bible Message by Robert Murray McCheyne.

⁵⁰ Daniel Copeland, "Have a Happy Sabbath," *Covenanter Witness*, October 22, 1975, pp. 14-15.

applicability of the Sabbath, which we now address.

Claim: *The Sabbath command is not repeated in the NT.* It is claimed that the Sabbath is the only command of the Ten Commandments not repeated explicitly in the NT. This seems to indicate that it is not as important as the other commands. Roger Fellows (in *The Law and The Christian*) stated,

“There is not a single command in the New Testament for Christians to keep the Sabbath. ... [T]his is surprising if the Sabbath were still in force today. There are a number of references to the other commandments, but never one about the Sabbath. There are numerous references and warnings about sexual sins, but not a single one about Sabbath breaking. There are several lists of sins in various books, but none of the lists mention the Sabbath. If believers are to live according to the commandments of our new covenant King, then it would appear that the Sabbath is not nearly as important as some would make it.”

Wayne Grudem makes a similar claim (*Christian Ethics*, p. 347). As does Michael Horton (*The law of perfect freedom: Relating to God and Others through the Ten Commandments*, p. 126).

Response: The NT references the Sabbath command (Mt 12.1-13; Mk 2.23-3.6; Lk 6.1-10; Lk 13.10-16; Lk 14.1-5; Lk 23.56 with Mk 16.1; Jn 5.8-15; Jn 9.13-16; Heb 4.6-11) and shows how Jesus and his disciples applied it correctly. In Matthew 12.12 Jesus says that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. This implies that there is a law (command) governing actions that are permissible on the Sabbath. There is also an explicit reiteration of the Sabbath-keeping command in the NT. It is found in Luke 23.56. Luke wrote to a Roman Gentile (Theophilus) and he states that the women rested “on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.” Luke uses ‘commandment’, referring to the Ten Commandments, in only two other places (Lk 1.6; Lk 18.20). If the Sabbath-keeping principle had ended with the death of Jesus, it is unlikely that Luke, writing about twenty-five years after the events, would have mentioned their ‘obedience to the commandment’. Instead, he would likely have used the word ‘custom’, referring to Mosaic ceremonial law practices, as he does elsewhere (Lk 1.9; Lk 2.27; Lk 2.42; Acts 6.14; Acts 15.1; Acts 21.21; Acts 28.17; see also Jn 2.6; Jn 19.40). He would have said something like, ‘in conformity with Jewish custom’. Since he used ‘commandment’, it seems reasonable to conclude that he wished to indicate that the Sabbath continues to apply in the NT era.

The argument that the NT, and more specifically, the post-Pentecost NT must restate the Sabbath command, or it is not binding, is fallacious since:

- The Bible is a unit, all parts are given for our instruction (2 Tim 3.16-17).
- There are a number of practices that the opponents of the Sabbath-keeping principle observe that they could not defend from post-Pentecost NT Scriptures, such as women participating in communion (not mentioned in the Bible anywhere), singing with instrumental accompaniment in NT worship, and singing merely human compositions in worship.
- There are commands in the OT that are not repeated in the NT, which nevertheless no Christian would question as being prohibitions today (e.g., bestiality [Ex 22.19; Lev 20.16; Dt 27.21] and brother-sister incest [Lev 18.9; Dt 27.22]). We can see the fallacy of the argument quoted above, by substitution: “If believers are to live according to the commandments of our new covenant King, then it would appear that the command against [bestiality/brother-sister incest] is not nearly as important as some would make it.”

Claim: *The Sabbath was revealed to Jews – not written on Gentiles’ hearts.* Roger Fellows also stated, “In fact the one command where it is hard to see how it could be written on people’s hearts, is the Sabbath. Gentiles would know little or nothing about the Sabbath.”

Response: All people know or sense that they are to set aside a time to worship God. The evidence is shown by the fact that within all religious systems men set aside days for worshiping their invented deities. Even

in ‘civil religion’ systems men create heroes, hold parades, and declare days of remembrance. It is ironic that it is hard to convince Christians of the importance of the Sabbath and yet it is easy for them to adapt pagan festivals such as Christmas and Easter. Even Reformed Presbyterians find it hard to resist the temptation, contrary to the *Westminster* standards they profess to adhere to: “There is no day commanded in scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called Holy-days, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued.” (*The Directory for the Public Worship of God*)

The authors of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* did not agree that the Sabbath could not be known by Gentiles. They said: “As it is of the law of nature, [Rom 2.14; not necessarily a support of Natural Law theory] that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him.” (chapter 21.7).

135. Responding to the Anti-Sabbath Arguments (part 2 of 7)

Claim: *John Calvin believed the Mosaic sabbath was abrogated.* This is a favourite objection of the anti-Sabbatarians who claim to be Reformed. They like to think that if Calvin spoke against Sabbath-keeping, we should take his position as normative. For example, Roger Fellows (in *The Law and The Christian*) stated, “John Calvin believed the Mosaic Sabbath was abrogated, but said that as it is useful to have one day a week for rest and for worship, it is good for us to keep the Lord's Day ... Basically I agree with Calvin's position.”

Response: Ironically, many of those who make a claim about Calvin's view of the Sabbath, would reject his statements in many other areas, such as on infant baptism, regulations for worship, use of only Psalms in worship, place of the law, role of the civil magistrate, etc. It really doesn't matter what Calvin believed, since our standard is the word of God. However, in reality those who make such a statement probably haven't actually read what Calvin says or they wouldn't say that they agree with his view of the Sabbath, for he does not say that Sabbath-keeping is abrogated for Christians. They are selective in their quotation of Calvin's *Institutes*, as is Wayne Grudem, who stops his quotation partway in his book *Christian Ethics* (p. 349). In general, Calvin understood the Sabbath commandment to have three continuing roles: to designate a stated day of public worship; to prescribe a day for bodily or physical rest; and a foreshadowing of the spiritual rest enjoyed by believers. Calvin also understood that there was a ceremonial aspect added to the Sabbath. He argues that this part of the Sabbath was replaced by the reality of Christ.

This is what Calvin said about the Sabbath in his *Institutes* (pp. 2.8.31-32):

[T]here is no doubt that by the Lord Christ's coming the *ceremonial part* of this commandment was abolished. For he himself is the truth, with whose presence all figures vanish; he is the body, at whose appearance the shadows are left behind. ... Christians ought therefore to *shun completely the superstitious observance of days*. The two latter reasons for the Sabbath *ought not to be relegated to the ancient shadows*, but are *equally applicable to every age*. Although the Sabbath [i.e., the Jewish ceremonial Sabbath] has been abrogated, there is still occasion for us: to assemble on stated days for the hearing of the Word, the breaking of the mystical bread, and for public prayers [see, Acts 2.42]; ... to give surcease from labor to servants and workmen. [Abbreviated; emphasis added.]

It is clear, also, from Calvin's two sermons on Deuteronomy 5.12-15 [1555] that he understood the fourth commandment to place an ongoing obligation on Christians to keep the Sabbath holy. He indicates that as a ceremonial observance it has changed, but the principle of Sabbath-keeping has not been changed. We must understand the distinction between the form and the essence, or principle. Listen to what Calvin actually says on the matter of the Sabbath:

[T]he [Sabbath or] *day of rest* was, **first**, a figure partly to show that men cannot serve God properly unless they put to death all that is of their own nature and dedicate themselves fully to him so as to be separate from the world. **Second**, the day of rest was a ceremony to bring the people together so that they could hear the Law, call upon the name of God, and offer sacrifices and do all other things that concern the spiritual government. Thus we see the type of Sabbath day being spoken of—yet it cannot be well understood without setting forth these two parts separately. ... Thus we can understand what Saint Paul means (Col 2.20) when he says that we are no longer tied to the old bondage of keeping the Sabbath day. Instead we must give much honour to Jesus Christ and be content with what he has given to us in his own person, since we no longer have the outward things that were under the Law. From this we observe how the *ceremony itself applies to us today—it is past*. Therefore we must come to the **important point** of this which is that *to serve God properly we must learn to give up our own wills, thoughts, and desires*. Why? Because otherwise we will be wise in our own conceits and will imagine that we can serve God with this or that, and thus mar everything. Therefore, we must lay down our own ‘wisdom’ and hear God speak, without following our own will or fancy. ... Thus, the first way *to keep the Sabbath as we should* is to *give up the things that seem good to ourselves*. Instead we must rest. How are we to rest? We must stand still so that our minds don’t wander to our own inventions. I say, we must continue quietly in obedience to God. When we are tempted by our own lusts, we must consider that all our lewd and disobedient desires are enemies of God. Therefore, we must rest, considering what God wants, so that he may work in us and guide and govern us by his Holy Spirit. ... We will profit throughout our lives if we keep the Sabbath well by renouncing whatever is our own and by dedicating ourselves entirely to God. ... *We ought to be more on fire for keeping spiritually the Sabbath of the LORD* since we have been set free from the slavish subjection to the Law and since God has granted to us greater privileges than he did to the fathers of the past. ... In fact, *what was commanded about the day of rest must also apply to us as well as to them. For we must take God’s law as it is and thus have an everlasting rule of righteousness. For it is certain that in the Ten Commandments God intended to give a rule that should endure forever*. Therefore, let us not think that the things which Moses says about the Sabbath day are unnecessary for us—not because the figure remains in force, but because we have the truth represented by the figure. [From a modern English [version](#) based on an Arthur Golding’s 1582 translation; emphasis added.]

136. Responding to the Anti-Sabbath Arguments (part 3 of 7)

Claim: *The Sabbath was part of the ceremonial laws of the OT that are completed in Christ*. For example, John MacArthur argues that “the Sabbath purpose was purely symbolic”⁵¹ in the same way as the sacrificial system and is no longer applicable. Likewise, Roger Fellows speaking about Matthew 12.1-5 says,

Jesus said that the priests *desecrate* the Sabbath, yet are innocent. Could Jesus have said that the priests could *break* any other commandment and be innocent? Could they commit adultery and be innocent? Could they worship idols and be innocent? That is unthinkable. No moral commandment can be desecrated and leave the offender without blame. Yet the priests could *break* the Sabbath and be innocent, because their priestly duties required them to work on the Sabbath. This surely removes the Sabbath commandment from the realm of moral to *ceremonial* as the later New Testament references so clearly show.⁵² [Emphasis added.]

Response: Roger Fellows’ argument about ‘desecration’ of the Sabbath is spurious and illogical:

- He changes the Greek word translated as ‘profane’ (ESV/KJV) or ‘desecrate’ (NIV) in verse 5 into ‘break’, as used in Matthew 15.2-3 and Romans 2.25. This is subtle, but it is twisting the facts. There

⁵¹ John MacArthur, *The Ultimate Priority*, (Moody Press, 1983), pp. 94-96.

⁵² Roger Fellows, *The Law and The Christian*, community.logos.com/forums/t/180139.aspx.

is a distinction between ‘profane’ or ‘desecrate’ and ‘break’ that is important. The word ‘profane’ refers to making something ceremonially unclean or ritually unacceptable without it necessarily being a sin, since a person could be ceremonially unclean without having committed any sin (Lev 15.16, 18-20). However, the Greek word translated ‘break’ means to act contrary to law, with an implication that there was an intent to disobey.

- We can consider examples where we set aside one moral law for fulfillment of another. We ‘profane’ or ‘desecrate’ private property to rescue a drowning man if we ‘trespass’ on that property (normally a breach of the commandment not to steal); the civil magistrate (as an executioner) or a soldier ‘profanes’ or ‘desecrates’ the command not to take the life of another if he kills him. Yet their actions are not classed as murder, because they are permitted and required by God (Gen 9.6; Ex 22.2-3; Dt 22.25-27).
- In the same way, works of necessary maintenance and mercy are included in the application of the law. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 12.5 and also in Luke (Lk 13.15-16; Lk 14.5). You do not break the command when you perform these classes of works on the Sabbath. The work of the priests on the Sabbath fell within the class of ‘works of necessary maintenance’.
- Because the law can be set aside, at times, by the priests doing their work, Fellows jumps to the conclusion that the Sabbath law was ceremonial. He can provide no grounds for making this supposed connection, since there aren’t any.

The restatement of the Sabbath principle in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20.8-11) includes sojourners (foreigners). This shows that the Fourth Commandment was not an essentially ceremonial law, i.e., one pointing to Christ and spiritual separation and holiness. Uncircumcised foreigners were generally not permitted to participate in the ceremonial rites of Israel (Ex 12.43, 45) and were allowed to eat unclean food (Dt 14.21). Nevertheless, they were required to observe the Sabbath.

It is true that after the fall of man into sin, the Sabbath did take on ceremonial-typical aspects (Ezk 20.12) that pointed to rest in Christ. The marriage ordinance that was established at creation also points to Christ (Eph 5.32). However, while the ceremonial-typical aspect of marriage (Hos 1.2; Hos 3.1) is fulfilled in Christ, that does not mean that marriage is no longer to be observed. In the same way, even if the ceremonial-typical aspects of the Sabbath are fulfilled in Christ, this does not mean that the overriding principle of the Sabbath no longer applies.

The Fourth Commandment must be distinguished from the ceremonial sabbatical observances (Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles) and the Jubilee Sabbaths (Lev 25.1-55; Ex 23.10-11) because its origin precedes the ceremonial forms by thousands of years.

Adam had not sinned when God set the Sabbath day apart. There was no need for the typical laws associated with substitution, redemption, cleansing, separation, and holiness when there was no sin. The system of ceremonial types pointing to Christ presupposes the need for atonement. The Sabbath institution, as a Creation ordinance, could not have been a ceremonial observance pointing to the atoning work of Christ because it was introduced before there was any sin and need for a substitute to atone for man’s sin.

Israel was expected to observe the Sabbath before any ceremonial laws were instituted by Moses, as demonstrated by the fact that the people were not to collect manna on the Sabbath (Ex 16.22-30) and God tells them to remember it (Ex 20.8) because they had been remiss in their observance of it during their time as slaves in Egypt.

137. Responding to the Anti-Sabbath Arguments (part 4 of 7)

Claim: *The Mosaic ordinance of sabbath observance is not binding on new covenant believers.* There are many in the Church today who argue that the requirement to keep holy one day in seven is nothing more

than a Mosaic requirement that is to be abandoned in the new-Covenant age. They usually claim that important passages that speak about Sabbath-keeping (e.g., Is 58.13-14; Jer 17.19-27) apply only to OT Jews under the Mosaic Covenant, because they do not appear to have universal applicability. For example: [T]he Mosaic ordinance of Sabbath observance is no longer binding on the new covenant people of God.⁵³

Now that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete, the Sabbath is not binding on us, just as circumcision is not binding on us because it was the sign of the covenant with Abraham.⁵⁴

Wayne Grudem in his section of the Sabbath says, “New Testament writers affirm clearly that the Mosaic covenant has been terminated and is no longer binding on people today, since we live in the age of the new covenant” (*Christian Ethics*, p. 346).

Response: It is insufficient to dismiss Sabbath-keeping by just saying that it is a ‘Mosaic ordinance’. Those who make this claim have to demonstrate that the Sabbath principle is not perpetually binding on the use of our time when it was binding for man before the Mosaic ordinances were issued (e.g., Adam, Noah, and the Jews at the time of the Exodus). There is only one Covenant, with multiple forms (shown in the table below), by which God deals with mankind. The Sabbath and the rainbow remain as perpetual signs of the Covenant.

Major Signs of the Covenant Instituted at Each Covenant Administration	
Covenantal Administration	Sign/Symbol
1. Creation (Adam): Commencement (Gen 1.26-2.17)	Sabbath (Gen 2.2-3)
2. New World (Noah): Preservation (Gen 8.20-9.17)	Rainbow (Gen 9.13-16)
3. National (Abraham): Promise of Seed and Land (Gen 15.1-21; Gen 17.1-14)	Circumcision (Gen 17.11)
4. Sinaitic (Moses): Law (Ex 24.1-18)	Passover [although it was instituted before the actual giving of the Law] and sacrifices (2 Ki 23.21; Ps 50.5)
5. Priestly (Phinehas): Holiness (Num 25.10-13)	Urim and Thummim (?)
6. Royal (David): Kingdom (2 Sam 7.5-16)	Scepter (Gen 49.10; Num 24.17; Ps 45.6; Ps 108.8; Ps 110.2; Heb 1.8), Salt (2 Chron 13.5)
7. New (Christ): Consummation (Jer 31.31-34; Lk 22.7-20; Heb 8-9)	Bloodless Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Col 2.11, 12; Lk 22.20)

- Rogers Fellows mentions circumcision as being obsolete because it was a sign of the covenant with Abram. However, it had a wider application. When the Covenant was re-enacted with Moses, circumcision was not removed (Jn 7.22). When the NT confirmation of the Covenant was established in Christ, circumcision as a sign of Covenant membership, was continued in a new *form*. It was replaced with baptism (Col 2.11-12).
- The Sabbath was not the primary sign of the Mosaic Covenant administration and was not introduced at that time (Ex 20.8). It was a sign primarily of the Covenant of Creation. However, it continued in the Mosaic Covenant with new symbolic elements (Dt 5.15). Dean Henry Law said: “[The Sabbath] arose not as a ceremony among ceremonies. Sinai was not its birth-place. The wilderness was not its cradle. Therefore Calvary is not its tomb.”⁵⁵

R. L. Dabney counters the argument that the Sabbath is a Mosaic ordinance that is no longer binding on

⁵³ Mark W. Karlberg. “Review: Created in God’s Image”, by Anthony A. Hoekema, *Westminster Theological Journal*, v. 49: 437-442.

⁵⁴ Roger Fellows, *The Law and The Christian*, community.logos.com/forums/t/180139.aspx.

⁵⁵ Dean Henry Law, “Christ is All,” *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 197?, p. 205.

Christians:

We are but using logic parallel to that which the Apostle Paul employs in a similar case. He is proving that the gospel promise made to the Hebrews in Abraham could not have been retracted when the law was published on Sinai. His argument is (Gal 3:17): “The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul.” So reason we: if the Sabbath was instituted long before, it did not come with Judaism, and does not go with it. It is instructive to note that those Christian Fathers who gave countenance to the idea that the divine injunction of the Sabbath was abrogated also leaned to the opinion that the Sabbath was of Mosaic origin. This indirectly confirms the soundness of our inference, while it betrays their slender acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures. The anti-Sabbath opinion in the Christian church had its origin in error and ignorance among the early, uninspired teachers.⁵⁶

138. Responding to the Anti-Sabbath Arguments (part 5 of 7)

Claim: *Paul Abolishes Sabbath Observance.* It is claimed that Paul abolishes Sabbath observance. For example, Donald Barnhouse said:

Sabbatarians have evolved a way to circumvent this direct statement of the Lord in Colossians 2:16, 17. Just as they have invented the two-law theory, that the ordinances were abolished but not the Ten Commandments, so they have invented the two-sabbath theory to get around this text. First, they say, there was the ordinary seventh-day sabbath, which is still in effect. Then there were various ceremonial sabbaths, and Colossians 2:16, 17 applies only to these! Since the Greek word for *sabbath* is in the plural here, they say, it refers to the high sabbaths. But they admit that in every other instance in the New Testament the same form refers to the weekly Sabbath.⁵⁷

Response: Barnhouse is correct to critique the ‘two-law’ theory. Law is treated as a unit in Scripture. However, there were other Sabbaths (Lev 19.3, 30) beside the seventh day Sabbath, such as festivals (Lev 23.28-38) and the Sabbatical month and year (Lev 25.1-55). Paul included these in his festivals and feasts. Paul switches from the singular for “festival” and “new moon” to the plural “sabbath *days*” to ensure that no one assumes that he is referring to *the* Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Thus, Albert Barnes’ commentary states:

The word Sabbath in the Old Testament is applied not only to the seventh day but to all the days of holy rest that were observed by the Hebrews, and particularly to the beginning and close of the great festivals. There is doubtless reference to those days in this place, as the word is use in the plural number, and the Apostle does not refer particularly to the Sabbath so called. There is ... not the slightest reason to believe that he meant to teach that one of the ten commandments had ceased to be binding on mankind. If he had used the word in the singular number, “The Sabbath,” it would then, of course, have been clear that he meant to teach that the commandment was no longer to be observed. But the use of the term in plural number, and the connection show that he had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law ...⁵⁸

Multiple citations of the three items—religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day (1 Chron 23.31; 2 Chron 2.4; 2 Chron 8.13; 2 Chron 31.3; Neh 10.33; Is 1.13-14; Ezk 45.17; Hos 2.11)—indicates that Paul is probably referring to the ceremonial aspects of the OT economy, and dealing with all the annual, monthly, and *possibly* the weekly (i.e., *the* Sabbath day) festivals of the ritual calendar of the OT economy. However, this does not mean that Christians are no longer to keep a holy Sabbath, since the original

⁵⁶ R. L. Dabney, “The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design And Proper Observance,” *Discussions Of Robert L. Dabney, Volume I*, p. 500.

⁵⁷ Donald Grey Barnhouse, “The Christian and the Sabbath,” *Six Bible Study Hour Broadcasts, Commentary on the Epistles to the Romans, Chapter 14, verses 5-6*; book 78; The Bible Study Hour, Phil. PA, 1958, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Albert Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*. New York: Harper Brothers, n.d.

institution of the Sabbath did not include ceremonial aspects. The ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath were added during the Mosaic administration. It is specifically the observance of the ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath about which Paul does not want us judging one another. He indicates this when he says in verse 17 that they are shadows of the coming NT covenantal era. Calvin, for example, commenting on this passage, says:

But there is no doubt that by the Lord Christ's coming the *ceremonial part* [emphasis added] of this commandment was abolished. For he himself is the truth, with whose presence all figures vanish; he is the body, at whose appearance the shadows are left behind. He is, I say, the true fulfillment of the Sabbath. ... Christians ought therefore to shun completely the superstitious observance of days. (*Institutes*; 2.8.31-32).

We conclude that the ceremonial part of the Sabbath, being fulfilled in Christ is now realized in its spiritual antitype to which it pointed. Therefore, we are not required to observe the Sabbath today with the redemptive-typical elements associated with it from the time of Moses. However, a proper interpretation of this passage in no way abrogates the perpetual binding obligation of the fourth commandment.

Anti-Sabbatarians also appeal to Romans 14.5. However, Charles Hodge says:

Some Christians ... thought it incumbent on them to observe these days; others were of a contrary opinion. Both were tolerated. The veneration of these days was a weakness; but still it was not a vital matter, and therefore should not be allowed to disturb the harmony of Christian intercourse, or the peace of the church. It is obvious from the context, and from such parallel passages as Galatians 4:10, "Ye observe days, and months, and times and years," and Colossians 2:16, "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of Sabbath-days," that Paul has reference to the Jewish festivals, and therefore his language cannot properly be applied to the Christian Sabbath.⁵⁹

In Galatians 4.9-10 Paul deals with a superstitious adherence to the forms of Jewish ceremonial observance as a means of appropriating salvation or gaining merit before God (Gal 2.16, 19; Gal 3.2, 5, 10-13, 17, 21; Gal 4.5). We must eschew such superstitions and observe the Lord's Day Sabbath with spiritual purity, as holy to the Lord (Gen 2.3; Ex 16.23; Ex 20.11; Dt 5.12; Is 58.13).

139. Responding to the Anti-Sabbath Arguments (part 6 of 7)

Claim: *The example and teaching of Jesus speaks against Sabbath observance.* It is claimed that Jesus shows by his example that the Sabbath is obsolete (e.g., Lk 13.10-17) and that he teaches that the Sabbath was made for man (Mk 2.23-28), so, we can do as we wish on any day of the week.

Response: In Luke 13.10-17, Jesus does not show by his example of healing a woman who had a "disabling spirit for eighteen years", that the Sabbath is obsolete. If it were truly obsolete, he would not have defended his action of healing her by pointing to his opponents' willingness to lead an animal to water and by indicating that a daughter of Abraham is of more importance than an animal. Instead, he would have said something like, "You are in error, the Sabbath no longer applies. and I, by my authority as the Son of God, tell you that it is okay now to heal the sick on any day of the week." By defending his action, Jesus teaches that the Sabbath command continues to apply—not that it is obsolete. And, he also shows how the Sabbath can be properly observed. He indicates that performing works of *mercy* (e.g., driving an ambulance to rescue a person who has had a stroke or performing emergency surgery) are not only permitted but are good things to do on the Sabbath. Thus, he provides a correction to the Pharisees who added many restrictions (the traditions of men; Mk 7.8) to the Sabbath so that observance became a heavy burden (Lk 11.46).

⁵⁹ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 1989.

In Mark 2.23-28, Jesus teaches that the Sabbath was made for man. Jesus' statement is to be understood as meaning that the Sabbath was set apart for mankind's good and benefit. The Sabbath is good for man because it brings him closer to God, gives him time to reflect on the goodness of God with thanks, provides him time set off from the lawful demands of other days to give glory to God through worship, gives him needed rest, and reminds him that he is not a slave to this world and to material and commercial pursuits. Along with all of God's other commands, the Sabbath command was given for man's benefit and welfare, if we observe it as he intended it to be observed as a holy day (1 Tim 1.8). If the Sabbath was obsolete, Jesus would not have defended the actions of his disciples, but would have said something like, "You are in error, the Sabbath no longer applies, and my disciples can now work as they please." Jesus made a claim that would have been astounding to his audience, that he as the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath. If the Sabbath had been abolished, he would be lord of nothing. Rather, he claims that since he is lord of the Sabbath he stands in the place of God and can provide the proper interpretation of how the Sabbath is to be applied. He indicates by his defense of his disciples' action, that performing works of necessary *maintenance* on the Sabbath are not only permitted but are a good thing. Thus, it is proper to prepare a family meal on Sunday and to give cattle their hay and grain—or in the case of many urbanites, to feed their pets. When he says that the Sabbath was made for man, this must be taken in the context of his conclusion, that he is Lord of the Sabbath. He does not teach that people can do whatever they wish on the Sabbath, but that by observing the Sabbath mankind is greatly benefitted.

Claim: *It is 'legalistic' to draw lines and set-up rules about keeping a day holy.* For example, Donald Barnhouse said:

Let us flee with horror from a legalism that would bind us to the observance of days. When we are thus free, the Lord will possess our Mondays and Tuesdays, our Wednesdays and Thursdays, our Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, and all our days and weeks and months and years because He has bought us and possesses our hearts in simple grace. Oh, praise God for deliverance from the bondage of keeping days, and may He restore to us the glory, of lives that are overflowing fountains, never knowing a time when the living water is not surging forth!⁶⁰

Response: God possessed the first six days of creation as much as the seventh, yet he set aside the seventh day as holy. If it is wrong now to set aside one day as holy, it was also wrong at the time of Moses and at the time of creation. Men always chafe at God's commands, in every area of life. Barnhouse is just formulating another example of man asking with Satan, "Did God really say?" Barnhouse accuses Sabbatarians of legalism. 'Legalism' can mean "excessive adherence to law". The Pharisees were legalistic in this sense, with their many additions to the law of God. Jesus deals with this problem when he shows how to correctly interpret and apply the fourth commandment (Lk 13.10-17; Mk 2.23-28) and by stating that our adherence to the law must surpass that of the Pharisees by scrupulous adherence to the commands and by having a proper attitude toward them (Mt 5.17-20). 'Legalism' can also mean "depending on obedience to law rather than on personal faith for salvation". The Pharisees were legalistic also in this sense. However, we cannot earn salvation through obedience to the fourth commandment any more than by obeying any of the Ten Commandments. We obey the Ten Commandments because we know that obedience pleases God, and we want to please him. Obeying God's laws is not 'legalistic' in either sense. Rather than being concerned about legalism, we should be concerned about the spirit of lawlessness (antinomianism and libertinism) that is rampant in society and in the Church—a lawlessness that rejects God's laws and encourages everyone to do what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17.6; Judges 21.25).

140. Responding to the Anti-Sabbath Arguments (part 7 of 7)

⁶⁰ Donald Grey Barnhouse, "The Christian and the Sabbath," *Six Bible Study Hour Broadcasts, Commentary on the Epistles to the Romans, Chapter 14, verses 5-6*; book 78; The Bible Study Hour, Phil. PA, 1958, p. 11.

Claim: *The seven-day week is an artifact of ancient Mesopotamia.* The unbelieving world claims that the seven-day week is nothing more than an artifact of ancient Mesopotamian culture. So, the idea that there is a universal innate sense that we are required to rest one day in seven is ludicrous to them. An article in *The Economist*⁶¹, speaks about the history of the week, stating:

Why does *The Economist* appear every seventh day? The answer is because we still regulate our lives by a septimal law that Mesopotamian star-gazers framed, and local warlords imposed, more than 40 centuries ago. ... [W]hy should the Sumerian system have not merely endured but become an almost universal conqueror? ... The year, the day and (not quite so obviously) the month are natural divisions of time. The week is an oddity. ... The Sumerians ... worshipped seven gods whom they could see in the sky. Reverently, they named the days of their week for these seven heavenly bodies ... For the Sumerians themselves, seven was a very special number. They conceived of a seven-branched Tree of Life, and of seven heavens ... In spite of all that, Ur's seventh day was not holy. On the contrary, it represented danger and darkness. It was risky to do anything at such a time. So it became a day of rest. Ever since the time when Abraham trekked westward from Ur, Mesopotamian influences had helped to form Hebrew traditions. The Jews got the story of the Flood from Sumeria. They got the seven-day-week idea early enough to use it in the account of the Creation given in Genesis. But there may have been some garbling in the transmission. The Sumerians would not have depicted the Creator as just sitting back, satisfied, on the seventh day; to them, he would seem to have stopped work, wisely, because anything attempted on that day must end in tears. The week reached India from Mesopotamia more than 2,000 years ago, in time to get into some of the Hindu scriptures. ... They never accepted a Sabbath ... Elsewhere, new names have been showered on the old gods and their planets. Yet, to an astonishing extent, they have retained their identities—and kept their places in the order of the days of the week. ... The French Revolution brought in a ten-day “week” whose days were, literally, numbered (the experiment lasted, officially, for 12 years, but never really took). As soon as the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917 they tried, but failed, to imitate the French revolutionaries ... Later, for 11 years starting in 1929, Stalin imposed first five-day and then six-day weeks. The elimination of Sunday, with its strong religious associations, was one purpose of his experiments. They all failed, abjectly. ... Seven is a thoroughly awkward number. It gives us a year of 52 weeks (another awkward number), plus the annoying extra one or two days which force us to keep buying new calendars. The seven-day system's ability to challenge and, in time, overlay all others has always rested on its religious inspiration, not on its practical value.

Response: The article is biased against the belief that Scripture is the word of God. Starting from that premise, all that the article states must be considered suspect. Specific mistakes in that article that need to be corrected include:

- Abraham and the Jews did not copy the Sumerians. The Sumerians had the account of the institution of the week (now recorded in Genesis) from before the Flood. It was probably delivered to them by Shem.
- It is an unsupportable assumption that the first eleven chapters of Genesis were composed after the time of the Sumerians. It is always in vogue to accept other historical documents and dismiss the Bible. The text of Genesis 10.1-32 does not support the view that the Genesis account was written at a late period (e.g., after the Sumerians). To the contrary, the internal evidence supports an ancient date for its composition. For example: Babylonia is referred to as the land of Cush (later Ethiopia was given this name); Sidon is mentioned but not Tyre (founded around 13th century BC); Sodom and Gomorrah were still existing (destroyed in 21st century BC); the Hebrew line is discontinued with Peleg, before Eber/Abraham were known to be important; importance is given to the Joktanites who were meaningless to Jews. And the Jebusites are mentioned without reference to Jerusalem. This evidence indicates that the account predates the foundation of Israel.
- The Sumerians did not have *seven* planets in their cosmology. They claimed that our system includes the Sun and eleven planets (counting the moon) and believed that there was a twelfth member of the

⁶¹ “Chronicles of chronology: The power of seven,” *Economist*, Dec 20th, 2001.

solar system—the home planet of the Nephilim. It is more likely that the seven-day week existed in ancient Sumer and they named the days after their astrological gods, rather than creating a week around the objects in the sky.

The article mentions that all cultures (ancient and modern) have accepted the seven-day week. It notes that attempts (e.g., ancient China, French Revolution, Russian communists) to overrule the seven-day week have failed. This points to the fact that in the week we encounter a phenomenon that is not the result of observing the sky, but rather given through revelation. The anomaly of a seven-day week, which does not fit any natural cycle (year, month, day), clearly points to God’s creation ordinance. All attempts to explain why the week has seven days, without accepting God’s word will fail. All men know that the seven-day week is from God. They may not observe the Sabbath, but they are faced each Sunday with the start of a new week that declares both God’s creation and his day of rest.

141. The Anti-Sabbatarian Deception

We previously determined that the Sabbath is an ongoing obligation in the post-resurrection era and that all mankind (not just Christians) are still obligated to keep the Sabbath—which, since Christ’s resurrection, is to be observed on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day (we will consider the move of the day as a separate topic). That the Bible teaches that there is a requirement for Lord’s Day Sabbath observance has been the long-standing understanding in the NT Church, and there are strong arguments to support this view. Despite this, there have been many attempts to disparage this Sabbatarian position.

Earlier, we noted that this study on Biblical ethics was undertaken partially to address some problems identified in Wayne Grudem’s book, *Christian Ethics*. One of the most egregious positions that he defends is the dismissal of the fourth commandment. For example, he states that “the Sabbath commandment is not morally binding on people today” (p. 346). He argues (incorrectly and unpersuasively) in chapter 13 that since the Mosaic covenant has been terminated, the fourth commandment is no longer binding (p. 352), claims (mistakenly) that the commandment is not reaffirmed in the NT (p. 347) and dismisses the command from the Ten Commandments—there are now only nine commandments in his thinking. He also misinterprets Paul’s statements about the Sabbath and appeals to John Calvin’s *Institutes* (pp. 348-349), taking Calvin’s comments selectively and out of context, to defend his view. Yet, he attempts to explain how we can gain wisdom from the fourth commandment, for example saying that it is wise for men to rest even though it is not a moral requirement (p. 354). He tries to determine what day of the week Christians should assemble for worship, which could be on any day of the week in his thinking (p. 352). He also states that governments should not enact Sunday Closing laws (pp. 357-358) and he argues pragmatically that some people (including himself and his wife occasionally) find it convenient to shop on Sundays (p. 358).

Similar views, like Grudem’s, about Sabbath observance have been stated by other prominent Evangelicals. For example, Justin Taylor, an EVP at the book publisher, Crossway, argued in a posting on The Gospel Coalition website that Sabbath keeping no longer applies to believers under the new covenant. James Borland, a professor of Biblical studies and theology at Liberty University and former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, promulgated a similar view, as did Matt Slick, President and Founder of the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, and Mike Oppenheimer, the founder of Let Us Reason Ministries. Others could be added to this list.

When prominent professors, preachers, evangelists, and authors claim that mankind is no longer obligated to keep the fourth commandment, they:

- *Ignore the plain reading of the text.* All of their complicated twisting of the word of God cannot obviate its clear statement, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex 20.8).
- *Cast doubt on God’s word.* If one of the Ten Commandments no longer applies, then people can think

that other commandments or other portions of the Bible (e.g., Genesis 1-11 or 1 Cor 14.34-35; 1 Tim 2.11-14) can also be reinterpreted to their convenience. It is a false counter argument to claim that the other commandments are repeated in the NT but the fourth is not. In fact, the observance of the Sabbath is reinforced in the NT (Lk 23.56).

- *Profane God.* God spoke through Ezekiel (Ezk 22.26) and condemned the priests who disregarded his Sabbaths. By doing this, they no longer made a distinction between the holy and common and caused God to be profaned. When God instituted the Sabbath, he declared it to be holy (Gen 2.1-2). Teachers who proclaim the Lord's Day Sabbath to be no different from any other day, pollute what God has declared to be holy and dishonour God.
- *Encourage people to sin.* Teachers who claim that mankind is no longer obligated to keep the Sabbath, encourage their followers to sin, as they engage in commercial activities (e.g., shopping or going for lunch after the morning service) or have their children participate in sports activities on the Lord's Day Sabbath; and as they use the Lord's Day Sabbath to advance their covetous practices of material consumption. Most people do not like Sabbath restrictions because they want to do their own thing and look for the day to end quickly (Amos 8.5-6). So, they are happy when religious teachers give them an 'out' from having to obey the command. In contrast, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14.15). He also says that it would be better for false teachers to fasten a great millstone around their necks and drown themselves in the sea than to cause the 'little ones' who are under their care and tutelage to sin (Mt 18.6).
- *Undermine worship in the public assemblies of the Church.* When any day will do as a day for public worship, then no day will work. People absent themselves from the stated assemblies with one excuse or another. Soon, evening worship services are eliminated, and it is not long before churches shut their doors. To follow the command not to neglect meeting together (Heb 10.25), there must be standard meeting times, and a conscious commitment to meet together.
- *Undermine respect and delight for the Sabbath.* The Sabbath was made for man (Mk 2.27)—i.e., for his benefit in rest, restoration, reflection, and reverence. We are to call it a delight and honourable and not do as we please on God's holy day (Is 58.13-14). God will hold these false teachers accountable and spit them out because of the irreverence they direct toward his holy day (Rev 3.15).

142. Sabbath Observance on the First Day of the Week

It is claimed by many in the Church that worship and holy resting on Sunday (the first day of the week) is not a continuation of the OT Sabbath-keeping principle. Their argument goes something like this: "The Sabbath was a Jewish ordinance that was abolished along with all its obligations. Sunday was chosen by the early church, or dictated by a Roman emperor, as just a convenient day to hold worship services." For example, the *Augsburg Confession* (1530), Article 28, endorsed by Lutherans, says:

For those who judge that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord's Day instead of the Sabbath-day was ordained as a thing necessary, do greatly err. *Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day*; for it teaches that, since the Gospel has been revealed, *all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted*. And yet, *because it was necessary to appoint a certain day, that the people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church designated the Lord's Day for this purpose*; and this day seems to have been chosen all the more for this additional reason, that men might have an example of Christian liberty, and might know that the keeping neither of the Sabbath nor of any other day is necessary. [Emphasis added.]

The *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), Article 24, written by Henry Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, presents a similar idea:

THE TIME NECESSARY FOR WORSHIP. Although religion is not bound to time, yet it cannot be cultivated and exercised without a proper distribution and arrangement of time. Every *Church, therefore, chooses for itself a certain time for public prayers, and for the preaching of the Gospel, and for the*

celebration of the sacraments; and no one is permitted to overthrow this appointment of the Church at his own pleasure. For unless some due time and leisure is given for the outward exercise of religion, without doubt men would be drawn away from it by their own affairs. THE LORD'S DAY. Hence we see that in the ancient churches there were not only certain set hours in the week appointed for meetings, but that also *the Lord's Day itself, ever since the apostles' time, was set aside for them and for a holy rest, a practice now rightly preserved by our Churches for the sake of worship and love.* [Emphasis added.]

According to these confessions, Sunday observance appears to be understood to be a mere human convention for ordering public worship, not as a divine moral commandment, even though it was instituted during the time of the Apostles and therefore has apostolic authority.

Calvin's position differs from the *Second Helvetic Confession* that was prepared a few years after his death. In his *Institutes* (para. 2.8.33) he says:

I am compelled to dwell longer on this because at present some restless spirits are *stirring up tumult over the Lord's Day. They complain that the Christian people are nourished in Judaism because they keep some observance of days.* But I reply that we transcend Judaism in observing these days because we are far different from the Jews in this respect. For we are not celebrating it as a ceremony with the most rigid scrupulousness, supposing a spiritual mystery to be figured thereby. *Rather, we are using it as a remedy needed to keep order in the church.* [Emphasis added.]

