

thing that can be taken lightly and without great concern, for its effects are often both far-reaching and long-lasting. In the next chapter we will be looking at the corporate effects of sin, that is, the impact of Adam's sin on the whole of his posterity. In this chapter, however, we will be concerned with the individual effects of one's sin as they are illustrated in Scripture (particularly in the account of Adam and Eve) and found in our own experience.

The impact of sin has several dimensions. There are effects upon the sinner's relationships with God and fellow humans. And sin also affects the sinner himself or herself. Some of the results of sin might be termed "natural consequences," that is, they follow from the sin in virtually an automatic cause-and-effect sequence. Others are specifically ordained and directed by God as a penalty for man's sin.

#### Results Affecting the Relationship with God

Sin produced an immediate transformation in the relationship which Adam and Eve had with God. They had evidently been on close and friendly terms with God. They trusted and obeyed him, and on the basis of Genesis 3:8 it can be concluded that they had customarily had fellowship with God. He loved them and provided everything they needed; we are reminded of the friendship of which Jesus spoke in John 15:15. Now, however, all of this was changed. Because they had violated the trust and the command of God, the relationship became quite different. They had placed themselves on the wrong side of God, and had in effect become his enemies. It was not God who had changed or moved, but Adam and Eve.

#### *Divine Disfavor*

It is notable how the Bible characterizes God's relationship to sin and the sinner. In two instances in the Old Testament, God is said to hate sinful Israel. In Hosea 9:15 God says, "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels." This is a very strong expression, for God actually says that he has begun to hate Israel and will love them no more. A similar sentiment is expressed in Jeremiah 12:8. On two other occasions God is said to hate the wicked (Pss. 5:5; 11:5). Much more frequent, however, are passages in which he is said to hate wickedness (e.g., Prov. 6:16–17; Zech. 8: 17). The hate is not one-sided on God's part, however, for the wicked are described as those who hate God (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 7:10) and, more

commonly, as those who hate the righteous (Pss. 18:40; 69:4; Prov. 29: 10). In those few passages where God is said to hate the wicked, it is apparent that he does so because they hate him and have already committed wickedness.

That God looks with favor upon some and with disfavor or anger upon others, and that he is sometimes described as loving Israel and at other times as hating them, are not signs of change, inconsistency, or fickleness in God. His reaction to our every deed is determined by his unchanging nature. God has indicated quite clearly that he cannot and does not tolerate certain things. In this he really has no choice. It is part of his holy nature to be categorically opposed to sinful actions. When we engage in such actions, we have moved into the territory of God's disfavor. In the case of Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was off limits. They had been told what God's response would be if they ate of its fruit. They chose, as it were, to become enemies of God, to fall into the domain of his disapproval.

The Old Testament frequently describes those who sin and violate God's law as enemies of God. Yet only very rarely does the Bible speak of God as their enemy (Exod. 23:22; Isa. 63: 10; Lam. 2:4–5). Ryder Smith comments: "In the Old Testament, 'enmity,' like hatred, is rare with God, but common with man."<sup>1</sup> By rebelling against God, it is man, not God, who breaks the relationship.

Enmity toward God had grievous results for Adam and Eve, and such will be the case for us today as well whenever we, though aware of the law and the penalty for violating it, sin anyway. In the case of Adam and Eve, trust, love, confidence, and closeness were replaced by fear, dread, and avoidance of God. Whereas they had previously looked forward with positive anticipation to their meetings with God, after the fall they did not want to see him. They hid themselves in an attempt to avoid him. Just as for Adam and Eve, the consequence of sin, for anyone who believes in the judgment of God, is that God becomes feared. He is no longer one's closest friend, but is consciously avoided. The situation is like our reaction to officers of the law. If we are abiding by the law, we do not mind seeing a police officer. We may even have a good, comfortable feeling when we spot a police car. It gives us a sense of security to know that protection is available and that someone is there to apprehend lawbreakers. If, however, we know we have broken the law, our attitude is quite different. We become very upset at the sight of a squad car, complete with flashing beacon, in our rear-view mirror. The activity of the police has not changed, but our relationship to them has.