He goes on to argue that the Mosaic ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath are no longer to be observed, but that the Sabbath principle is retained. While he has a similar view as the *Augsburg Confession* and *Second Helvetic Confession*, that keeping the Lord's Day is for maintaining order in the Church, he also argues that the observance of the Sabbath was moved from the seventh day of the week to the first day by apostolic appointment. He therefore views Sunday worship and holy resting as a continuation of the Sabbath-keeping principle.

As we noted earlier, in his *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (preached in June of 1555) Calvin shows that he clearly understood that the fourth commandment places an obligation on Christians to keep the *Sabbath* holy. He indicates that as a ceremonial observance it has been discontinued ("it is past"), but the principle has not:

From this we observe how the ceremony itself applies to us today – it is past. Therefore we must come to the important point of this which is that to serve God properly we must learn to give up our own wills, thoughts, and desires. ... Thus, the first way to keep the Sabbath as we should is to give up the things that seem good to ourselves. ... In fact, what was commanded about the day of rest must also apply to us as well as to them. For we must take God's law as it is and thus have an everlasting rule of righteousness. For it is certain that in the Ten Commandments God intended to give a rule that should endure forever. Therefore, let us not think that the things which Moses says about the Sabbath day are unnecessary for us ...

Although some of the early 16th century continental Reformers may have been (or appear to have been) anti-Sabbatarian—that is they argued that the Sabbath had been annulled—they still generally held to the view that Sunday (the Lord's Day) was to be set apart from other days of the week as a day for worship and discontinuance of commercial activities. However, by the mid-17th century a consideration of the Biblical and historical evidence resulted in the delivery of an unequivocal statement, in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, that "the Lord's Day ... is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian *Sabbath*" (chapter 21.7) [Emphasis added.]

143. The Lord's Day

The term 'the Lord's day' occurs in the Bible only in Revelation 1.10. There has always been speculation about what it means. For example, some people have claimed that John is speaking of a 'day of the LORD' prophesied in the OT (e.g., Is 13.6; Zeph 1.7). Others claim that it is a reference to the day of judgement at the end of time, and that John was transported in the spirit to that day. It has also been suggested that John was speaking of the annual festival that is called 'Easter Sunday'. However, it is most likely that John is referring to the day that people, in nations with a vestige of Greco-Roman culture, call 'Sunday'—the first day of the week.

Elsewhere in the NT, there are references to Christians assembling on the first day of the week (Jn 20.19; Acts 20.7; 1 Cor 16:2). It has been widely believed by most Church historians that, by the time John wrote this letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor, Christians had begun to refer to the first day of the week as 'the Lord's Day' in commemoration of Jesus' resurrection (Mt 28.1; Mk 16.2, 9; Lk 24.1; Jn 20.1).

Early Christian writers use the same term, 'Lord's Day', to speak of the first day of the week. For example, Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35 - c. 108 AD), in his letter to the Magnesians, refers to the day commemorating the resurrection as the Lord's Day: "those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death." Likewise, to the Trallians, he writes, "At the dawning of the Lord's day He arose from the dead, according to what was spoken by Himself." Other early Christian writers (Melito of Sardis, Dionysius of Corinth, Clement of Alexandria, etc.), following Ignatius, referred to the first day of the week as 'the Lord's Day'.

By calling the first day of the week 'the Lord's Day', Christians declared their independence from paganism. In ancient Greece and Rome, the days of the week were named after gods in the mythological pantheon, and the planets that represented them. The first day of the week was called *dies Sōlis*, in the Latin of Rome, that is, 'day of the Sun'. Likewise, the second day was named for the moon goddess (*dies Lūnae*), the third for Mars (*dies Martis*). Some of the names we use in the English-speaking world for the days of the week have been changed to represent Anglo-Saxon pagan gods (e.g., the fourth day is named after Woden, the fifth after Thor, and the sixth, after Frige), however the seventh day is still named after the Roman god, and associated planet, Saturn.

By calling the first day of the week, 'the Lord's Day', Christians in the Roman Empire also declared their allegiance to Christ and defied the imperial cult, which venerated the emperor as a god.

The names of the week used in English have no significance for modern unbelievers. They generally have no idea what the original meanings were behind the names of the days of the week or of months—e.g., January is named after Janus, the god of the doorway. Nevertheless, Christians can make a similar declaration for Christ as Lord, by referring to the first day of the week as the Lord's Day, rather than using the common term 'Sunday'.

From the earliest days of the NT Church, Christians assembled for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20.7; 1 Cor 16:2), and to remember the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Some early Christians, particularly those who were converted out of Judaism, also observed the seventh day of the week as a day for assembly and worship. Over time, Christians discontinued the observance of the Jewish Sabbath and assembled for worship on the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath.

John tells us that he was "in the Spirit" on the Lord's Day when he received the visions that he records. Most commentators assume that what John means by 'in the Spirit' is that he was in an ecstatic state, or

that he fell into a trance—as Paul did when he was praying (Acts 22.17), and Peter did when he was praying on a rooftop in Joppa (Acts 10.10). While it is possible that John received his visions while he was in a trance, we cannot conclude this from the statement that he “was in the Spirit”. Our English translations assume that John is speaking of being in the Holy Spirit and capitalize the word ‘spirit’. However, if John were saying that he was in a trance, then it would be inappropriate to capitalize the word as it would apply to his personal state—that is, in *my* spirit (the Greek has only ‘in spirit’, not ‘in *the* spirit’). In Acts 19.21 Paul says that he “resolved in the Spirit” to go in a particular direction, and in Ephesians (Eph 6.18) he says that we should pray at all times “in the Spirit”. He also says that believers are “in the Spirit” when the Spirit dwells in them (Rom 8.9). Thus, John is not telling us that he was in an ecstatic trance (although he may have been). Rather, he is informing us that he was in an attitude and place of worship—his mind and will were attuned to the working and influences of the Holy Spirit. Every believer who comes before God with true worship can likewise be ‘in the Spirit’ and receive spiritual blessings as he hears the voice of God speaking to him through the read and preached word in the assembly of believers worshipping together on the Lord’s Day, the Christian Sabbath. Thus, Jesus says (as reported by John) that those who worship correctly “must worship in spirit [which, to be consistent, should probably be ‘Spirit’] and truth” (Jn 4.24).

144. The Sabbath – Moved to the First Day (part 1 of 3)

Some doctrines (such as, infant baptism) are based on an amalgam of theological, analogical, and historical (i.e., the practice of the Apostles and apostolic Church) arguments. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 1.6) refers to this approach for establishing belief and practice as what “by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.” It is important that we lay this foundation, because the arguments for observing Sunday (the first day of the week) as the NT Sabbath are drawn from inferences and are not obtained from direct prescription. We will now consider the reasons the Sabbath was moved:

- *The day of the resurrection.* Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Lk 24.1-12; Jn 20.1-9). On that day Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (Rom 1.4; Acts 13.33). Through his resurrection on the first day of the week, Jesus blessed that day and made it holy. The first covenant administration began on an established holy day (the seventh day of the week). The final covenant administration, in Christ, also began on a holy day (the first day of the week).
- *Commemorating creation and recreation.* The change of day is founded on the relationship between God’s creative work in nature and Christ’s recreative work in redemption. The OT work of creation was followed by a holy day. The NT work of redemption was followed by a holy day. In the first creation God was victorious over natural darkness and chaos. In the new creation he is victorious over spiritual darkness and chaos. On the first Sabbath he rested from his work of creation, on the new Sabbath he rested from his work of recreation. Robert Dabney observes:
 But when the ceremonial law was for a particular, temporary purpose added to the original, patriarchal dispensation, the seventh day became also for a time a Levitical holy day and a type. This temporary feature has of course passed away with the Jewish institutions. Upon the resurrection of Christ the original Sabbath obligation was by God fixed upon the first day of the week, because *this day completed a second work even more glorious and beneficent than the world's creation*, by the rising of Christ from the tomb. Hence, from that date to the end of the world the Lord's day is, by divine and apostolic authority, substantially what the Sabbath day was originally to God's people. It is literally the “Christian Sabbath,” and is to be observed with the same sanctity as it was by the patriarchs.⁶² [Emphasis added.]
- *Commemorating redemption.* Commemoration of creation was given as a reason for keeping the Sabbath when the fourth commandment was first delivered (Ex 20.11). Forty years later, as Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, the commandment was repeated (Dt 5.12-15). This time the reason given was as a commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt. The first reason was not abolished, but

⁶² R. L. Dabney, “The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design And Proper Observance,” *Discussions of Robert L. Dabney, Volume I*, pp. 498, 499.

the second was added. The deliverance from Egypt is referred to as a redemption (Ex 6.6; Ex 15.13; Dt 7.7-9; Dt 9.26; Dt 13.5; Dt 15.15; Dt 24.18; 2 Sam 7.23; Ps 78.42; Ps 111.9; Mic 6.4). Thus, it is analogical or typical of the spiritual redemption that would be procured by Christ. The observance of the Sabbath on the first day of the week does not abolish the original reason it was given: to commemorate the work of creation—it expands it. Just as a second reason was added to commemorate redemption in the OT economy, so in the NT economy a more glorious reason is added—the commemoration of the greater work of spiritual redemption from sin accomplished by Christ through his death and resurrection. In this respect John Murray says:

The Sabbath commandment derives its sanction not only from God's rest in creation but also from redemption out of Egypt's bondage. This fact, that the Sabbath in Israel had a redemptive reference and sanction, bears directly upon the question of its relevance in the New Testament. The redemption from Egypt cannot be properly viewed except as the anticipation of the greater redemption wrought in the fullness of the time. Hence, if redemption from Egypt accorded sanction to the Sabbath institution and provided reason for its observance, the same must apply to the greater redemption and apply in a way commensurate with the greater fulness and dimensions of the redemption secured by the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, it is the fulness and richness of the new covenant that accord to the Sabbath ordinance increased relevance, sanction, and blessing.⁶³

We now commemorate, through the Christian Sabbath, the deliverance from Satan by Christ rather than the deliverance from Pharaoh by Moses.

- *A day blessed by the Holy Spirit.* On the first day of the week Jesus was raised as the first fruits (Lev 23.11; 1 Cor 15.20) of the resurrection and of the Gospel age. Then, the Day of Pentecost fell on the first day of the week 50 days after a seventh-day Sabbath (Lev 23.15-16), closing the feast of Unleavened Bread. Therefore, the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-41) was the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks—a type for the work of Jesus. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered the Church for its mission (Acts 2:1-4) and blessed the first day of the week by adding thousands to the Church. When we assemble on the first-day Sabbath, we commemorate the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church.

145. The Sabbath – Moved to the First Day (part 2 of 3)

Previously, we considered reasons for the move of the Sabbath day from the seventh day to the first day of the week in the NT era: the day of resurrection, commemorating creation and recreation, commemorating redemption, and a day blessed by the Holy Spirit. We now consider additional reasons:

- *Endorsed by Jesus' post-resurrection appearances.* The appearances of Jesus to his disciples or the women, after his resurrection and before his ascension, occurred on the first day of the week. Jesus appeared to his disciples or to the women multiple times. Of these appearances, at least two explicitly mention the first day of the week (Mt 28.1; Mk 16.9; Jn 20.19), and it appears that all of them occurred on the first day of the week:
 - Matthew 28.1-9; Mark 16.9; John 20.10-18 – to Mary Magdalene.
 - Mark 16.12; Luke 24.13-35 – to two on the road to Emmaus.
 - Mark 16.14; Luke 24.36-49 – to the eleven.
 - John 20.19-23 – to the disciples [this could be the same as one of the appearances noted above].
 - John 20.26-29 – a week later to the disciples.
 - John 21.1-23 – Jesus' meeting with the disciples, feeding them, and reinstating Peter. [This could not have been on the seventh day, or the disciples would not have gone fishing on the Jewish Sabbath.]

By implication, Jesus no longer paid any attention to the seventh-day Sabbath after his resurrection.

⁶³ John Murray, *The Pattern of the Lord's Day*.

- *Endorsed by Jesus' post-resurrection actions.* The actions of Jesus that occurred during his appearances on first day of the week invest the day with special significance:
 - He revealed himself to the disciples in the upper room and turned their fear into peace (Lk 24.40; Jn 20.19-23).
 - He symbolized the new resurrection fellowship by eating with his disciples and offering forgiveness (Jn 21.12).
 - He commissioned his disciples (John 20.21).
 - He blessed the disciples with the presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20.22).
 - He accepted worship from Thomas (Jn 20.26, 28).

There is no reference to Jesus meeting with the disciples on any other day of the week after his resurrection. This silence endows the first day of the week with significance.
- *The ascension.* The ascension of the Son into the glorious presence of the Father (Lk 24.50-51; Acts 1.2-11) may have occurred (and probably did occur) on the first day of the week. We are not told this explicitly, but it can be inferred from the fact that some parts of the Church from the earliest days dated (and commemorated) the ascension as the seventh Sunday of Easter (where Easter is the first and Ascension Sunday is the seventh). It should be noted that others determine that the ascension occurred on a Thursday, 40 days after Easter. This is because Luke tells us that Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days (Acts 1.3). However, the exact number of days between Easter and Ascension Sunday is 42. Therefore, it is possible that Luke is giving the days as a rounded total, and he chose to use the number 40 as a symbolic approximation to coincide with other Biblical forty-day periods:
 - Flood (Gen 7.4, 12, 17).
 - Moses on Sinai (Ex 24.17).
 - Days of exploration (Num 13.25).
 - Elijah's journey (1 Ki 19.7).
 - Jesus' temptation and preparation (Lk 4.1-2).
- *The NT day of assembly.* The assembly of NT believers after the resurrection never occurs (at least no record is given) on the seventh day, but it does occur on the first day of the week.
 - *Pre-ascension* (Jn 20.19; Jn 20.26; Acts 2.1): It is not claimed that these were post-resurrection worship services, similar to how we know them. The NT Church was just being formed by post-resurrection believers. However, their assembly on the first day of the week indicates that they understood the day to have special significance, if at this point to do nothing other than to remember the resurrection.
 - *Post-ascension* (Acts 20.7): The believers assembled to remember the resurrection in "breaking bread" and to hear a sermon. We see in this the first explicit instance of a NT worship assembly—and it is held on the first day of the week. Paul was in the city for seven days (Acts 20.6). This means that he was there on a seventh and a first day. There was an opportunity to choose between the two days, and he chose the first day of the week. Also, he didn't travel or depart on that day. Paul's actions give apostolic endorsement to the first day of the week as the day of assembly for NT believers.
- *The day for tithes and offerings.* Christians are also commanded to bring to the treasury of the Church their tithes and offerings on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16.1-2). Paul, in this instance, is speaking to the Corinthian congregation (as he also told the Galatian congregations) and telling them that each person is to bring his tithes into God's storehouse (Mal 3.8-10), "each of you by himself let him put, storing what ever he is prospered". Seventh Day Adventists argue that this passage speaks of a person setting aside his offering at home and has nothing to do with the corporate assembly on the first day of the week. This view is purely an attempt to avoid the truth and is contrary to the interpretation of the passage by the NT Church from its earliest days.

146. The Sabbath – Moved to the First Day (part 3 of 3)

We conclude our three-part consideration of why the Sabbath was moved from the seventh day to the first day of the week by considering the practice and teachings of the early Church:

- *Ignatius of Antioch*, who knew a number of the Apostles personally, said: “If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day ... let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, “To the end, for the eighth day,” on which our life both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ ...”⁶⁴
- *The Didache*, about 90-110 AD: “But on the Lord's day, after that ye have assembled together, break bread and give thanks, having in addition confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let not anyone who hath a quarrel with his companion join with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be polluted.”⁶⁵
- *The Epistle of St Barnabas*, around the end of the first century: “Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”⁶⁶
- *Justin Martyr*, writing about 145 AD: “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His Apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.”⁶⁷
- *Clement of Alexander*, writing about 194 AD: “He [a true Christian], in fulfilment of the precept, according to the Gospel, keeps the Lord's day, when he abandons an evil disposition, and assumes that of the Gnostic, glorifying the Lord's resurrection in himself.”⁶⁸
- *Tertullian*, writing at the close of the second century: “In the matter of kneeling also prayer is subject to diversity of observance, through the act of some few who abstain from kneeling on the Sabbath; and since this dissension is particularly on its trial before the churches, the Lord will give His grace that the dissentients may either yield, or else indulge their opinion without offence to others. We, however (just as we have received), only on the day of the Lord's Resurrection ought to guard not only against kneeling, but every posture and office of solicitude; deferring even our businesses lest we give any

⁶⁴ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, about 110-116 AD, chapter. 9

⁶⁵ *The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, Translated by Charles H. Hoole, sections 14.1 and 14.2, dated around 100 AD www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/St.Pachomius/Liturgical/didache.html

⁶⁶ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, “The Epistle of Barnabas,” Chapter 15, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

⁶⁷ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, “Justin Martyr: *First Apology*, Chapter 67,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research, Inc.) 1997.

⁶⁸ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, “Clement of Alexandria: *Elucidations*, Chapter XII.—The True Gnostic is Beneficent, Continent, and Despises Worldly Things.” *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

place to the devil.”⁶⁹

- *Anatolius of Alexandria*, writing around 270 AD: “Following their example up to the present time all the bishops of Asia—as themselves also receiving the rule from an unimpeachable authority ... John, who leant on the Lord’s breast, and drank in instructions spiritual without doubt—were in the way of celebrating the Paschal feast ... every year ... not acquiescing, so far as regards this matter, with the authority of some, namely, the successors of Peter and Paul, who have taught all the churches in which they sowed the spiritual seeds of the Gospel, that the solemn festival of the resurrection of the Lord can be celebrated only on the Lord’s day.”⁷⁰

From the earliest days of the NT Church, the Christian Sabbath was observed on the Lord’s Day, which is the first day of the week.

147. Responding to Seventh-Day Arguments (part 1 of 3)

As we have seen thus far, the Sabbath is a universal and enduring ordinance of God; therefore, it applies to all people through all time. The day of its observance, however, has been changed to the first day of the week under the authority of Jesus Christ and the apostolic Church. It is clear that this view is not understood or accepted throughout the Church today. Even among those who claim to be Reformed. For example, Roger Fellows states:

We are often told that the Sabbath is ‘God’s abiding, unchanging moral law.’ My response to that is to ask, “Who really believes that?” The Mosaic command, as we saw, was to keep the seventh day holy. Who does that apart from Seventh Day Adventists and a few others? ... Whatever people say, those who believe the Sabbath applies to Christians, change it from the form in which it was given, so how can it be abiding and unchanging?⁷¹

His statement that changing the *form* of the observance of the Sabbath shows that it is not abiding and unchanging is spurious. He does not understand that the principles of the OT law and worship system and of the NT law and worship system are the same. The *forms* have changed, but not the principles.

God’s law is an eternal and universal moral standard, reflecting his character and defining his righteousness. It applies to all mankind, at all times (e.g., Rom 2.15; Rom 8.4; 1 Cor 7.19; 1 Tim 1.8-11; 1 Jn 3.4). It is against this standard that men will be judged on the last day. Time or geography do not alter his standard. The Law, as a specific portion of God’s word, continues to be valid in the NT era and retains its validity in its entirety (Mt 5.18) and in its parts (Mt 5.18-19). There is no part of God’s law about which we can say “This is abolished or cancelled.” Jesus says specifically that he did not come to *abolish* the “Law” (Mt 5.17). There is no room in Jesus’ statement for the idea that the OT is obsolete, has no application to us, or that we do not have to obey its commands. We are not to be NT Christians; we are to be Biblical (‘whole-Bible’) Christians.

However, the fulfillment of the Law by Christ does have the effect of altering the specific *way* we are to keep many of the laws. And in other cases, the specific observance of some of the laws has been set aside, or the *form* has been changed, because the righteousness they require is now experienced in a different manner. For example, God places before us the eternal requirement to worship him as he prescribes but has changed the specific forms at various times. Abraham offered sacrifices and was given a new covenantal sign of circumcision. The sacrificial system under Moses became more elaborate with the introduction of many elements pointing to Christ. At the time of David, God added new elements such as instrumental

⁶⁹ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, “Tertullian: *Prayer*, Chapter XXIII,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

⁷⁰ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, “Anatolius of Alexandria: *The Paschal Canon*, Chapter X,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

⁷¹ Roger Fellows, *The Law and The Christian*, community.logos.com/forums/t/180139.aspx.

music. With the destruction of the temple, the form of worship was simplified; the types were replaced by spiritual equivalents.

The OT forms for observing the redemptive types in God's Law—the sacrificial system (e.g., Heb 7.11; Heb 9.9, 10; Heb 13.15), the festivals (e.g., Acts 20.7; Col 2.16-17), and the OT signs of the covenant (e.g., Acts 2.38; Gal 5.11)—are not required today because of God's completed revelation in Christ. The types have been replaced by NT counterparts by which Christians fulfill the requirements of the ceremonial laws. Also, specific laws of holiness and separation (e.g., food laws; clothing, seed and animal mixtures; intermarriage with non-Jews; levirate marriage; cities of refuge; Nazarite vows; etc.) are not to be observed today (e.g., Mk 7.19; Acts 10.9-16) as they were by the Jews. These were physical symbols of principles that are to be manifested in the spiritual life of believers (e.g., Mt 16.11, 12; 2 Cor 6.14-18).

The Sabbath principle remains in the NT economy, even though the form (e.g., the day of the week) of its observation has been changed because we have a fullness in Christ. We now keep the Sabbath not only as a memorial of creation (Ex 20.11), but as a commemoration of the recreation in Christ that was accomplished at his resurrection on the first day of the week; not as a commemoration of the escape from Egypt (Dt 5.15), but as commemoration of our escape from sin (Heb 4.6-11).

Other objections to the proposition that the first day of the week is to be the Christian Sabbath come primarily from the Seventh Day Adventists. Most of their arguments are included in the work of Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Seventh Day Adventist. He was the first non-Catholic to graduate from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He graduated *summa cum laude* and was awarded a gold medal by Pope Paul VI. He wrote a book entitled *From Sabbath to Sunday* that was published with the *imprimatur* of the university's press in Rome. This book was highly acclaimed within the Roman Catholic Church because, as Professor V. Monachino, S. J., says in the preface: "We gladly mention the thesis that Bacchiocchi defends regarding the birthplace of Sunday worship: for him this arose most probably not in the primitive Church of Jerusalem ... but rather in the Church of Rome."⁷² His thesis is that it was the early Roman Church that changed the day. This is a claim agreeable to the Roman Catholic Church and the contention of the Seventh Day Adventists.

We will address the Seventh Day Adventists' arguments against the move of the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first day, in the next two meditations.

148. Responding to Seventh-Day Arguments (part 2 of 3)

One of the claims of Seventh Day Adventists is that the early Church, after the time of the Apostles and after the destruction of Jerusalem, changed the day the Sabbath was observed. Thus, they claim that the day for Christian worship was not changed to the first day of the week by Christ, the Apostles, or the early church in Jerusalem. It is claimed further that Sunday observance arose as late as the time of Emperor Hadrian (117-135 AD), when Roman persecution of the Jews forced the Christians to adopt a different day of worship to distinguish themselves from the Jews.

We quoted earlier from writers (e.g., Ignatius, *The Didache*, and *The Epistle to Barnabas*), whose lives overlapped the lives of the Apostles, or who lived in the next generation, who show that the Lord's Day was observed by Christians as the Christian Sabbath before the time of Hadrian. However, it is probably the case that some converted Jews continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. But the historical evidence seems to indicate that the Jewish-Christians also kept the first-day Sabbath—thus Paul says that no one is to pass judgement on a person over the question of a Sabbath (Col 2.16). If this is the case, then

⁷² Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977).

by the time of Hadrian they weren't making a switch but were discontinuing a Jewish observance.

In 1873 Philotheos Bryennios, then headmaster of the higher Greek school at Constantinople, discovered a collection of manuscripts in the library of a monastery in Constantinople. This collection is bound in one volume, is transcribed by one hand, and bears the Greek date of 6564 = 1056 AD. There has been much debate about the authenticity of the documents; and when they were originally written, and by whom. However, the scholarly opinion is that the earliest portion of the documents has similarities to the writings of Ignatius and date from at least as early as the first half of the second century, and probably no later than 120 AD. Here is a portion of what is stated in the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*:

[B]ut assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house: in the morning saying the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but *principally on the Sabbath-day. And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's day*, [Emphasis added] meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning the resurrection, on which we pray thrice standing in memory of Him who arose in three days, in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the Gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food?⁷³

From this quotation, it can be observed that early Jewish Christians probably continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath along with the first-day Lord's Day Sabbath. However, more emphasis is placed on worship on the Lord's Day (Sunday), since the observance of the Lord's Day, the celebration of the resurrection, has extended worship that corresponds to what we observe. It should also be noted that if this document dates from 120 AD, as scholars conclude, the Lord's Day was being observed before the time of Emperor Hadrian.

Another claim made by Seventh Day Adventists is that the Church of Rome chose Sunday as the Christian day of worship because the day of the sun, honoured by the pagan sun cult, was already prominent. By adopting Sunday as the day of worship they could more easily Christianize the pagan symbols of the cult to represent Christ. They claim that worship on Sunday is Satan's attempt to counterfeit God's work and a mark of false religion and a human ordinance.

Adopting a practice of paganism in the second century would have been contrary to the position held by the early post-apostolic Church. Writings, such as those from Justin Martyr (c. 100-165), speak explicitly against adopting the superstitious and idolatrous practices of the pagans. Christians were still being persecuted for not accepting pagan practices in the second century. Therefore, it is highly improbable that they would have adopted the Sun Cult practice when they were willing to give their lives to resist other pagan practices. It is also beyond credulity that in the second century, if Rome introduced a pagan day of worship, the other leading churches (Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, etc.) would have gone along without a complaint.

In an attempt to substantiate this argument a parallel is made to the observation of Christmas on December 25th. It is claimed that worship on Sunday was derived from the Sun Cult and promoted by the Church of Rome. However, this supposed parallel fails to have merit because Christmas was introduced into the Church after the time of Constantine (after 325 AD) when the Church was becoming 'comfortable' as a State-endorsed religion and had begun to permit pagan influences to creep in.

⁷³ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," Book 2, sec. 7, para. 59, "Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume VII, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

149. Responding to Seventh-Day Arguments (part 3 of 3)

Another claim of Seventh Day Adventists is that the Bishop of Rome (not yet identified as the Pope) was the prime mover behind the recognition of Sunday as the Christian day of worship. The successful substitution of Sunday for the seventh day in the second century was due to the primacy of Rome. Roman Catholic scholars appreciate this argument because it seems to support their view that the Church of Rome had early supremacy over the other churches.

However, the Church of Rome did not have that kind authority over the widely dispersed congregations throughout the Roman Empire. Even at the end of the second century, bishop Victor of Rome could not influence other churches with respect to calculating the date for the observance of Easter. Also, there is no evidence to support the claim that Sunday worship was introduced and promulgated by the second century church in Rome, and not by Jesus and the Apostles in the first century.

It is also claimed by Seventh Day Adventists that Revelation 1.10 speaks of the seventh day (compare Is 58.13 and Mt 12.8), not the first day of the week—the day of the resurrection. This is certainly not how Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who knew many of the Apostles personally, understood it. We have previously noted that he said:

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day ... let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, "To the end, for the eighth day," on which our life both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ ...⁷⁴

Finally, it is claimed that "[t]hose who argue for a Sabbath today say that the day is not important. All that matters is to observe one day in seven. But is that true? Could an Israelite change the day? We have in Numbers 15.32-36 the record of a man being stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath. If the day was not important, he could have said to Moses, 'You misunderstand me, I am not breaking the Sabbath, I will be keeping my Sabbath tomorrow.' Of course, that wouldn't be good enough. The day was specified and never changed."⁷⁵

There are many in the Church who don't believe that the Sabbath day is a perpetual obligation. They do, however, assemble for worship on Sundays and believe that after worship they can do as they please with the rest of the day (e.g., go shopping or to the neighbourhood restaurant buffet). They may argue that worship can be held on any day (e.g., Saturday evening), but they don't argue that the Sabbath can be moved on a whim, because they don't believe that Sabbath observance is still required in the NT economy. This is essentially the view espoused by Wayne Grudem (*Christian Ethics*; pp. 353-355). He says that taking a weekly day of rest is a wise practice, but not a commandment of God. He says that no particular day is required to be set aside for worship and rest. However, this view can only result in chaos in the church and society. Christians will be required by their employers to work on Sundays and Satan will ensure that they won't make it to worship services.

There are others (again, including the Seventh Day Adventists) who believe that the Sabbath should still be observed, but that the NT Church must continue to observe it on the seventh day. There is probably no one, today, who holds to the view that the Sabbath is a perpetual obligation and that it could be observed on any day of the week—i.e., the specific day that is to be set aside for worship and rest is not important. Rather, it is universally the case that those who don't hold to the Seventh Day Adventist's position and believe that there is a perpetual obligation to keep the Sabbath holy, believe that it *must* be observed on the Lord's

⁷⁴ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, about 110-116 AD, chapter. 9

⁷⁵ Roger Fellows, *The Law and The Christian*, community.logos.com/forums/t/180139.aspx.

Day—the first day of the week.

The specific day of the week on which the Sabbath is observed by Christians is not *unimportant*. Rather the specific day for worship and rest is very important. The day for observing the Sabbath in the NT era is the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection—the day that symbolizes the promise of the everlasting Sabbath which we will enjoy with God in the glory of heaven. Keeping that day holy is as (and even more) important for the Christian than was keeping the seventh day holy by a Jewish OT believer.

OT Jews did not have a right to change the day of the week on which the Sabbath was observed, because God had designated the seventh day (Gen 2.2-3) as the holy day on which the Sabbath rest was applied, and worship was offered up to God. Nor do modern Christians have the right to change the day of the week on which the Sabbath is observed. No mere human has the right to change the day. The only person who could change the day for celebrating and observing the Sabbath was Jesus. He changed it, as we have seen, through his actions such as his resurrection and through the post-resurrection meetings that he held with the disciples and by blessing the day with his resurrected presence and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

150. Commercial Activities Prohibited on the Sabbath

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem from a period of absence, he found people who claimed to be part of God's covenant community who were performing work on the Sabbath (Neh 13.15-16) that was prohibited by God (Ex 34.21; Jer 17.21). He also found that travelling merchants from the surrounding nations were breaking the Sabbath by selling their wares and being encouraged to do so by the shoppers from Jerusalem and its vicinity. This breach of the creation ordinance, the innate law placed within man's hearts, and the explicit provision of the written moral law, was visible to direct observation. Nehemiah did not have to set up an investigation to determine if men were breaking God's law. Their violation was open to the eyes of everyone, and it appeared to have spread widely throughout the community.

The specific activities that Nehemiah refers to as falling within the prohibitions of the Sabbath-keeping principle are wine manufacturing, transporting merchandise, and selling produce. All of these activities fall into the category of what today we would call commercial activity. This passage provides an application and example, in the OT Jewish societal context, of what both Jews and Gentiles were to cease doing in order to rest from work. Ceasing from commercial activities falls within the scope of the creation ordinance and the explicit provisions of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20.10). In the case of the creation ordinance, God rested from his creative work activities, so we also are to rest from our work activities. In our case, this includes all activities related to the primary provision of our material sustenance. In the fourth commandment, God requires man to conduct his work of labour related to his livelihood over a six-day period and to rest from that work on the Sabbath.

It is clear from Scripture that men and women are to cease their commercial activities on the Sabbath day. Of course, it is somewhat easier to state the overriding principle than it is to define precisely what falls within the scope of the prohibition on commercial activity on the Sabbath. It is quite easy for us to become pedantic about the application of the Sabbath principle and get lost in minutiae. For example, we could get bogged down when considering questions such as the following:

- What are legitimate (i.e., necessary) forms of work on the Sabbath? For example, should we wash the dishes on a Sunday or leave them until Monday?
- What are legitimate forms of rest from work? For example, are fishing from a cottage dock or walking in a park on a Sunday afternoon legitimate forms of rest?

It is easy for us to make the Sabbath rather than the Lord into our god. In some respects, this is what the

Jews at the time of Jesus had done. They made Sabbath-keeping more important than justice and mercy. However, it is clear from the account in Nehemiah, and from elsewhere in the Bible, that Sabbath-keeping is of paramount importance. We will look at how to apply the Sabbath principle in more detail as we continue this study in Biblical ethics; but before we look at the *how*, we need to understand the *why*.

Thus far, we have established that the Sabbath principle has continuing validity in the NT economy. Therefore, *assuming* that it does, and based on the example of Nehemiah, the classes of commercial activity undertaken in the 21st century that clearly fall within the prohibitions of the Sabbath principle (based on Neh 13.15-16) include:

- Manufacturing food products (wine) or, by extension, any kind of goods.
- Operating a supermarket or other kind of store to sell merchandise.
- Operating a restaurant.
- Operating commercial transportation for the purposes of moving goods to market (e.g., food or manufactured products).

By logical extension the other classes of commercial activity, in our day, that we can include under this prohibition, because they are associated with the commercial activities that are prohibited, are all forms of service work that are directly related to commercial and manufacturing activities (e.g., banking, financial services, and information technology services to support commercial and manufacturing activities).

Nehemiah prohibited not only those who were selling but also those who wanted to make purchases from undertaking commercial activities. Based on the example of Nehemiah's shutting down the markets, we are not to utilize the services of people who work in commercial or service activities on the Sabbath. That is, we are not to hire others to work on our behalf on the Sabbath so that we can avoid doing the work ourselves. This is consistent with the Sabbath command (Ex 20.8-11) that extends to servants, animals, and foreigners.

Nehemiah applied the fourth commandment by requiring the men of Tyre, as well as the Jews, to cease from their commercial activities. It wasn't right for the Jews to say: "We'll let the non-Jewish sellers work since they don't hold to God's laws." In the same way, it would be wrong for us to hire Muslims to work on Sunday because they don't observe the Christian Sabbath, so that we could reap the benefits of commercial activities performed on Sunday (e.g., operating a store). Nehemiah expected all people to stop work on the same day. As a further extension, we should not eat in a restaurant or go shopping on Sunday, because that would require other people to work on our behalf on that day. This prohibition applies, even if those who are working on Sunday do not believe that they are breaking the Sabbath.

151. Correct Administration of the Sabbath

In previous topics dealing with the fourth commandment, we have demonstrated that the observance of the Sabbath continues to be an obligation for mankind:

- The Sabbath was instituted at creation (Gen 2.2-3) and was an obligation for mankind before Moses was given the law on Mt. Sinai (Ex 16.22-30).
- The Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20.8-11), which are a summary of the moral demands that God places upon all mankind.
- Nehemiah's imposition of Sabbath-keeping within a territory of the Persian Empire, including on Gentiles from Tyre, (Neh 13.15-22), demonstrates that the command did not apply only to OT Jews.
- Isaiah indicates that foreigners who keep the Sabbath without profaning it will be acceptable to God (Is 56.1-8).
- Jesus indicates that the command was not abolished by the institution of the new covenant (Mt 5.17-18) and his teaching about the Sabbath and the example of how he kept it holy provide us with insight into how the Sabbath should be observed correctly today.

We have also considered the weakness of anti-Sabbath arguments—such as the false claim that the command is not repeated in the NT or that it was a command intended only for the Jews as part of their ceremonial system. We have also shown that there are a number of reasons why the day for observing the Sabbath was moved by Christ and his Apostles and by the Holy Spirit to the Lord’s Day—the first day of the week—and that the Seventh-Day arguments (mainly put forward by Seventh Day Adventists) are spurious. Finally, we have observed thus far, based on the example of Nehemiah, the explicit statement in the commandment (Ex 20.9-10), and from other places in Scripture, that undertaking commercial activities is prohibited on the Christian Sabbath.

Having laid this foundation, we are now able to determine how Christians are to keep the Sabbath holy and to observe the first-day Sabbath and what is the correct way to administer the Sabbath under the NT economy. To structure our consideration, we can use the guidance of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 21.8) and the *Larger Catechism* (Q117):

This Sabbath is to be kept holy unto the Lord when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

Q. How is the Sabbath or Lord’s day to be sanctified?

A. The Sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.

In these two statements, the components of keeping the Sabbath holy are identified. The activities that can and should be performed with respect to keeping the Sabbath holy can be categorized as follows:

- *Melioration* – Holy resting from the commercial work and recreation that is lawful on other days and doing what we can to contribute to a restorative rest for the body and mind. This includes avoiding activities that would cause others to work unnecessarily on the Sabbath on our behalf (Ex 20.9-10)—e.g., by not frequenting restaurants or purchasing goods at a store on Sundays or that will be delivered by Amazon on a Sunday.
- *Maintenance* – Performing works and duties of necessary maintenance such as preparing meals or shovelling snow off the sidewalks and feeding animals on Sundays or working as a police officer.
- *Mercy* – Performing loving works of care and healing, such as delivering meals to shut-ins or working as a paramedic, nurse, or doctor.
- *Meditation* – Performing and delighting in the exercises of public and private worship. We are to dedicate the Lord’s Day to the Lord. This means that we should be eager to learn from his word, meditate on his sovereignty over creation, declare him worthy of worship (Rev 4.11), reflect on what Jesus accomplished on the cross, bless God with thankful hearts for all the benefits he has bestowed upon us, and anticipate the everlasting Sabbath and true rest that we will enjoy with God in the glory of heaven.
- *Management* – Planning the use of our time and preparing in advance for the Sabbath. This includes being disciplined in the use of our time during the preceding six days of the week so that we do not have unfinished tasks that we ‘must’ perform on Sundays. It also includes maintaining a regular sleep pattern so that we do not fall asleep during a sermon, and praying in advance that the preaching of the Gospel will be effective, and the people of God will be edified by the teaching and fellowship of Sunday activities.

We will now consider each of these five categories in more detail to determine what the Biblical guidelines

are for correct Sabbath-keeping and then apply these guidelines to some of the specific day-to-day questions and issues that often arise whenever Christians discuss the subject of Sabbath-keeping.

152. Correct Administration of the Sabbath - Melioration

When we consider the commands and examples that define rest from work on the Sabbath (e.g., Ex 20.9, 10; Ex 35.2-3; Lev 23.2-3; Luke 23.56), we find that properly observing the Sabbath includes not performing normal (legitimate and non-sinful) work that could be performed on the other days of the week. By not performing the normal work of the other six days we engage in rest (i.e., we desist, or rest, from doing the activity). The normal work that falls within the scope of the command's prohibitions includes:

- Economic or commercial activity (Neh 13.15, 16; Jer 17.19-27).
- Household work (Ex 16.5, 23; Ex 35.2-3; Num 15.32-36).
- Farm work (Ex 20.9, 10; Ex 34.21).
- Work associated with preparing for funerals (Luke 23.56), since the Sabbath is to be a life-affirming day.

In summary, we are not to undertake any activity by which we make our regular livelihood, or which furthers our personal economic welfare. We are also not to require (or permit) others to do that kind of work on our behalf (Ex 20.9-10). We can apply these guidelines to our own situation today by considering *examples* of regular activities that we should not engage in on the Sabbath, such as:

- Regular work activities including work at offices, construction sites, stores, academic institutions (as teachers or students), restaurants, banks, marinas, airlines, sports facilities, and sporting events.
- Shopping or utilizing restaurants, attending sporting events, and using commercial airlines on Sunday as these would require others to work on our behalf, and they are not to be caused by our actions to perform their normal means of providing a livelihood on Sunday.