1. Charles Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Sin and of the Ways of God with Sinners* (London: Epworth, 1953), p. 43.

While God is only rarely spoken of as hating the wicked, it is common for the Old Testament to refer to him as angry with them. God's anger should not be thought of as uncontrolled fury or personal spitefulness. Rather, it is more in the nature of righteous indignation.

There are several Hebrew terms that depict the anger of God. The term נְפָתַח ('anaph) originally meant "to snort." It is a very concrete and picturesque word, conveying the idea of one of the physical accompaniments or expressions of anger. The verb form is rare, but is used of God (Deut. 1:37; Isa. 12:1) and of his anointed (Ps. 2:12). The noun is much more common and has three meanings-nostril, face, and anger. It is used of God's anger 180 times, about four times as frequently as it is used of man's.<sup>2</sup> God is pictured as angry with Israel for having made the golden calf while Moses was conferring with him on the mountain. The Lord says to Moses, "Let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation." Moses responds, "O **LORD**, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people?" (Exod. 32:10-11). The anger of God is pictured as a fire which will consume or burn up the Israelites. There are numerous other references to God's anger: "The anger of the **LORD** was kindled against Israel" (Judg. 2: 14). Jeremiah asks the Lord to correct him, but "not in thy anger" (Jer. 10:24). The psalmist rejoices that God's "anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime" (Ps. 30:5).

Two other Hebrew roots, חָרַח (*charah*) and יָחַם (*yacham*), suggest the idea of heat. The verb of the former is frequently translated 'kindle,' as in Psalm 106:40: "Then the anger of the **LORD** was kindled against his people." The noun form is usually rendered "fierce [anger]" or "fierceness."<sup>3</sup> The nominal form of the latter root is properly rendered "wrath," as in 'lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your doings' (Jer. 4:4).

In the New Testament there is a particular focus on the enmity and hatred of unbelievers and the world toward God and his people. To sin is to make oneself an enemy of God. In Romans 8:7 and Colossians 1:21 Paul describes the mind that is set on the flesh as being "hostile to God." In James 4:4 we read that "whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." God, however, is not the enemy of anyone; he loves all and hates none. He loved enough to send his Son to die for us while we were yet sinners and at enmity with him (Rom. 5:8-10). He epitomizes what he commands. He loves his enemies.

Although God is not the enemy of sinners nor does he hate them, it is also quite clear that God is angered by sin. The two words that express

this most clearly are θυμός and ὀργή ("anger, wrath"). In many cases these words do not merely refer to God's present reaction to sin, but also suggest certain divine actions to come. In John 3:36, for example, Jesus says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him." There are several passages which teach that while the anger of God presently rests upon sin and those who commit it, this anger will be converted into action at some future time. Romans 1:18 teaches that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth." Romans 2:5 speaks of "storing up wrath" for the day of judgment; and Romans 9:22 notes that God, while "desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction." The picture in all of these passages is that God's wrath is a very real and present matter, but will not be fully revealed, or manifested in action, until some later point.

From the foregoing it is evident that God looks with disfavor upon sin, indeed, that sin occasions anger or wrath or displeasure within him. Two additional comments should be made, however. The first is that anger is not something that God chooses to feel. His disapproval of sin is not an arbitrary matter, for his very nature is one of holiness; it automatically rejects sin. He is, as we have suggested in another place, "allergic to sin," as it were.<sup>4</sup> The second comment is that we must avoid thinking of God's anger as being excessively emotional. It is not as if he is seething with anger, his temper virtually surging out of control. He is capable of exercising patience and long-suffering, and does so. Nor is God to be thought of as somehow frustrated by our sin. Disappointment is perhaps a more accurate way of characterizing his reaction.

### Guilt

Another result of our sins which affects our relationship with God is guilt. This word needs some careful explication, for in today's world the usual meaning of the term is guilt feelings, or the subjective aspect of guilt. These feelings are often thought of as irrational, and indeed they sometimes are. That is, a person may not have done anything objectively wrong so as to be deserving of punishment, but nonetheless may have these feelings. What we are referring to here, however, is the objective state of having violated God's intention for man and thus being liable to punishment. It is this aspect of guilt that deserves our special attention.