We will consider possible exceptions to these guidelines when we look at the duties of necessary *maintenance* and *mercy* as a separate topic.

The command to rest on the Sabbath day does not mean that we are to work six days in one way (i.e., in commercial activities) and then to work on a seventh day in another way. Rest on the Sabbath must include cessation from normal work and it certainly may include an increase in restorative relaxation such as taking an afternoon nap. However, in the context of the Sabbath commandment, rest does not mean doing nothing. Rather, the day of rest is to include participation in different kinds of activities such as worship and in Christian fellowship. However, if we are going to properly rest on the Sabbath day, this means that we are not to engage in a frantic participation in church activities on Sunday. If we come home at the end of the day on Sunday exhausted from participating in many church activities (e.g., singing in a choir rehearsal, teaching Sunday School classes, setting up the assembly hall, attending services or Bible studies, working in the church nursery, setting up for a congregational meal or coffee time) then we have not properly observed the Sabbath as a day of rest. A careful application of the command's requirement that we rest shows that we are called to maintain a balance that includes eliminating normal work activities and slowing down the pace from other days, while involving ourselves in selected holy activities that are proper for the Lord's Day.

Many in the Church argue that recreation is a form of rest. There are forms of recreation that do not cause others to work on Sunday, including: swimming in a home pool, reading a novel, playing a computer game, or working on a hobby such as building a model train layout. So, someone might ask, "Can these recreational activities be performed on the Sabbath without breaking the command?" A difficulty we can have with answering this question is that the Bible does not say anything about what we today call 'recreation'. However, the Bible may give us guidance in Isaiah 58.13-14, where it says that we should not do as we please on the Sabbath. It may be that the best approach to issues related to private and personal recreation is for us to ask some questions to help us determine whether we should participate in a particular

activity:

- Is the activity a duty of necessary maintenance or mercy, or worship?
- Does the activity provide true rest for my body and mind?
- Does the activity help me draw closer to God?
- Does the activity cause me to think more about the things of the world than I should?
- Does this activity help me enjoy the fellowship of other believers in a way that brings us all closer to God?
- Could this activity be performed on another day of the week; for example, on a Saturday, and the only reason I am performing it on Sunday is because I cannot make time for it on other days?

We close this topic with the words of Robert Murray McCheyne:

Oh, Sabbath-breaker, whoever you are, you are a sacrilegious robber! When you steal the hours of the Lord's Day for business or for pleasure, you are robbing Christ of the precious hours which He claims as His own. ... Surely we may well say, in the words of Dr. Love, that eminent servant of Christ, now gone to the Sabbath above, "Cursed is that gain, cursed is that recreation, cursed is that health, which is gained by criminal encroachments on this sacred day."⁷⁶

153. Correct Administration of the Sabbath - Maintenance and Mercy

Jesus showed by example, and by what he taught, how the principle of the Sabbath command is to be applied. His actions and teachings show us that there are two classes (that overlap) of work that can be performed on the Sabbath:

- Acts of necessary *maintenance* (Mt 12.1-8; Mk 2.23-28; Lk 6.1-5). The Pharisees claimed that the disciples had broken the Sabbath when they plucked grain to eat immediately. However, Jesus pronounced the disciples guiltless (Mt 12.7), showing that their action did not break either the letter or the spirit of the Sabbath command. Acts of necessary maintenance are:
 - *Ordinary* – This category certainly includes simple food preparation, eating food, simple personal hygiene, dressing, working as a guard in a jail, and feeding animals. We can think of ordinary maintenance as actions which must be performed in order for us to engage in worship and those which if not performed would cause us to be distracted from worshipping or serving on the Sabbath. We must be careful, however, not to overindulge in the ordinary maintenance acts, as this would violate the spirit of Sabbath-keeping. For example, although it is legitimate to scramble eggs for breakfast on the Sabbath, it is not legitimate, since unnecessary, to prepare a ten-course dinner.
 - *Extraordinary* – These are actions not normally performed on the Sabbath, or on any other day, but are required in the event of true emergencies such as fighting a fire or filling sandbags to place along a levy during a time of excessive flooding.
- Acts of *mercy* (Mt 12.9-13; Mk 3.1-6; Lk 6.6-11; Lk 13.10-14). This class of actions includes the preservation of animal and human life in emergency situations and may require some people to work at their regular employment activities on Sundays (e.g., driving an ambulance or performing emergency surgery). Acts of mercy do not *break* the Sabbath command; they may not even temporarily *set aside* the Sabbath command (as, for example, bashing in a door to save a person from a fire does not 'break' the eighth commandment). God never pits one law (e.g., the preservation of life) against another law (e.g., keeping the Sabbath holy). Proper keeping of the Sabbath *includes* preserving and protecting life.

A consideration of what Jesus taught about the Sabbath and what actions he performed or endorsed cautions us to be careful about proscribing actions; for example, the disciples would not have died of starvation if they had *not* eaten on the Sabbath. Yet, their plucking and eating was considered a valid work of necessary maintenance. Also, it was not *necessary* for Jesus to heal the man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. His

⁷⁶ "I Love the Lord's Day," Bible Message by Robert Murray McCheyne.

hand had had been like that for many years, and the healing was not as urgent as performing a life-saving procedure such as a tracheotomy. Yet, Jesus performed this work of mercy on the Sabbath. Jesus appears to leave the scope of acts of maintenance and mercy vague to allow for its application in various situations. This shows that we must be careful not to draw the line about what constitutes works of maintenance or mercy too tightly (Eccl 7.16). However, as a counterbalance, we must also be careful that we don't try to excuse actions on Sunday by calling them necessary maintenance or mercy. We must be careful that we don't use liberty as licence.

Jesus deliberately healed on a Sabbath (Mt 12.10-13) to challenge the Pharisees wrong interpretation of the Sabbath command. But notice the context. He had gone to the synagogue to worship (Mt 12.9). The man with the shriveled hand was present in the synagogue. Jesus did not skip attendance at worship in order to perform an act of mercy. This example warns us that we are not to use performance of acts of maintenance and mercy as a means of avoiding attendance at the stated assemblies of God's people. We might agree that a particular action (e.g., visiting a sick relative in the hospital) falls clearly within the scope of the Sabbath-keeping principle, but it does not constitute grounds for skipping worship. As an illustration, it seems that some people who are tending a housebound relative can find time to go shopping during the week but somehow 'must' stay home from worship to tend to the relative on Sunday.

Jesus' quotation from Hosea 6.6 (Mt 12.7) shows that we are not to have a slavish attitude to the observance of the Sabbath. God will not accept a slavish adherence to the form of the Sabbath if our hearts are begrudging the observance. The Sabbath is to be a delight and to be observed with joy, humility, love, and a spirit of mercy.

Our definition of maintenance and mercy must be guided by the examples and teaching of Jesus. Someone might say: "It is necessary for me to work on Sunday because I must be prepared for my 7:00am Monday meeting." or "It is necessary for me to drive home on Sunday because I don't want to miss the hockey game on Saturday night." or "It is necessary for me to go into work on Sunday because my boss told me to." In these instances, is the person applying his own meaning to what is necessary, or applying the Biblical sense?

The Bible provides examples of acts of maintenance and mercy as guidance: basic food preparation (Lk 6.1-5), feeding animals (Lk 13.6), acting as a guard (2 Ki 11.5, 7, 9), rescuing an animal (Lk 14.5), caring for the sick and needy (Lk 6.6-10; Lk 13.10-16; Lk 14.1-4; James 1.27). Examples of activities that do not fall within the definition include monitoring computers processing credit card transactions, flying a commercial airplane, or operating a supermarket. These are unnecessary. There are very few duties that are acts of maintenance or mercy that *must* be performed on the Sabbath day.

154. Correct Administration of the Sabbath - Meditation

The problem with identifying works of necessary maintenance or mercy seems to lie with our hearts. We are so attached to the things of this world that we consider it to be a burden to have to put aside our legitimate work and recreation of the other six days of the week. In contrast, it should be considered a blessing that we can set aside the burden of these over-pressing responsibilities without any sense of guilt that we aren't doing our job or doing enough (e.g., to meet the demands of an unreasonable boss). We should be eager to rejoice that God has set apart this day as holy from all others and that no man can take it from us (Ps 118.24). It should also be a joy to us that we can confess that we are not mastered by the temporary and passing things of the physical realm. When we can't wait until the Sabbath is over (Amos 8.5-6), it shows that we are mastered by the world and not by grace.

Jesus was diligent in his attendance at the synagogue on the Sabbath (e.g., Mk 6.2; Lk 4.16). His practice should encourage us to perform our exercises of worship on the first-day Sabbath (Heb 10.25). What should

we do on the first-day Sabbath with respect to worship? We should set aside the legitimate activities of the other six days of the week and consecrate our hearts in worship of God and find joy in that worship (Ps 43.4; Ps 71.23).

Men in general, and Christians when under a burden of sin, find little joy in worshipping God. If we have been saved by Jesus Christ, we should desire, on the Sabbath, to:

- Learn more through study and attention to the teaching and preaching about our God and to draw closer to him.
- Recall God's creative powers and governance of his universe, and with him contemplate that all that he does is very good (Gen 1.31).
- Remember our Lord's death and resurrection, in the 'feast of life' (1 Cor 11.24).
- Contemplate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first-day Sabbath (Acts 2:1-4).
- Thank and worship God for all his mercy and love toward us (Ps 116.17-19).
- Undertake edifying and encouraging fellowship with God's people (1 Thess 4.18; 1 Thess 5.11; Heb 10.25).
- Anticipate the everlasting Sabbath and true rest we will enjoy in heaven (Heb 4.9).

The Westminster Assembly's, *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* provides the following for our guidance:

That what time is vacant, between or after the solemn meetings of the congregation in public, be spent in reading, meditation, repetition of sermons; especially by calling their families to an account of what they have heard, and catechising of them, holy conferences, prayer for a blessing upon the public ordinances, singing of psalms, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, and such like duties of piety, charity, and mercy, accounting the sabbath a delight.⁷⁷

Dedicating the Sabbath day to God is the portion of what God has given to us that we are to give back to him as a 'tithe' of our time, similar to giving a tenth of our income. The general obligations of the covenant made between God and man apply in two key areas. First, man must keep the Ten Commandments and secondly, man must return to God a portion (a tribute payment) of everything that God gives to him. This is the *Principle of the Portion*.⁷⁸ We find this principle defined in Exodus 34.1-28, as well as elsewhere in Scripture. In brief, the principle is that everything belongs to the Lord (Ex 34.1-9; Job 41.11; Ps 50.10), man has been given a role as God's vassal. As a subordinate monarch over creation (Gen 1.28; Ex 34.10) and as a vassal of the Great King man is to abide by the covenant treaty obligations (Ex 34.11-28). The treaty obligations include strict obedience to what God commands (Ex 34.27, 28) and payment of a tribute of:

- Life (Ex 34.12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 25, 26).
 - Not to Mix the Unlike (Ex 34.12, 15, 16, 25, 26b).
 - Firstborn (Ex 34.19, 20).
 - Blood (Ex 34.25).
- Worship (Ex 34.13, 14, 17, 18, 22-24).
- Possessions (Ex 34.20b, 22, 26a).
- Time (Ex 34.21).

The *Principle of the Portion* extends to the allotment of time that we are given by God. Just as some people are given the responsibility of stewardship over more possessions than others, some are given more time than others—i.e., longer lives. Yet God requires that we each pay tribute with the same portion of our time. He holds forth his sovereignty by requiring that we return to him one seventh of all the time he gives to us—and

⁷⁷ "Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day," *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, 1645.

⁷⁸ James R. Hughes, *The Principle of The Portion: A Structure for Organizing Biblical Law* (2002-11), available at: www.epctoronto.org.

to dedicate that time to rest and worship of him.

The purpose of all the tribute obligations is to remind us that we are creatures before a sovereign creator (Ex 34.29-35). We are finite, whereas he is infinite. We do not live of ourselves or to ourselves, as he does. We live and move and have our continuing existence only because he so wills it. Ultimately, we do not own our lives, possessions, worship, or time. Nothing that we are, or do, or claim to own is excluded from God's sovereign ownership.

155. Correct Administration of the Sabbath - Management

In order to enjoy the Sabbath properly we should manage our time and activities in such a manner that we are properly prepared for Sabbath observance. The Puritans viewed preparation as including anticipatory expectation of the coming Sabbath. We should anticipate the Sabbath with the mind-frame of children preparing for a special outing or their birthday. Our preparation should consist of at least the following:

- *Diligent Discipline.* A reason that people, in general and even in the Church, sometimes end up having to work on the Sabbath is because they have not worked as they should have during the preceding six days, with diligence and discipline. A problem is that people often manage their time so poorly that they allow timewasters to crowd their days and have to use Sunday to catch up. We need to think seriously about how to plan and schedule our lives better so that we can clear the Sabbath of all the junk that piles up during the week. There is a blessing in this. Preparing for the Sabbath teaches us to be disciplined, to plan ahead, and not to procrastinate. By logical extension, societies that diligently observe the Sabbath will be more prosperous because they will be more disciplined.

We should order our lives so that unnecessary activities do not need to be performed on the Sabbath. The Westminster Assembly's *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* provides the following for our guidance:

The Lord's day ought to be so remembered beforehand, as that all worldly business of our ordinary callings may be so ordered, and so timely and seasonably laid aside, as they may not be impediments to the due sanctifying of the day when it comes. ... That the diet on that day be so ordered, as that neither servants be unnecessarily detained from the public worship of God, nor any other person hindered from the sanctifying that day. That there be private preparations of every person and family, by prayer for themselves, and for God's assistance of the minister, and for a blessing upon his ministry; and by such other holy exercises, as may further dispose them to a more comfortable communion with God in his public ordinances.⁷⁹

Likewise, a portion of the answer in the *Larger Catechism*, to the question (Q117), "How is the sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?" states, "... to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day."

- *Sufficient Sleep.* While the Sabbath is given to man as a day of rest, and is to include physical rest from wearying labour, it is not to be a day only for physical rest. A problem that is often seen in churches is that their members have difficulty making it to the Sunday School classes or morning services on time or they doze off during the services. One of the reasons is because they stay up late on Saturday night. While they might not stay up late on a weeknight because they know that they have to go to work or to school the next day, they stay up later than their usual bedtime on Saturday nights with the excuse that they can sleep in on Sunday since it is a day of rest. However, sleep studies indicate that maintaining

⁷⁹ "Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day," *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, 1645.

regular sleep schedules helps people to be at their optimum level of performance. Christians who are serious about honouring God and about worshiping him effectively should get sufficient sleep on Saturday nights so that they can join the classes, Bible studies, and worship services refreshed and invigorated.

- *Prayer Petitions.* A pointed question is, “Did you pray for the services, the pastor, and the preaching before you went to church this past Sunday?” If we took our duty to pray for the activities, our church leaders, and members of our congregations more consistently, we would be surprised at what the Holy Spirit would do as he opened the floodgates of heaven. We should be praying for, at least, the following as we anticipate an upcoming Sabbath:
 - “Hallowed be your name”. Our prayer should be that God will be honoured by all of our activities on the Lord’s Day and that our worship would be offered up in Spirit and in truth for his glory. If we showed that we were really concerned for the honour of God, the world would see this dedication and take note, and the Church would turn the world upside down (Acts 17.6).
 - “Your kingdom come”. Paul is clear that a primary means of bringing unbelievers to Christ is through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the assembly of the saints (Rom 10.14; 1 Cor 14.23-24; Titus 1.3). Thus, we should be praying that God the Holy Spirit would be endowing preachers with words that will convict and convert sinners and build up believers.
 - “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. One of our great desires should be to see Christians and members of society at large obeying God’s law as it is revealed in the Bible. Thus, our prayers anticipating the Sabbath should be that each one of those who profess Christ as their Lord and Saviour will reflect the holiness of God in their lives so that the world will observe it with amazement. A means of displaying a commitment to holiness is through the observance of the Sabbath.

156. Cases Studies for Applying the Sabbath Principle (part 1 of 3)

We will now apply the Biblical principles about Sabbath-keeping to provide practical guidance for how we should observe the first-day, Christian Sabbath. Our approach is to use a few case-study examples from representative questions that are often asked by young people who grow up in congregations where the Sabbath has been observed or when there is debate about Sabbath-keeping. We cannot consider all the possible circumstances that apply to keeping the Sabbath holy, nor should we. We do not want to create the equivalent of the Jewish *Halakhah* that attempts to lay out exhaustively the right way to walk. In addition, we cannot begin to address every possible circumstance, since cultural and technological considerations influence how each generation and society will keep the Sabbath. This is not to suggest that we are to apply some form of subjective morality; rather, our application of the Sabbath-keeping principle is to be in accord with current reality. For example, while the Jews had the concept of a Sabbath day’s walk (Acts 1.12) and rules with respect to lighting fires (Ex 35.3), they did not have automobiles or live in sub-zero climates where furnaces are required or use electric stoves or lights. Rather, we want to encourage Christians to apply intelligently the principles of Sabbath-keeping with a desire to love God and their neighbours.

A common issue is whether we should work on Sundays in commercial activities if our bosses demand it. Some Christians say that they will be fired if they don’t. However, it is unlikely that they would be fired if they politely refused to work on Sunday. At present, there are laws in most western countries that prohibit a boss from firing an employee because he objected to working on Sunday. In addition, most bosses who would make such a threat are bullies who think that threatening someone is the way to get him to perform but are in fact cowards who wouldn’t carry through on their threats. If a person is doing good work, his boss won’t want to lose him. A good response is being willing to work on Saturday, if the work is really pressing. Offering this alternative will test our own commitment to the Sabbath and our boss’s commitment to see the work completed.

Another way to challenge this supposed requirement to work on Sundays is to ask ourselves if we would do other things that our boss wanted done even if he threatened to fire us. For example, if he asked us to steal or lie or lose our job, would we do it? Hopefully we would refuse. Yet, when it comes to the Sabbath command it seems to be easier to break than others of the Ten Commandments.

Our boss and our co-workers need rest as much as we do, and we should object to work situations that require more than six days of hard and dedicated work per week. The Sabbath command is a universal command that applies to all men, including our bosses. They have no right to require us to work on the Sabbath, and we have to be willing with the Apostles to say that we will obey God rather than man (Acts 4.19). We also need to question why we should put aside God's law for our own, or for others', commercial and economic benefit. We should not contribute to our boss's greed and inability to plan properly by agreeing to work on the Sabbath. A story is told about a boss who responded to a Christian's objection to work on Sunday, "Doesn't the Bible say that if your donkey falls into a pit on the Sabbath you can pull it out? Well, our business has fallen into a pit; we need you to help pull it out." The Christian worker replied, "Sure I would pull out the donkey. But if my donkey kept falling into the pit every week, I would either fill the pit with dirt or sell the donkey!"

Someone said, with respect to bosses who require work on the Sabbath, that,

Work is good. Bondage to work is bad. But work easily becomes a form of bondage. The Sabbath is a sign that our work is not coerced, and regular rest allows us to experience our work as free people rather than as bondslaves. ... Without being legalistic about it, Christians have a duty to protest the oppressive tyranny of time and productivity and an economic order that tries to squeeze inordinate productivity out of people's energies. ... There is a gratuitous quality to Sabbath rest. It is antithetical to utility. The celebration of the goodness of God and of his creation needs no further justification.⁸⁰

We need to say: "Sunday, the Sabbath, is ours (Mk 2.27). You can't have it!"

Even if the worst did happen and we lost our job because of refusing to work on Sunday, would this have justified working on the Sabbath? We have to determine whether or not we trust God to work his providences for our best benefit and his glory. Christians who are really living for God may be persecuted and are to trust God when they are the victims of injustices, such as being fired, for standing in obedience to God's law (Mt 5.10; 1 Pt 3.13-17).

This discussion does not apply to work of *extraordinary necessity* that includes stacking bags of sand during a flood to protect *lives*, putting out a fire, and performing emergency surgery. However, what should we do if there was a flood at a data center and a boss called in his team to prevent the destruction of millions of dollars' worth of computer equipment and avoid putting hundreds of people out of work? We should consider these questions:

- Do the principles of preventing loss of life apply to economic loss?
- Are the computers insured? If not, why not?
- Does the company have a disaster back-up site and recovery plan? If not, why not?

157. Cases Studies for Applying the Sabbath Principle (part 2 of 3)

A second class of questions Christians often ask about how they should observe the Sabbath, when they have a desire to keep the Sabbath holy, relate to whether we may utilize commercial services on the Lord's Day. The fourth commandment not only applies to the normal work that we perform, which is to be done on the other six days of the week, but also to making others work on our behalf. The commandment says

⁸⁰ "Take Back Your Sabbath," Editorial in *Christianity Today*, Nov 2003, pp. 42-43.

that our servants are not to work on the Sabbath (Ex 20.10). Thus:

- In general, we should not frequent restaurants on Sunday. When we go to a restaurant on Sunday, we are asking the restaurant staff to engage in unnecessary commercial activity on our behalf. If we are away from home, staying in a hotel, and not invited to a Christian's home for lunch, then we may have to use a food catering facility. If possible, it would be better to use a facility that does not exist purely for commercial purposes (such as a fast-food restaurant), and instead use a facility that must be open for other reasons. For example, it is possible to get quality food in a hospital cafeteria. It could be argued that operating this facility on a Sunday is necessary since hospital staff and visitors to the sick require food.
- We should not do our shopping on Sunday. For the purchase of most items, we should have planned ahead and made our purchases during the other days of the week. If a true emergency arises, we may have to use a store or a gas station. However, we should apply a test to determine if our need to purchase something constitutes a true emergency. This test is simple: what if all the stores were shut (such as may happen on Christmas day), what would we do in that situation—for example, borrow something from a friend or neighbour? If we can come up with another way of meeting the 'emergency' or would just wait until the next day to make the purchase, then it does not truly constitute an emergency. In this respect, consider what one writer has said:
God gave us one day in seven to serve our deepest needs. Yet, like Esau, we are now willing to sell our birthright rather than suffer a momentary discomfort. Just because we can shop on Sunday does not mean we must shop on Sunday. We can choose to step beyond the economic struggle to a resting place. Surely we can plan our lives to allow one day to stand as a symbol of our highest values. Sunday is the day to declare our independence of anything that is not of God.⁸¹
- We don't need to use online shopping sites on Sunday. Although much of the order processing is automated and no human being is involved directly, the order fulfillment process eventually requires a person (e.g., to pick and package or deliver the items). So, we should try to avoid imposing work on other people that likely will be performed by them on a Sunday. There is no justifiable reason for placing orders on a Sunday, particularly when same-day shipping is so prevalent, and we can submit an order first thing on Monday morning. We should be able to set aside our focus on acquiring material goods for a single day per week.
- We should not use intercity modes of transportation, such as commercial airlines on a Sunday. Often, Christians fly out on Sundays so that they can be at a work meeting on Mondays. It takes courage to tell managers and clients that you will not travel on Sunday for work initiatives because it is the Lord's Day.
- We should try to avoid using urban public transit to travel to church services. However, the use of public transit may be in a different category than using intercity modes of transportation. Ideally, congregations should provide transportation (e.g., car pooling) for its members who do not have access to cars or can no longer drive. This is a good way to test our commitment to Sabbath-keeping principles. However, when a person gets no offer of a ride, and takes a bus or subway to get to church, he is justified in this action under the heading of necessity. It would be silly to argue that an elderly person or family should walk long distances or ride bicycles to get to church. In some cultural settings, e.g., where access to cars is scarce, we might legitimately argue that working a shift as a transit worker is similar to working a shift as a police officer. However, in North America where everyone has (direct or indirect) access to a car, there is little justification for running transit systems on the Lord's Day. So, Christians who work in the transit sector should try to avoid working on Sundays. It is interesting to consider how cavalier much of the Church is today about the use of public transit compared with the mid-19th century in Scotland.

Dear fellow countrymen, as a servant of God in this dark and cloudy day, I feel constrained to lift up my voice in behalf of the entire sanctification of the Lord's Day. The daring attack that is now

⁸¹ Judith Loback, "Speaking Out: Sunday is No Day for Shopping," Christianity Today, 1989/03/03, p. 8.

made by some of the directors of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway on the law of God and the peace of our Scottish Sabbath, the blasphemous motion which they mean to propose to the shareholders next February, and the wicked pamphlets which are now being circulated in thousands, full of all manner of lies and impieties, call loudly for the calm, deliberate testimony of all faithful ministers and private Christians in behalf of God's holy day.⁸²

158. Cases Studies for Applying the Sabbath Principle (part 3 of 3)

Are fishing from a cottage dock, canoeing, sailing, walking in the park, flower gardening, going for a run, or reading a novel on a Sunday afternoon, legitimate forms of rest? These are not easy examples to deal with. Some Christians are fitness fanatics and run every day of the week. For them to run on Sunday would be wrong because they would allow their exercise to consume them. On the opposite end of the spectrum someone who works in a high-stress office setting and gets little exercise during the week may find that as his adrenaline level drops, he becomes sleepy and can't read or becomes drowsy during the worship services. A brisk walk or even a jog may contribute to his concentration and spiritual communion with God. Light recreation that is truly helpful for keeping the Sabbath holy may be considered permissible.

However, attendance at, and participation in, professional sports on Sunday is clearly unnecessary and does little more than contribute to the commercial interests of team owners and highly paid athletes. Why we should further their greed on the Sabbath is beyond any possible justification. Participation in organized amateur sports on Sunday is also hard to justify. Participation requires that umpires or referees and possibly grounds keepers or other staff, such as lifeguards, be employed in unnecessary work on Sunday. In many cases, coaches of amateur teams are also paid for their work (even if it is not their primary occupation). We are not to require others to work on the Sabbath on our behalf in any work that is not necessary.

In addition, we should be aware of the way in which organized sports can become all-consuming and distract us from focusing on rest and the worship of God on the Sabbath. We should reflect on what Isaiah (Is 58.13) says about not doing as we please on God's holy day and remind ourselves of good examples of those who have resisted the temptation to participate in sports on Sunday, such as Eric Liddell (as shown in the movie *Chariots of Fire*) and Michael Jones, one of the best players on New Zealand's Rugby team in the late 1980s. Michael Jones said before the semifinals of the World Cup: "Since I was young I have not played on Sunday, and I do not intend to start now. Sunday is the Lord's Day. Rugby is very important to me, but there are other things in life. It is up to the individual⁸³, but I certainly feel happier adhering to my principles and standards of never playing on a Sunday. It would be hypocritical to change my mind now just because there is a World Cup semifinal coming up. I would love to play in terms of the opportunity, but I put God first. I hope people can understand and accept that."⁸⁴ NZ went on to beat Wales, and the final was played on a Saturday and Michael Jones was able to participate.

Radio and TV broadcasting requires significant involvement of staff who are required to work on Sunday to make live broadcasts possible. We should avoid using the media so that these people don't have to work. The entertainment media should remain shut-off on the Lord's Day, and we should avoid listening to the news. It is usually not urgent on a Sunday to know what is going on in the world. Whatever has happened, will still be there on Monday. The same should apply to the use of Internet news services. Besides the fact that we require people to work in order to post the news on the Internet, we also need to overcome the

⁸² "I Love the Lord's Day," Bible Message by Robert Murray McCheyne.

⁸³ He makes adherence to the Sabbath a matter of personal private morality, rather than God's standard for all men, however, his point about putting God first is still valid.

⁸⁴ Geoff Thomas, "Sunday Sport: Should Christians Compete?" *Evangelical Times*, August 1987. Reprinted in the *Gospel Witness*, Nov. 5, 1987, pp. 15-16.

insatiable temptation to know what is happening in the world. Being pressed by world or local events just distracts us from being focused on what we should be thinking about on the Lord's Day—Jesus' victory over sin and death.

Many churches regularly live-stream their services on Sunday, and some Christians argue that this is necessary for involving those who are unable to make it to the worship services and as a means of evangelism. The media can be of great service to the Church, but they can also present a danger. Just as the Reformation leaders used the printing press very effectively to reach large audiences, so electronic media can be used effectively. However, just as the printing press disseminated the Bible, it also allowed people to gain access to *The Communist Manifesto* and Darwin's writings. In the same way, electronic media have a dark underbelly—such as the dissemination of pornography. While we should applaud the effective use of electronic media for the cause of Christ, we need to question whether *regular* live streaming of worship services is truly effective and even right. Christians should be together in assemblies of the saints on the Lord's Day (Heb 10.25), not sitting in front of a computer screen. Also, broadcast services with high-powered 'evangelists' may have done more to undermine local congregations of God's people than they have ever contributed to building the Kingdom. The argument that live streaming a service provides for the needs of shut-ins is questionable. Shut-ins represent a small minority of any congregation and there are other ways to provide for them, including supplying them with DVDs or posting an audio or video recording of the sermon after the service. The real need of shut-ins is that they be visited by members of the congregation, not that they be provided with electronic surrogates of the assembly of worship.

159. Balance in Applying the Sabbath Principle

We have applied the Sabbath-keeping principle and have concluded that we should not work in commercial activities on the Lord's Day, even if our boss demands it. The corollary is that we should not require others to work on our behalf on Sundays, for example, by eating in restaurants, going shopping, participating in organized sports, or using live news and entertainment media on a Sunday. We also briefly considered how we should keep the Sabbath holy in private and family settings even when we do not participate in our regular work activities or require others to work on our behalf.

We now need to consider how we can apply a balanced approach when we address questions that may arise among Christians who sincerely desire to keep the Sabbath holy. For example, among Christians who believe in Sabbath-keeping, most would wash their dishes after a Sunday lunch, but some might not think it proper to use a washing machine on a Sunday.

As another example, consider the fact that the news that is available early on Monday morning usually means that some people had to work on Sunday to prepare it. Thus, if we subscribe to a news service, we could be encouraging others to work on Sunday on our behalf. It certainly is not necessary to read the news on Mondays, so anyone who has a qualm about reading the news produced on Sunday should not do it (James 4.17). However, it is possible that we can become overly 'righteous' (Eccl 7.16) and scrupulous, since everything we consume could be produced on a Sunday. For example, the farmer who grew the wheat from which our bread was made could have harvested it on a Sunday, or parts in our computer could have been manufactured on a Sunday in Vietnam, the mail we receive on Monday may have been sorted on Sunday, and our Amazon order that we scheduled for delivery on a Tuesday arrives early on a Sunday, etc. If we wanted to ensure that no one performed any work on our behalf on a Sunday, we would have to boycott everything in this world and could no longer live in it. It may be that there is a legitimate distinction between asking or requiring someone to work on Sunday specifically on our behalf or using a service directly on a Sunday which specifically requires someone to work on that day, and using a service later in the week which may have involved people working on Sunday. For example, the Monday news could be

produced early Monday morning, if the news service wanted to observe the Sabbath. We are not the ones requiring Sunday work by our actions. Paul's instructions on questioning secondary causes (1 Cor 10.25-26) may give us some guidance in this area. If so, we can purchase the items without considering when they were made and how they got to market.

When we consider matters such as these, we must apply caution so that we do not become overly precise and make human rules about keeping the Sabbath and make its observance into a burden rather than a joy. Also, we should not rely on a list of "do's and don'ts". A heavy-handed Pharisaism makes one rule for all people and makes keeping manmade rules a measure of saintliness, a standard for congregational membership, and even a supposed means of earning blessings from God. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees of his day for their pedantic scrupulosity (Mt 15.9; Mt 23.1-36; Mk 2.23-28). Likewise, Paul warns us of the danger of making human regulations into rules for everyone (Col 2.21-23). Thus, when we are confronted by questions about what is right or wrong to do on the Sabbath, we should ask ourselves:

- What is our motivation for Sabbath observance?
- What is our motivation or reason for undertaking a particular action on a Sunday?
- Are we looking for a justification to participate in worldly affairs?
- Are we being consumed by the Word or by the world?
- Is our objective to draw closer to God and his people on the Lord's Day?
- Does the action contribute or hinder our joy in the Lord?
- Is the action good for us—body and soul?

If we are in real doubt about whether or not to do a particular task around the house or participate in a family activity, then it is wise to refrain from it (Rom 14.22-23). We need to remind ourselves that while the details of how we obey God are important (Mt 5.20; Mt 23.23) our focus should be on our hearts (our motives and reasons) more than on the specific details of how we apply the Sabbath principles to works that are necessary. The *Larger Catechism* (Q119) provides a good summary:

The sins forbidden in the Fourth Commandment are, all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.

Keeping the Sabbath helps us manage our time better and teaches us to be better prepared for the future. Sabbath-keeping is a blessing for individuals, companies, and societies; thus "... along with church worship [the Sabbath] should be characterized by a cessation from paid employment, a respite from commercial activity, an investment in relationships, a receptivity to divine wisdom, a celebration of creation, and intentional acts of kindness."⁸⁵

160. The Civil Magistrate's Administration of the Sabbath (part 1 of 2)

The *Larger Catechism* (Q116), states that, "The fourth commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath, and in the New Testament called the Lord's day." The belief of the authors of the *Catechism* was that the Bible teaches that all men are required to observe a Sabbath day on the first day of the week.

The *Larger Catechism* (Q118) also asks, "Why is the charge of keeping the sabbath more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors?" The answer is that "The charge of keeping the sabbath is

⁸⁵ "Take Back Your Sabbath," Editorial in *Christianity Today*, Nov 2003, pp. 42-43.

more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it be observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder them by employments of their own.” Thus, the authors of the *Catechism* believed that the Bible teaches that the civil magistrate has an obligation to legislate and enforce Sabbath-keeping within their domain of jurisdiction.

Since the time of Constantine, until the mid-20th Century it was widely accepted in the West that the civil magistrate should legislate the observance of the Christian Sabbath. However, with the widespread deceptions that the secular state should be religiously neutral and that religious pluralism is to be accommodated, Sabbath laws have been repealed and most Christians do not believe that the civil magistrate has a role in legislating Sabbath observance. For example, Wayne Grudem (*Christian Ethics*, p. 357), says, “My personal judgement is that governmental laws should allow considerable freedom in this area for individuals and businesses to decide as they think best.” His view teaches that a person can do what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17.6).

Nehemiah’s actions (Neh 13.19-22) provide us with lessons about Sabbath-keeping that goes beyond Christian personal and congregational observance. Nehemiah not only held the Jews accountable for keeping the Sabbath but also the people from the territories around Judea that were part of the Persian Empire. He told the foreigners that they should not spend the evening and night before the walls, hoping to go into the city to sell their goods on the Sabbath. He commanded them to desist from selling their goods and then took specific action to enforce his commands. He ordered the doors of the gates to be shut during the Sabbath so that merchandise could not be transported through them into the market squares in the city, and he placed guards at the gates to ensure that his command was enforced. It is probable that he had a horn or trumpet blown to announce publicly the start of the Sabbath.⁸⁶ It was likely blown from under a canopy or awning (2 Ki 16.18).⁸⁷

The requirement to keep the Sabbath applies not only to those who are within the bounds of the covenant community; it also applies to those outside of the covenant community, including those from pagan societies. Nehemiah would not have imposed Sabbath keeping on the merchants if he held to the modern *laissez-faire* attitude of people who argue that in a pluralistic society everyone should be allowed to do his own thing with respect to religious practices; and he did not take the modern view heard so often from the mouths of political leaders and even many Christians: “I believe it is wrong to <fill in the blank—have an abortion, or conduct commercial activity on the Sabbath, or whatever else> but I can’t impose my morality on other people.” Nehemiah held the view, that in the area of morality, either an action is right, or it is wrong. If it is wrong, then it is wrong for all people, regardless of what they may believe.

Nehemiah viewed it to be the responsibility of the civil magistrate to enforce the laws of God. Nehemiah did not consider it proper to enforce the laws of the Persian king but inappropriate to enforce the laws of God. He did not want the ceremony of worship to be hindered by commercial activities that would distract the worshipers. He viewed the civil administration of God’s law to be an important aspect of preserving the proper worship of God. He did not believe in the supposed separation of church or religion and the state. The civil magistrate was to work with the religious authority (the priests and Levites) for the just administration of society. The authors of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 23.2-3) held essentially the same view as Nehemiah.

Nehemiah used his government-appointed personal soldiers and guards to enforce the Sabbath laws. Later he also used the temple guards (Levites), once they had purified themselves (they may have fallen out of

⁸⁶ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 4.9.12.

⁸⁷ Excavators found a stone from the remains of Titus’ siege of the temple with this inscription: “for the place of the blowing (of the trumpet).” This may refer to the place where the priest or Levite stood.

the discipline of this procedure during the period that Nehemiah was out of the territory), to enforce the Sabbath laws. It may be that he used the temple guards in addition to his own soldiers because he wanted to establish a permanent pattern. He and his troops would be returning to the Persian capital, and he needed to leave behind a permanent administration. He could justify the use of civil officers to enforce the Sabbath law because he did not believe it was contrary to the correct use of the power of the civil authority.

161. The Civil Magistrate's Administration of the Sabbath (part 2 of 2)

Not only did Nehemiah enact a Sabbath law under the Persian government, but he also threatened to apply punishment as prescribed in God's Law against those merchants who persisted in their commercial activities on the Sabbath (Neh 13.15-22). He threatened to "lay hands" on them, which probably means that he would have taken them into custody and punished them—possibly with death if they persisted in ignoring his decree. Nehemiah took the first proper step in administering justice by informing the merchants that their action was wrong. Only if they had persisted in the action would he have arrested them. He didn't have to exercise penal consequences against their actions because the people took him seriously and the commercial activity on the Sabbath was discontinued.

Assuming that the Sabbath law continues to apply today, and the civil magistrate is supposed to administer it, how should he punish those who break the Sabbath? What should be done to stop, for example, a Jewish, Muslim, pagan, professed atheist, or other merchant who defies the authorities and continues to sell furs or operate a grocery store? These are not hypothetical questions and actually had to be answered in recent history in Ontario in cases where Jews broke the law by opening their stores on Sunday.⁸⁸ The framers of the 17th century Virginia and New Haven statutes did not think that even capital punishment was inappropriate for someone who continually breached the fourth commandment (in one case it was for a third offence and in another case it was for a willfully grievous breach).

God considers a breach of the Sabbath a serious offence. In the OT law, the punishment for Sabbath breaking included execution (Ex 31.14; Ex 35.2; Num 15.32-36). Of course, today we are considering the question of punishment in the context of an essentially pagan society that has thrown out all consideration of God's law. We are, practically speaking, a long way from the administration of God's law by the civil magistrate, let alone having to consider what punishments should be associated with a breach of a Sabbath law. It is not the purpose of this study, to argue for a reinstatement of capital or corporal punishment for Sabbath breakers. Rather, we can consider a few rhetorical questions to generate thought on the topic of punishment of Sabbath breakers, *assuming* that the civil magistrate should enforce the Sabbath-keeping law:

- Why is it considered right for a government to institute statutory holidays (e.g., Labour Day or Christmas) and punish commercial businesses (e.g., with fines) if they operate on those days, but it is not right for a government to require commercial businesses to cease operation on the Lord's Day?
- What NT principles, if any, change the penalty for Sabbath breaking?
- Why was it considered proper under European Common Law, for about 1,400 years, to punish Sabbath breakers?
- What gives late 20th century or early 21st century man the monopoly on defining what constitutes good laws and proper punishments? Do a few men in black robes (the high priests of secular humanism) have the final authority on law? Does majority opinion determine what is right?
- Many people today would argue that the civil magistrate has no role in punishing sins related to the first four commandments and even sins such homosexual practices, fornication, incest, adultery, and the dissemination of pornography. What role then does Paul envision for the civil magistrate when he

⁸⁸ See for example: *Hy and Zel's Inc. v. Ontario (Attorney General)*, File No. 22556, 1993: February 25 and *Paul Magder Furs Ltd. v. Ontario (Attorney General)*, File No. 22559, 1993: October 21.

says, “For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.” (Rom 13.3-4)?

- What bearing, if any, does Hebrews 2.2-3, which speaks of every violation and disobedience receiving its just punishment, have on the matter of determining whether it was or is proper to apply punishment for Sabbath breaking? the writer of Hebrews indicates that “every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution” (Heb 2.2). How can we explain why forms of punishment established by God and declared to be just in the OT are no longer just now, since God has not changed his character, his abhorrence of sin, or his law?
- Why is it too harsh to punish a flagrant, public Sabbath breaker? How can it be too harsh when God instituted the punishment? Can man be more merciful than God, who is good, merciful, kind, and loving?
- God will condemn forever those who persist in breaking his law (Rev 22.15). Therefore, assuming that a person didn’t murder, steal, etc., but only broke the Sabbath regularly without repentance, would he be subject to everlasting condemnation?

Nehemiah’s reforms appear to have been somewhat successful. Almost 500 years later, at the time of Jesus, it seems that the Jews of Jerusalem were still rigorously applying the prohibition against commercial activity on the Sabbath. However, by the time of Jesus, their form of Sabbath observance had become perverted with legalism and encrusted with many manmade laws, and the spirit or worshipful rest had been sucked out of the Sabbath principle.

162. Historical Examples of Sabbath Laws (part 1 of 2)

Many people today have little interest in history, so they have no idea of how prevalent Sabbath (rest) laws were at one time in Europe. For example:

- Constantine instituted a law (in 321 AD) that required tradesmen to rest on Sunday but permitted tending of crops and vines on that day. But it does not appear that his rationale and reasons were consistent with Biblical law, as he refers to the day as the “venerable day of the Sun”⁸⁹
- Theodosius I (r. 379-395) and Theodosius II (r. 408-450) published laws forbidding all public games and theatrical displays on the Lord's Day.⁹⁰
- The Third Council of Orleans in 538 (canon 27), though deploring Jewish Sabbatarianism, forbade “field labours” or “agricultural work” so that “people may be able to come to church and worship” or “offer prayers to God.” This was endorsed by Roman emperor Justinian I (r. 527-565).⁹¹
- Sabbatarian laws from Wihtred (Anglo-Saxon king of Kent 690-725) and Ine (king of Wessex, 687-726) are mainly of the nature of amendments to customs: “If anyone proceeds to bargain on a Sunday, he shall forfeit the goods, and 12 ores [in addition] in a Danish district, and 30 shillings in an English district.”⁹²
- “Charlemagne at Aquisgranum (Aachen) in 788 decreed that all ordinary labor on the Lord's Day be forbidden, since it was against the Fourth Commandment, especially labor in the field or vineyard

⁸⁹ *The Code of Justinian*, Book 3, title 12, law 3; trans. in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3, 5th ed., 1902, p. 380, note 1.

⁹⁰ *Cod. Theod.*, lib. 15, tit. 5; *De Spectaculis*, Leg. 2 and 5, quoted in: A. A. Hodge, “Sabbath, The Day Changed: The Sabbath Preserved,” www.apuritansmind.com/TheLordsDay/AAHodgeSabbath.htm.

⁹¹ Charles J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, trans. by Henry N. Oxenham (Edinburgh, 1896), Vol. IV, pp. 208, 209.

⁹² Quoted in Stephen C. Perks, *Christianity and Law – An Enquiry into the Influence of Christianity on the Development of English Common Law*, (Whitby, England, Avant Books, 1993), p. 22; taken from F. L. Attenborough, ed. And trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 105.

which Constantine had exempted.”⁹³

- Alfred’s (Anglo-Saxon king, 871-899 or 901) *Dooms* opens with the Ten Commandments—the earliest portion of the Bible translated into early English.⁹⁴
- Aethelred’s (King of the English, 978-1016) law code states: “44. that they should diligently abstain from marketings and public assemblies on Sundays”⁹⁵
- The *Charter of Canute* (1020) states: “And I will that all people ... hold fast Edgar’s law, which all men have chosen and sworn to at Oxford, for that all the bishops say that it right deeply offends God, that a man break oaths or pledges; and likewise they further teach us that we should with all might and main, alike seek, love, and worship the eternal merciful God, and eschew all unrighteousness; that is, slaying of kinsmen, and murder, and perjury, and witchcraft and enchantment, and adultery, and incest; and also we charge in the name of God Almighty, and of all his saints, that no man be so bold as to marry a hallowed nun or mynchen; and if any have done so, be he outlaw towards God, and excommunicated from all Christendom, and answerable to the king in all he has, unless he quickly alter and deeply make amends to God; ... we admonish that men keep Sunday’s festival with all their might, and observe it from Saturday’s noon to Monday’s dawning; and no man be so bold that he either go to market or seek any court on that holy day; and all men, poor and rich, seek their church, and ask forgiveness for their sins, and keep earnestly every ordained fast, and earnestly honour the saints that the mass priests shall bid us, that we may altogether through the mercy of the everlasting God and the intercession of his saints come to the joy of the kingdom of heaven, and dwell with Him who liveth and reigneth for ever without end. Amen.”⁹⁶
- Charles II (r. 1660-85): “Be it enacted . . . that all and every Person and Persons whatsoever, shall on every Lord’s Day apply themselves to the Observation of the same, by exercising themselves thereon in the Duties of Piety and true Religion, publickly and privately; (4) and that no . . . Person whatsoever, shall do or exercise any worldly Labour, Business, or Work of their ordinary Callings, upon the Lord’s Day, or any Part thereof (Works of Necessity and Charity only excepted) ... (6) and that no Person or Persons whatsoever, shall publickly cry, shew forth, or expose to Sale, any Wares, Merchandizes, Fruit, Herbs, Goods or Chattels whatsoever.”⁹⁷
- The first Scottish parliament to meet after the restoration (1661) passed 93 acts. Some of these condemned the Presbyterians, rejected the *Solemn League and Covenant*, and sentenced to death four of the Covenanters such as Samuel Rutherford. Nevertheless, at this parliament, “means were adopted to safeguard the observance of the Sabbath.”⁹⁸

We will consider lessons which we can derive from these legislative examples in our next meditation.

163. Historical Examples of Sabbath Laws (part 2 of 2)

In part 1, we considered examples of Sabbath laws enacted in Europe from the fourth to the 17th centuries. In North America, Sabbath laws were also put in place:

“The First Sunday Law imposed on an American colony [Virginia, 1610] required church attendance, and prescribed the death penalty for the third offense.”⁹⁹ The specific law included the following: “Every man and woman shall repaire in the morning to the divine service, and Sermons preached upon

⁹³ W. W. Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 261.

⁹⁴ www.northvegr.org/lore/anglo_saxon_dooms/002.php#alfred.

⁹⁵ A. J. Robertson, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 119.

⁹⁶ The Avalon Project at Yale Law School: Anglo-Saxon Law - Extracts From Early Laws of the English, www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/saxlaw.htm.

⁹⁷ Charles II, chap. 7, in [British] *Statutes at Large* (1763), Vol. 3, p. 388.

⁹⁸ Alexander Smellie, *Men of the Covenant* (London; Andrew Melrose, 1903), p. 45.

⁹⁹ Peter Force, *Tracts Relating to the Colonies in North America*, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 11.

the Sabbath day, and in the afternoon to divine service, and Catechising, upon paine for the first fault to lose their provision, and allowance for the whole week following, for the second to lose the said allowance, and also to be whipped, and for the third to suffer death.”¹⁰⁰

Connecticut had similar laws: “Whosoever shall prophane the Lord's day, or any part of it, either by sinful servile work, or by unlawful sport, recreation, or otherwise, whether wilfully, or in a careless neglect, shall be duly punished by fine, imprisonment, or corporally according to the nature, and measure of the sin, and offence. But if the Court upon examination, by clear, and satisfying evidence find that the sin was proudly, presumptuously, & with a high hand committed against the known command and authority of the blessed God, such a person therein despising and reproaching the Lord, shall be put to death, That all others may feare and shun such provoking Rebellious courses.”¹⁰¹

Sabbath, Sunday, or Lord's Day laws continued to be applied by the civil magistrate in North America until the middle of the 20th century. For example, in Ontario, Canada, the 1907 version of the *Lord's Day Act* governed activities on the Lord's Day. This act can be traced through “An Act to prevent the Profanation of the Lord's Day in Upper Canada” found in the statute books of the Provinces and of Canada (1845) to earlier laws from Great Britain. The 1845 and 1907 (*Lord's Day Act*) Acts made it unlawful “to do or exercise any worldly labour, business or work of one's ordinary calling.” The 1845 Act exempted “conveying travellers or Her Majesty's Mail, selling Drugs and Medicines, and other works of necessity, and works of charity.” The 1907 Act included a somewhat longer list of “works of necessity” that were exempted.

Since the adoption of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) it is now considered unlawful and discriminatory on the basis of religion to protect Sunday as the universal day of the Sabbath. As a result, there was an impetus to change the Sabbath laws during the mid-1980s which has brought about more permissive practices relative to the operation of commercial establishments on Sunday. In addition, since the late 1980s, increasing economic pressures (e.g. North American free trade and recessions) have pushed legislators to liberalize legislation pertaining to Sunday closing.¹⁰² It is interesting to note that it was pressure to conduct commercial activities that the Department of Labour refers to as influencing changes to the *Lord's Day Act*. It is precisely this area of activity (i.e., commercial activity) that Nehemiah addressed in his enforcement of the Sabbath law (Neh 13.19-22).

People today think that their views about law are the only correct ones, and that laws that have existed for thousands of years are irrelevant. Thus, to conclude our consideration of the civil magistrate's role in enforcing Sabbath laws, let us ask some rhetorical questions that show the inconsistency of modern legislators and judges, and many Christians, with respect to Sabbath laws:

- Why was it justifiable for 1,400 years of European Common Law tradition and legislative enactments to have laws governing Sunday commercial activity, but now it is considered ‘intolerant’ and an ‘imposition of morality’?
- Were the kings and legislators of the past 1,400 years stupider than the legislators and judges of the late 20th century, in that they accepted God's law as the standard for civil behaviour?
- Were there no Jews, pagans, members of other religions, and professed atheists within society during the past 1,400 years who were compelled to observe the Christian Sabbath by ceasing their commercial activities?
- Was there a greater percentage of true Christians in western society at any point during the past 1,400

¹⁰⁰ Laws and Orders, Divine, Politique, and Martial, for the Colony in Virginia: first established by Sir Thomas Gates, knight, Lieutenant - General, the 24th of May, 1610.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Charles J. Hoadly, *Records of the Colony or Jurisdiction of New Haven*, From May, 1653, to the Union, Together With the *New Haven Code* of 1656, p. 605 (1858 edition).

¹⁰² Information taken from the Government of Canada website: labour.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/psait_spila/lmnc/eslc/eslc/stand7-e1.html.

years than there is today?

- Why is it more of a problem to impose God's law today than it was for the previous 1,400 years?
- What valid reasons can be given for not continuing to have the civil magistrate enforce God's Sabbath law?
- What were the real reasons that laws regulating Sunday activities were abolished? Was it out of a concern that we not offend adherents of other religions, or out of a belief that merchants have an inalienable right to sell goods on Sunday, or because men do not want to adhere to God's law?
- What does the change in Sunday laws tell us about society and the Church?

164. Six Days You Shall Labour

The command that requires that we remember to keep the Sabbath day holy includes a second aspect—a command that we labour six days of the week (Ex 20.9). Not only do people not want to keep the Sabbath day holy through rest and worship, but many also despise the command to labour over the other six days of the week.

A natural tendency of sinful mankind is toward laziness and slothfulness (Prov 6.6, 9-10; Prov 19.15, 24; Prov 20.4; Prov 21.25; Prov 26.13-15). If it were not necessary to work to provide food, other necessities, and money to spend on pleasurable pursuits, many people would be content to live a life of indolence. This is one of the reasons why Paul had to give the command that if a person was not willing to work, then he was not to be provided with food (2 Thess 3.10). Instead of being idle (2 Thess 3.6) and busybodies, people are to be busy at their work to earn their own living (2 Thess 3.11-12).

God intended for mankind to work to provide for his own welfare and he gave Adam the job of tending the plants in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2.15). Likewise, Eve was given to Adam as a suitable companion and to assist him with his work (Gen 2.18). God appointed productive employment to be part of our created nature. Man was not created to be idle. This is why we innately despise the 'idle rich' (the ancient aristocrat and the modern playboy), while at the same time secretly envying them because of our own souls' propensity to sin. Thus, work is a blessing, not a curse, since life without a productive purpose becomes life without meaning. Consuming without contributing, partaking without producing, and eating and drinking without earning and diligence, are contrary to the created nature of man and to the creation mandate we were given by God. It is through diligent labour that we can provide for ourselves and for those under our care (Prov 12.24; Prov 18.9; Prov 19.15) and are able to supply resources for the advancement of God's kingdom (e.g., by providing financial support for pastors and works of charitable benevolence) and the benefit of our neighbours and society (e.g., by paying taxes which are used to fund police and emergency services).

When we conduct our work, we demonstrate that we are sub-sovereigns under God over the created order (Gen 1.26). For Adam, this included creative mental activity through naming the animals (Gen 2.19) and physical labour such as the probable need to prune fruit-bearing trees and mow the grass in the garden. Nevertheless, work has been cursed as a result of Adam's sin (Gen 3.17-19), making it at times mundane, laborious, and painful. Thus, we need to maintain a balance in our labour along multiple dimensions:

- *Creative vs routine.* If our fulltime employment involves primarily the performance of routine tasks such as packing boxes with items for shipping or installing components on a manufacturing assembly line, we diminish our human nature, created in the image of God, if after leaving our place of employment we collapse on the couch and watch four hours of mind-numbing entertainment. To fulfill the mandate of this command, we need to provide secondary labour activities by which we can stimulate our creative dimension—for example, making custom furniture or sewing baby clothes. It is also through our labour (in paid-employment, schoolwork, or hobbies) that we can discover the wonders of what God has established in creation and invent technologies which, to an extent, can overcome the vestiges of the curse on labour.

- *Mental vs physical.* If our paid work involves mostly sitting at a desk and thinking and writing, we need to balance this with a consistent program of physical labour such as renovating a basement or tending roses. An example of this kind of balance would be a plumber who makes a good income to provide for his family and who also writes detective novels. All forms of work, if not inherently sinful, have dignity.
- *Effort vs relaxation.* The command to labour six days does not mean that every waking hour is to be consumed by our work. However, how to maintain a balance in this dimension is a challenge. Some people are ‘workaholics’ who use work as a means of escape from relationships or to bolster their self-esteem. On the other hand, ‘quiet quitters’ watch the clock so that they can rush out to be entertained. Many live for a weekend adrenaline rush or their next adventure vacation. The colloquial proverb, “a change is as good as a rest” can be applied in this dimension. Changing from one form of labour to another can recharge a person’s energy and offset weariness. For example, a person who maintains complex machinery may find it beneficial to also volunteer to work in a setting where he can engage with people more intimately and intensely.

Because work is a blessing and at the same time a requirement from God, governments should not put policies in place which hinder peoples’ ability to fulfill this command. For example, minimum wage laws may hinder unskilled youth from obtaining their first employment opportunities. And the requirement that employers provide a full suite of benefits to employees who work more than a stated number of hours per week causes employers to reduce the number of hours they schedule for their non-management staff—thus depriving people of an opportunity of being engaged in fulltime work. Also, governments do not have a God-given right to declare permanent statutory holidays that *require* business to cease operations. When they do this, they usurp God’s right to declare a day of rest (Gen 2.3; Ex 20.8-11) and they replace the Lord’s Day with secular (and pagan) equivalents.

165. Man was Created to Work

It is ironic that many people today work so that they will not need to work—they work for the weekend or for retirement when they can stop working. Others work hard at not working—they concoct schemes to milk and bilk charities or government welfare systems. As with everything good that God created, men find ways to pervert work. Work is innately a good thing, since God himself works—by creating and then by providentially governing and sustaining creation. In his whole being, man was created to work—he was given a mind to work from, a body to work with, and a world to work on.

The appointment of work for man is not the result of sin and the curse on sin; mankind in paradise was not exempt from work. Productive work was given to man as a mandate and as a blessing, not something to be avoided or shunned. In the state of perfection work, and particularly the physical labour mentioned in Genesis 2.15, was challenging and delightful without being wearying. Man was not created to be idle. This is why we innately despise the ‘idle rich’ (the ancient aristocrat and the modern playboy), while at the same time envying them because of our souls’ propensity to sin.

Consuming without contributing, partaking without producing, and eating and drinking without earning and diligence, are contrary to the created nature of man and to the eighth commandment. We need to work, because:

- God appointed productive employment as part of our created nature.
- Life without a productive purpose becomes life without meaning.
- We must provide for our own and family’s needs (2 Thess 3.10; 1 Tim 5.8).
- Providing for the needs of others extends our focus beyond self.
- We gain true pleasure from doing a job well, for the glory of God.
- Without cultivation, the natural world would run wild. Even before the sin of Adam, man was to keep

(cultivate) the garden; now it is even more needed because of the decay man introduced through sin (Rom 8.20-22).

- It demonstrates that we are sub-sovereigns over the creation (Gen 1.26).

God's intention at the time of creation was for mankind to be employed in meaningful, productive, work. Governments, corporations, and labour unions steeped in the swill of sin conspire to frustrate God's purposes. For example: minimum wage laws may make employers not want to hire the unskilled; the able-bodied are compensated for not working with unemployment 'insurance' and welfare disbursements, while jobs go unfilled and produce lies unharvested on farms because potential workers prefer to collect 'entitlements'; restrictive laws and labour contracts make it so difficult for firms to change workers' jobs that they automate functions rather than hire workers; manufacturers dissect jobs into highly specialized, dull, repetitive steps to increase productivity; corporations expect dedication from their employees yet treat them as commodities which can be laid off at the whiff of an economic downturn, and make no investment to retrain them with new skills; unions, with closed-shop agreements, make it difficult for companies to hire novices; and unions and governments collude in restricting employment to those who carry particular credentials. All of these, and more, undermine God's mandate for man to work productively for his own good and to glorify his God.

The work that Adam was assigned was to cultivate the garden (Gen 2.15). From his efforts, he would be able to partake of the fruit and crops that the garden would yield. He and his descendants were to manage the garden so that its resources would not be neglected, dissipated, or spoiled but rather made to flourish. This mandate remains ours. Through diligent husbandry, we are to establish order and productivity in the physical realm that God has placed under our care. The word translated 'work' in Genesis 2.15 is applied elsewhere to tilling the soil. This is a significant consideration for our 'enlightened' age. The work that man was originally assigned to do included physical labour. This type of work is generally scorned today. If a person does not have a university degree or does not work in a profession, with a computer, or with his 'mind' he is considered by our society to be doing something less significant. Again, we have turned God's good order upside down. Christians have believed the same myth. In the Church, someone who works fulltime in preaching or missionary endeavours is considered to be more important than someone who works as an auto mechanic or construction worker. Yet, it was physical labour, given to man in the state of innocence, which was deemed by God to be the most meaningful and fulfilling form of work. When we understand God's design for mankind, we realize that the sense of accomplishment that we receive from setting out a row of seedlings, completing a fine brick wall, or installing a well-made cabinet easily exceeds the financial rewards which the world associates with many jobs that often lead to stress, frustration, and burn-out.

It is interesting that the Hebrew word translated in Genesis 2.15 as 'put' comes from the same root as 'rest' (i.e., to rest on something). God rested, or established, man in his work of physical labour. Although physical labour would be cursed later (Gen 3.17), being made painful and difficult, it is still what mankind was designed for and will find most rewarding. The ideal form of work seems to be that which permits us to labour with our hands and exercises our minds as we bring order and beauty into this sin-stained world. Only when we balance labour for six days (Ex 20.9) with a weekly Sabbath for physical rest (Ex 20.10) and worship can we fully satisfy our created nature. When we reach heaven, work will be restored to the blessing it is—since man was created to work.

166. Retirement

We need to establish a few contextual considerations before we address the question of whether it is proper or not for a person to go into retirement:

- For the purposes of this study, we define 'retirement' as the *complete* cessation of productive work to

devote the remainder of one's life to consumption of goods and services (e.g., entertainment and travel), playing games most of the day (e.g., shuffleboard or golf) or doing essentially nothing (e.g., sitting on the front porch gossiping and watching the world go by). This is a fool's bargain with God (Lk 12.16-21).

- This consideration applies to people who are healthy in mind and body; not to those who have physical (e.g., impairment from a stroke) or mental (e.g., dementia) challenges.
- The concept of retirement from *paid* employment at a specified age (e.g., at 65), while a person is still healthy is a relatively recent phenomenon.
- Changing one's *type* of work as one grows older is not retirement. For example, a construction worker may take on a less physically demanding job as he ages (e.g., as a gardener in a greenhouse or as a sales associate in a hardware store).
- Decreasing one's workload to match a diminished energy level and strength as a person grows older, is not retirement.
- There is evidence that some people who have laboured for many years and who suddenly go into retirement experience depression (reported to be as high as 20% of retirees) and a higher susceptibility to illnesses. This is not surprising since man was created to work, and many people derive their purpose in their life from their jobs.

The priests in the OT ceremonial economy were required to withdraw from active service in performing sacrificial duties at the age of 50 (Num 4.3; Num 8.23-25). However, they may have changed their role (Num 8.26) and did not go into a passive retirement. The reason is not stated. However, we may infer that it was due to the physical demands associated with the slaughter and sacrificing of sheep, goats, and bulls that would have required the strength of younger men. Other than this references to a change of role for priests at the age of 50, the Bible is silent about the matter of retirement as defined above. Thus, we need to address the matter from a wider set of Biblical principles and examples.

There are many Biblical examples of godly people who worked in their callings and performed services for the Lord into old age and to the point of their deaths, including Moses, Joshua, Daniel, Simeon and Anna (Lk 2.25-38), and John. Likewise, there are many examples of Christians (and others) who served God, the Church, or their nations into old age, including Billy Graham, R. C. Sproul, Winston Churchill, and Queen Elizabeth II.

Paul indicates that older men and women are to teach by example and mentor younger men and women how to live diligent Christian lives (Titus 2.2-8). He follows the Psalmist who requests that God preserve him into old age so that he can mentor the next generation (Ps 71.18). Christians who have sufficient financial resources to sustain themselves and their families may no longer have to work in income-producing jobs. However, they can, and should, continue working through volunteer activities in their churches, in Christian charitable organizations, or in community services organizations (such as hospitals or shelters for the indigent), by providing care for their grandchildren or the children of families where both parents must work, or by providing care for disabled members of their extended family (Ps 92.12-14).

The concept of forced retirement at age 65, was introduced in 1883 by the German chancellor, Otto Von Bismarck. Those forced out of their jobs were provided with a pension funded out of taxes (mandatory 'contributions' from a person's income). This model spread quickly into other Western countries, and beyond. It has been supported by the modern cult of youth and by the belief that a person is most productive and creative between the ages of twenty-five and forty, tolerably so between the ages of forty and sixty-five, and mostly useless after the age of sixty-five. There are some who advocate removing older people from their current jobs to make way for younger individuals (who presumably will earn less and cost a company less), and even for the euthanization of the elderly to free up societal resources. Most countries have realized that forced (or expected) retirement creates problems (e.g., unfunded pension plans and

increased burdens on social and health services) and have attempted to rectify the situation—e.g., by upping the age at which pensions can be collected or by enacting legislation to prevent age discrimination. However, there is a cultural ‘schizophrenia’ when seniors’ discounts are offered for goods and services and yet we are expected not to discriminate on the basis of age.

Christians should be leading by example to demonstrate that retirement is an invention of sinful minds, and not consistent with God’s purposes. With old age comes acquired wisdom and maturity—something that is sorely lacking in our society, in our governments, and in many companies. Paul tells us how we should live out our lives, including in our senior years. We should:

- Not grow weary in doing good, and not give up, particularly as we have opportunities to support the household of faith (Gal 6.9-10).
- Not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom 12.2).
- Work heartily at whatever we do, for the Lord and not for men (Col 3.23) as we work for six days (Ex 20.9) and rest on a seventh (Ex 20.10).

Biblical Ethics – Honor Your Father and Mother

167. Protecting Authority Relationships

The fifth commandment states, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Ex 20.12; Dt 5.16). The Hebrew word that is translated as ‘honour’ is the imperative verbal form of a word that has a broad meaning that includes ‘heavy’ (Gen 48.10), ‘weighty’ (Ex 5.9), or ‘grave’ (Gen 18.20), and is translated as ‘glory’ in many places. To honour someone (God or man), means that we show respect and reverence toward him, obey his lawful commands, and offer thanksgiving for the blessings which we receive from his hands.

The authors of the Westminster *Larger Catechism* identify those who are comprehended within the scope of the phrase “your father and your mother” in the fifth commandment and include not only natural parents but all those who have a God-appointed authority over us—in a family, church, school, work, or government setting (Q124). Thus, they include our responsibility to obey elders (1 Thess 5.12-13; 1 Tim 5.17) and the civil magistrate (Rom 13.1-2; 1 Pt 2.13-15). Since Paul and Peter indicate that wives are to submit to their husbands (Eph 5.22-24; Col 3.18; 1 Pt 3.1), the obedience which they render falls within the scope of this commandment. The authors of the *Catechism* did not explicitly mention our responsibility to obey our teachers and masters (Eph 6.5; Col 3.22; Titus 2.9; 1 Pt 2.18-20)—managers or bosses—but undoubtedly would have understood that they are included within the scope of the commandment.

These officials (i.e., civil magistrates, elders, teachers, husbands, and masters) are included within the scope of the commandment along with natural parents because they at times act in the role of our natural parents when they are absent (e.g., teachers) and they have a number of responsibilities toward those under their care, including teaching them how to live in a moral and holy manner (2 Tim 4.2), setting an example for them (1 Cor 11.1), expressing love toward them (Col 3.19), protecting and caring for them (1 Tim 5.8), and praying for them (2 Cor 11.28). Likewise, ‘children’ (i.e., every person under the authority of an official) have responsibilities toward their ‘parents’, including honouring their offices (Acts 23.3-5), obeying their lawful commands with diligence and cheerfulness (Titus 3.1), imitating their virtues (Heb 13.7), loving them, and praying for them (1 Tim 2.1-2). The authors of the *Catechism* also include our peers within the scope of the commandment. Thus, we are to honour those who have an equal station with our own—for example, by regarding their dignity and worth, rejoicing in how God has allocated gifts to each of them, not envying them, and assisting them to advance their own station in life (Rom 12.10; 1 Cor 13.4; Phil 2.3; 1 Pt 2.17).

This commandment opens the second section of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments deal with our responsibility to honour our ultimate father—God—through our reverence for him, worship of him, obedience to his commands, protection of his holy name, and offering thanks for all the good things he has given to us. Therefore, the fifth commandment flows logically from the first four commandments. As sub-sovereigns under God, ‘parents’ have been delegated authority from God over those who fall within the scope of their responsibilities. Thus, when a child disobeys her mother who told her to eat her broccoli, she is ultimately disobeying God. And, when a person disobeys a legitimate law enacted by government officials (e.g., by not driving within the speed limit) or ignores an order given by a boss (e.g., to sweep the hallway) he is ultimately disobeying God.

Many of the problems that we see in society today result from a disregard for this commandment. The problems begin with parents who do not take their responsibilities seriously and do not train their children in righteous living (Prov 22.6), do not expect to receive from them the honour and respect that is due to them because of their role as parents (Ex 20.12), and do not discipline them when required (Prov 22.15; Prov 23.13). Then, children who do not honour their parents often show disrespect toward their teachers, employers, police, and elected representatives. The lack of respect for anyone in authority is endemic today because people have been beguiled by Satan’s lie—“You will be like God”—and believe that they have total personal autonomy and are not accountable to anyone else. Governments undermine parental authority today by treating delinquent minors as irresponsible for their actions and by limiting parental authority in areas such as education and corporal punishment.

A civil society depends on the fifth commandment being followed. Of course, the other commandments must be followed also! When Moses incorporated the Ten Commandments into Deuteronomy, the Book of the Covenant, just prior to the Israelites’ crossing the Jordan to enter Canaan, he added, “and that it may go well with you” (Dt 5.16) to the commandment. Paul quotes the first part of this commandment nearly verbatim from the Greek version of the OT in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 6.2-3) and adds a comment that “this is the first commandment with a promise”. The promise stated in this commandment indicates that if we are obedient, then blessings will follow. The blessings that flow from obedience to this commandment are a long and a prosperous life because things will go well in society. Most people would not associate long and healthy lives and material prosperity with obedience to parents. However, when everyone in society is diligently obedient to all their ‘parents’ they will generally be healthier, because they avoid destructive sins, and will apply self-discipline in their lives, take responsibility for providing for themselves and those for whom they should have a concern, and plan for future eventualities.

168. Responsibilities of Children to their Parents

The fifth commandment states, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex 20.12). When the OT was translated into Greek (the *Septuagint* version) before the NT era, the Hebrew word translated into English as ‘honour’ in this command, was translated into Greek with a word that is also translated into English as ‘honour’ when it is used in the NT. For example, Jesus refers to the fifth commandment, and the Greek word for ‘honour’ used by Matthew (Mt 15.4, 6, 8) is translated into English as ‘honour’—it is the same Greek word as is used in the *Septuagint*. Likewise, when Paul quotes the fifth commandment (Eph 6.2), he uses the same Greek word for ‘honour’. However, he provides us with additional information. Thus, he explains that the primary means by which children may *honour* their parents is, by obeying them (Eph 6.1-3; Col 3.20).

The first responsibility of children to their parents is obedience. This is to be done because it is a command (Eph 6.1) and because, as Paul indicates, it pleases the Lord when children are obedient (Col 3.20). Paul also says that children are to obey their parents in *everything* (Col 3.20). Questions can be raised about his use of the word ‘everything’. He clearly does not mean that children are to obey their parents when they

direct them to do something that is contrary to God's other commands (Mt 10.37; Acts 5.29). The *Larger Catechism* (Q127) qualifies this obedience as, "willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels". Thus, in all cases of lawful commands they should be obedient. Someone might object and say, something like, "But what if they command me to marry someone that I don't love?" or "What if they expect me to pursue a particular career when I have no interest in it?" We will deal with the responsibilities of parents to their children as a separate topic; however, for the moment we should note that parents should be reasonable with the demands they place on their children (Eph 6.4; Col 3.21). But, if parents require their children to wear boots because of the prospect of rain, make their beds, or take out the garbage, they are being quite reasonable and must be obeyed. Even Jesus was obedient to his parents (Lk 2.51).

Another issue that is often raised is whether *adult* children are required to obey their parents. God indicates that children, once married, are to leave their parents and to hold fast to their respective spouses (Gen 2.24). This seems to indicate that a change in relationship also implies a change in responsibility. So, when adult children move out of their parents' homes to form new homes, the nature of their responsibility to honour their parents changes. However, if adult children are single and still living at home (a common phenomenon in our day, but uncommon before the last century), they should continue to obey their parents, even if they are paying rent. For example, if their parents ask them to shovel the snow off the driveway or mow the grass, or not to leave their dirty dishes lying around and to put them in the dishwasher, they should obey instantly and without hesitation.

Children have an ongoing responsibility to honour their parents by:

- *Showing respect.* They display reverence in their attitude towards their parents, with their words directed to them, and in their words about them.
- *Honouring their wisdom.* Mark Twain is reported to have said, "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." Children who honour their parents should not be like Twain but should always look to their parents for guidance and be submissive to their corrections.
- *Imitating their virtues.* Children should imitate the virtues and graces of their parents.
- *Praying for them.* Paul says that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for all people (1 Tim 2.1); this includes children praying for the parents' temporal and spiritual wellbeing.
- *Caring for them.* They demonstrate love toward them through affectionate actions and words of comfort when needed and by providing assistance if they become infirm or destitute (Prov 28.24; 1 Tim 5.4, 8).
- *Withholding verbal or physical abuse.* They do not speak disrespectfully about their parents behind their backs or to their faces. For example, they would not call their father, "the old man" (as Mark Twain did). They do not curse or mock them, and never strike them with their hand or an object (Ex 21.15, 17; Mt 15.4-9; Mk 7.9-13).

As Paul tells us, the fifth commandment is the first commandment (among the Ten Commandments) with a promise (Eph 6.2). The promise is that blessings will follow from obedience; specifically, "that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you" (Ex 20.12). All the promises of God are certain. However, they are also contingent on our obedience and on God's providential decrees. Not every person who is diligently obedient to his parents will have a long life. However, in general, children who are obedient to their parents do live longer and are more prosperous than disobedient children. They listen to their parents' good counsel, avoid rebellious and dangerous behaviours, do their homework and study hard, learn to control their passions (including anger [Prov 14.29] and a sharp tongue [James 1.26]), and heed the Gospel message when it is presented to them. Obedience builds self-control, discipline, and character—key attributes for life.

169. Responsibilities of Parents to their Children

Since children are to honour and obey their parents (Eph 6.1), their parents should be worthy of reverence and respect and demonstrate that their rules should be followed. However, having unreasonable or demanding parents provides no excuse for children to disobey them—after all most children at some point think that their parents are too restrictive and unfair. So, the scope of the fifth commandment includes responsibilities of parents to their children and the Bible provides direction for how parents should raise their children:

- *Treat them with respect.* As image-bearers of God, children are precious to God (Ps 127.3; Mk 10.13-16) and should be to all mankind. They should be given the same respect that any other human being is afforded. Children are not to be treated like pets or like slaves.
- *Love them.* Parental (particularly maternal) love is an innate endowment from God (Ps 103.13; Lk 11.11-13). However, because of pervasive sin, we often hear of horrific examples of neglect and abuse of children by their parents. It is the duty of parents to demonstrate sacrificial love for children.
- *Pray for them.* Jesus and Paul prayed for their spiritual children (Jn 17.9; Phil 1.4; Col 1.3), so parents should pray for their natural children's temporal and spiritual wellbeing (Gen 17.18; 1 Chron 29.19; Job 1.5).
- *Set a good example.* Christians are to be examples of godliness to one another (1 Cor 11.1). So, parents should be models of good works and sound speech before their children, so that they can learn to live holy lives and be shameless before the watching world (Titus 2.7-8).
- *Train them in way of godliness.* Parents are responsible for educating their children. This must begin with teaching them about God (his nature and works), sin and salvation, and their duty to obey God's commandments (Dt 6.6-7; Ps 78.4; Prov 1.8; Eph 6.4). Means of training them include family worship, catechising, and bringing them to worship and Sunday School. If parents are diligent in training them in the way of godliness when they are young, they will not depart from it when they become older (Prov 22.6)
- *Educate them.* Parental responsibility for the education of children extends also to preparing them for a calling in life. We will consider how parents should provide schooling for their children as a separate topic.
- *Discipline them.* Part of training children involves teaching them to be self-disciplined, which includes admonishing, reproving, and punishing them when necessary. Anyone who aspires to be an elder must have his children under control (1 Tim 3.4; Titus 1.6). However, this is a standard to which all parents should aspire. We will consider how parents should discipline and punish children as a separate topic.
- *Provide for them.* The *Larger Catechism* (Q129) says that parents are responsible for "providing ... all things necessary for soul and body". This includes protecting children from harm and providing adequate quality food, clothing, and other necessities. Paul says that anyone who does not care for his own household is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5.8).
- *Engage with them.* Rather than plunking their children in front of tablets with YouTube videos, parents should make time daily to engage with their children. Families should join together at meals (shutting off all electronic devices), take them to their extra-curricular events, and play games with them. Work and church activities should not be so all-consuming that parents do not schedule time to engage with their own children.
- *Encourage them.* The *Larger Catechism* (Q129) also says, "commending and rewarding such as do well". Parents are to encourage and build up their children (1 Thess 5.11), and not to tear them down with critical comments and harping about their faults and shortcomings so that they become discouraged (Col 3.21).
- *Be reasonable.* Paul tells parents not to provoke or exasperate their children (Eph 6.4; Col 3.21). One way they do this is by being overly restrictive in their expectations and overly protective. Parents need to let their children experience new things in order to grow into mature and responsible adults. Sometimes they will make mistakes and even get hurt; but they will learn from these experiences. The

wisdom of Solomon applies in this situation. He tells us that we should not be overly righteous or attempt to be too wise lest we destroy ourselves (or our children) in the process (Eccl 7.16).

- *Not lead them into sin.* Parents are not to permit their children to be part of sinful pursuits (e.g., filming child pornography). Nor are they to encourage them to sin (e.g., offering them a marijuana joint) or command them to sin (e.g., to participate in petty larceny such as shoplifting). Nor are they to use their children to advance their own vanity (e.g., driving them to become models, actors, scholars, or athletes) so that they can boast about their children's accomplishments.
- *Not interfere.* Some parents interfere in the lives of their children. This is unwise, particularly when they are older and married. A newly married couple is to leave their parents and form their own new family (Gen 2.24). There is nothing more aggravating than a domineering mother-in-law.
- *Leave an inheritance.* "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous" (Prov 13.22).

A lot is resting on parents. Raising children in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" is a challenging responsibility. However, it is God's chosen means for raising the next generation. Parents need to ask God to give them wisdom to execute their duties as parents (James 1.5-6). The result will be the reward of seeing them become responsible citizens as they raise their own families.

170. Teaching Children the Ways of God is a Covenant Responsibility

God interacts with mankind, as his children, through a covenantal model. When parents interact with their children, God expects them also to operate under a covenantal model, as we learn from his instructions to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6.1-25. Thus, parents are to:

- *Teach their children to fear the LORD* (Dt 6.2) *and to obey his statutes and commandments* (Dt 6.3) so that their children may live a long life and have prosperous lives, and then themselves produce future generations (Dt 6.3).
- *Display a personal heart-based commitment to God and to obedience to his commands* (Dt 6.4-5, 17-18). If not, their hypocrisy will be easily perceived by their children and their instruction ignored. Parents cannot be expected to be obeyed and to have a positive influence on their children's development if they say one thing and do the opposite.
- *Study, memorize, and internalize God's word* (Dt 6.6) so that it influences and directs all their thoughts, words, and actions. A parent cannot teach a child anything about which he has no personal knowledge or experience.
- *Teach children the commands of God diligently at every opportunity*—when sitting down, walking about the neighbourhood, at night before going to bed, or in the morning when arising from sleep (Dt 6.7). In every circumstance there are opportunities for parents to teach their children about God's works of creation and providence and about the work of redemption accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- *Fill their homes with the word of God* (Dt 6.8-9). The Jews enclosed scraps of 'paper' (papyrus or possibly parchment) with words from the Torah in small boxes and tied them to their turbans and attached them to the doorposts or lintels of their homes. Some Jews continue this practice by attaching *mezuzahs*. A similar practice may be seen in many Christian homes where Bible verses are posted on walls or refrigerators. However, the point of this covenant responsibility is not to mechanically post motivational words copied from Scripture with fancy calligraphy or in needlepoint, such as 1 Corinthians 13.4-7, but to have your home permeated with the spiritual presence of the word of God.
- *Demonstrate how God works out his providences* (Dt 6.10-11). Great deliverances, such as a recovery from a serious illness or financial loss, are times when parents can reflect with their children on how the hand of God is working for their good (Rom 8.28). However, we should also see the hand of God working in the smallest details of life, since there is really no such thing as a coincidence.
- *Exhibit a conscious and constant spirit of thankfulness* (Dt 6.12). Nothing is more effective in

demonstrating to children the role of God in our daily lives than rendering him sincere and heartfelt thanks on a regular basis for all the benefits that he graciously pours out daily upon us.