To clarify what we mean by 'guilt,' it will be helpful for us to comment

2. Ibid., p. 44.

3. Ibid.

4. See p. 285.

briefly on two words which may occur in one's definition of sin, namely, "bad" and "wrong." On the one hand, we may define sin as that which is intrinsically bad rather than good. It is impure, repulsive, hated by God simply because it is the opposite of the good. There is a problem here, however, inasmuch as the word *bud* is capable of many meanings—for example it can mean "defective, inadequate, insufficient." One may think of a bad athletic team or a bad worker as being inept and nonproductive, but not necessarily morally wrong. And so the statement that sin is bad may be understood only in aesthetic terms—sin is ugly, twisted, spoiled action which comes short of the perfect standard of what God intended.

On the other hand, however, we may define sin as involving not merely the bad, but the wrong as well. In the former case, sin might be likened to a foul disease which healthy people shrink from in fear. But in the latter case, we are thinking of sin not merely as a lack of wholeness or of perfection, but as moral wrong, as a deliberate violation of what God has commanded, and thus as deserving of punishment. This is to think of sin not in **aesthetic**, but juristic terms. In the former view, the good is thought of as the beautiful, the harmonious, lovable, desirable, and attractive, whereas evil is understood as the inharmonious, turbulent, ugly, and repulsive. In the latter view, the law is emphasized. The right is what conforms to the law's stipulations, and the wrong is whatever departs from that standard in some way. It therefore deserves to be punished.<sup>5</sup>

This distinction can be illustrated in other ways. One might think of an athlete executing a particular play poorly; for example, a basketball player who shoots at the basket but misses it completely. Poorly executed, the play results in no score, but it is not an infraction of the rules, and no foul will be called. On the other hand, if in the process of shooting, the player charges into a stationary defensive player, then a rule has been broken and a foul will be called. Or one might think of an automobile which is hard to maneuver and inefficient, giving very poor gas mileage, or is badly damaged and an eyesore. Such an automobile might be a trial of patience for its owner and arouse feelings of disgust, but as long as the headlights, turn signals, and other safety features function properly and the exhaust emissions are within the prescribed limits of the law, there is nothing illegal about the vehicle. The driver cannot be given a citation for driving it, provided that he does not violate any traffic regulations. If, however, the automobile is emitting an excessive amount of contaminants into the environment, or some safety feature is malfunctioning, the law is being broken, and a penalty would be deservedly imposed. Now when we speak of guilt, we mean that the sinner, like the

5. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), p. 730.

basketball player who commits a foul, and the automobile which does not meet legal safety regulations, has violated the law and, accordingly, is liable to punishment.

At this point we must look into the precise nature of the disruption which sin and guilt produce in the relationship between God and man. God is the almighty, eternal one, the only independent or noncontingent reality. Everything that is has derived its existence from him. And man, the highest of all of the creatures, has the gifts of life and personhood only because of God's goodness and graciousness. As the master, God has placed man in charge of the creation and commanded him to rule over it (Gen. 1:28). Man has been appointed the steward of God's kingdom or vineyard, with all the opportunities and privileges which that entails. As the almighty and completely holy one, God has asked our worship and obedience in return for his gifts. But man has failed to do God's bidding. Entrusted with the wealth of the creation, man has used it for his own purposes, like an employee who embezzles from his employer. In addition, like a citizen who treats contemptuously a monarch or a high elected official, a hero or a person of great accomplishment, man has failed to treat with respect the highest of all beings. Further, man is ungrateful for all that God has done for him and given to him (Rom. 1:21). And finally, man has spurned God's offer of friendship and love, and, in the most extreme case, the salvation accomplished through the death of God's own Son. These offenses are magnified by who God is: he is the almighty Creator, infinitely above us. Under obligation to no one he brought us into existence. Hence he has an absolute claim upon us. And the standard of behavior he expects us to emulate is his own holy perfection. As Jesus himself said, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

We must think of sin and guilt in metaphysical categories if we are to gain a conception of their immense effect on our relationship with God and indeed on the whole of the universe. God is the highest being and we are his creatures. Failure to fulfil his standards disrupts the whole economy of the universe. Whenever the creature deprives the Creator of what is rightfully his, the balance is upset for God is not being honored and obeyed. Were such wrong, such disruption, to go uncorrected, God would virtually cease to be God. Therefore, sin and the sinner deserve and even need to be punished.