- *Avoid idolatry* (Dt 6.13-15). When parents place God first in their lives, do not display a love of money (1 Tim 6.10), and eschew acquisitiveness, they influence their children to give God priority in their lives and to seek first the advancement of the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Mt 6.33).
- *Trust God* (Dt 6.16). Parents are to display a deep trust in God. Even when times are tough and God's providences appear to be difficult, we are to believe, and to communicate the belief that all (ALL!!) things work out for good for those who are the children of God (Rom 8.28). When we are anxious about the future—e.g., a job prospect or a medical procedure—we indicate that we do not trust God or believe the words of Jesus, when he instructs us not to be anxious, because God knows what we need (Mt 6.25-34). Worry or anxiety are an indication that we are putting God to the test, like the Israelites did at Massah, and is rebellion. Children can sense when their parents are not trusting God and they learn bad habits from them.
- *Prohibit consorting with the enemy* (Dt 6.19). The Israelites were to drive out the pagans who inhabited Canaan and to destroy their idols (Dt 7.2, 5). Under the NT economy, this has a spiritual application. Parents must be judiciously protective of their children until they are able to make intelligent and principled decisions on their own. For example, they should control whom, when, and where, they may date so that they are not tempted into sexual sins or end up committing to marry an unbeliever (Dt 7.3-4); scrutinize their education, particularly if they attend secular public schools; and provide opportunities for them to participate on sports teams and in clubs which do not meet on the Lord's Day.
- *Be prepared to give answers* (Dt 6.20-25). Children ask questions. We know that one of their favourites is, "Why?" So, they are going to ask their parents why they believe what they do and why they require obedience. The wrong answers are to say, "Just because" or "Because I said so". God instructed the Israelites to be prepared to explain why God had given them his laws, and they were to answer with a review of their recent history as they escaped from slavery in Egypt. Likewise, Peter instructs Christians to be prepared to give an answer for their hope (1 Pt 3.15). Thus, parents must be prepared to provide rational, reasoned, and convincing arguments for their beliefs and hopes, and to defend the demands which they place upon their children. For example, they should be prepared to recount how they came to believe in Christ (their escape from slavery to Satan) and give a personal testimony to their relationship with the Lord. They should also be able to explain why they believe that God is the creator of all things, why his word given in the Bible is true, why they should believe in miracles such as the virgin conception and the resurrection, and why they should place their faith in Jesus and their hope in his return and the resurrection.

171. Education of Children

Debates among Christians about the means of educating children (e.g., using state sponsored schools, Christian schools, or homeschooling) can escalate to the point that the parents' choice is viewed to be a measure of their holiness, or it becomes a congregational membership or elder qualification requirement.

Parents are responsible for the education of their children. However, this does not mean that parents must only provide homeschooling. Their responsibility does not change, if they 'hire' others to teach their children—e.g., using specialized subject-matter tutors, online courses, tuition at a private (secular or Christian) school, or a tax-funded secular school. Governments do not have a God-given right to provide education. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is wrong for Christians to use services funded by taxes (including schools). For example, governments fund other services, which they should not, and Christians utilize them without thinking that it is wrong (e.g., roads, health care, public transit, airports, pensions, telecommunications networks, etc.). Ironically, it was the New England Puritans in Massachusetts who

initiated (in 1647) the practice of municipal funding of elementary schooling,¹⁰³ which has now become almost a universal practice. The Puritans would be disgusted at where State-funded education is today—teaching falsehood such as evolution and ‘gender fluidity’ and excluding Christian moral principles. If they had had foresight, they would probably not have created publicly funded schooling.

Arguments for sending children to state sponsored schools are often weak (e.g., opportunities to develop faith and moral character) or pragmatic (e.g., better training in some areas like advanced mathematics or cheaper since it is already paid for by taxes). Arguments for utilizing Christian schools are more persuasive—e.g., use of Bible-centered curricula, teachers held to a higher ethical standard, and the censoring of destructive falsehoods. Arguments in favour of homeschooling can be even more persuasive—e.g., total parental control of curricula and separating children from bad influences. However, these reasons are generally not based on explicit Biblical arguments but on general principles such as the parents’ responsibility for the education of their children (Eph 6.4). Regardless of which form of education parents use, they must be actively involved in their children’s education. They need to know what their children are learning and be prepared to intervene if necessary.

Some countries do not permit homeschooling, since they consider government operated schooling to be a prime means of moulding youth as future citizens. In North America, anti-Christians do not like homeschooling (or any form of schooling where parents have control of the curriculum) since they know the power of education for indoctrinating children in their latest ideas such as environmentalism and acceptance of aberrant sexual practices. We should be prepared to fight for the right to educate our children (e.g., homeschooling or using Christian schools) and not abdicate control of education to government.

Daniel 1.4-6 provides insight into the propriety of Christians sending their children to schools funded by governments or of obtaining a secular education. Based on Daniel’s willingness to attend the Babylonian government-operated and funded school system (which was a propaganda machine for the government and pagan State religion) we can derive guidance for our thinking and practice. Some apologists for Daniel attempt to get around his attendance at the pagan school by suggesting that he did not ‘defile’ himself with the mythological teachings of the Babylonians, just as he did not defile himself with their physical food sacrificed to idols. This idea is mistaken. His course of study would have included pagan mythology and religion. Others suggest that the account merely provides an historical record of what happened. They say that we cannot draw moral lessons from this historical account. However, Daniel is presented in Scripture as an exemplar for us of righteousness who would have nothing to do with pagan religious practices (Ezk 14.14, 20; Dan 1.8). His life is presented as a model for practical Christian living. Therefore, his attendance at a pagan school cannot be relegated to an insignificant fact but has to be considered in the context of his representation as a model for a Christian’s life in a pagan society.

Based on Daniel’s example, we can conclude that attendance at a government-operated school or a school that teaches pagan philosophies is not morally wrong for a Christian. We may believe that it is best for youth in Christian families to be educated at home or in private (i.e., not government sponsored) schools that are run by a board of Christian parents. However, it does not logically follow from this belief that it is morally wrong for children of Christian parents to attend a government sponsored school or to study, for example, the works of Aristotle or Homer’s legends or to study about the theory of evolution. This does not mean that all children should study all aspects of pagan systems. Some children are not able to discern between truth and error and some will always be too easily influenced by falsehood. Parents must exercise great discretion and care in their determination of which of their children can be sent to a pagan school or study pagan teachings without succumbing to the temptations engendered by such attendance.

Regardless, of how we choose to educate our children, we must be careful not to demonize or condemn

¹⁰³ Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop—America’s Forgotten Founding Father* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 311.

families that utilize a different model than we prefer.

172. Disciplining Children

Paul directs that anyone who aspires to be an elder must have his children under control (1 Tim 3.4; Titus 1.6). However, this does not apply only to elders. In order to elect elders who display this qualification, and others, there must be men in a congregation who meet the Biblical standards for family decorum. Therefore, the requirement that parents discipline their children and maintain order in their families is a standard to which all parents should aspire. The Bible places the responsibility for disciplining children on parents. They must not abdicate this responsibility to representatives of the State such as teachers, social workers, or the police. For example, it is not the responsibility of teachers to instill discipline in children. The disciplinary problems teachers encounter in schools (e.g., disrespect, defiance, bullying, and aggression) originate in homes where parents have abdicated their responsibility to take necessary disciplinary actions to check their recalcitrant children. Also, school administrators who create policies that hold younger students accountable for their behaviour place the responsibility in the wrong place—it must begin at home, and parents must be held accountable for their children's misbehaviour.

Effective discipline must begin with parents having defined standards and basic expectations. For example, for younger children the standards may define the hour for bedtime, toy cleanup requirements, amount of time permitted for watching YouTube or playing games, and no temper tantrums. As the children become older the standards may define the time that must be spent on homework before connecting to social media, no hitting siblings, hours for using social media, curfew, completion of assigned chores (e.g., doing the dishes or taking out the recycling), when they can get a driver's licence, and no single couples' dating until they turn 18. Key factors for instilling discipline in children include:

- Understanding that children are innately sinners and need to be corrected (Ps 51.5; Rom 3.10, 23). Without any limits, children become incorrigible.
- Consistently applying the Biblical and subordinate household standards for behaviour. If parents are capricious or inconsistent, children do not know what to expect. They also learn to get around rules by playing off one parent against the other.
- Providing reasonable arguments for why a particular behaviour is expected or prohibited, rather than the common, "Because I say so".
- Realizing that parents who provide discipline will be respected by their children and not despised, even if at times they scream "It's not fair!" and think that the discipline is painful. Eventually, they will realize the benefits of having been brought up in a Christian home (Heb 12.9-11).
- Changing the form of the restrictions over time. It is often difficult for parents to relinquish control over their children. However, as children grow up, the form of the household rules and the children's responsibilities need to change so that the children can mature into responsible Christian citizens.
- Ensuring that the household rules and punishments are not unnecessary or overly restrictive and cause the children to become exasperated and to push back in anger (Eph 6.4; Col 3.21).
- Applying appropriate, fair, punishments swiftly, when necessary.

There are various ways that parents can train children and encourage them to become self-disciplined including encouragement (1 Thess 5.11), positive reinforcement, admonishments, reproofs and corrections from Scripture (2 Tim 3.16), and punishment. Forms of punishment must vary to reflect the age of the child and the nature of the infraction being punished. Some of the forms of punishment that can be used include time outs, removing privileges (e.g., dessert, allowance, use of toys or electronic tablets), restrictions (e.g., grounding and tighter curfews), and spanking.

At this point the hackles might go up! Many people today, including many Christians, believe that spanking a child is a form of physical abuse and should be outlawed. As of the end of 2016, 52 countries had banned

spanking. For example, in France the law that banned spanking, known as the Equality and Citizenship Bill, forbids “all cruel degrading or humiliating treatment, including corporal punishment” by parents. Even in countries that have not yet banned spanking, government organizations such as Children’s Aid Societies, which place children for foster care or adoption, require prospective parents to sign a covenant that they will not spank the children placed with them.

Many claim that spanking models hitting and teaches children that hitting others is okay; devalues a child and the parent; can lead to more serious forms of physical abuse; does not work, does not change aberrant behaviour, but rather can lead to a reinforcement of misbehaviour; promotes anger, antisocial behaviour, cognitive difficulties, and mental health problems; and creates or dredges up bad memories. Opponents of spanking refer us to (supposedly empirical) studies which demonstrate their conclusions. For example, an article that appeared in *Psychology Today* in 2018 entitled, “The Spanking Debate Is Over” stated that, “The empirical, theoretical, and moral arguments against spanking are compelling”. We cannot address now the supposed merits (e.g., surveys of childhood memories or studies of family abuse patterns) of these studies. Rather, we will note that the Bible is clear that corporal punishment is a legitimate, and at times a necessary form of discipline (Prov 13.24; Prov 22.15; Prov 23.13-14; Prov 29.17), which may be used by Christian parents as long as it is administered in love, not in anger, with parental tears, and without abuse that would cause permanent physical harm to a child.

173. Students and Teachers

Teachers serve as representatives of parents when they provide education to children. As such they stand in the place of parents in the matters of training and, at times, discipline. Thus, the relationship between teachers and students falls under the broader scope of the fifth commandment. Therefore, students should be submissive and obedient to teachers just as they should be to their parents (Eph 6.1; Col 3.20) and should honour and respect their teachers as they should their parents (Ex 20.12). As students, their current ‘employment’ is to learn. Therefore, they should not speak back, argue with, be unruly towards their teachers, or cause disruptions in school (Titus 2.9; Titus 3.2; 1 Pt 2.18). Also, they should apply themselves to their work with diligence and an attention to detail as for the Lord (Col 3.22-23).

Teachers can be hired directly as tutors or indirectly by a school administration to teach. Thus, their primary responsibility is to teach the subjects that they have been hired to teach. They are to fulfill this responsibility with diligence and are to strive for excellence, working for the Lord, not to please men, so that they may reflect the goodness of God (1 Cor 10.31; Eph 6.5-8; Col 3.22-24; Titus 2.10). And, standing in the place of parents, teachers should be like parents toward the children who are charged to their care. They should treat them with respect as image-bearers of God (Ps 127.3; Mk 10.13-16), love them (Ps 103.13; Lk 11.11-13), set a good example for them (1 Cor 11.1), train them in the way of godliness (Dt 6.6-7; Prov 1.8; Eph 6.4), pray for them (1 Tim 2.1), encourage and reward them for good work (1 Thess 5.11), and discipline them when chastisement is required.

The subject of the discipline of children in schools can engender heated debate. Statistics about reported incidents of discipline problems in government-funded schools do not necessarily show that the problems have worsened of late across all jurisdictions. However, a 2018 Gallup Poll survey in the US indicated that almost half of teachers were “actively looking for a different job”. The reported reasons that teachers quit teaching included having to work in buildings that are falling apart, a lack of basic classroom materials, overwhelming stress, a lack of respect, an emphasis on testing and data collection, and discipline issues. Teachers often report that they have little recourse when children misbehave, and that the children know it and that parents will sue school officials if they think that their children have been mistreated. Also, some students say that they don’t bother reporting on other children who threaten or bully them because they believe that teachers and principals won’t do anything about it.

Over the past 50 or so years there has been a systematic attempt by education ‘experts’ spouting psychobabble to introduce therapeutic techniques into the schools, which are designed to manipulate students’ behaviour, rather than to provide discipline that punishes and corrects aggressive behaviour, based on Biblical standards of morality. As matters stand today in many schools, we appear to have reached a point where a society-wide re-calibration of policy and practice is required. The first change that is required is to restore the right of teachers to act in the place of parents and to use corporal punishment when required (e.g., on students who physically attack other students or teachers) and to administer permanent expulsions for hard-to-discipline children or for those who resort to abusive practices such as sexual harassment or cyberbullying. It is ironic that school administrative bureaucracies that have neutered teachers when it comes to administering discipline, have also assigned them parental responsibilities which they should not have—e.g., requiring school staff to teach sex-education courses that endorse homosexual practices, and to provide counselling about abortion, drug use, or sex transitions to students without speaking with their parents. In some jurisdictions, school officials can take girls for an abortion procedure without informing their parents or obtaining their permission.

Another problem that must be addressed society-wide is when parents abdicate their responsibility to properly discipline their children and expect the schools to provide that discipline. Teachers report that some parents do not want to take on parental responsibilities but want to be their child’s ‘friend’. Ultimately, the parents of children who are bullies, are disrespectful to their teachers, engage in unruly behaviour in the classroom or playground, or use foul language must be held accountable for their children’s actions. Determining how, in a school context, this accountability should be applied is not simple in today’s culture where the general responsibility of parents for their children’s behaviour is being undermined by legislators and the courts that treat juvenile delinquents as not accountable before the law, and yet do not hold parents accountable for their children’s behaviour.

Another issue that must be addressed when it comes to the relationship between students and teachers is the definition of curricula. In many jurisdictions the government imposes the curricula for publicly funded schools and even for the study program for homeschooled children. Complete control of curricula should reside with parents, and only with them. In addition, parents should have the right to remove their children from a course of study (e.g., sex-education) if they wish. School officials should focus on providing education in core-skills, which were previously referred to as “reading, writing, and arithmetic”, and not rush into implementing the latest trendy programs such as ‘emotional literacy training’, ‘diversity training’, ‘ethnic studies’, ‘gamification’, ‘student-driven learning’, and ‘holistic learning’.

174. Male Headship

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul’s makes a statement that is viewed by many as problematic, “the head of a wife is her husband” (1 Cor 11.3). This statement is dismissed today as being antiquated, misogynistic, culturally relative, not politically correct, or a gross error. However, God instituted a chain of command at the time of creation—God (the Father) has headship over the God-man, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3.23; 1 Cor 15.27), who has headship over men (1 Cor 11.3); men have headship over women (Eph 5.22-23; 1 Pt 3.1, 5-6); and parents have headship over their children (Eph 6.1) until they form family units of their own (Gen 2.24). This order applies in a marriage (1 Cor 11.3) and in the Church (Eph 1.22; Eph 4.15; 1 Tim 2.11-13).

A debated topic in the past (though rarely addressed today) was whether the headship chain-of-command also applies in government or business settings. Some Christians have argued that women should not hold political office. For example, John Knox, in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), argues that rule by females is contrary to the Bible. The virtuous woman of Proverbs

31.10-31 would likely have had male servants whom she commanded. This seems to provide indirect, but sufficient, warrant for the existence of female managers in a business setting.

The headship chain-of-command in the marriage relationship did not arise because of sin. The order was in place before Adam and Eve sinned (1 Tim 2.13). In addition, a headship chain-of-command, though voluntary, exists within the holy Trinity. Being in a subordinate position is not wrong; otherwise, Jesus would not be subject to the Father. Rather it is a sign of love and respect (Eph 5.33). Paul's statement in Galatians 3.28—there is no male or female—does not eliminate the created distinctions and order of precedence between the sexes. The equality Paul speaks about in Galatians relates to the full equality of all people before God with respect to salvific grace.

Males and females have different roles defined by God at creation. This role differentiation is to be maintained (at minimum) within the family and the Church, and in particular during worship assemblies (whether in a church building or in a home). Worship is to reflect the order of creation. It is ironic that many of the Christians involved in the 'head covering movement,' which interprets 1 Corinthians 11.3-16 as speaking of the requirement to wear a fabric head covering in worship, choose to ignore Paul's clear injunction against women speaking in a worship assembly and his command that they remain silent (1 Cor 14.34-35; 1 Tim 2.12). For example, there is a testimonial on one of their websites about female worship leaders and preachers. This is an example of how the Evangelical Church today majors on minors and ignores the clear teachings of God (e.g., the Ten Commandments' requirement for Sabbath keeping) but emphasize a particular interpretation of a passage that has been contested for centuries.

Paul indicates that the reason for male headship is based on two primary factors: "Adam was formed first, then Eve"; and "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2.13-14). It is obvious that in any setting where more than a single person is involved (e.g., family, church, government, work, or school) and something is to be achieved or accomplished, someone has to be in charge to allocate duties and to make a final decision where there are differences of opinion. Thus, the final authority in a marriage and family setting has been assigned by God to the male (Adam) because he was created first and the female (Eve) was created to be a "helper fit for him" (Gen 2.18; 1 Cor 11.8-9).

Paul's second argument for male headship is that the woman (Eve) was deceived. All of mankind's troubles began when Eve ignored the authority God delegated to Adam and the command Adam had relayed to her from God, not to eat of the forbidden tree. She wandered into the realm of temptation and acted independently from her husband. It is not considered politically correct today to suggest that there are differences between men and women, but it does appear that women are generally easier to dupe and to prey upon than men (this is one reason for the special warnings in Scripture to care for widows and not to oppress them). Satan knew that Adam could not be deceived, so he used Eve as the means of getting at Adam—Adam was not deceived, he knew exactly what he was doing when he ate the fruit, and he sinned willfully. Eve's weaknesses were her sensitivity to the beautiful talking serpent (possessed by Satan), her sympathetic ear, and her limited knowledge. Adam's weakness was his unquestioning trust of his only human friend—his wife. Satan used Job's wife in a similar way to tempt Job (Job 2.9), but unsuccessfully (Job 2.10).

Troubles between men and women continue today because men abdicate their headship role in marriage and accede to their wives' wishes and demands in areas where they should take a principled stand—as Solomon was led into idolatry by his wives (1 Ki 11.3-8). Paul and Peter state that wives are to submit to their husbands (obviously, when they are not requiring them to do something that is immoral; Acts 5.29), not attempting to rule over them (Eph 5.22; Col 3.18; 1 Pt 3.1). Husbands are to love their wives and not to be harsh with them (Eph 5.25, 28, 33; Col 3.19). When God's instructions are followed, marriage relationships, and relationships between men and women in general, improve, and conflict in society can be reduced.

175. Woman's Rebellion Against Male Headship

Eve's punishment for eating the forbidden fruit was centred on relationships (Gen 3.16). As the mother of all living (Gen 3.20), she was condemned to suffer pain as she brought new life into the world. Her relationship with her children should have been filled only with joy when she fulfilled the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, but instead it became arduous. Another relationship that was damaged was that with her husband. It was changed from being a relationship of love, respect, and support into one of ongoing conflict and tension. She attempted to gratify her pride and pleasure, and instead gained pain and persecution. Her punishment not only affected her but has been visited on all of her female descendants.

The pains of childbearing include not only the severe pain associated with labour but also other problems, including difficulties conceiving, pain during sexual intercourse, miscarriages, excessive bleeding after giving birth, breech births which often require caesarian sections, and lactation problems such as that caused by plugged milk ducts. These pains related to childbearing that women experience worldwide are a constant reminder of Eve's grievous sin.

The statement "Your desire shall be contrary [or, toward] to your husband" (Gen 3.16) has interpretation challenges. First, the Hebrew word translated 'desire' appears only two other times. In one instance (Song 7.10) the meaning appears to be 'sexual desire'. If this is the meaning here, then God may be setting up a contrast—even though women will experience pain in childbearing they will still desire to have sexual intercourse and thereby produce children, thus ensuring that the mandate to bear children is achieved in a sinful world. Today, we see how women have thwarted this mandate with the use of conception control, so that sexual desires can be fulfilled without a connection to procreation.

The other occurrence of the word translated 'desire' is in Genesis 4.7. In this instance, the word appears to have the meaning of sin wanting to be a master over Cain. The ESV translates the adjacent 'unto' as 'contrary to', since the word 'unto' can also be translated as 'against'. Thus, the statement could be read as, "your desire shall be *against* your husband". Given the contextual proximity of Genesis 4.7 to Genesis 3.16, it may be best to translate and interpret the two passages in a comparable manner—i.e., with 'against'—with the idea that the woman will desire to have mastery over the man. Thus, it appears that God declares that Eve and her descendants will have a desire for independence from, and to rule over, their husbands. Instead of accepting their God-defined role in marriage, as helpers for their husbands, they will want to oppose and dominate them. Some respond to this suggestion by noting that Eve had already acted independently from her husband when she ate the fruit, and thus her punishment would be that she would *desire* from then on to be submissive toward her husband. However, this response is faulty since if Adam and Eve had not sinned, Eve would have desired to be submissive to Adam, in accord with God's defined role-hierarchy.

It is evident that some women despise, disobey, and domineer over their husbands—a direct result of the curse on the marriage relationship. And this rebellion extends beyond the marriage relationship. It underlies the struggle between the sexes that has been especially visible as a driving factor beneath modern feminism, which has been taken over by lesbians who hate the God-defined male headship (1 Cor 11.3). It has become a curse that causes modern media (e.g., in advertisements) to portray men as bumbling fools and their spouses as rational, clear-headed leaders. It is this curse that has also led women to demand roles which God has not assigned to them such as participating in combat in military engagements or being elders or pastors of congregations. This curse has also contributed to the gender confusion of our day that has resulted in lesbian couples breeding and rearing children without the presence of a male marital partner.

As a result of Eve's sin and punishment, women are cursed with not being content to have submissive roles

to men. The NT clearly teaches that women are not to aspire to fill roles assigned by God only to men (1 Cor 14.34-35; 1 Tim 2.11-12) and that women are to be submissive to their husbands (Eph 5.22-24; Col 3.18; 1 Pt 3.1-6). This is not a culturally conditional injunction which died out after the apostolic age, as many modern interpreters attempt to demonstrate. It is based on the creation order (1 Tim 2.13-15).

The curse extends beyond the attempt of women to have dominion over men—it includes the failure of their attempt, as shown by the translation, “*but* he shall rule over you.” (Gen 3.16). In a sinful society, when women attempt to dominate over men, it backfires, and men re-assert their God-given headship; but do so in an authoritarian and harsh manner. This is why the status of women is so bad in societies dominated by false religions such as Islam and Hinduism, where men often rule over women with despotic cruelty, treating them as slaves. It is only in Western civilization, with a Christian heritage, that women have been granted the rights that are missing elsewhere. However, as the West has continued its decline into resurgent paganism, the Church has ceded the Biblical position and has encouraged women to dominate over men. If the Church does not emphasize the proper Biblical model for marriage—wives being submissive and respectful and husbands being wise, loving and gentle with their wives (Eph 5.21-33)—we can expect to see the return of harsh domination of women by men, even in the supposedly enlightened countries of Europe and North America.

176. Baptism

Some readers may be surprised that the topic of baptism appears in a series on Biblical ethics. For example, Wayne Grudem in his book, *Christian Ethics*, makes no reference to the topic, and most books dealing with Biblical ethics do not include the topic. However, baptism is a matter for a study on ethics and not just for a study of the theology of salvation or of the Church. For example:

- Jesus told John that he had to be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3.15). Thus, baptism falls within the realm of morality.
- Mark reports the words of Jesus, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16.16), making baptism a requirement for salvation—not that one is saved by baptism, but the step of seeking and receiving baptism is an outward sign of the inward conversion that a Christian has experienced. Peter (Acts 2.38, 41; Acts 10.48), Philip (Acts 8.27-38) and Paul (Acts 9.18; Acts 16.14-15, 30-33; Acts 18.8; Acts 19.4-5) make the connection between being saved and marking with baptism the change that occurs in a person’s state before God upon conversion (new birth, faith, and repentance).
- Jesus gives his disciples the command to go into the world and make disciples of the peoples and baptize them (Mt 28.19). Thus, the command and act of baptizing converts is a binding moral requirement.
- Baptism is the NT counterpart of, and replacement for, the OT sign of the covenant—circumcision. Just as circumcision was required, so is its replacement. However, under the OT economy, the sign was applied only to male adults and infants (Gen 17.12-13; Ex 12.48). But under the NT economy the scope of the application of baptism has been widened, since it is now to be applied to females as well as to males (Acts 16.15, 32).

So, we can conclude that baptism is a moral imperative—both for an individual to receive and for the Church to administer.

Reasons why baptism is a moral imperative include:

- It is a command of God. If there were no other reason, everyone who makes a profession of faith in Jesus should be baptized.
- It is a sign of being placed under covenant obligations to God. Adults who take a baptismal vow for themselves, or representing one of their children, indicate that they are placing themselves or their family under the authority of their heavenly Father. This is why baptism falls logically under the obligations of the fifth commandment. Of course, since a vow is involved, participating in a baptism is also governed by the ninth commandment—we are not to give false testimony. And baptism and

baptismal vows are acts of worship that are governed by the second commandment.

- Baptism is an act of public profession of personal and familial allegiance to Jesus Christ (Josh 24.15). Christianity is different from a number of other religions with their distinguishing apparel (e.g., turban, kippah, hajib, henna markings) and accoutrements (e.g., ceremonial daggers, jewellery). Some Christians may wear jewellery with crosses or fish symbols, but there is no Biblical requirement to do so. Rather, a Christian cannot be distinguished physically from other people. The distinguishing feature of Christians is the observable actions that demonstrate that a person is a Christian, not their outward physical appearance. On the one hand, there are negative actions, such as not committing adultery, not stealing, not blaspheming, and not engaging in commercial activities on the Lord's Day. On the other hand, the positive, observable actions include demonstrating love to neighbours (Mt 22.39), assembling for worship on the Lord's Day (Heb 10.25), sitting at the Lord's Supper with Christian brothers and sisters, and being baptized. However, participation in any of these actions does not leave any direct tangible evidence on a person's body or apparel that would indicate that he is a Christian.
- Besides being an act whereby we declare our allegiance to God, baptism also places a person being baptized under the authority of God's appointed representatives within the Church. A convert or an infant does not baptize himself. Rather, the overseers (pastors/elders) in a congregation perform a baptism, placing the blessing of the Trinity on the individual (Mt 28.19). Thus, the overseers have a responsibility, delegated to them by Christ, for admitting individuals into the visible Church (Mt 16.19) and overseeing their spiritual and moral growth; and the individuals who are baptized have a responsibility to honour and obey the elders of the congregation into which they have been baptized.

Since the time of the early 16th century Reformation, with the appearance of the Anabaptists (e.g., Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites, as they are now known), the Christian world has been divided over the issue of whether infants should be baptized or only professing adults. This is not the right place to engage in a defense of infant baptism—which is Biblical, when we understand the nature of federal representation assigned to parents (starting with Adam), the covenantal continuity between the OT and NT with baptism replacing circumcision, the expanded scope of the applicable recipients (i.e., including women), the promises of God's blessing on covenanted families (1 Cor 7.13-14, 16), and the household baptisms recorded in Scripture. However, if a Biblical case can be made for the baptism of children, then Christian parents who do not present their children for baptism are breaking the fifth commandment. Ironically, some churches which do not baptize infants have introduced infant dedication ceremonies. This appears to indicate that Christians realize innately that covenant children belong to the Church and to God and are holy—not made holy through baptism, but holy because of their place in a covenant family.

177. Church Membership – A Requirement

Once a person is converted by the Holy Spirit, he is to seek membership in the Church through baptism and affiliation with a local congregation whose elders will administer his admission into the visible organized Church. The Biblical evidence supporting the requirement for a believer to be a member of a local congregation, include:

- Jesus appoints men to act as his 'under shepherds' (pastors/elders) in each church (Titus 1.5). They are to lead, rule, guide, admonish, teach, protect, care for, and discipline the flock of God, over which God has made them overseers (Acts 20.13-35; 1 Tim 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-16; 1 Pt 5.1-4). Caring for the flock would be impossible if there were no recognizable membership. An elder/pastor couldn't watch over a flock that he couldn't define in terms of some form of membership or association (whatever we want to call it).
- By Christ's own authorization (Mt 16.15-19), the Church is provided with the power of the "keys" so as to have the assigned responsibility of "binding and loosing", which at the very least includes the authority to determine terms of communion and membership in the authorized covenant community.

Since the time of the Apostles, it is the elders' job to draw the line where the Lord Jesus would draw it—no tighter and no looser!

- Elders are directly responsible for particular assemblies of God's people. Thus, it is necessary for both them and the people to know who makes up the assembly. It is therefore necessary to demarcate in some way (e.g., count or enumerate, list, ask for a covenant commitment, etc.) those who are within the assembly and those who are outside the assembly (1 Cor 5.12).
- A congregation could not keep the commands to obey church leaders (Heb 13.17; 1 Tim 5.17) if there is not a definable and visible group of leaders. Thus, by necessary inference, a person who is a Christian must be committed to a congregation with a definable group of leaders.
- Jesus provides an order to be followed when calling an erring brother or sister to repentance and restoring fellowship between individual members of the Church (Mt 18.15ff). If the guilty person refuses to listen, Jesus instructs us to bring the matter to the Church. That clearly points to believers being recognized as members of some organized body in which to put into effect Church censures.
- Excommunication is expelling someone from the Church, which includes, at least, excluding someone from the Lord's Supper. A church cannot have power to expel if it does not have power to admit. If we admit ourselves to the Church (e.g., come to the Lord's Supper solely by our own volition), then we cannot be removed by any other means. Admission to, and exclusion from, the Church's sacraments is by the same means—either our own individual volition or through the authority of elders. Paul does not say a man is to remove himself, but that the Church is to expel him (1 Cor 5.13). The Church cannot expel someone if there is no concept of membership and if it does not have the duty of admission into membership.

Despite these reasons, it is common for people to reject the concept of Church membership today. Some reasons people give, include:

- Membership does not make you a Christian, only profession of faith does, therefore membership is not needed. The logic of this argument fails when you consider the example of the following: "Baptism does not make you a Christian, only profession of faith does, therefore baptism is not needed."
- Membership in God's invisible, everlasting church does not necessarily require membership in a local congregation or denomination. A person can belong to the Church without making a specific commitment to an organization. A person can be a Christian without being a member of a congregation. However, there are many things that one can do (or not do), while being a Christian, but nevertheless be an inconsistent Christian. Since membership is a Scriptural requirement, then full obedience will require it. In addition, the two are not mutually exclusive. A person can be a member of both the visible and the invisible Church through two different relationships, just as a person can be a member of a family through two different relationships (e.g., as a daughter and as a sister).
- "The sin, hypocrisy, and inconsistency visible in every congregation and denomination turns me off. There is no perfect organization, so I won't join any." If consistently applied, the logic of this position would require Christians to cease being committed to the institution of marriage because some marriages have failed; or, to give up citizenship in a country because particular politicians are corrupt.
- Abuse by elders makes people leery of the organized church and they feel it is 'safer' not to be subject to others. This argument cannot be applied consistently. If it were, we would have to be against parenthood because some parents abuse their children. Or we could not work for a boss because some bosses are unfair. At times, all human authority is abused. However, this does not mean that human authority is never to be respected.
- Membership is not an important matter; rather the Church should be focused on evangelism. This same kind of argument is used by those who say what we do in worship is not an important matter or is to be determined by individual taste. It is also the argument used by people who want to dismiss Paul's instruction that women are not to preach, and in other areas where people do not want to hear what the Bible teaches, or the logical conclusions of arguments derived from those teachings. This argument can be used only if membership is truly a matter of indifference. If membership can be demonstrated to

have Scriptural warrant, then it is required.

178. Church Membership – Responsibilities

We noted previously that people give various reasons for why they will not become members of a local congregation. However, these reasons are at root attempts to rationalize their unwillingness to make a commitment to the work of the Church of Jesus Christ. Underlying causes of this lack of commitment vary by individual, but may include:

- A spirit of individualism and independency, which is rampant throughout Western culture.
- Fear of the unknown, indicating a lack of trust in God.
- An unforgiving spirit and holding grudges—a hinderance to prayer (Mt 6.12) and demonstrative of a lack of love (1 Cor 13.4-7).
- A lack of understanding of the covenantal and federal model that God used when he established the institutions of marriage, the State, and the Church.
- A lack of commitment to corporate responsibility, which can be partially attributed to the Church's lack of emphasis and teaching about corporate responsibility and individual accountability.
- Rebellion against the explicit oversight by elders (or authority in general).
- Ignorance of Biblical doctrine that pervades the Church—in particular ignorance about the doctrine of the Church.
- No commitment to the historic and Reformed confessional position on the Church—e.g., a rejection of the Westminster Standards, including *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*.

A Christian is required by the NT to be a member of a local congregation and to take on responsibilities on behalf of that congregation, which include:

- *Agreeing to a covenant of membership.* This is an example of making a lawful vow before God and witnesses and is to be taken seriously.
- *Attending the stated services.* When the elders of a congregation designate public worship assemblies on the Lord's Day, the members should be in attendance (Heb 10.25). If the elders designate two services, the members should be present at both, unless there are extenuating circumstances (e.g., a newborn in the home). In addition, members should demonstrate their commitment to the congregation by attending, as they are able, mid-week meetings, membership classes, Sunday School classes, fellowship lunches, or other events organized by the leaders. People demonstrate a lack of commitment to the fellowship of their congregation when they place a higher priority on other activities (e.g., sleeping in on Sunday morning or participating in a recreational activity instead of attending a Church event).
- *Assuming volunteer roles.* Church is not a spectator sport or a passive form of entertainment. It is a body made up of believers (1 Cor 12.12-29) who mutually support each other and who work together for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. A problem in many parts of the Church today is that volunteer roles within churches are being replaced with roles assigned to paid professionals who are expected to have advanced degrees (e.g., music directors, specialty ministries, counsellors). The only identifiable paid positions in the NT are elders/pastors (1 Tim 5.17-18; Gal 6.1). Most mega-churches (2000+) have a number of paid fulltime positions (e.g., Senior Pastor, Worship Pastor, pastors for different age groups, Outreach Director, IT Director, A/V Technician, Executive Assistant, Finance Manager, Facilities Manager, etc.). Although they will also have volunteers (e.g., teaching Sunday School or staffing the nursery) they undermine volunteerism with paid professional staff. Imagine instead of a congregation with 2,400 members concentrated in one location being split into twenty congregations of ~120 members each, with half of the members actively involved in volunteer activities in their congregations. The impact in a community would likely be far greater than the impact of the single mega-church with its paid professional staff.
- *Sitting at the Lord's Table.* It is clear from apostolic example and Paul's instruction that professing

believers (in good standing) are expected to participate in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2.42; Acts 20.7, 11; 1 Cor 11.17-34).

- *Praying for leaders.* We are instructed to pray for those in authority over us in the civil domain, so it is even more of a requirement that we pray for the persons and ministry of Church leaders (Eph 6.18-19; Heb 13.18-19).
- *Praying for other members.* It is a good practice to refer to the prayer requests in the congregation's Lord's Day bulletin and to work through your congregation's directory in your daily prayers. This will help you to be aware of needs and to determine how you might be of assistance.
- *Caring for other members.* Our commitment to a local congregation must include helping those in the congregation through acts of care and kindness (Jn 13.34-35; Rom 12.10; Gal 6.2, 9-10; 1 Jn 3.17-18) and encouragement (1 Thess 4.18; 1 Thess 5.11; Heb 3.13).
- *Obedying leaders.* We are to imitate and obey our elders (Heb 13.7, 17).
- *Tithing.* The works of ministry of a congregation are to be funded out of the tithes and freewill offerings of members. This money is used to pay the pastor, maintain facilities, and support outreach and benevolence activities.
- *Voting.* We assume that the Presbyterian model of congregational voting for the appointment of deacons and elders/pastors is defensible from Scripture, rather than the model in which a church hierarchy (e.g., a bishop) assigns persons. Therefore, all members must ensure that they are voting for properly qualified individuals (1 Tim 3.1-12; Titus 1.6-9), when new persons are being considered for filling church offices.

179. The Relationship between Church Officers and Members

The Church is to be governed by God's laws as much as is any other institution which he has established (e.g., marriage and civil government). There must not be a set of moral standards for the Church that is separate from those which God has established for all of mankind. Officers and members of the Church are accountable before God to obey all the commands God has communicated in Scripture more diligently than anyone else (Mt 5.20). However, there are additional procedural laws that apply to the Church which do not apply outside of the Church—for example, for appointing Church officers (i.e., elders/pastors and deacons; 1 Tim 3.1-13; Titus 1.5-9); the nature and operation of Church courts (i.e., sessions, presbyteries, and synods); for identifying the recipients of baptism and for admission to the Lord's Table; and regulations for Church discipline and censures which go beyond what civil magistrates may apply for specific crimes. In this series on Biblical ethics, we will not consider all the God-defined regulations governing the operation of churches. Rather, we will consider only how the Church should be governed, as identified in the Bible's guidance about the relationship between church officers and church members.

The primary command that applies to the relationship between church officers and church members is the fifth commandment, which in its broad application specifies that church members should:

- *Respect their elders.* Paul indicates that elders should be respected, esteemed, and loved (1 Thess 5.12-13). Also, those who rule well should be considered worthy of a double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. (1 Tim 5.17).
- *Pay them fairly.* He also indicates that the elders deserve to be paid for their work for the Church (1 Tim 5.18). They should receive a fair remuneration for their ministry services, commensurate with what similar professionals receive and with the cost of living in their geography of service.
- *Submit to them.* We are to obey elders because they have been appointed by God (Rom 13.1; Heb 13.17; 1 Pt 5.5). Of course, obedience to any human authority is not absolute. It is conditional. Elders are to be obeyed only if their commands are consistent with God's revealed will (Acts 5.29).
- *Pray for them.* Elders have heavy responsibilities (1 Cor 11.28) and their work for the Kingdom needs to be covered with sincere and earnest prayers (2 Thess 3.1; 1 Tim 2.2; Heb 13.7, 18).
- *Imitate them.* Elders who are faithful to God serve as examples for their congregations through the

visibility of their faith, moral behaviour, and displays of loving compassion. Christians should imitate them in these things (1 Cor 4.16-17; 1 Cor 11.1-2; 1 Thess 1.6; Heb 13.7). Assuming that godly men are in positions of leadership—even with their foibles and idiosyncrasies—society would be better off if people imitated them rather than the current trendsetting sports, entertainment, and business celebrities.

- *Not make judgements about them.* Congregations must love their elders and not be judgemental of their ministries (Mt 7.1-5; Rom 14.4; 1 Cor 4.1-5), make comparisons with the ministries of others (1 Cor 11.1-15), or judge them by ‘standards’ of the world (e.g., intellectual achievements, oratory and management skills, or popularity). Much (most) of the judgement of an elders’ ministry in a congregation arises from a spirit of jealousy or self-will from people who want to have their own way or to receive honours.
- *Not falsely accuse.* No false accusations should be made against an elder. If there is a legitimate concern about the doctrine or behaviour of an elder, then two credible witnesses must support the claim or charge (1 Tim 5.19).
- *Care for them.* Pastors often ‘burn out’ as they try to meet unreasonable expectations (e.g., to be: available 24X7, a first-class orator, a counsellor, a people person, and a great evangelist). They have few friends, receive little encouragement, and feel that they are left to do everything; all for low pay. Members should encourage their elders with kind words and tokens of appreciation (e.g., meals, small gifts, or invitations), and should strive to maintain peace so that the elders’ service is be filled with joy (Heb 13.17).
- *Be committed.* Too many people in the Church are ‘sermon-sippers’ or ‘band-wagon’ members who at the slightest offence, or if they don’t get their own way, pack up and leave. Members must commit and participate.
- *Not idolize.* However, loving and caring for pastors and being committed to a congregation does not mean that we are to place them on a pedestal. No one is perfect. So, we must not put our brains in neutral and follow them with cultic attachment.

Conversely church elders/pastors are to:

- *Keep watch over their flocks*, in terms of their faith and morals, as those who will have to give an account of their faithfulness (Heb 13.17; 1 Pt 5.2).
- *Serve willingly* and eagerly, not under compulsion and not for worldly gain or honours (1 Pt 5.2-4).
- *Set an example* in faith and morals (1 Tim 3.2-4; Titus 1.6-9; 1 Pt 5.3); by living transparent lives in which the faithfulness of their doctrine and life is evident to all.
- *Preach and teach*, to educate, reprove, rebuke, and exhort those under their care (1 Tim 3.2; 2 Tim 2.2, 24; 2 Tim 4.1-2, 13).
- *Be gentle shepherds*, not tyrannical overlords (Mt 20.25-28; Jn 21.15-17; 1 Pt 5.2-3), since they are under-shepherds of Christ, and are to do only that which can be supported Biblically and is for the edification and building up of the Church.

180. Preaching, Teaching, and Ruling Roles in the Church

We noted previously, under our consideration of the second commandment, that preaching/teaching is an approved element of the worship of God—it is one of the elements of worship that are ‘downward’, meaning that it, along with Bible reading, is a means that God communicates his word and precepts to mankind. Pastors/teachers are messengers (2 Cor 5.20; Eph 6.19-20) of God, appointed by God (Rom 1.1; 1 Cor 12.28-31; Eph 4.1), who are to proclaim only what the Bible teaches and not their personal opinions (1 Tim 1.7) or anything that is heretical (e.g., myths like the idea that God used evolution over millions of years to create life on the earth; or a works-based means of salvation).

A man may receive a call to pursue an office within the Church through an inner compulsion (1 Tim 3.1)

from the Holy Spirit, friends or associates within the congregation may encourage him to consider taking on an official role, or the current elders may identify and recommend him for office. Regardless, he is to seek recognition and administration of this call by the body of elders overseeing the congregation. He is not to appoint himself to the office (Jer 14.14; Heb 5.4).

The body of elders will recognize and administer a man's call to a Church office by ensuring that:

- He displays the character and gifts (e.g., teaching and encouraging) required of a person in a position of spiritual leadership (Acts 6.3; 1 Tim 3.2-7; 1 Tim 4.14; Titus 1.6-9). However, no leader can be sinless and perfect. So, the expectation must be that the prevailing indication is that the man's faith, morals, and doctrine are consistent with Scripture.
- He is not a recent convert (1 Tim 3.6). Recent converts are often very excited to speak about their salvation experience, and they have a lot of energy and exuberance. As a result, some leaders in the Church rush to give them opportunities to teach. But Paul says that we are not to bring them into teaching and leadership positions too quickly (1 Tim 5.22). Although there must be a balance in this. In the Presbyterian and Reformed churches there may be a tendency to hold back opportunities for service from people far too long. This can quickly turn excited new Christians into 'dead' pew-fillers. Also, this does not mean that the person must attend four years of seminary before he can teach. But he must be a student of the Bible and understand the system of doctrine that is taught therein (2 Tim 3.16-17; Titus 1.9).
- He is not pursuing the office for reasons of self-glorification, to gain honour, for mercenary reasons, or to lord it over others (1 Pt 5.3).
- He has been trained, tested and proven (1 Tim 5.22). Sometimes, it is difficult to assess a person's readiness if we don't know him well. It is not like looking at his batting average in baseball or at his time running a 5K race. Nevertheless, we must assess his readiness. Ordination bodies need to be honest with candidates, who also need to be honest with themselves.
- The will of God has been discerned through prayer (Acts 13.4; Acts 14.23).
- The will of the congregation has been determined (Dt 1.13; Acts 6.3).
- An agreement of a plurality of the elders (in a congregation or presbytery) has been confirmed before the appointment of the man to the office.
- He has been ordained by the elders (1 Tim 4.14; Titus 1.5).
- He is the husband of one wife (1 Tim 3.2, 12; Titus 1.6). Thus, a Muslim (or patriarch in a Mormon offshoot) male convert with four wives, while not required to divorce three wives (1 Cor 7.13-14, 16)—we are not to tear apart marriages even if they do not follow the God-ordained model of one man and one wife for life—is not to be ordained as an elder or deacon.

Women are not to be ordained to preaching/teaching and ruling roles within a congregation (1 Cor 14.34-35; 1 Tim 2.11-15). Paul is emphatic about this, repeating his statement three times in 1 Corinthians, indicating that this is a universal principle ("in all the churches of the saints"), and that it is shameful for women to preach/teach. Also, women in a worship assembly of the Church are not to read the Scriptures as a sole reader (as distinct from congregational responsive reading) or to teach where men are present in the assembly. And it is possible that they should also not lead in prayer—if the injunction for them to keep silent, includes engaging in solo audible praying. Reading the Scriptures, preaching, and probably leading in prayer, are actions which are to be allocated only to those in positions of authority within the Church. If a woman undertakes one of these actions, she indicates that she has authority over the men who are present in the worship assembly and that she is not in a subordinate station and being submissive to them. Paul provides reasons for this restriction on women: it is contrary to the law of God (1 Cor 14.34), since in the OT economy only men were appointed to a priestly or prophetic office; that a woman is to have a subordinate role to a man by nature, from creation (Gen 2.20-24; 1 Cor 11.8-9; 1 Tim 2.13); and because "Eve was deceived" (1 Tim 2.14). We won't examine the many counter arguments that have been presented by those who choose to disagree with the clear statements given by Paul under the authority of the Holy Spirit (e.g., translations support the oppression of women, Paul was a misogynist, men and women were

created to have equal roles, the prohibition is derived from a contemporary cultural distinctive, women prophesied in the OT, the prohibition applies only to married women, women have been effective preachers, or the prohibition is a non-Pauline interpolation or a late manuscript addition). We won't ask, "Did God actually say? (Gen 3.1), but we will obey God's commands through the Apostle Paul.

181. Employee-Employer Relationships

A broad application of the fifth commandment directs employees about how they should act toward their employers. In the ancient world, 'employees' were often indentured servants or slaves. Free men (other than the poor) would often operate their own businesses and would not be employed by others as are most workers today. However, the commands relating to slaves, certainly apply to employed workers today. Some of the specific duties of employees are:

- *To obey their managers' lawful commands.* They are to perform an assigned task, even if they don't like the nature of the work or don't understand why it needs be done (Eph 6.5; Col 3.22; Titus 2.9; 1 Pt 2.18-20). Claiming that a task is 'outside of their job description' is not a legitimate reason for not performing a task. If an employee believes that there may be an alternate or better way to accomplish a task, he may work with his manager to suggest improvements, but not in an argumentative manner (Titus 2.9; Titus 3.2). Regardless of the outcome of such a discussion, he is to perform the work he is assigned.
- *To do good work.* Employees are not to perform their work in a negligent, shoddy, or desultory manner. Rather they are to perform their tasks to the best of their ability and with the highest regard for quality and an attention to detail. Paul provides the reason—they are to work for the Lord, not to please men, so that they may reflect the goodness of God (Eph 6.5-8; Col 3.22-24; Titus 2.10). Even if harshly treated or rebuked with unkind words they are not to retaliate by working-to-rule, sabotaging their companies, or working half-heartedly; rather, they are to receive correction (deserved or undeserved) with grace (Heb 12.9; 1 Pt 2.18-20).
- *To be content with their wages.* Discontentment plagues our society. It is exacerbated by union demands for salary adjustments, governments that cater to an entitlement mentality, advertising that suggests that we deserve more than we currently have or get, and a pervasive covetousness. John told the Roman soldiers to be content with their wages (Lk 3.14) and Paul instructs us to be content with our situation in life (Phil 4.11; 1 Tim 6.8) and not to be envious of others' lot in life (Gal 5.21; Titus 3.3).
- *Not to steal.* Theft by employees is a significant problem. It includes removing items (e.g., supplies, tools, computers, merchandise, etc.) from a work site, larceny (e.g., skimming from a cash drawer), embezzlement (e.g., falsifying deposits or expense reimbursements), copying and selling intellectual property, and not working an assigned number of hours or conducting other business on work time. Paul tells employees that they are not to pilfer from their managers or companies (Titus 2.10).
- *Not to envy others' positions.* Workers are not to covet (Ex 20.17; James 4.2) what their managers have or their positions. Workers who are skillful and diligent in their work will be recognized and rewarded (Prov 22.29).
- *Not to criticize.* A common practice among workers is to engage in negative 'water-cooler' chatter—often about their bosses. If they are not to speak evil of anyone (Titus 3.2; James 4.11), that certainly includes of their bosses; to whom they should not show contempt, and whom they should not mock or curse.
- *To direct them to Christ.* Where they have unbelieving managers, workers should endeavour to direct them to Christ through their example (Titus 2.7), gracious words (Prov 16.24; Col 4.6), and prayers (1 Tim 2.1-2).

The fifth commandment is explicitly directed to subordinates; however, it also has implications for how superiors (employers) are to treat their employees. Employers are to:

- *Set the moral tone for their organization.* They should set an example; by a "grave, wise, holy, and

exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God” (*Larger Catechism*, Q129). Thus, they will not do anything underhanded or direct their employees to do anything that is unlawful (e.g., to ‘sandbag’ expected earnings, ‘cook the books’, or sell ‘vapourware’).

- *Treat employees with kindness.* They should be considerate to every person who works for them, as an image-bearer of God, and not be unreasonably demanding when setting targets or assigning tasks, and not be harsh when correcting them (Eph 6.9; Col 4.1).
- *Pay a fair wage.* A common complaint among workers is that they are not paid fairly. The Bible is clear that employers are to pay a fair wage (Dt 24.14-15; Jer 22.13; Col 4.1; 1 Tim 5.18; 1 Tim 6.18; James 5.4). However, determining what is fair is not easy. Governments don’t help when they interfere in the economy (e.g., setting minimum wages and legislating pay-equity standards). Also, what is a fair wage may vary by circumstances. For example, a family-owned business may determine that paying a widow with two school-aged children more than a college-student, to perform the same role, may be fair. It may not strike us as fair, but employers should be permitted to make appropriate decisions based on their best judgement (Mt 20.15). Regardless, employers should pay what they promised (Mt 20.13). Employers should share ownership and profits with their employees and not selfishly seek to pad their own pockets.
- *Reward those who do well.* Employers should train their employees so that they can obtain new skills (rather than laying them off) and challenge them with new opportunities. They should also promote from within, rather than going outside and hiring over the heads of their dedicated employees.
- *Direct them to Christ.* Christian managers can direct employees to Christ without overt evangelism through their example and prayers (1 Sam 12.23).

182. Honest Labour Relations – Employees

A Google search on ‘labor relations’ retrieved 260 million entries. In the news, we hear of store chains closing and large numbers of workers being laid off, companies offshoring work and making long-term employees redundant, complaints about skimpy severance packages, strikes by various unions, age discrimination in the workplace, ‘right to work’ and ‘right to strike’ legislation, decisions by labour relations boards, parental leave laws, demands for flex-time or telework accommodation, high turnover rates and ballooning hiring costs, labour shortages, enactment of a new minimum wage level, and many other labour-related topics. Employers blame employees and unions for problems and employees blame greedy corporations. Both sides need to work together, based on the principles of Biblical ethics, to establish honest labour relations.

Workers need to:

- *Work.* As we noted previously, Adam was given a job to perform in the garden before sin entered the world. Thus, the requirement for mankind to engage in productive work is not the result of sin. Productive work was given to mankind as a blessing. Work provides meaning in our lives by allowing us to create and contribute, giving us an opportunity to experience satisfaction from a well-done job, and engendering responsibility and a proper sense of self reliance (1 Thess 4.12; 1 Thess 5.14).
- *Work and avoid idleness.* Idleness is strongly condemned in the Bible. For example, Paul says that if a person is not willing to work, he should not eat (1 Thess 4.10), and he warns against the sin of idleness (1 Thess 4.11; 1 Thess 5.14; 2 Thess 3.6). The book of Proverbs has many warnings against idleness, condemning the sluggard who only consumes and extolling the diligent person (Prov 6.6-11; Prov 13.4; Prov 14.23; Prov 18.9; Prov 19.15; Prov 20.4; Prov 21.25; Prov 26.13-16). Idleness leads to sponging off others (by begging or seeking government ‘entitlements’ such as welfare payments), prodigality and licentious living, and theft; all of which destroy individuals, families, and civilizations.
- *Work diligently.* The proverb, “an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work”, has two sides. From a worker’s perspective we are required to give an effort that is commensurate with the expectations of our employers and the contractual commitments we have made. Many jobs require a person to be

present (e.g., at a service counter or to take calls) during specified hours, and diligence is ‘measured’ by how many satisfied customers were served during the stated hours. Some jobs are outcome-based (e.g., heart surgery, writing a book, sports) and ‘diligence’ can be measured by how efficiently a worker did a good job, rather than merely by measuring effort applied through time. Payment for some kinds of jobs can be straight forward—for example, pay a worker for the hours he works or pay him based on his success rate (e.g., sales) rather than specifying the number of hours he has to work. In some work-related situations, employees paid by the hour can increase their total pay for a job (e.g., in construction work) by being *less* productive (slacking off) and stretching out the duration of employment. In whatever job or contract situation, workers must be diligent to provide true value for the payment which they receive.

- *Work to provide.* We are to labour with diligence to produce enough income to care for our own needs and the needs of our family (Prov 28.19). Paul says that anyone who does not provide for his family is “worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5.8). He also charges those who had been recently converted to stop stealing and to work so that they have resources to share with those in need (Eph 4.28).
- *Work in a lawful calling.* Paul’s charge to recent converts also includes a requirement that they labour at “honest work”. There are hundreds of kinds of jobs today. Most of them are intrinsically honest because they provide useful and legal products and services (e.g., heart surgeon, auto mechanic, computer programmer, or mathematics teacher). However, some do not (e.g., prostitute, abortion provider, casino card dealer, or chemist producing heroin). Many jobs that are intrinsically honest can become dishonest when performed in a way that displeases God (e.g., selling tickets on midway rides on a Sunday or agreeing to photograph a same-sex ‘marriage’).
- *Work in a suitable calling.* Paul also charges the former thief to work with his own hands (Eph 4.28). Paul employed himself as a craftsman (Acts 18.3). However, he does not mean that everyone must work in a job that requires manual labour. But he certainly endorses such kinds of jobs. Rather he means for each person to take on a job for which he is suited and has the gifts and interests. It has been said that the best kind of job that we can have is when our vocation is also our avocation. Many people take jobs purely for the income and are unhappy in their jobs. Despite the curse on work (Gen 3.17-19), God wants us to work at a job in which we can be happily employed (Dt 16.15; Ps 90.17; Eccl 2.10, 24-25).
- *Work for six days.* The fourth commandment is despised today primarily because it requires that we observe the Christian Sabbath as holy and give up worldly pursuits for a time. However, it also is not agreeable to our culture because it says that we are to labour for six days (Ex 20.9). This does not mean that it is wrong for us to take vacations, but it does mean that we are not to be agitating for a shorter workweek so that we can lounge around like cats in the sun. Our labour should extend beyond paid employment to various duties we should take on in our churches and homes, and as volunteers.
- *Work for God’s glory.* We should work, not to fill our lives with toys and entertainment, but to advance Christ’s kingdom (Eph 6.5-8; Col 3.22-23).

183. Honest Labour Relations – Employers

Previously, we addressed what employees need to do to foster honest labour relations. We will now consider employers’ responsibilities. They need to:

- *Pay a fair wage.* The proverb, “an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work”, applies to employers as well as to employees. Employers are required by God’s law to pay a fair wage (Jer 22.13; Rom 4.4; Col 4.1; 1 Tim 5.18; James 5.4). However, it is not simple to define a ‘fair wage’. At minimum, it includes meeting contractual obligations (Mt 20.15-16). But it does not mean that every employee must be paid the same amount for the same kind of work—for example, a skilled craftsman may be paid more for his productions than a trainee or a novice, or athletes on a team may be paid different salaries depending on their statistics and market value. Likewise, a fair wage does not mean that those who work harder or for longer hours necessarily must be paid more than those who work fewer hours, as Jesus demonstrates with his use of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt 20.1-16). Some workers

are considerably more efficient than others and can accomplish the same amount of work but in less time. Factors that may go into determining a fair wage include, education or experience levels, regional disparities, market rates for comparable jobs (e.g., at, above, or below the industry-wide mean or median salaries), and individual productivity rates. Regardless, employers are not to play favourites when setting wage levels for employees (Eph 6.9; James 2.1, 9).

- *Pay promptly.* Most employees who work for large corporations which use payroll services receive their wages on a regular schedule (e.g., every two weeks). However, some corporations are slow in paying employees who are on incentive plans (e.g., paying commissions). And many people are slow when it comes to paying invoices for services that have been rendered (e.g., for household improvements). The Bible states that we are to pay wages on a prompt basis (Lev 19.13; Dt 24.15). Churches and Christians in general should be prompt about paying what is owed and not be indebted to those who are owed payments for their services (Rom 13.7-8).
- *Provide meaningful work.* God created mankind in his image and gave us skills and the ability to be creative (Gen 1.28). Every person needs the sense of purpose that can be inculcated by having meaningful work (Gen 2.15). Thus, employers should define jobs that provide the opportunity for their employees to be stimulated and challenged. Some jobs created by the industrial revolution were essentially ‘mindless’—e.g., endlessly cutting a piece of wire to make dies for pins or nails or repetitious placement of parts on an assembly line. Thankfully, many of these jobs have been relegated to machines. Yet corporations still create ‘mindless’ work for their employees. For example, each new management regime seems to want to ‘make its mark’ and staff are put through endless cycles of rewriting processes or procedures and making changes due to software tool churn. Managers should not highly centralize controls and decisions but delegate degrees of responsibility and provide real opportunities to challenge employees to improve processes, products and services, and corporate culture.
- *Treat employees with respect.* Almost every corporation repeats the mantra in their mission statements or annual goal-setting activities, “our employees are our most valuable resource (or asset)”. Yet, this is often nothing more than a hollow claim. Invariably they seem to treat lower-level staff like inanimate objects—by cutting labour costs and demanding that retained employees do more work, setting irresponsible (impossible) sales targets which are not based on rational analysis of a market to determine reasonable possibilities, and focusing on short-term profit and undermining long-term improvements (e.g., investments must have payback within a single fiscal year). This is contrary to the respect that Paul says managers should show toward their employees (Eph 6.5, 9).
- *Provide training and careers.* Almost every week there is news of a massive layoff in some corporation. Obviously, if a company is shedding business it must downsize. However, a lot of layoffs are because of internal shifts in priorities which often affect older, longer-term employees. Companies shed them to save costs and hire less expensive staff, often in low cost, offshore, locations. Ironically, when they hire in the same region in which layoffs occurred, the new employees often have higher salaries than the long-term employees. Likewise, many companies hire from the outside over the heads of dedicated employees and do not promote from within. Yet, it is probably more cost-effective for companies to invest in training and development of new careers for dedicated employees.
- *Dismiss with dignity.* When it is necessary to layoff employees, severance packages and assistance for finding a new job should be adequate and fair.
- *Be honest.* In every aspect of their business activities, companies need to be scrupulously honest—for example, not accepting bribes; invoicing at stated prices, only for work performed or products delivered; producing quality products and providing excellent services; and not making false promises about products or services. When marketing and sales make false promises (e.g., selling ‘vapourware’, or making untrue claims about a product) they put their employees who are responsible for delivery into difficult situations and undermine their relationship with them.

The best way to foster honest labour relations between employers and employees is not through additional

government defined rules and regulations. The best way is for Christian employers to set an example of honest and fair business practices that will lead to success and prosperity (Dt 29.9).

184. Honest Labour Relations – Governments

Because of the persistent presence of sin and the pervasiveness of selfishness, employers and employees often are at odds with one another—as evidenced by labour strikes, surveys that show employee dissatisfaction, turnover of staff, and legal suits being filed against employers. In some cases, the response of many is that the government should ‘do something’ about the situation. As far as most people are concerned, government is the ‘solution’ to just about every problem in society. The general feeling seems to be that if there were just a law against a particular action, then things would be better between labour and management. The naivety of this belief can be exhibited by the fact that God has delivered ten clear commandments to mankind and every person breaks at least one of them every day. More labour laws will not make for better relationships between employers and employees. The only thing that will truly improve the relationship is when hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit and people strive to live by Biblical ethics.

Christians have different opinions as to how involved governments should be in dealing with labour issues. For example, some believe that governments should outlaw all strikes—the number of ‘essential services’ (e.g., police, firefighter) included under non-strike legislation has increased (e.g., to include waste disposal workers) or that labour disputes should always be arbitrated by a government mediator. We should take the ‘less is more’ approach when it comes to government involvement in labour-management disputes. In general, the legislative arm of governments should remain hands-off and let market forces and civil courts handle these matters. However, the reality is that at times governments need to and should provide legislation and make judicial decisions in an attempt to establish fair and honest labour relations.

Where legislation becomes necessary, it should be fair. The history of labour relations legislation in North America has at times favoured corporations and at other times employees and unions. For example, at one time many US states required employees to pay union dues if a union was in place. However, many states are now enacting ‘right to work’ legislation allowing workers to opt out of unions. This example indicates that Governments should not play favourites with either employers (e.g., businesses or corporations) or with employees (e.g., individual workers or unions representing them) through legislation or judicial decisions (Lev 19.15; Dt 1.17; Dt 16.19; Prov 18.5; Prov 24.23).

In our culture, legislative acts and the decisions of ‘human rights’ commissions and judges are often egregious in their injustice to both businesses and workers. For example:

- Minimum wage laws can hurt both. Businesses which employ entry-level personnel (e.g., fast-food restaurants and stores) cut their workers’ hours and reduce the number of entry-level positions to stay in business.
- Pay equity laws create bureaucratic nightmares and increase costs for companies that need to map their jobs to supposedly comparable standards.
- Requiring companies to provide full health, retirement, and vacation benefits to all employees who work more than a specified number of hours per week drives companies to hire more parttime workers and to provide fewer hours to their dedicated, good workers.
- Legislating hiring quotas based on sex or phenotypic variations require organizations to hire underqualified individuals or facilitate discrimination.
- A biological male filed ‘human rights’ complaints against small businesses that provided bikini waxes. He claimed to be a female and wanted them to wax his genitals. The businesses refused his request and became embroiled in lawsuits or closed. His complaints were eventually rejected.
- When ‘human rights’ tribunals, courts, or legislators require business owners to provide services against their religious convictions (e.g., forcing a Christian baker to make a cake for a homosexual union), they

act unfairly and interfere with the right of businesses to operate as their owners wish.

- Many jurisdictions place ridiculous environmental protection conditions on businesses—often with unintended consequences, such as in California where forest densities have increased because of restrictions on loggers, and forest fires have become severe.
- The US Environmental Protection Agency fined a Wyoming farmer \$16M, for building a pond on his property in 2014, even when they could not demonstrate that he had violated the Clean Water Act and even though his pond provided demonstrable environmental benefits for fish, wildlife, and migratory birds. With the help of the Pacific Legal Foundation, he eventually won his case.
- Requiring certifications in jobs that don't need them (e.g., hairdressing or martial-arts training) and creating barriers to entry.
- Taxing employees who work in a particular locale, if they live elsewhere. This form of taxation drives jobs out of cities—as it did in Detroit.

There may be a valid case for protecting workers, for example with a 'whistleblower' law. Also, since the most common complaint filed by employees is that they have to work in dangerous conditions, we need laws requiring employers to provide safe work environments. However, government action often goes beyond what is required—such as Ontario's almost useless 'Health and Safety Awareness Training'. Ironically, governments won't enact one law for workers that they should—a prohibition on commercial activities on the Lord's Day—the Christian Sabbath (Ex 20.8-11; Neh 13.15-22).

185. Labour Unions

If employees and employers were working together according to the principles of Biblical ethics which we considered in the previous topics, there would never (rarely) be labour unrest and a call for strike actions. However, as long as the intentions of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually (Gen 6.5), the idea that there can be full labour-management concord is as hypothetical as pondering the question, "What if man didn't sin?" So, we need to consider what recourse workers have and what actions they should take when employer-employee relationships are caustic and acrimonious.

One approach used in the attempt to resolve long-standing conflicts between employers and employees has been through the creation of unions for collective negotiation of better working conditions and bargaining for increased wages. Using US history as an example (similar actions have occurred in other countries), unions formed in the late-19th century, after the Civil War. The first significant labour movement was with the creation of the American Federation of Labor (1886), that coordinated local unions and supported strike actions. The AFL and similar organizations became involved in national politics and almost exclusively supported candidates for the Democratic Party. In the 1930s, as part of the New Deal, the Wagner Act provided a legal right for individuals to organize unions. Participation in labour unions peaked after WW II at about 35% of the labour force and began a gradual decline thereafter. Today, in the US, less than 10% of private sector employees are in unions, but about 40% of public sector employees are in unions. Some US states have recently created 'right to work' laws to curb the power of unions and to permit workers to opt out of paying union dues if they do not agree with a union's policies.

We could debate whether the creation of unions and the rights granted to them have been beneficial for society and the economy. Some people argue that during the era of the 'robber barons' in the late 19th century (such as, Andrew Carnegie, Marshall Field, J. P. Morgan, W. R. Hearst, J. D. Rockefeller, Charles Schwab, and Cornelius Vanderbilt) who often used unscrupulous and ruthless business practices, unions and strikes seemed to be the only way of protecting the interests of workers. Strikes appear to have provided immediate improvements—such as safer working conditions, shorter workdays, higher pay, and additional benefits (e.g., paid sick leave and extended health care). However, from a Biblical ethics perspective we must question whether the creation of unions and the use of strike actions are the best means of

accomplishing the goal of improving employer-employee relationships. For example:

- The largest unions today generally support anti-Christian positions or political parties that are strongly anti-Christian, on matters such as abortion and homosexual practices. For example, it was reported in 2019 that 99% of union political spending in the US went to left-leaning causes during the previous decade. Christians are forced, in many jurisdictions, to pay union dues which are then used to fund initiatives that are un-Biblical.
- Some strikes have included violence, perpetrated by either side, loss of life, and destruction of property, and have created health hazards (e.g., the 1968 NY City garbage strike). A Biblical approach for solving disputes never includes this type of behaviour. Christians are to be subject to their masters and work for them as working for the Lord (Col 3.22; 1 Pt 2.18-21).
- Most strikes make it difficult for others to perform their work and cause a loss of income. Of course, that is often a reason for the strikes—the unions wish to draw attention to their demands. However, this is a form of theft.
- Unions create monopolies by excluding non-union members from contracts and force employers to pay more than a competitive market would require.
- If we consider the largest strikes in the US during a 100-year period from 1890 to 1990 (i.e., dock workers, railroad operations, coal mining, automobile and railroad car manufacturing, textile manufacturing, steel production, and the postal service), we find that there are far fewer workers employed today in most of these industries and some are practically extinct in the US today. Companies faced with labour unrest automate jobs and move jobs offshore, and people find substitutes when inconvenienced (e.g., using e-mail and couriers rather than the postal services). Thus, the unions and strike actions may have provided short-term gain for their workers but have essentially wiped out some domestic industries in the process.
- Unions today are concentrated mostly in the public sector—teachers, municipal workers, police, firefighters, government clerks, etc. Ironically, this is in the domain of ‘public service’, but the concept of ‘service’ seems to have departed from the minds of union leaders.
- Unions negotiate on behalf of their constituents, often in an adversarial manner, with a basic goal of getting more—which they hide under the rhetoric of ‘fairness’. This is contrary to the Bible’s injunctions that we are to be content with our situation in life (Lk 3.14; Phil 4.11; 1 Tim 6.8), not be envious of others’ lot in life (Gal 5.21; Titus 3.3), and not to covet (Ex 20.17; James 4.2).

Christians should avoid joining unions (2 Cor 6.14-17) and opt out where they have an opportunity. Even if it means a temporary loss of income, they should not participate in strikes and should consider taking alternative employment in order not to be part of a union. Where they can, they should work through legal means to change laws to rein in the power of unions and to allow individuals who disagree with union policies to continue working.

186. God Established Civil Government

Government *per se* is not a human invention. There is an authority structure within the Trinity (Jn 5.19, 30; Jn 8.28). Also, although it is not explicitly stated, we can infer that human government is a creation ordinance, established by God (Rom 13.1), since even in a perfect state Adam, as the patriarchal head of the human family, would have had to make ‘legislative’ decisions, for example to define a cubit and similar standards so that men could work together. And, civil government is a logical extension of familial governance, applied to a larger collective. After he sinned, Adam would have served as mankind’s first and highest-ranking civil magistrate, establishing laws and standards and settling disputes. After Adam’s death, tyrants (Gen 6.4) arose who likely created warring kingdoms. Soon after the Flood, a similar structure appears to have arisen, with tyrannical rulers such as Nimrod (likely, Sargon the Great) forming empires with subject kings, which began to war against one another (Gen 14.1-11). As the Jews were formed into a nation, Moses, Joshua, and then a series of senior judges (assisted by councils of elders) served as the head

of state, but not as dynastic kings. Meanwhile, the nations surrounding Israel were establishing dynastic dictatorial kingdoms, and Israel asked Samuel to establish a similar government for them (1 Sam 8.4-8, 19-22); which he did, but with a warning about what life would be like under a dynastic king (1 Sam 8.9-18).

God established human civil government for at least the following reasons:

- *For his own glory.* All things exist to bring glory to God (Ps 115.1; Is 42.8; Rom 9.23; Rom 11.36) and to demonstrate the sovereignty of his will (Job 9.12; Prov 16.4; Rom 9.19; Eph 1.11).
- *So that man may emulate his creator.* God endowed mankind with a sub-sovereign responsibility over the created order (Gen 1.26). That rule encompasses human authority structures (Ex 20.12).
- *For the organization of chaos.* The Almighty brought order out of the initial formless void (Gen 1.2, 18; Is 45.18) because he is a God of order (1 Cor 14.33). So, mankind fulfilling their mandate, and also emulating their creator, brings order out of the chaos—in natural and human systems and structures—caused by the curse on creation and by Satan’s attempts to dethrone God’s rule with lawlessness and nihilism (Gen 3.1-5).
- *It is a necessity.* The need for human government to exist is axiomatic, despite the challenges of creating a righteous government among men. Without it, mankind would be consigned to anarchy (Dt 12.8; Judges 17.6).
- *To establish standards.* Without standards (e.g., weights and measures, alphabets, and radio frequency allocation), economic systems could not exist, and human communication would fail.
- *To create subordinate laws.* Men are to apply the Ten Commandments, using Biblical case-law examples, within their specific cultural contexts.
- *To protect human liberties.* God endows men with a power to make moral choices (Dt 30.19; Josh 24.15) and holds them responsible for their choices. Governments are to protect this privilege but are not to infringe on it through restrictive legislation or paternalistic coddling.
- *For the protection of life and property.* The power of the sword (Rom 13.4) is assigned to the civil magistrate to protect citizens from those doing evil and from those attacking their persons or attempting to plunder them.
- *To punish wrongdoers.* God delegated temporal punishment of those who do not obey God’s laws to the civil magistrates (Gen 9.5-6; Rom 13.3, 5; 1 Pt 2.14). Civil magistrates the world-over are to punish wrongdoers. Since their authority comes from God, their standard for judging must also come from him. The definition for wrongdoing is God’s law, as given in the Bible, not the teachings of mere humans such as Hammurabi, Confucius, Buddha, Krishna, or Mohammed.
- *For the commendation of good.* One of the purposes of government is to encourage and recognize good behaviour (Rom 13.3; 1 Pt 2.14).
- *To settle disputes.* The civil magistrate is to provide fair and equitable judicial decisions (Ex 23.6-8; Dt 1.16-17; Dt 16.19-20; Prov 17.15).
- *For the sanctification of believers.* Often Christians are confronted with injustice and persecution at the hands of wicked human governments. But God uses these circumstances for the advancement of his kingdom and the perfection of his saints (Rom 8.28; James 1.2).
- *To present a contrast.* Despite the need for human government in this sin-stained world, God demonstrates that Satan’s and man’s reigns are failures (Dan 2.34) in contrast with Christ’s reign which is glorious and everlasting (Is 9.6-7; Dan 2.44; Ps 45.6; Lk 1.33; Rev 11.15).

Ultimately it is God who establishes every human government (Is 45.1; Dan 2.21, 37-38; Dan 4.17; Jn 19.10-11; Rom 13.1; 1 Pt 2.14), not inherited rights, the strength of an army, a party ‘machine’, or the will of the electorate. Thus, God is the final authority over the kingdoms of men (Dan 4.17). All the governors of the earth are God’s servants and ministers (Rom 13.4, 6), whether or not they believe it, and are to be subject to his authority (Ps 2.10-12) and to enforce his laws—as summarized in the Ten Commandments and illustrated in the Biblical case laws. And, because all governments have been established by God, every person is to be subject to the governing authorities in the jurisdiction in which they reside (Rom 13.1; 1 Pt

2.13). Our obedience to the governing authorities is not to be in response to their worthiness—no mere human is worthy of honour—but out of obedience to God and out of a respect for the delegated offices which these men hold (Ex 22.28; Acts 23.5).

187. Civil Government is Good

Thomas Paine, an American revolutionary leader, said in his book *Common Sense*, “Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one; for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries by a government, which we might expect in a country without government, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer.” Thomas Paine was a Deist and no friend of Christianity or of the Bible, so we should not expect to find that his views would be consistent with God’s thinking. Yet, many Bible expositors seem to hold, at least implicitly, a similar view as Paine. If they are asked when and why God instituted human civil government, they say that human civil government was instituted after the Flood when God delegated capital punishment to men (Gen 9.6), and that the purpose of civil government is to restrain and punish evil.

There is no doubt that *a* purpose of civil government, since Adam sinned and certainly since the Flood, is to use its power of coercion to restrain and punish evil (Rom 13.1-7). However, this is not the only purpose of civil government. Civil government also has the role of providing regulations and standards for the smooth functioning of society. The government may have to establish sanctions and punishments associated with those regulations, because of the human tendency to rebel against all authority, but the regulations themselves may not be required because of sin.

Assume that Adam and Eve had not sinned and that they had been fruitful and filled the earth with their sinless progeny. Over time, people would have moved to various parts of the original continent and would have had to define means for coordinating their activities to avoid sub-optimal outcomes. For example, each time zone covers a distance of over 1,500 Km. The sun rises and sets an hour earlier at the eastern edge of a time zone than at the western edge. Creating a standard, that clocks will be set to the middle of the time zone, would allow people to assemble for worship at the right time. Likewise, a stonemason building a house, even in a sinless world, would likely have preferred to be compensated with some form of currency (e.g., gold or silver coins) rather than having to carry home a bushel of apples every day. So, for the purposes of coordination and communication the citizens of a paradise would have agreed on the value of a medium of exchange. Another example is the need for the establishment of standards for measurement. A carpenter working with a remote lumberjack would have had to communicate the size of the roof beams that he would need to install in his barn using an agreed standard. In fact, such a standard did exist before the Flood. God gave Noah directions for building the ark based on dimensions which used the cubit as a standard (Gen 6.15). To be of any use, the cubit had to be a consistent size; and it was likely standardized on the length of the forearm of Adam, the first man. Today, governments (actually, an international organization sponsored by many governments) define the meter and the kilogram so that we can work together cooperatively.

The institution of human civil government was first formally administered when Adam named the animals—during the creation week, in a sinless state, not after sin had entered the world. Adam had been given delegated authority as a king over God’s creation (Gen 1.26). The animals were brought to him so that he could name them. When he assigned names to them, those were their names for all time (at least until the confusion of languages at Babel). Eve would have learned the names from Adam, as would all of their children. Naming entities is an example of exercising authority, but it is also an example of facilitating communication and coordination. When Adam asked his sons to bring in the sheep for shearing, they would not have run off and brought the angora rabbits. So, Adam, as the first king, *before* sin entered the world, exercised the role of administering good civil government.

The establishment of government standards does not necessarily also require the coercive use of sanctions and punishment. In general, even in our sinful state, we agree to use standard definitions for many things—for example, the dimensions of construction materials—and cooperate because the natural consequence of not cooperating become readily apparent—shortened sheets of flooring plywood would not fit on standard joist spacing and mismatched couplings would make the installation of bathroom fixtures a challenge. By agreeing to use these standards, we benefit and do not have to resort to the inefficiencies of unique and custom situations.

In a sinless state, the citizens of the world would have complied with the administration of the standards happily, as being beneficial and not coercive. So, it is with God's law. God's law is beneficial and good for man, not a burden and hardship, as rebellious libertines would have us believe. In the restored paradise, redeemed mankind will cooperate in their endeavours through the administration of good civil government under the rule of King Jesus—for example, heavenly choirs will use an agreed-upon standard for musical notation.

Governmental authority is not derived from the people, but from God. It is needed primarily because we are not omniscient, not because we are sinful. Government is *not* a 'necessary evil' as Thomas Paine claimed, it is a necessary good and a blessing from God that he instituted at creation.

188. The God-Defined Role for Civil Government

A common statement you will hear is, "The government needs to do something ..." about "vaping", "Greyhound's service cuts", "shootings in Toronto", "climate change", "the housing crisis", "homelessness", "student debt", "health care shortages", "tariffs" ... on and on it goes. As far as most people are concerned, the 'government' (collectively referring to all levels) is the solution to every problem facing our country—and ironically also, in the thinking of many, the cause of many of the problems. If government were to address all the issues that it is supposedly responsible for, it would spend not only the roughly 50% of all earned income it does today, but 100%, and there would be nothing left of the economy. Thus, applying a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, it is impossible for government to address everyone's expectations. Paraphrasing a quip, attributed to various people including Abraham Lincoln and P. T. Barnum, "Government can please all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but it cannot please all the people all the time."