#### *Punishment*

Liability to God's punishment, then, is another result of our sin. It is important for us to ascertain the basic nature and intent of God's punishment of the sinner. Is it remedial, intended to correct the sinner? Is it

deterrent, a pointing out of the consequences to which sin leads and hence a warning to others against wrongdoing? Or is it retributive, designed simply to give sinners what they deserve? We need to examine each of these concepts in turn.

There is today a rather widespread feeling of opposition to the idea that God's punishment of the sinner is retribution. Retribution is regarded as primitive, cruel, a mark of hostility and vindictiveness, which is singularly inappropriate in a God of love who is a Father to his earthly children.<sup>6</sup> Yet despite this feeling, which may reflect a permissive society's conception of what a loving father is, there is definitely a dimension of divine retribution in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament. Ryder Smith puts it categorically: "There is no doubt that in Hebrew thought punishment is retributive. The use of the death penalty is enough to show that."<sup>7</sup> While one might question the absoluteness of Smith's conclusion, it does appear that retribution was a prominent element in the Hebrew understanding of the law. Certainly, the death penalty was not intended to be rehabilitative, being terminal in nature. And while it also had a deterrent effect, the direct connection between what had been done to the victim and what was to be done to the offender is clear. This is seen particularly in a passage like Genesis 9:6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image." Because of the heinousness of what has been done (the image of God has been destroyed), there is and must be a corresponding penalty.

The idea of retribution is also seen quite clearly in the term נקם (*naqam*). This word, which (including its derivatives) appears about eighty times in the Old Testament, is frequently rendered "avenge, revenge, take vengeance." While the terms *vengeance* and *revenge* are appropriate translations in designating Israel's actions against her neighbors, there is something inappropriate about applying them to God's actions.<sup>8</sup> For "vengeance" applies particularly to a private individuals reacting against a wrong done to him. God, however, considered in relationship to the violations of the moral and spiritual law, is not a private person, but a public person, the administrator of the law. Further, "vengeance" or "revenge" carries the idea of retaliation, of gaining satisfaction (psychologically) to compensate for what was done, rather than the idea of obtaining and administering justice. God's concern, however,

6. Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 228.

7. Smith, *Doctrine of Sin*, p. 51.

8. Ibid., p. 47.

is the maintenance of justice. Thus, in connection with God's punishment of sinners, "retribution" is a better translation than is "vengeance."

There are numerous references, particularly in the Major Prophets, to the retributive dimension of God's punishment of sinners. Examples are to be found in Isaiah 1:24; 6:1-2; 63:4; Jeremiah 46:10; and Ezekiel 25:14. In Psalm 94:1 God is spoken of as the "God of vengeance." In these cases, as in most instances in the Old Testament, the punishment envisioned is to take place within historical time rather than in some future state.

The idea of retribution is found not only in didactic material, but also in numerous narrative passages. To punish the awful wickedness of the whole human race upon the earth, God sent the flood to destroy mankind (Gen. 6). The flood was not sent to deter anyone from sin, for the only survivors, Noah and his family, were already righteous people. And it certainly could not have been sent for any corrective or rehabilitative reason, since the wicked were all destroyed. The case of Sodom and Gomorrah is similar. Because of the wickedness of these cities, God acted to destroy them. God's action was simply retribution for their sin. What they were doing deserved destruction, and in this manner God purged the earth of such sin.