This raises fundamental questions, "What should be the role of government?" and "Who should define the role of government?" Since civil government is an institution ultimately established by God, he is the one to whom we must look for a definition of the parameters within which all human government should operate and the scope of its responsibilities. However, the Bible does not state in explicit terms what the responsibilities of civil government are. Also, the Biblical accounts of the actions of God-fearing men and women in high positions in governments (including, Joseph, Moses, kings of Judah, Daniel, Esther and Mordecai, and Nehemiah) seem, at times, to provide confusing direction. For example, should governments take guidance from the examples of Joseph's confiscation of the real property in Egypt (Gen 47.20), Mordecai's decreed pre-emptive killings (Est 9.1-15), or Nehemiah's closure of all businesses on the Sabbath (Neh 13.15-21)?

We can apply the following Biblical principles as we consider the God-defined role for civil government. Governments are to:

- *Serve God.* Governments do not exist to serve a king, emperor, president, or prime minister; to provide cushy and lucrative jobs for politicians and bureaucrats; or to cater to the demands and wishes of the citizens. They exist to glorify God (2 Chron 20.6; Ps 2.10-12; Dan 4.34, 37; Dan 5.21).

- *Obey God.* Governments are to obey the commands of God, given in the Bible, and to enforce all of his commands, as summarized in the Ten Commandments and illustrated in Scripture's case laws (2 Chron 19.6; Rom 13.4). God's law is not one of many possible standards, it is the only standard by which men must live.
- *Enact legislation.* However, all human laws must be:
 - *Derivative:* It must be possible to demonstrate that specific human laws are a *direct* application of one, or more, of the Ten Commandments and follow the example of the case laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (e.g., speed limits on highways are a direct application of the sixth commandment; laws requiring fences around construction sites are an application of the case law requiring parapets on flat roofs [Dt 22.8]).
 - *Consistent:* No human law may be contrary to God's Law (e.g., permitting Sunday shopping or the 'marriage' of homosexuals).
 - *Subordinate:* No human law can be of greater importance than God's law (Acts 5.29)—e.g., a mother's 'right' to abortion cannot trump the father's right over a child or a child's right to life).
- *Administer justice.* Civil magistrates are to provide fair and equitable judicial decisions (Ex 23.6-8; Dt 1.16-17; Dt 16.19-20; Prov 17.15). This means that governments may appoint judges and operate courts. Judicial decisions must be understood as having a three-fold purpose: for justice (Rom 13.4; Heb 2.2; 1 Pt 2.14), deterrence (Dt 13.10-11; Dt 17.13; Dt 19.20; Prov 21.11; 1 Tim 5.20), and correction of individuals who commit crimes (Prov 22.15; Prov 29.15; Heb 12.11).
- *Punish wrongdoers.* God delegated temporal punishment of those who do not obey God's laws to the civil magistrates (Gen 9.5-6; Rom 13.3, 5; 1 Pt 2.14), who are to punish wrongdoers.
- *Protect the citizens' lives and property.* The power of the sword (Rom 13.4) is assigned to the civil magistrate to protect citizens from those doing evil and from those attacking their persons or attempting to plunder them. This means that governments are permitted to:
 - Operate a police force, maintain an army, and wage war when necessary for defensive purposes.
 - Administer the issuance of birth and death certificates and passports or citizenship identification papers, in order to identify citizens and protect their rights.
 - Control border entry-points to ensure that criminals and terrorists do not enter the jurisdiction and endanger the lives of its citizens.
- *Collect taxes.* Taxes to fund the legitimate activities of government may be collected (Mt 22.17-21; Rom 13.6).
- *Establish Christianity.* Governments must acknowledge the God of the Bible as the only true God and historic Christianity as the only true religion (Mt 4.10; Acts 17.22-31). All other religions are false, and impostors or imitators of the true religion (Jn 14.6; Acts 4.12; Phil 2.9-11). Governments do not have a right to establish a false religion or permit false religions to exercise their rituals overtly, or to endorse the existence of a plurality of religious views (Ex 20.4-6; Dt 8.19; Ps 53.1; Mt 4.10; Acts 17.22-31).

189. Government Role Usurpation

God has defined three institutions of human relationship—the family (Gen 2.18, 24; Mal 2.14-16; Mt 19.3-9), Church (Mt 16.18), and State (Prov 8.15, 16; Rom 13.1-4)—each of which has its own God-given domain of sovereignty, and is not to encroach on the domain of the other institutions:

- *Family.* The family is responsible for the administration of marriage (Gen 24.67; Ex 22.17; Dt 22.16; Jn 2.1-2; 1 Cor 7.38), the provision of childcare and education (Ps 113.9; Prov 31.10-31; Eph 6.4), health services, and economic welfare (Eph 4.28; 2 Thess 3.10).
- *Church.* The church is responsible for the corporate worship of God, proclamation of the Gospel, administration of the sacraments, corrective discipline (with excommunication being the ultimate form) leading to repentance, and the collective provision of secondary welfare for the truly needy (Acts 6.1-7; 1 Cor 16.1-3).
- *State.* Human governments are responsible for policing, military defence, enactment of laws which are

consistent with and subordinate to the Ten Commandments, the administration of justice through the courts, and the punishment of criminals (Dt 16.18; Rom 13.1-7; 1 Pt 2.13, 14).

In the ancient world, pagan governments subsumed to themselves oversight of religious practice—often the head of a state was also the chief religious official. In some countries, the practice continues today. For example, the king is the titular head of the Church of England, and after the revolution in Iran, in 1979, religion and government were conflated under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. In the US, the ‘wall of separation’ between religion and the State has become the vaunted ‘ideal’ that is used to drive out anything Christian from public forums. The US and many countries in the West have replaced a once-held principle of adherence to Biblical ethics and the establishment of Christianity with the endorsement and advancement of the religion of materialistic secular humanism—which posits as its primary tenets: physical matter, which came into existence spontaneously, is the only reality; mind, thoughts, feelings, and will are emanations from the physical brain; physical wellbeing, pleasure, and possessions are paramount; man is his own god and establishes his own moral standards; and governments exist to cater to their constituents and to provide for their needs from birth to death.

We have become so inured to governments performing many of the roles assigned to the family or Church that we generally don’t question the propriety, suitability or sustainability of the practice. For example, most Christians would assume that governments have a right to provide tax-funded educational services (e.g., certifying and paying teachers and building schools). Ironically, it was the New England Puritans in Massachusetts who initiated the practice of municipal funding of elementary schooling. Likewise, most Christians in Canada would assume that government-funding of medical services is legitimate. Ironically, it was Tommy Douglas (1904-1986), a Baptist minister, who as the leader of the CCF (a precursor to the NDPs) introduced State-sponsored and salaried-physician medical care to Canada. Thus, modern government-funding of schools and health care can be attributed to ‘Christian’ sentimentalities. The provision of government-funded welfare and old age pensions does not appear to have arisen from the same ‘Christian’ influence, but from attempts to appease workers (e.g., Bismarck’s reacting to pressure from the workers’ movement in Germany in the late 19th century). Today the welfare-state is advanced by ostensibly Christian organizations under the rubric of ‘social justice’.

Christians have been suckered into accepting another of Satan’s big lies and have eaten a forbidden fruit of the welfare-state and paternalistic government that undermines individual responsibility; deprives folks of legitimate liberties; destroys family accountability; coercively plunders the productive to provide ‘benefits’ and ‘entitlements’ that often subsidize lassitude and dissipation; and endows a godlike status to politicians, judges, and bureaucrats. God does not assign to government responsibility for many things that we assume they may or should do, such as: regulating or operating media content and distribution services such as on television or the internet; providing welfare payments, food stamps, unemployment insurance, disability compensation payments, or retirement pensions; funding or operating hospitals, or providing health care or medical insurance; operating transportation services, such as trains, buses, or taxis; operating shipping through postal services; or regulating the operation of the economy by issuing fiat money and setting interest rates. Someone might question the practicality of removing government involvement from many of the things that it does today. However, it is becoming increasingly practical with technological innovations such as internet applications, ‘smart’ phones, cryptocurrencies, blockchain systems for ownership identification, GPS satellites, and transponders for location identification and usage charges.

Christians should not endorse or support government role usurpation and should use whatever legal means they can to reduce the encroachment of governments into roles that God does not assign to them. However, we do not need to exit society in protest, as for example the strict Amish attempt to do. Using services improperly funded and managed by governments (e.g., roads, health care, utilities, transit, airports, pensions, telecommunications networks, parks, schools, universities, government-issued currency, etc.) does not make Christians culpable for government overreach, unless the government demands that we do

something that is forbidden in God's word.

190. Government Failure to Perform Its God-given Duties

We have considered the scope of human civil government and the role it should have relative to the family and the Church. We established that governments are responsible for policing, military defence, enactment of laws which are subordinate to the Ten Commandments, the administration of justice through the courts, and the punishment of criminals (Dt 16.18; Rom 13.1-7; 1 Pt 2.13, 14). We also noted that governments have taken on roles which God does not assign to them, which undermines individual responsibility, deprives folks of legitimate liberties, destroys family accountability, coercively plunders the productive, and endows a godlike status to government officials. We will now consider examples of how governments have shirked their God-assigned duties, usurped roles that belong to individuals and the family, and abused their right to govern in the affairs of men.

Governments *fail* to administer roles assigned to them by God when they:

- Do not protect human life from conception until natural death by ensuring that every human being is free from the threat of abortion and euthanasia (Gen 1.26, 27; Gen 25.21-26; Ex 20.13; Ex 21.22-25; Job 10.8-12; Ps 22.9-10; Ps 51.5; Ps 139.13-16; Is 46.3; Lk 1.41-44).
- Permit commercial activities to be carried out on Sunday—the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath (Gen 2.2-3; Ex 20.8-11; Neh 13.17, 18; Mk 2.23-28). Ironically, in many places where it was once against the law to operate a store on Sunday, it is difficult for merchants to close a store on Sundays since bylaws or mall contracts require stores to be open during core hours. Also ironically, governments declare statutory holidays that require every business to cease operations but do not respect the Lord's Day.
- Do not suppress blasphemies (Ex 20.7; Lev 24.16) and the overt practice of false religions (Ex 20.3-6; Dt 13.6-10; Ezra 7.26; 2 Ki 18.4; 2 Chron 34.33).
- Permit gambling or lotteries, which are breaches of the eighth and tenth commandments, administer gambling programs, and use funds raised from gambling or lotteries for the purposes of operating government.

Governments *usurp* roles assigned to other entities when they:

- Enact laws or establish administrative procedures regulating marriage or authorizing officials to perform marriages. Marriage is a family ordinance (Gen 24.67; Ex 22.17; Dt 22.16; Jn 2.1-2; 1 Cor 7.38) and is to be administered by families.
- Regulate the operation of the economy in ways which create inequities and imbalanced behaviour in free markets—for example, setting interest rates; imposing import or export quotas or tariffs; setting minimum wages or maximum prices (e.g., rent controls); prohibiting businesses from utilizing alternate labourers if employees withhold their services (e.g., in a strike); providing direct or indirect incentives to encourage businesses to operate, or locate, in their jurisdiction; or defining overly restrictive zoning that creates artificial monopolies and allocates rights arbitrarily.
- Legislate educational requirements, standards or curricula, licence teachers, operate educational institutions, or provide funds for education (e.g., tuition assistance or direct subsidies to schools).
- Build and operate rent-geared-to-income public housing—which almost always is badly administered and facilitates the emergence of crime-infested ghettos.

Governments *abuse* their powers when they:

- Enact laws that prohibit or hinder the expression of Christianity—for example, prohibiting worship assemblies or the offering of public prayer in the name of Christ by government, institutional, or military officials.

- Permit a guilty party to avoid deserved punishment through protracted procedural delays (e.g., a lengthy appeals process), plea bargaining, or a procedural error (e.g., a judge put the wrong date on a warrant) where the mistake has no material bearing on the determination of innocence or guilt.
- Enact laws that deal with matters of the heart (e.g., ‘hate’ crimes). No man can know the heart of another person or have control over the intentions of another person. Laws enacted by the government to prohibit crimes should deal only with overt behaviour such as blasphemy, theft, violence, adultery, murder, and conducting commercial activities on Sunday.
- Create non-judicial bodies or tribunals to settle disputes or administer justice, such as Human Rights Commissions, Labour Relations Boards, Landlord and Tenant Boards, Immigration Appeals Tribunals, Trademark and Patent Appeals Tribunals, and Worker Safety Commissions. These entities should not be established. Rather, the duties assigned to these types of bodies, should be administered within the State’s system of graded courts staffed by adequately trained and duly appointed lawyers and judges.
- Differentiate among persons (Ex 23.3; Lev 19.15; Dt 1.17; Dt 16.19) by enacting laws that provide exceptions or special provisions that are based on age, health, phenotypical characteristics (e.g., skin colour), ethnicity, aboriginal status, physical disability, dementia, gender, sexual preference, income, status, rank, etc. For example, governments should not impose equity quotas on, or require reporting from, any government department, institution, organization, or business based on differences among people; and they should not permit children or youth to be treated differently from those deemed to be adults when they commit crimes.

191. The Foundation for Constitutional Law

The US *Constitution*, with its *Bill of Rights*, has often been hailed for its attempts to limit government powers, to lay out citizens’ responsibilities, and to protect individual rights (e.g., of free speech, to bear arms, and to worship without interference). However, it has also been the subject of much debate—with respect to its philosophical roots, whether it successfully established a foundation for a just society, how broadly it can be interpreted, and whether it is inviolable or a ‘living’ set of concepts. Nevertheless, it is an example of what many people believe (rightly or wrongly) is required in a nation if its citizens are not to be subjected to a capricious tyranny.

God provides the foundation for the best form of constitutional law in the Bible—which civil magistrates are to adopt and emulate. When civil magistrates seriously apply the moral law of God (given in summary form in the Ten Commandments) and follow the model for the application of the moral law given in the Biblical case-law examples, they can approach true justice and equity. To the extent that they deviate from God’s law, to that extent society degenerates, and daily existence becomes drudgery.

Prior to the formal delivery of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, the basic requirements of God’s law were innately understood by men (Rom 1.19-20). However, initial elements of God’s law for mankind were explicitly delivered to Adam as stated rights and responsibilities, e.g., dominion over the rest of creation, a prohibition against eating from a particular tree, the institution of marriage, Sabbath observance, and animal sacrifice for substitutionary atonement. Yet, many aspects of God’s law were not explicitly stated. Initially, God let men apply their own reason, guided by conscience. We have seen where this led (Gen 6.5), and how God had to deal with the results by cleansing the earth of mankind’s wickedness. So, God began to reveal progressively aspects of his moral requirements as standing law.

God indicates that the conscience of man cannot be trusted because the intentions of his heart are evil from his youth (Gen 8.21). Thus, God begins the process of formally establishing *constitutional* law for mankind immediately after the Flood. The first focus of the formal statement of the law concerns rights and responsibilities related to the preservation of human life. This is given in the context of the Flood which had destroyed all human life (except for eight persons), and the survivors’ need of reassurance to overcome

any fear they may have had about their future prospects on the barren earth. This does not mean that the creation ordinances—e.g., the Sabbath and marriage—were of less importance. It is to be assumed that the creation ordinances remain perpetual and universal, unless explicitly changed. The universally applicable antediluvian ordinances would be reiterated in later deliverances of the constitutional law for the governance of the nations on God’s earth.

The reference to “Noah and his sons” (Gen 9.1, 8) reinforces the universal nature of the rights and responsibilities provided in Genesis 9.1-7. What God states here cannot be dismissed as applying only to the Jewish nation—which would not come into existence for another 1,000 years. The rights and responsibilities stated here, are the conditions for the renewal of the covenant which would follow (Gen 9.8-17). This covenant applies to all of Noah’s descendants (Gen 9.9).

The rights provided under the renewed covenant are:

- *Family*. At this new beginning for mankind, God restates the blessing of producing families (Gen 9.1). Although death would continue to reign, the earth will never again be depopulated.
- *Land*. Mankind was given the earth as his possession to fill (Gen 9.1; Ps 115.16). Although the earth is not as pleasant a place as it was before the Flood, it is still endowed with abundant resources and fruitfulness for the benefit of mankind.
- *Dominion*. The original grant of dominion over the rest of creation (Gen 1.28) stands (Gen 9.2-3). Originally Adam ruled by love, now men rule by tyranny and the inculcation of fear.
- *Safety*. Assurance is given that animals will, generally, be afraid of men and avoid them (Gen 9.2), thus protecting men from danger.
- *Sustenance*. After Adam sinned, animals could be used for clothing (Gen 3.21). Now God grants their use for food (Gen 9.3-4).

The responsibilities explicitly associated with the renewed covenant are to:

- *Abstain from blood*. Men are not to eat or drink blood, or to eat meat with blood still in it (Gen 9.4; Lev 7.26; Dt 15.23; Ezk 33.20; Acts 15.20, 29). Even though God gives animal meat to men as food, he reserves the blood of animals and mankind for himself. The blood is a symbol of life (‘lifeblood’), to reinforce the fact that all of life ultimately belongs to God.
- *Preserve Life*. A man must not kill himself (e.g., by suicide or through wanton living) or take the life of another person through murder. The inverse is also implied—we are to strive to preserve the life of others (Gen 9.5-6).
- *Protect humans from animals*. Animals must not be allowed to hurt men, and if they do, they are to be put to death (Gen 9.5; Ex 21.28).
- *Punish murderers*. Wilful murderers must be put to death (Gen 9.6).
- *Reproduce*. Mankind is to produce abundant life to fill the earth (Gen 9.7). This is the only condition, in this covenant renewal, which is a right and a responsibility—forming large families is a blessing and an obligation.

192. Criteria for Assessing the Legitimacy of a Proposed Human Law

God has delegated responsibility for administering his law to civil magistrates (Rom 13.1-7) in the nations in the locations where he has distributed them across the earth (Acts 17.26). They are not to create their own systems of law, but to administer God’s moral law. However, this does not mean that they cannot enact additional subordinate laws, as long as these laws are applied instances of God’s moral law. For example, when a government creates a law that governs the maximum speed at which vehicles may travel on different types of roads, it creates a defined instance of the law, “You shall not murder” (Ex 20.13); since a law against speeding is intended to protect citizens from dangerous driving and potential incidents of injury or death.

Thus, human governments may define laws, as long as they are:

- *Derivative*: It must be possible to demonstrate that a specific human law is derived from God's moral law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, and a *direct* application of one, or more, of the Ten Commandments (Dt 4.13; Dt 5.6-22; Ps 96.10; Acts 17.24-31; Rom 1.18-32; Rom 13.1-7).
- *Consistent*: No human law may be contrary or contradictory to God's law; for example, permitting Sunday shopping or the 'marriage' of homosexuals (Ex 20.3; Lev 18.4; Acts 4.19; Acts 5.29).
- *Subordinate*: No human law can be of greater importance than God's law; for example, a mother's 'right' to abortion cannot trump the father's right over a child or a child's right to life.
- *Imitative*. Any law defined by a human government must follow the example of the case laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which are applied instances of the Ten Commandments. For example, a principle, derived from the sixth commandment and a case law about care when digging pits (Ex 21.33-34), makes it proper for a city council to require builders to put fences around construction sites.
- *Jurisdictional*. Any law enacted by governments must be in the domain of responsibility that is allocated to civil government by God (Dt 16.18; Rom 13.1-7; 1 Pt 2.13-14). The laws enacted by civil magistrates must not encroach on the responsibilities of the other God-ordained institutions of the family (Eph 4.28; 2 Thess 3.10) and the Church (Acts 6.1-7; 1 Cor 16.1-3). For example, governments should not make laws which require that children attend specific schools (e.g., those funded illegitimately through collected taxes); or which medical services citizens may, or may not, use (e.g., when governments usurp personal and family responsibilities by providing and operating universal health care services).
- *Protective*. The intent of human laws should be to protect and preserve human lives and their owned property (Rom 13.1-5) so that citizens may live peaceful and quiet lives (1 Tim 2.2); not to carry out the latest socialistic or perceived equity fad, such as forcing income redistribution through excessive taxation and the provision of 'entitlements' or compelling corporations to meet gender or ethnic hiring quotas.
- *Enforceable*. The Ten Commandments (other than the tenth) prohibit overt immoral actions which can be observed if the law is broken. If a law is not easy to enforce it should not be created. If the administration of a law would require that a team of specialized enforcers be employed to monitor people's actions, then the law is likely not a reasonable law—there may be exceptions, such as inspection of food preparation sites. Also, laws that attempt to control people's thoughts (e.g., 'hate crimes') should not exist.
- *Enforced*. Not only should a human law be enforceable, it should be enforced. Toronto has various bylaws (e.g., you need a permit to pave a driveway and hedges and retaining walls must be set back at least 30cms from the sidewalk) which are rarely enforced, and then often only if someone files a complaint. Since a citizen can file complaints with the City, without having his identity revealed, some folks file complaints against their neighbours out of spite. The lack of a consistent enforcement of the bylaws results in uncertainty and unfairness.
- *Equitable*. No law should favour an individual, party, group, or class of citizens over another or create inequities among the citizens (Ex 23.3; Lev 19.15; James 2.9). Thus, for example, laws which favour aboriginal peoples over later immigrants to a country are intrinsically sinful.
- *Accompanied by penalties*. All laws should have associated penalties, which are consistently applied, without provisions for plea bargaining or lightened sentences due to circumstances. The penalties for crimes should provide for just retribution and facilitate restitution (Rom 13.4; 1 Pt 2.14).
- *Deterrents*. While penalties are to be administered so that justice is served, the threat of them can also act as a deterrent for immoral behaviour and encourage evil men to respect the rights of others (Rom 13.3; 1 Pt 2.14).
- *Fostering responsibility*. Human laws should not encourage citizens to act irresponsibly (1 Thess 4.11) or make them dependent on a paternalistic State to provide for their needs (2 Thess 3.10; 1 Tim 5.8). For example, a municipal bylaw which requires a merchant to keep the sidewalk in front of his store

clear of human feces but does not punish the defecator is unjust.

- *Required.* A law should only be created when there is no alternative for dealing with the unjust behaviour of wicked men. For example, if people believe that plastic products are bad for the environment—e.g., straws, grocery bags, drinking cups—they should not ban their use but use other means (e.g., education, suasion, privately funded incentives, celebrity examples, social media, psychological nudges, etc.) to change behaviour.

193. Foolish Legislation

Previously, we identified criteria for assessing the legitimacy of a proposed human law, and noted that any law of human legislators or courts should be:

- Derived from God's moral law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments.
- Consistent with God's law and not contrary or contradictory to it.
- Subordinate to God's law; not placing a human law above God's laws.
- Imitative of how the Biblical case laws apply the Ten Commandments.
- Within the domain of responsibility that God allocates to civil government.
- Protective of human lives and their owned property.
- Enforceable and enforced, with appropriate penalties for a breach.
- Equitable; not favouring individuals or classes of citizens over others.
- Designed to encourage citizens to act responsibly.
- Created only if no alternative exists for addressing sinful human behaviour.

Paul tells us that the natural man, who suppresses his innate knowledge of God and the requirement to obey his law, claims to be wise but is a fool (Rom 1.22)—a moral and an intellectual fool. When legislators and judges enact laws, they often display their foolishness. We can think of egregious examples such as:

- The 1973 *Roe vs Wade* decision of the US Supreme Court to affirm the legality of a woman's 'right' to have an abortion (since rescinded).
- Laws which declare that two individuals of the same sex may marry.

While these laws are contrary to God's law, they do not require that a person perform a sinful action. Granting a 'right' to an abortion or to homosexuals to get 'married' does not require a person to sin, unless the State overreaches and requires doctors to perform abortions and clerks and pastors to sign marriage certificates for homosexual unions.

However, there are many less egregious examples of laws which have outlawed common behaviour or required new behaviour that have been or will be shown to be utterly foolish. For example:

- Some governments outlawed the manufacture, importation, and sale of incandescent light bulbs. For a time, the only reasonably priced alternative were compact fluorescent bulbs. However, these have potential dangers because they contain mercury, and people are supposed to treat defective bulbs as hazardous waste. Thankfully, human ingenuity came to the rescue with the widespread introduction of LED bulbs.
- Many jurisdictions banned the use of plastic bags by grocery stores, even though there were valid reasons for not banning them, including that where they were banned people used [thicker](#) plastic bags for groceries and waste disposal, used a greater number of more expensive paper bags that increased the [volume](#) and mass of garbage, or switched to reusable bags made of synthetic fibers (plastic!) that bred bacteria with correlated spikes in [food poisoning](#), and also eventually had to be sent to the dump. The foolishness of plastic bag bans was demonstrated during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, when it was shown that reusable bags harboured the virus and merchants refused to allow patrons to bring their reusable bags into their stores, and legislators had to suspend the plastic bag bans and even require their use.

Many other examples of foolish government laws could be provided (e.g., permitting biological males who claim to be females to compete in female sports or to use female change rooms or washrooms, taxes on carbon emissions and ‘carbon footprint’ trading, and paying property owners more for power generated than the end consumer could be charged for the delivered electricity. However, these examples (incandescent light bulbs and plastic grocery bags) were chosen to illustrate the problems with much of law-making, including:

- *Declaring something to be illegal that is not immoral.* The practical incandescent bulb was invented by Thomas Edison in the 1880s became a world-wide standard and an icon of human ingenuity. It is difficult to imagine how using an incandescent lightbulb breaks any of the Ten Commandments, and how it is environmentally more destructive than a burning candle or oil lamp that Jesus, who never sinned, would have used.
- *Catering to the latest politically correct fad.* Governments have been fooled by Satan into dealing with issues of peripheral importance and often based on a lack solid empirical evidence (e.g., that plastic bags are bad for the environment) and little understanding of the unintended consequences (e.g., disposal of compact fluorescent bulbs or of large fibreglass windmill blades) that may arise. Yet, that they won’t deal with sins that clearly are forbidden by God and are grievously destructive, such as abortion, homosexual practices, and gambling.
- *A hubristic paternalism.* Many of the laws put into place today do not deal with true moral issues but are attempts to reengineer society to achieve paternalistic visions of utopia, which are actually a dystopia—for example, turning education into a means of socializing children to the perverted ideas about gender neutrality, sexual disorientations, lifestyle choices, respect for evil religions, or other nonsense.
- *Over regulating.* Human legislators make too many laws and add law upon law in an attempt to address every contingency, so that it is practically impossible for a person to obey all the laws consistently (obeying one law can lead to a breach of another) and citizens are relieved of having to think and act as responsible citizens.

Regardless of how foolish human laws may be, Christians are expected to obey them (to honour their rulers as parents), unless a law clearly violates God’s law.

194. Legislating Morality

The prevailing opinion in our society today is that Biblical law is at best an option which may compete for a hearing in the courts of public opinion, and at worst a fearsome ‘monster’ that must be exorcised from all legislative chambers. The view that is held by most Christians is that God’s laws (at least the NT ones, but often not the OT ones) are personal guidelines for Christian holiness but are not to be considered standards for our nation. Most people would consider it absurd if a Christian suggested that God’s law must be *the* standard for a culture or nation that does not profess to be Christian. The view that God’s law should actually be the foundation for legislation in today’s society and include Biblical laws (e.g., prohibiting commercial activities on Sunday, idolatry, or homosexual practices) is scorned not only by non-Christians but also by many professing Christians. Consider the following quotation as one example of the general attitude found throughout society and much of the Church:

First, we must recognize that the task of the state is not to legislate morality. The state may not define rules for virtuous living in society, and then insist, by legal means, that all live in accordance with those rules. This would be a most terrible form of tyranny. Instead, the task of the state is to administer public justice; an important difference and one upon which the work of CPJ [Citizens for Public Justice] is premised.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Tim Schouls, “Loving our Neighbours” Politically, *Christian Week*, January 21, 1992.

Most people cannot see the foolishness of a statement such as, “the task of the State is not to legislate morality” or a more commonly heard equivalent, “You cannot legislate morality”. The State has God-defined responsibilities such as protecting its citizens (i.e., with police and the military) and providing judicial decisions through the administration of justice. However, it also is responsible for legislating morality. Law, by its very nature, deals with matters of morality. Any good law legislates moral behaviour. For example, a law against stealing intellectual property (e.g., downloading and distributing an illegal digital copy of a movie) legislates moral behaviour. Likewise, bad laws also have moral ramifications, and they often legislate immoral behaviour. For example, a law that permits abortion or euthanasia and prohibits a nurse from refusing to participate in a procedure, legislates immorality. Or a law that requires a private business (e.g., a banquet hall or photography service) to cater to homosexuals who want to use the service for a same-sex ‘marriage’ event legislates immorality. Even a law such as requiring that a person stop at a red light or one that prohibits parking a car on a street during the rush hour legislates morality, since these laws can be shown to be valid applications of the sixth and eighth commandments. Likewise, laws that mandate a minimum wage or impose rent controls legislate immorality, since it can be demonstrated that they are contrary to the eighth commandment. Also, when governments rightly (Rom 13.4; 1 Pt 2.14) punish people who break the law (e.g., with fines or prison sentences), this indicates that they are legislating moral behaviour.

The reality is that the State does, and must, ‘legislate morality’ and define rules for ‘virtuous living in society’ (Is 10.1-2; Rom 13.4). So, the real issue is not whether the State will or should legislate morality, but *whose* morality it will be—man’s or God’s. What people really mean when they say “You cannot legislate morality” is that they do not want God and God’s laws to rule over them. Any law that is based on anything other than what God has said, seems to be acceptable today. If a law is presented as coming from the Bible or is endorsed by a Christian, then people put their fingers in their ears and scream: “You can’t legislate morality!”; or they decry the imposition of a ‘theocracy’, without having a clue what that means—a theocracy is a government ruled by priests or religious leaders in the name of their god. When people claim that the State cannot, or should not, legislate morality, what they are saying is that they don’t want God’s law to be applied to them. However, as we considered earlier in the Foundation section of this series of topics on Biblical ethics, it is the responsibility of all governments to enact laws that enforce God’s law, because God’s law applies to all mankind, in all times. Thus, governments are to create legislation that is derived from, consistent with, and subordinate to the Ten Commandments.

If a nation’s laws are not founded upon the Bible, and it is not the responsibility of the State to legislate Biblical morality, then its values, principles, and laws must come from another source. If the ultimate source of law is not from God, as revealed in the Bible, then law will come from the *Qur’an*, the writings of mere human philosophers or ethicists, popular opinion polls, the demands of a mob, or the imposition of a dictatorial autocrat or elite group of mandarins. Ultimately if the source of law is not God, then it is Satan. And, if the source of law is not God and the Bible, then all laws will be arbitrary and subject to caprice—what is ‘lawful’ and what is ‘unlawful’ today may become ‘unlawful’ and ‘lawful’ tomorrow—and the citizens will flounder in uncertainty and will do what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17.6).

Ironically, modern secular governments operate as ‘theocracies’, since they are ruled by the ‘high priests’ of materialistic secular humanism, who espouse man as gods, evolution as their ‘theology’, and fulfillment of pleasure as their ‘liturgy’. A nation with values rooted in Biblical morality is not a theocracy! It is the only means of providing for a citizenry that can live in peace and with stability.

195. The Welfare State

The UN’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) states:

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of

his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” (Article 25.1).

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” (Article 26.1).

Although not explicitly stated, the implied intent of Article 25.1 is that government is responsible for providing for a minimum (adequate) standard of living (including food, clothing, housing, and medical care), unemployment and disability insurance, and old age pensions. Since the *Declaration* mentions that education shall be ‘free’, it is evident that the intent is that governments shall fund through taxes, at minimum, elementary education. The *Declaration* entrenches principles that began to be incorporated into government practices in the West during the 19th century—i.e., that governments should be responsible for the health, education, and welfare of a nation’s citizens; should fund services to fulfill this responsibility; should define standards for the provision of these services; and should, in many cases, operate these services. Therefore, in most countries in Europe, and in Canada, the US, Australia, and New Zealand, it is generally assumed that governments should fund and operate schools, provide payments to the indigent and poor, administer unemployment insurance, supply old age pensions, provide universal health care (at least for the poor), and build and operate low-income, subsidized, housing. In addition, many people today advocate for minimum guaranteed income supplements and are calling for tuition debt forgiveness, free tuition at post-secondary institutions, and for an enforced distribution of wealth through higher levels of taxation on the rich. The provision of these services by government constitutes the ‘welfare state’.

The existence of the welfare state is a paradigmatic reality within much of the West and the consensus belief of most people who live in the West or aspire to live there. For someone to question this belief is equivalent to raising a doubt about the existence of air. However, the principles of Biblical ethics do not support the existence of the welfare state. The welfare state is unbiblical and should be condemned for the following reasons:

- The welfare state is an historical aberration that cannot be maintained in the long term. It is becoming increasingly difficult to fund all the tax-supported initiatives that politicians promise and citizens demand. Even if 100% of incomes were taxed, governments could not fund everything people would like to have governments provide—e.g., more teachers with higher salaries; more doctors, nurses, and hospitals; guaranteed pensions; child-support payments and free daycare; free university tuition; disability support payments (e.g., for children with autism); unemployment benefits, etc. Because tax revenue cannot be increased beyond a maximum practical limit to raise more income—by setting tax rates too high, governments actually reduce revenue—governments must resort to other sources for funding programs such as borrowing and lotteries. Government debt loads today are astronomical and eventually interest payments on debt is going to bankrupt governments and destroy the welfare state system.
- Paying for welfare state services through tax revenues forcefully loots the productive to redistribute to the undeserving poor—for example, providing debt relief for companies or student loans. This is a form of theft.
- The welfare state undermines personal and family accountability for providing for the necessities of life and the education of children. It robs individuals and families of the motivation to act responsibly and productively—for example, many people assume that the government will care for them in old age and spend most of their earnings and save little.
- When governments fund and operate welfare state services they encroach on the God-defined responsibilities of the family and the Church. The welfare state undermines Christian giving through the church and charities; and indirectly undermines the Church’s mission which, in part, includes caring for the deserving poor.

- Government-funded welfare programs have proven to be ineffective in addressing most cases of poverty and instead have contributed to the creation of generational poverty. We will consider the means God has established for helping the deserving poor in the last section, Additional Ethical Guidance.
- Governments are bad (inefficient and expensive) at providing services that should be left to the private or charitable sectors of the economy (e.g., running hospitals, disposing of garbage, providing housing, or operating postal or transportation systems); but not when they provide services within their God-defined mandate (e.g., national defence and the judiciary).
- Government paternalism is a ploy used by Satan to deflect mankind's dependence on God and direct it to the government, which becomes an idol that stands in the place of God.
- The welfare state fosters envy and covetousness. Politicians capitalize on this as they promise more "bread and circuses" for the electorate.
- Welfare states invariably collapse due to graft by the elite, rather than improving the quality of life and living conditions of the population.

196. Forms of Civil Government

The earliest recorded example of a human government after the Flood appeared in Shinar (the early Biblical name for the southern portion of the area later called Babylonia), in the valley between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, with the ascension of a tyrannical ruler, Nimrod (Gen 10.8-12), likely also called Sargon the Great, around 2230 BC. His empire is believed to have controlled much of Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia for a century and a half. It is likely that the demise of his empire was caused by the disruption which God sent after men built the tower at Babel (Gen 11.1-9). Various governments arose during the next 2,000 years; most were ruled by tribal leaders, despotic kings over city-states or individual nations, or emperors with vassals under their suzerainty.

By the middle of the first millennium before Christ, political theorists began to grapple with how governments should be organized. For example, in China various forms of government were proposed, such as Confucianism, based on a hierarchical, meritocracy; Mohism, a communal, decentralized federation focused on asceticism; Legalism, an authoritarian structure enabled by draconian laws and associated punishments; and Taoism, a form of anarchy. In the same era, Plato addressed the topic in his book, the *Republic*. He advocated a form of aristocracy ruled by a philosopher-king and described the natural devolution of government through subsequent successive stages (timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny). In Plato's view, a democracy was one step away from tyranny. Thus, it is interesting that the political theorists who formed the United States rejected a monarchy and established a democratic republic because recent history had demonstrated to them the dangers of being subject to profligate kings. Winston Churchill is reported to have said, "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." Most people in the West today believe that some form of democracy is the best form of government.

A Wikipedia article that lists the various forms of government, identifies over twenty different ones. However, most forms of government fit into one of four basic categories—the rule of: none (i.e., anarchy), one (e.g., monarchy or dictatorship), a few (e.g., oligarchy, theocracy, communism), all (e.g., direct or representative democracy).

The Bible does not provide enough information for us to determine if one form of civil government is the best or to be preferred. For example, Paul does not say, "Elect representatives and send them off to serve in parliament." Rather, he says that we are to be subject to the governing authorities (Rom 13.1), which in this case would have included the emperor (Nero), the Roman senate, and district governors (e.g., subject

kings like Agrippa or governors like Porcius Festus). By this injunction, he does not endorse the form of government in place at the time but emphasizes our responsibility to obey the governing authorities in whatever particular form of government may exist in our day.

Some Christian political theorists attempt to defend democracy as the best form of government and suggest that the OT Israelite and NT Church eldership can serve as models for modern civil government. However, we are not told in the Bible how the elders in the Israelite pre-monarchial period were identified and appointed to their positions. It appears that the eldership at that time was based on a form of patriarchal hereditary oligarchy. We have only extra-Biblical guidance as to how the synagogue elders were selected and appointed. And the NT does not state explicitly how elders are to be selected in the Church. Presbyterians have inferred that Church officers are to be selected by a vote of the congregation (Acts 1.23; Acts 6.2-6; Acts 15.22; 2 Cor 8.19). However, this cannot necessarily be applied to the appointment of civil government officials.

Those who defend a representative democratic republic or parliamentary system, with officials elected by a vote of the citizens, as the best form of government present arguments such as the following:

- All people are equal, so there should not be a hereditary incumbency.
- In theory, any citizen can run for office.
- Politicians are held accountable to the people through elections.
- The people collectively can determine if their representatives are working for the good of the citizens and the nation.
- Bad governments can be voted out.
- Appointed officials (e.g., judges and administrators) can provide a counterbalance to rein in legislators.

These arguments may be valid in principle but fail in practice. As recent North American events have shown, elected officials and governments can be corrupt, make stupid policies and evil laws, and pander to the people in order to ‘buy’ votes. Even the vaunted ‘separation of powers’ in the US system does not guarantee good government.

There is no perfect form of human civil government—not even close! Therefore, we are not to put our hope in paternalistic governments as the solution to evils of this world. Nevertheless, we are to be obedient to those in authority (Rom 13.1; Titus 3.1; 1 Pt 2.13), honour and respect them (Rom 13.7; 1 Pt 2.17), pay our taxes (Mt 22.21; Rom 13.7), pray for them (1 Tim 2.1-2), ask God to provide a measure of peace and safety under their administrations (Jer 29.7; 1 Tim 2.2), and place our hope only in the soon to be fully revealed righteous kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ (Is 9.6-7; Rev 11.15).

197. Obedience to Government

In North America and the UK, it is becoming increasingly difficult to obey government dictates. For example, a Christian doctor who refused to refer to biological males as women, and vice-versa, according to their ‘gender preference’ was fired. A tribunal that ruled against him, stated that “Belief in Genesis 1.27, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism in our judgement are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others, specifically here, transgender individuals.” David Mackereth said, “Without intellectual and moral integrity, medicine cannot function and my 30 years as a doctor are now considered irrelevant compared to the risk that someone else might be offended.” As he pointed out, and as is becoming evident, ‘transgenderism’ presents dangers, as for example, when a nurse thought a ‘man’ with abdominal pains was obese and later she gave birth to a stillborn baby.

Mackereth’s action raises the question, is it ever right for Christians to disobey the government? The Bible is explicit; as a rule, we are to obey the governing authorities (Eccl 8.2-7; Rom 13.1-2; 1 Pt 2.13-15).

However, there are circumstances under which a Christian is not to obey a government dictate. Biblical examples that can be presented to support this proposition are the behaviour of the Hebrew midwives who refused to obey the command of Pharaoh to kill the Hebrew male babies (Ex 1.17); the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down to the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up on the plain of Dura (Dan 3.1); Daniel's refusal to stop praying to God after Darius commanded it (Dan 6.6-10); and the Apostles' refusal to stop preaching the Gospel when commanded to do so by the Jewish officials (Acts 4.18-20; Acts 5.27-29). In the latter instance, Peter says that we must judge if it is right in the sight of God to listen to the rulers rather than to God (Acts 4.19) and then, that we must obey God rather than men (Acts 4.29). These examples demonstrate that we must disobey the government when it commands us:

- *To do something that is contrary to God's law.* For example, if a government requires a Christian doctor to participate in an abortion or in an assisted suicide procedure, he is to refuse to participate (Ex 20.13). Also, if a government requires justices or pastors to perform marriage ceremonies for homosexuals or to issues a same-sex 'marriage' certificate, they are to refuse, since this is not marriage (Gen 1.27; Gen 2.24).
- *Not to do something that God has required that we do.* For example, if a government bans Christians from assembling for worship, they are to ignore the command (Heb 10.25)—the Scottish Covenanters had to do this during the Killing Time (1680-1688) and meet in conventicles. Likewise, if a government commands us to stop reading the Bible we are to refuse.

Our obedience to government falls under the responsibilities of the fifth commandment, which also applies to our responsibilities in the workplace. So, the same principles carry over. If our boss requires that we do something that is contrary to God's law—e.g., to work on the Lord's Day (the Christian Sabbath) in a commercial venture such as in a manufacturing or retail establishment, then we are to refuse to do it (Ex 20.8-11); or if he asks us to create a false invoice (Ex 20.15) or to participate in a parade promoting sexual immorality (Ex 20.14), we are to refuse to do it. Likewise, if he prohibits us from referring to a co-worker with 'he' or 'him' when he is six-feet tall and has a beard but wants to be identified as a female, we are to ignore our boss' dictate.

Like Mackerth, we might lose our job, or like the Covenanters we might be jailed for acts of civil disobedience. Satan will attempt to crush the Church and the spirit of Christians through opposition that tries to force us by laws and police action or 'blackmail' (e.g., the threat of losing our job). If that is the case, we are to trust God when he says that he has our best interests in mind (Rom 8.28; 1 Pt 2.20; 1 Pt 3.14). Such persecution is to be expected (Jn 15.18; 2 Tim 3.12), and we are to view it as beneficial for our own sanctification (Mt 5.10; Rom 5.3-5; 2 Cor 12.9-10; James 1.2-4) and for the promotion of the Gospel.

We must obey the government even if its laws are stupid, but not morally wrong, such as not using plastic straws or not to cut down a tree that is rotten and could fall on our house in the next storm; and even when the laws are oppressive. Paul and Peter wrote about obedience to government under the rule of a wicked Roman emperor (Nero). It is clear from their teachings that rebellion against government is unlawful (Rom 13.2). Some Christians (e.g., living in the US) attempt to justify revolution. The American Revolution was a sinful action—regardless of the long list of grievances (in the Indictment) the signers of the *Declaration of Independence* had against King George III's government. The problem is clear when the *Declaration* says, "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed". This is false; governments derive their power from God, not the people (Rom 13.1). The American Revolution was a declaration of man's independence from God and of self-will and influential in encouraging the more destructive French Revolution. Canada received its independence from the UK in 1867, less than 100 years after the US, without having to resort to revolution. Quoting John Calvin (*Institutes*; 4.20.31) and claiming that government is a criminal gang does not provide a warrant for rebellion against governments—even tyrannical ones. The Christians living in Rome, and suffering persecution, during the three centuries after Christ, present a model of how we should relate to government. Their example speaks to us as well as to Christians living in China or Iran.

198. Church and State Relationship

Andrew Melville confronted King James (VI of Scotland, I of England), the king whose name appears in the King James Version of the Bible, in 1596:

There is King James the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus the King of the church, whose subject James the sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member.

Melville was making the point that elders/pastors had been given authority by Christ to rule in the Church and not the monarch. The idea that there are two distinct kingdoms was taught by Jesus in his response to the query about whether or not it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar (Mt 22.17-21). Jesus responded, “[R]ender to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

That there are two kingdoms is the commonly accepted position within Christendom. However, what the relationship is to be between the two kingdoms has been widely debated. Some of the different relationship models that have been tried or proposed over the past 2,000 years include:

- *Caesaropapism* – The king is under God and over the nobility and church hierarchy, who are both over the people.
- *Middle Ages Papal* – The pope is under God and over the church hierarchy and the king. The king is over the nobility. The church hierarchy and the nobility are over the people.
- *Middle Ages Kingly* – The king is under God and over the nobility and the pope. The pope is over the church hierarchy. The nobility and church hierarchy are over the people.
- *Marsilian* – The people are under God and participate in the two kingdoms as citizenry and the congregation. The citizenry is over the king and nobility, and the congregation is over the pope and church hierarchy.
- *Erastianism* – The king is under God and over the civil magistrates. The civil magistrates are over the church hierarchy. The civil magistrates and the church hierarchy are over the people. This is the current model applied in the Church of England, but without any weight.
- *Reformation* – Christ is over the king and councils. The king is over the nobility, who are over the citizenry. Councils are over the elders who are over the congregation. The citizenry and the congregation are over the people.
- *Presbyterian* – Christ is over the people, who are over the civil magistrates and church leaders. Civil magistrates are over the citizenry. Church members are over the elders, who are then over the congregation.
- *Wall of Separation* – The people are over the civil magistrates, who are over the citizenry. The church hierarchy is under God, and over the congregation.
- *Secular* – The people are over the citizenry and the congregation. The citizenry is over the civil magistrates, and the congregation is over the church hierarchy.

Differences over which of these models is correct (if any) have resulted in civil disobedience, protests, excommunications, legal disputes prosecuted in the highest courts, and even wars and executions. Principles that should be applied when establishing a structure for the relationship between church and state, include:

- The government should not assume roles that it has not been assigned by God; for example, defining ethical standards and procedures for the Church, appointing pastors, or defining liturgical practices. Following David’s example, Elizabeth I believed incorrectly that as monarch she had authority to impose a new liturgy on the Church of England.
- The Church should not assume roles that are assigned to the State by God; for example, punishing criminals with execution, fines, or imprisonment (Rom 13.4). Rather, it is to use suasion and occasionally excommunication.

- The Church should not receive funds from taxes collected by the State and should not receive benefits such as property tax exemption (Mt 22.21).
- The government is to honour Christ as its ultimate sovereign (2 Chron 20.6; Ps 2.1-12; Dan 5.21; Dan 4.25; Rom 13.1-7).
- The civil government should enforce the Ten Commandments. God's law, as given in the Bible, is not one of many possible 'standards', it is the only standard. All men know innately what God requires that we believe and what we must do to obey him, but men suppress this truth (Rom 1.18-31; Rom 2.14-15). God has also revealed his law in written form (Dt 4.13; Dt 5.6-22). God's law applies to all men through all time and in all nations.
- The government should establish Christianity as the religion of the State and nation. Christianity is the only true religion. All other religions are false, and impostors or imitators of the true religion (Jn 14.6; Acts 4.12; Phil 2.9-11). However, establishment of Christianity is not the same as creating a state church (e.g., as in England or in Scandinavian countries).
- The government should support Christianity by prohibiting the overt practice of false religions (e.g., building mosques and sacrificing animals). Man does not have a right to proclaim atheism or any false religion, nor to endorse the existence of a plurality of religious views (Ex 20.4-6; Dt 8.19; Ps 53.1; Mt 4.10; Acts 17.22-31). However, this does not mean that governments are to compel by force people to believe in Jesus or to participate in Christian religious practices, since Jesus never forced anyone to believe in him.

199. Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion, the 'right' to practice whatever religion one chooses, is a chimera—it is impossible to achieve and an abomination before God.

A belief that dominates much of Western thinking is that it is possible and necessary to create a thick wall of separation between religious practices and a secular state. The proponents of the idea of a secular state that permits religious pluralism are unable to see the foolishness and dangers of their position:

- A secular (non-religious) state that theoretically permits and encourages all religions to coexist cannot be achieved because a secular state takes a religious position that is anti-Christian. It endorses materialistic secular humanism, which is a form of religion, and cannot tolerate the claim Christ makes to exclusivity (Jn 14.6; Acts 4.12). Every secular state will tolerate, to an extent and for a time, false religions but will always be antithetical to Christianity and will persecute believers and attempt to destroy the Church.
- It is impossible to define morally legitimate laws (all law-making involves moral decisions) without an objective standard—God's law summarized in the Ten Commandments. Rejection of God's law can only lead to other approaches for allocating resources, rights, and privileges such as, 'might makes right'; 'the loudest voice gets preferential treatment'; or 'he who has the biggest wallet, wins'. In addition, a moral plurality cannot long endure, because one man's morality is another's bigotry or evil.
- Religious pluralism cannot work because no objective and fair means of adjudicating between the conflicting systems and priorities can be defined. For example, which 'holy' days should be observed (Jews and Muslims would complain if they were prohibited from conducting commercial activities on the Lord's Day; and Muslims are quick to file law suits if they are required to serve alcohol, are served ham while in prison, cannot observe their 'prayer' times, and refuse to transport blind persons with dogs in their taxies), whether sacrificing animals can be permitted in public parks, which religious organizations can apply for tax exemption (e.g., Satanism, Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahai, Islam, etc.), which religious schools can receive money from property taxes, and which religions may use public facilities such as schools for their religious rituals.
- There is no possible way for secular states to avoid the moral chaos and physical dangers which are the result of a society rejecting the law of God. Eventually, and often within a lifetime, every secular state

will collapse under the weight of its absurd inconsistencies (e.g., allowing males who claim to be women to compete in women's sports or promoting drag queen story hours in public libraries).

- Nations that allow all religions to observe their practices cannot avoid the dangers associated with permitting and even endorsing the evil practices of false religions such as Islam—which has a stated goal of forcing everyone else to become a Muslim or die.
- There are ultimately only two possibilities—either a nation endorses and establishes Christianity as its only religion and forbids others from overtly practicing their religions, or it will officially endorse a single false religion, since eventually a single religion will become dominant and drive out all others, as has happened in much of the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia. It is impossible for religious pluralism to long endure, because if men are not for Christ, they will be against him (Lk 11.23).

The idea that a government can and should prohibit the overt exercise of false religious practices is anathema to most people in the West today. However, when pressed, they admit that some ostensibly religious practices must be banned—e.g., human sacrifices, female genital mutilation, forcing girls to convert and marry, and 'honour' killings. Also, it is ironic that many people who claim to support the concepts of religious toleration and pluralism, would approve of a law prohibiting the distribution or internet-posting of the Bible, or at least parts of it such as Leviticus 18.22 or Romans 1.24-27.

The advocates of 'freedom of religion' would claim that the suppression of any religions practices is totalitarian. However, there is a distinct difference between prohibiting an overt religious practice and forcing others to agree with or to participate in a religious practice. For example, Slovakia does not recognize Islam as a religion, does not permit mosques to be built, does not permit Islamic schools to operate, and does not allow Islamic religious leaders to receive financial contributions from the State or to conduct marriages. Slovakia has the lowest rate of deaths attributed to terrorist activities of any major country in the world. However, the 5,000 Muslims living in the country have not been forced to convert to Christianity and are not required to participate in Christian religious practices. Without a question, forced conversions, as was practiced in Spain in the 16th century, is wicked—as wicked as Muslims in Pakistan forcing Christians to convert to Islam. Jesus did not compel anyone to believe in him and genuine faith cannot be forced.

Paul indicated that God overlooked the ignorance of nations that did not honour the true God (Acts 17.30). However, nations that once generally maintained moral and legal standards consistent with the Ten Commandments (much of Northern Europe, the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and have now abandoned their former allegiance are an abomination before God. It is far worse to have obeyed once and then to disobey, than never to have obeyed. God requires that we repent or face his wrath (Acts 17.30-31).

200. The True Form of a Christian Civil Government

Most people who see a statement like the one in the title, would think, "What is he proposing, some sort of Talibanic theocracy?" Of course, most people don't have a clue what a theocracy is and that that is not how God intends for human civil governments to operate. Elders in the Church are not priests, and the civil magistrates are independent officers from elders. However, both elders and civil magistrates are accountable to Christ; he is Lord over the State as well as over the Church (Ps 2.1-12; Mt 28.19; Rom 13.1-7; Phil 2.10-11; Rev 2.26-27). Some people argue that Jesus' statement, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Mk 12.17) shows that there must be a 'wall of separation' between the institutions of the Church and the State. But Jesus is not speaking about the accountability, or about the mutual responsibility, of the two institutions. He only indicates that there are clearly defined, and largely distinct, roles for each.

A Christian civil government would:

- *Acknowledge the true God.* Everyone in a position of power is accountable to the true God, the God who has communicated his laws only through the Bible, not in another ‘holy’ writing. They must acknowledge that they have received their authority by the appointment of God (Rom 13.1).
- *Endorse and enforce the Ten Commandments.* If a nation is not governed by God’s law, it can only be governed by subjective and fallible human laws. While most people would agree that some of the Ten Commandments should apply universally (e.g., not murder, steal, commit adultery, or lie), many, including some Christians, create a false dichotomy and they disagree with the general application of the first four commandments. For example, someone might say, “I cannot object if you want to work on Sundays. You are a free agent, and I have no right to dictate to you. But I do object if, because you are working, I am inconvenienced by noise and traffic.” This argument is faulty, as can be demonstrated by the substitution, “I cannot object if you want to steal. You are a free agent, and I have no right to dictate to you. But I do object if, because you are stealing, I am deprived of my goods.” God’s law is a unitary whole. It provides a comprehensive set of standards for all of mankind’s personal life and corporate relationships.
- *Enforce the Ten Commandments as God intends.* The Ten Commandments are a summary of God’s law. The entire Bible must be considered when determining how to apply God’s law. For example, a person is mistaken if he says that the command against murder does not include a prohibition against abortion; or the command against adultery does not apply to pre-marital sex. Some might think that we cannot determine what God’s will is since there are different interpretations of the Bible. However, there are also different interpretations of civil constitutions and statute laws. We rely on the consensus of wise men to provide interpretive guidance. We should look to the wisdom of councils and creeds and to two-thousand years of consensus to provide guidance. A few judges in black robes (high priests of secular humanism) are not the final authority on law. And 21st century man does not have the monopoly on how to define and apply God’s law.
- *Enact laws consistent with the Ten Commandments.* Any law of man should be demonstrably a derivation of the principles summarized in the Ten Commandments and an instance that follows the example of how the case laws in the Bible apply the Ten Commandments.
- *Prohibit and punish overt breaches of the Ten Commandments.* God alone knows the thoughts of a person. Labelling some actions as ‘hate’ crimes is nonsense. Only actions that can be supported with evidence (e.g., seen, heard, or read) can be judged by men. Therefore, all laws and punishments should apply only to overt breaches for which there is clear evidence.
- *Undertake only its God-assigned duties.* Human governments are responsible for policing, military defence, enactment of laws subordinate to the Ten Commandments, the administration of justice through the courts, and the punishment of criminals. Anything else is a usurpation of responsibilities God has assigned to individuals, families, or the Church.
- *Not overregulate.* Governments should not attempt to legislate compassion, undertake paternalistic social engineering schemes, or use the power of the sword to regulate every area of life. For example, as much as we may dislike the interruption of telemarketing calls, those selling legitimate products and services are probably not breaking any of God’s laws when they phone us and ask us if we would like to make a purchase. Therefore, governments should not interfere (e.g., with ineffective no-call registries) but leave the creation of a solution to human innovation.
- *Suppress observance of false religious practices.* Since it is proper to require that non-Christians not murder, lie, or steal, it is also proper to stop them from worshipping idols and profaning God’s holy day and name. Men do not have a right to observe false religious practices or to blaspheme God. God holds civil magistrates accountable who permit these abominations. The suppression of overt religious practices is not totalitarian. However, the attempt to force others to accept a religious creed or profess allegiance to a religion (as is done in Islam) is evil. Only the Holy Spirit can change a heart.

A truly Christian civil government would not be oppressive. Rather, it would encourage individual and family responsibility, provide for a work-rest balance, maintain law and order, and result in a peaceful and prosperous society. But given our current State-induced stupor to accept a nanny-State, we could not today handle the liberties and responsibilities it would provide.

201. Is Establishing a Christian Civil Government Possible?

A truly Christian civil government would not be oppressive. Rather, it would encourage individual and family responsibility, provide for a work-rest balance, maintain law and order based on the Ten Commandments, and result in a peaceful and prosperous society. Thus, we now address the question of how such a government could be established, if it is even possible in a sin-stained world.

Nehemiah (Neh 7.2) and Moses (Ex 18.21; Dt 1.13-18) appointed men of integrity with a fear of God, to positions of authority. This indicates that the *primary* criterion for their appointment was their relationship with God, not their abilities as administrators, leaders, or military tacticians (although they would have likely also had abilities in all these areas). However, since we do not have prophets among us and cannot know the state of people's hearts, we cannot know if they are true believers who have a true reverence for God. There was a time in British history when the signing of a religious oath became a requirement for holding a public office. The Religious Test became a major issue during the reign of James II (1685-1688) when he attempted to place Roman Catholics in offices where they were required to take an oath of allegiance to the Anglican Church. King James arbitrarily attempted to overrule the law. Jonathan Swift refers to the Test requirement, which he supported to prevent Roman Catholics and nonconformists from holding public office, in his political satire: *Gulliver's Travels*, written about 1722:

Many hundred large volumes have been published upon this controversy: but the books of the Big-Endians have been long forbidden, and the whole party rendered incapable by law of holding employments. ...

In like manner, the disbelief of a divine Providence renders a man incapable of holding any public station; for since kings avow themselves to be deputies of Providence, the Lilliputians think nothing can be more absurd than for a prince to employ such men as disown the authority under which he acts.

Also, a Test was put in place in 1643 when the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland adopted the *Solemn League and Covenant*. Adherence to the *Covenant* became a condition before a person could hold public office. Adherence to the conditions of a Test may appear to provide an objective means for establishing a Christian civil government. However, the lessons of history teach us that many who took a vow of allegiance did so insincerely or in ignorance, following the example of others, out of fear of civil or ecclesiastical censures, or to maintain privileges. Within a generation, there was little zeal left, because good intentions are not sufficient, nor can they be sustained.

A vow of faithfulness is not enough even in a denomination where elders/pastors, with hands having been laid on their heads, have sworn agreement with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (or a similar Reformed Confession). Even these men can drift from the principles which they have agreed to defend. So, it is not surprising when those in civil government offices do not uphold their oaths. This is confirmed by presidents and justices who swear to uphold the US *Constitution* but appear at times not to do so. So, a Christian civil government cannot be sustained with a Test. Rather, each official would have to be judged by how consistent his overt behaviour was with God's law—for example, not being an adulterer, endorsing homosexual practices, engaging in public acts of false worship, or blaspheming God.

Another matter that needs to be considered is what would be done with dissenters under a system of government that professed to be Christian and how they would be treated. For example, the *Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts* (1648) ruled that Anabaptists and Jesuits were to be expelled from the colony.

Clearly tolerance has boundaries. For example, most people would not permit false religions to sacrifice children or adults (like the Moabites or Aztecs). The real issue is not if there will be boundaries, but where they will be drawn. Some practices must be excluded. True tolerance could allow the 'right' to hold private false beliefs. However, the question is what is to be done with the outward practice of falsehood. Contrary to the thinking of most people, who have bought into the myth of religious pluralism, a truly Christian society is the only society that can formulate any form of true tolerance. All other societies are intolerant, whether ancient Rome, France at the time of the Revolution, or in modern times as displayed by communism, Nazism, the Khmer Rouge, Islam, or the supposed defenders of the socially marginalized. They all persecute Christians. One reason why we don't yet see full-scale persecution in the West is because there are vestiges of Christianity left in our culture. But they are fading fast. Radical feminists and homosexual activists have demonstrated that they cannot tolerate any dimension of Biblical Christianity. It would be far better for everyone to live in a Christian society where evils (e.g., shoplifting, assaults, abortion, aberrant sexual practices, financial scams, and terrorism) are punished than in one where evil reigns and Christians are persecuted.

Is the establishment of a Christian civil government in a sinful world even possible? David's model kingdom began to decline near the end of Solomon's reign. And, from the time of Constantine various attempts to introduce Christian civil government have been advanced—e.g., in Geneva beginning in the 1540s, and in England, Scotland and Massachusetts also beginning in the 1640s. There was also an attempt in Holland in the late 19th century under Abraham Kuyper. By the third generation these societies had largely been consumed by nominalism. Also, with the denominational chaos in the Church today it would be a challenge to establish a legal framework for a Christian government. Only by the work of the Holy Spirit through a major revival and a new reformation would it be possible. And then, it might only last for the generation that brought it into existence. Our hope must not be in the establishment of an earthly Christian civil government, but in everlasting government of the Messiah-Prince (Is 9.6-7).

202. Christians' Participation in Civil Government

History demonstrates that Satan influences people so that the establishment and sustainment of a Christian civil government is very difficult. Thus, Christians need to determine how they will participate in non-Christian civil governments. On one pole, there are Christian separatist communities such as the Amish, some Mennonites, and the Hutterites who avoid participation in secular society and civil government. On the other pole, is another form of strict separatism advocated among those who claim that religion and government are not to be entangled and that Christian beliefs are a matter of personal faith and should not influence political or legislative activities—for example, they would say that a person may have a personal belief that abortion is wrong, but yet vote in favour of a candidate who would fund abortion procedures.

A position between near total non-involvement in civil government and near total capitulation and concurrence with pagan governments seems to be the position presented in the Bible. We encounter examples of godly men and women who actively served God through their involvement in pagan governments—e.g., Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Esther and Mordecai. Some people might contend that these accounts do not apply today because their involvement in the governments of their day is not presented as normative for how we should act but only report what they did and do not provide an endorsement of their actions. However, Daniel, Nehemiah and Mordecai were all Prophets, and Daniel is presented as one of the most righteous of all men ever to have lived (Ezk 14.14, 20). Therefore, the accounts of their lives can be interpreted as models, which Christians should imitate for how to be involved in civil government. Also, we observe that the governments in which they were involved were far more pagan and draconian than most governments Christians encounter today (except for exceptions like in Iran, North Korea, or China). In addition, we find examples of believers working to influence pagan governments such as John's rebuke of Herod (Mt 14.3-4) and Paul's reasonings with Felix and Drusilla (Acts 24.24-26). These examples

indicate that Christians are not to remove themselves entirely from working to influence civil government.

Voting, although not mandated in most countries, is generally considered to be a civic duty. Therefore, Christians should vote when they have an opportunity to do so. Some Christians say that we should only vote for Christians who are running as candidates. However, the reality is that we will rarely ever agree 100% with the positions of any candidate. In fact, some true Christians who run for political office are mistaken in their views—e.g., advocating ‘social justice’ initiatives such as massive income redistribution, provision of ‘free’ services such as universal health care by governments, or radical ‘green’ initiatives, or they advocate against capital punishment—and should not be elected because they will do more harm than good over the long term for the cause of Christ and his Church. Also, when we vote, we should not vote for a candidate based on a single issue, such as if he is pro-life. In general, we should vote for candidates whose lives are outwardly consistent with the Ten Commandments and whose policies come the closest to supporting a full Biblical ethic. Sadly, at times, we may have to spoil our ballots or hold our noses as we vote.

When Christians have an opportunity and sense a call to run for an elected office, have the skills and resources (e.g., financial and peer support) required to do so, and have a reasonable prospect of being elected, they should fulfill their responsibility to act for positive good. Sometimes, they can have the most influence for Christian principles at lower levels of government such as on school boards or as county sheriffs. Likewise, Christians may, and should, serve in government appointed positions (e.g., as deputy ministers of finance or judges) when given an opportunity. Lord James Mackay, Baron of Clashfern, who served as Lord Advocate in the UK from 1979 to 1984, provides an example of how a modern ‘Daniel’ may have an influence in a government that is essentially pagan.

Christians (in elected or appointed offices) must serve Christ first, and should:

- Never compromise Biblical principles for short-term political gains.
- Encourage the State to follow and apply God’s laws (Mt 28.19-20) and present Biblical principles (e.g., that homosexuality is a sin, abortion is murder, commercial activity on the Sabbath is abhorrent to God).
- Call the civil magistrate to account by reminding him that he is a minister of God (Rom 13.4) who must do what God requires.
- Never be afraid to declare God’s law as the standard for the nations. David, Jesus, John the Baptist, and Paul were not ashamed by it. Nor were Alfred, Calvin, and the Puritans. We do not know more than these wise men!
- Continue to strive for Christian influence in government at every opportunity, using every legitimate means of directing governments toward practices that are God-honouring, while presenting the Gospel.
- Use legitimate means (e.g., the courts) to challenge impositions of evil against Christianity and God’s laws.
- Learn from history and do not repeat the mistakes of the past—a primary mistake is making people take vows that they really don’t believe.
- Be realists. A Christian civil government appears to have a limited probability of being realized today. The Church is weak, uncoordinated, and living a love-affair with materialism. When our fellow believers don’t hold to the basics of Biblical ethics it is hard to expect that society will.
- Not focus on trying to reform government when hearts are not converted.

203. Leadership Qualifications

The 2020 US Presidential election included a Democratic candidate who claimed to be a Christian but was an open homosexual who said that if elected, his partner would be called the ‘first husband’. He also was a supporter of abortion. The 2020 candidate for the Republican party, who had been elected as President four years earlier, had broken the seventh commandment before he became President. Sadly, neither of them, or

any of the other candidates for the office of President, displayed stellar moral character. If possible, we should vote for candidates whose lives are outwardly consistent with the Ten Commandments and whose policies come the closest to supporting a full Biblical ethic.

We can identify leadership qualifications that we should desire to see exhibited by those we elect or appoint to government position. Since God holds leaders to a higher standard, these qualifications can be adapted from Paul's qualifications for Church elders, from instructions given by Moses, and from the example of Nehemiah's leadership. Thus, we should desire and expect our leaders to be:

- *Godly*. Leaders should demonstrate a sincere belief in the Bible and in applying Biblical ethics that condition and guide all their actions (Ex 18.21; Dt 1.13-18; 2 Chron 19.5-7; Neh 7.2; 1 Tim 3.2-3; Titus 1.8-9). In government, magistrates are to be ministers of God (Rom 13.1-7). They are not man's servants, but God's. Regardless of how they are appointed (e.g., by a more senior government official or elected by the citizens) they should 'fear God'. Society will only flourish when those who are in charge excel in virtue and are known for their godliness.
- *Respectable*. They should be respectable (1 Tim 3.2); not be violent or quarrelsome, but gentle (1 Tim 3.3; Titus 1.7); have a good reputation (1 Tim 3.7); not be quick tempered (Titus 1.7); be above reproach and blameless (1 Tim 3.2; Titus 1.6); not given to drunkenness, but temperate (1 Tim 3.2-3; Titus 1.7); and love what is good (Titus 1.8).
- *Principled*. Government officials should stand for what is right and not blow in the wind and change policy direction based on the whim of the people who are being governed (Ex 18.21; Neh 5.14-6.19).
- *Trustworthy*. They should be men who hate dishonest gain (Titus 1.7) and are not lovers of money (1 Tim 3.3) who can be influenced by bribes (Ex 18.21; Ex 23.8).
- *Visionaries*. Leaders should be able to articulate goals, make plans, set direction, and carry out their plans through execution (Neh 2.11-16).
- *Knowledgeable and skilled*. They need to understand human nature and how to achieve goals with human, time, material, and technical resources (Neh 2.11-16).
- *Communicative*. Not only must a leader be able to formulate a vision, but he must also be able to communicate it well to others, by teaching, exciting, motivating, discipling, and guiding them (Neh 2.17-18). He must be prepared and able to answer objections with a clear strategy and a definition of the steps required to carry an initiative forward.
- *Adept Managers*. Leaders need to be able to plan the work of others and delegate, follow-up, evaluate, and reward (Neh 3.1-32; Neh 7.2). Planning requires scope definition, articulation of clear statements of what the tasks are (their size, parameters, limits, and time frames), and an ability to assess risks to achieve realistic goals. In addition, good leaders must work with and through people through delegation.
- *Responsible*. Good leaders take responsibility for their actions and do not 'pass the buck' or blame others for the problems they create. They admit to their mistakes, failures, and sins honestly and quickly (Neh 9.32-35).
- *Tenacious*. They have an ability to carry out a plan even under adverse circumstances (e.g., setbacks, rejection, challenges) and persevere in the face of opponents (Neh 4.6-23).
- *Servants*. Great leaders care for those who are within the domain of their responsibility (Neh 5.14-19), as servants of God (Rom 13.4). They do not lord it over others (Titus 1.7, 11; 1 Tim 3.3, 8) and are willing to give up their 'rights' to serve others and for the benefit of the group. Exemplars include Jesus (Phil 2.6-8) and Paul (1 Cor 9.1-23; 2 Thess 3.7-9).
- *Faithful*. Nehemiah's trademark attribute was faithfulness (Neh 5.19). Faithfulness to God is *the* key attribute of true leadership that is missing today in the Church, governments, and many businesses (Prov 20.6).

We should not accept the idea that a man's personal life (e.g., his divorces, adulterous affairs, sexual escapades, drug problems, family difficulties, or criminal offences) have no bearing on his ability to

perform in a public office. How a man administers his private moral life has a direct bearing on how he will administer public affairs. Therefore, we should take seriously the Biblical qualifications when we are voting for candidates for elected offices.

Identifying Biblical criteria for good leaders does not mean that there should be a ‘spiritual’ test for those who are elected or appointed to a public office. This was tried in the 17th century in England, during the Puritan ascendancy, and it proved impossible to implement in a fallen world because people will always be tempted to break their vows and to pursue self-interests. We cannot have reformed government without reformed hearts. Those who think that we can legislate principled leadership behaviour put too much emphasis on reformation of the State before society has been reformed through a spiritual revival. A reformed State will be a natural outworking of a pervasive Christian influence in society but is not achievable without the salvific work of the Holy Spirit.

204. Military Service

We will address whether governments should engage in war when we consider the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder”. So, for the moment, let us assume that governments have a God-defined role to defend their citizens from aggressors by waging war when it is necessary and when there is no other option such as negotiating a peace treaty. When soldiers asked John the Baptist what they should do, after he had preached repentance, he told them not to extort money and to be content with their wages (Lk 3.14). He did not tell them to leave their military service, thereby indicating that it was inherently evil, even though the government they served was corrupt and decadent. We should also observe that the centurions (roughly equivalent to sergeants, lieutenants, and captains in today’s army) in the Roman army at the time the NT was written were appointed based on merit and were generally respected for their integrity, competence, and discipline. Every mention of centurions in the NT reflects positively on them; as men of character, and even of faith (Mt 8.5-13; Mt 27.54; Mk 15.39, 44-45; Lk 7.1-9; Lk 23.47; Acts 10.1-43; Acts 21.32; Acts 22.25-26; Acts 23.17-31; Acts 24.23; Acts 27.1-6, 11, 31-32, 43).

If a nation has a selective service conscription (as the US had until 1973) or requires all of its (male and sometimes female) citizens to perform compulsory military service (e.g., in Switzerland, Austria, and Israel), then in obedience to the government (Rom 13.1-2, 5) Christians should step up and fulfill their obligation and not find ways to avoid their duty—e.g., paying substitutes to take their place (as some did during the American Civil War), using invalid excuses for avoiding service, or claiming to be conscientious objectors for moral reasons. Sometimes governments which have mandatory military service will accommodate true conscientious objectors, not by waiving their service but by putting them into non-combat roles such as working in field kitchens or as medics or by assigning them domestic emergency responder duties.

When a nation does not have compulsory military service, Christians do not have an explicit requirement to serve in military roles. However, the Church should encourage some young men with strong Christian faith, a demonstrated commitment to a life that is consistent with a Biblical ethic, and an aptitude for military service (e.g., good health, physical strength and mental agility to make wise tactical decisions) to consider military service. If all Christians abandoned military service, then the leavening influence of Christians would be removed from an important part of a nation’s legitimate cultural institutions. One way that Christians may serve in the military and possibly have a wider influence than serving as a soldier is by serving as a chaplain or as a military doctor. In these roles they may be able to have a more direct spiritual influence.

The NT does not give guidance for how Christians should engage in military service. However, the OT provides guidelines which the divisions of the armed forces should consider. God instructed Gideon to send

home those who were fearful and trembling (Judges 7.3). Although God's purpose with Gideon was to reduce his army so that when it was very small and successfully defeated its enemies, the Israelites would not credit themselves with the victory but would give the credit and glory to God. Nevertheless, the elimination of cowards indicates that a volunteer army should be preferred over one where people are forced into service and might defect under pressure. At the time that ending the US draft was being debated, people provided reasonable arguments for an all-volunteer military and also for requiring compulsory service. However, since the end of the draft, the US military has generally not had difficulty filling its ranks. The primary challenge it faces today is not in finding a sufficient number who would be willing to volunteer but finding volunteers who are able to meet the rigorous demands of military preparedness—for example, many young people are not able to face the physical challenges of boot camp. The OT also indicates that men who were twenty years of age or older (Num 1.3) were to be listed as possible candidates for military service. This may serve as a guide for current practice—teenagers should probably not be conscripted or permitted to enlist. It is ironic that in some jurisdictions, the legal drinking age is 19 (Ontario) or even 21 (US Federal). If government officials do not believe that 18 or 19-year-olds are mature enough to drink alcohol, they should not be considered mature enough to be trained to fight for their country. We also should note that newly married men were to be excused from military duty for a year (Dt 24.5). This provision appears to have two purposes. First, it is to strengthen the marriage bond. It is less likely that a husband or wife will commit adultery during a time of separation if they have been married for some time, particularly if a child has been born or is on the way. Also, it would give the husband time to establish his household and to provide for his wife in the event that he did not return from a war.

Whether women should serve in the military is a debated subject. There may be legitimate arguments for including women in military roles such as nurses or as communication officers. However, only biological males (Num 1.2-3) should be included in combat units and assigned dangerous duties such as patrolling in a war zone or participating in direct combat. Women participating in combat usurp a male role, may confuse and tempt their male peers, and may jeopardize missions because of their different physical abilities. Also, females serving in the military should never be bunked in the same rooms with males or use the same washroom and shower facilities during training or in the field.

205. Principles Governing the Application of Punishments

When God introduced the first law of prohibition to mankind (Gen 2.7), he included a penalty—death—if the law was broken. This indicates that for a law to have any merit, there must be an associated punishment for the breach of that law. Because of mankind's tendency to pervert justice, God has provided instruction and examples in the Bible for achieving equitable convictions for crimes and their associated punishments. Biblical guidance provides us with at least the following principles:

- In Western legal systems we accept the principle that a person is “innocent until *proven* guilty” (this is the notion of the presumption of innocence) as being consistent with Biblical jurisprudence (Ex 23.7; Num 5.14-31; Dt 17.6; Josh 20.3-6). However, we have seen recent examples of how this principle is being undermined in modern North American culture, such as during the confirmation hearings before Brett Kavanaugh was appointed to the US Supreme Court. He was accused of sexual misconduct by three women. Immediately, the mainstream media assumed his guilt, although no corroboration of the allegations could be presented, even after extensive investigation by the FBI. Similarly, many people are assumed to be guilty of crimes or prejudices based solely on their skin colour.
- If an error can be committed in legal judgement, a ‘type I error’—an innocent person is convicted of a crime when he is in fact not guilty—is more egregious than a ‘type II error’—a guilty person is declared not-guilty of the crime he is charged with, when in fact he did commit the crime. It is marginally better to let a guilty person escape punishment than to punish an innocent person. However, both outcomes are bad (Prov 17.15), and diligence needs to be applied to ensure that justice is administered fairly based on sufficient corroborating evidence.

- Punishment should fit the crime. This is the principle of *lex talionis* (the ‘law of *talion*’ or retribution), which is God’s standard for justice. It is summarized in the statement, “an eye for an eye” (Ex 21.23-25; Lev 24.17-22; Dt 19.21; Jer 50.29; Ob 15; Hab 2.8). Since this principle was to be applied to foreigners as well as Jews (Lev 24.22), it clearly cannot be dismissed as merely a Jewish law. In Matthew 5.38, Jesus endorses *lex talionis* by expounding on the underlying meaning of the command and subsequently warning against personal vindictiveness (Mt 5.38-39; Mt 7.2). God established this principle to provide for proportionate punishment; for example, he provided limits on the repayment of stolen items which restored the amount stolen and provided for an amount as punishment. He also established appropriate punishments for various classes of crimes; for example, murder vs manslaughter (Num 35.20-23). In our society, we see abuses of the principle of equitable justice in two directions:
 - Inadequate punishments for serious crimes; for example, sentencing a drunk driver who kills a pedestrian to a month of house-arrest.
 - Drastically overstated or absurd penalties; for example, awarding millions of dollars to a person who spilled hot coffee on herself in a restaurant or exacting a heavy fine on a homeowner, who was on vacation, because a robber locked himself in the homeowner’s garage.
- Laws and their associated penalties should encourage ethical behaviour. However, if a law is unenforceable or not actively enforced, no penalty (e.g., a fine) can reasonably be expected to encourage adherence to the law. For example, in Toronto it is illegal to build a retaining wall around a flower bed or install a hedge, within half a meter of the sidewalk. Yet, this bylaw is rarely enforced (only if a neighbour complains) and homeowners universally disobey it.
- Punishment for breaking a law should be exacted primarily for the sake of justice and latterly to warn others to behave differently and to reform and rehabilitate offenders. An obvious example of punishment for the sake of justice is the exercise of capital punishment for murder (Gen 9.5-6). A murderer cannot be reformed by this punishment. This principle is being undermined today in many jurisdictions in the West, where governments call their institutions ‘correctional facilities’ rather than ‘penitentiaries’.
- Punishment should be administered consistently and impartially (Ex 23.3; Lev 19.15; Prov 24.23; Prov 31.8-9; Is 10.1-2).
- Judicial procedures and punishment should be administered expeditiously so that the penalty is clearly associated with the crime; otherwise, the penalty will appear abstract and capricious (Eccl 8.11)
- Penalties should not be applied retroactively, after new laws are enacted. If something hasn’t been defined as a crime in the past, then one cannot be considered guilty of committing the crime in the past, after a new law has been enacted. An example of this inequity occurred in 2013, when some members of the Canadian Senate were required to repay claimed expenses after changes were made to the policy related to submission of valid travel expenses. Likewise, changes in tax laws (e.g., for permitted deductions) should not require taxpayers to reimburse the government for deductions which when they were submitted were considered legitimate.
- Penalties should never be instruments of personal retaliation (Rom 12.19).
- Punishment should not be cruel. When capital punishment is administered it should be rapid and efficient; and corporal punishment should be restrained (Dt 25.1-3; Prov 13.24; Prov 22.15; Prov 23.13-14; Prov 29.15). It is ironic that many of the people who protest against the use of capital and corporal punishment because they claim they are cruel, are those who advocate for the slaughter of the unborn in the womb of their mothers.