Although less frequently than in the Old Testament, the idea of retributive justice is also found in the New Testament. Here the reference is more to future rather than temporal judgment. Paraphrases of Deuteronomy 32:35 are found in both Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30—"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." In Romans Paul's purpose is to deter believers from attempting to avenge wrongs done to them. God is a God of justice, and wrongs will not go unpunished.

While God's punishment of sinners definitely has a retributive character, we should not overlook its two other dimensions or functions. Warnings in Deuteronomy to beware of sin are coupled with examples of punishments inflicted on sinners. These examples were intended to deter persons from wrongdoing (Deut. 6: 12-15; 8: 11, 19-20). The same is true of Jeremiah's reminder to Judah of what God did to Shiloh (Jer. 7: 12-14) and the psalmist's recalling of what happened to the generation that perished in the wilderness (Ps. 95:8-11). The stoning of Achan and his family was partly retribution for what he had done, but it was also a means of dissuading others from a similar course of conduct. For this reason the punishment of evildoers was frequently administered publicly.

There is also the disciplinary effect of punishment. Punishment was administered to convince the sinner of the error of his ways and to turn him from it. Psalm 107: 10-16 indicates that the Lord had punished Israel for their sins and they had consequently turned from their wrongdoing, at least temporarily. The psalmist elsewhere acknowledges that punish-

ment had been good for him since he had thereby learned the Lord's statutes (Ps. 119:71). The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:6).

In the Old Testament there is even a bit of the idea of purification from sin through punishment. This is at least hinted at in Isaiah 10:20-21. Assyria will be used of God to punish his people; as a result of this experience a remnant of Israel will learn to lean upon the Lord. "A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God."

The way in which punishment is administered is also significant. At times it is administered indirectly, simply through God's immanent working in the physical and psychological laws which he has established in the world. Indirect punishment may be external, as, for example, when sin violates the principles of health and hygiene and results in illness. The person who engages in sexual sin and contracts a venereal disease is an obvious and frequently cited instance, but less dramatic cases also abound. We are now learning increasingly from psychologists that hatred and hostility have destructive effects upon physical health. Indirect punishment may also take the form of external conflicts (e.g., in one's family) issuing from one's sin and the psychological laws God has ordained. David may be a case in point. Because of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, David was told that trouble would come upon his house (2 Sam. 12:10-12). The rape of Tamar, the murder of Amnon by Absalom, and Absalom's revolt against David were fulfillments of this prophecy. Now while we may think of these tragedies as being specifically chosen and directly administered by God to fit David's sin, we may also regard them as natural consequences flowing automatically from David's behavior and basic human psychology. The crimes of the sons may well have been the consequences either of the propensity of children to imitate their parents or of the failure of David to discipline his sons, thinking that this would be hypocritical in view of his own past behavior. Finally, indirect punishment may be internal. For example, sin may lead automatically to an awful feeling of guilt, a gnawing sense of responsibility.

That there is in some cases a virtual cause-and-effect relationship between sin and punishment is taught in some of the didactic passages of the Bible. In Galatians 6:7-8 Paul uses the imagery of sowing and reaping to compare the results of sin and of righteousness. It is implied that just as the crop that is obtained follows from the nature of the seed which was planted, so does the punishment follow automatically from the sinful act. Yet we should be careful to note that while God often works indirectly through the physical and psychological laws he has established, this is not the only or even the primary channel through

which he administers punishment. More common are those cases where God by a definite decision and direct act metes out punishment. And we should also carefully point out that even where the punishment follows naturally from the act, it is not something impersonal, a piece of misfortune. The law that governs these fixed patterns is an expression of God's will.

The Christian view that God punishes indirectly through the patterns he has established is to be distinguished from the Hindu and Buddhist concept of karma, according to which every act has certain consequences. There is an inexorable connection between the two.<sup>9</sup> There is nothing that can break this connection, not even death, for the law of karma carries over into the next incarnation. In the Christian view, the sin-punishment sequence can be interrupted by repentance and confession of sins, with consequent forgiveness, and death brings a release from the temporal effects of sin.

### *Death*

One of the most obvious results of sin is death. This truth is first pointed out in God's statement forbidding Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen. 2: 17). It is also found in clear didactic form in Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." Paul's point is that, like wages, death is a fitting return, a just recompense for what we have done. This death which we have deserved has several different aspects: (1) physical death, (2) spiritual death, and (3) eternal death.

#### *1. Physical Death*

The mortality of all men is both an obvious fact and a truth taught by Scripture. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment." Paul in Romans 5:12 attributes death to the original sin of Adam. Yet while death entered the world through Adams sin, it spread to all men because all sinned.

This raises the question of whether man was created mortal or immortal. Would he have died if he had not sinned? Calvinists have basically taken the negative position, arguing that physical death entered with the curse (Gen. 3: 19).<sup>10</sup> The Pelagian view, on the other hand, is that man was

9. L. de la Vallée Poussin, "Karma," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), vol. 7, pp. 673-76.

10. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 260. Arminians generally tend to agree with Calvinists rather than Pelagians on this point. See H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 34-37, 91-95.

created mortal. Just as everything about us dies sooner or later, so it is and has always been with man. The principle of death and decay is a part of the whole of creation.<sup>11</sup> The Pelagians point out that if the Calvinist view is correct, then it was the serpent who was right and Jehovah was wrong in saying, "In the day that you eat of it you shall die," for Adam and Eve were not struck dead on the day of their sin.<sup>12</sup> Physical death, in the Pelagian view, is a natural accompaniment of being human. The biblical references to death as a consequence of sin are understood as references to spiritual death, separation from God, rather than physical death.

The problem is not as simple as it might at first appear. The assumption that mortality began with the fall, and that Romans 5:12 and similar New Testament references to death are to be understood as references to physical death, may not be warranted. A roadblock to the idea that physical mortality is a result of sin is the case of Jesus. Not only did he not sin himself (Heb. 4:15), but he was not tainted by the corrupted nature of Adam. Yet he died. How could mortality have affected someone who, spiritually, stood where Adam and Eve did before the fall? This is an enigma. We have conflicting data here. Is it possible somehow to slip between the horns of the dilemma?

First, we must observe that physical death is linked to the fall in some clear way. Genesis 3: 19 would seem to be not a statement of what is the case and has been the case from creation, but a pronouncement of a new situation: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Further, it seems difficult to separate the ideas of physical death and spiritual death in the writings of Paul, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul's theme is that physical death has been defeated through Christ's resurrection. His resurrection does not mean that humans no longer die, but that the finality of death has been removed. Paul attributes to sin the power which physical death possesses in the absence of resurrection. But with Christ's overcoming of physical death, sin itself (and thus spiritual death) is defeated (w. 55-56). Apart from Christ's resurrection from physical death, we would remain in our sins, that is, we would remain spiritually dead (v. 17). Louis Berkhof appears to be correct when he says, "The Bible does not know the distinction, so common among us, between a physical, a spiritual, and an eternal death; it has a synthetic view of death and regards it as separation from God."<sup>13</sup>

11. See Augustine *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants* 1.2.

12. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 295.

13. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 258-59.

On the other hand, there are the considerations that Adam and Eve died spiritually but not physically the moment or the day that they sinned, and that even the sinless Jesus was capable of dying. How is all of this to be untangled?

I would suggest the concept of *conditional immortality* as the state of Adam before the fall. He was not inherently able to live forever, but he need not have died.<sup>14</sup> Given the right conditions, he could have lived on forever. This may be the meaning of God's words when he decided to expel Adam and Eve from Eden and from the presence of the tree of life: "and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (3:22). The impression is given that Adam, even after the fall, could have lived forever if he had eaten the fruit of the tree of life. What happened at the time of his expulsion from Eden was that man, who formerly could have either lived forever or died, was now separated from those conditions which made eternal life possible, and thus it became inevitable that he die. Previously he could die; now he *would* die. This also means that Jesus was born with a body that was subject to death. He had to eat to live; had he failed to eat he would have starved to death.

We should note that there were other changes as a result of sin. In Eden man had a body which could become diseased; after the fall there were diseases for him to contract. The curse, involving the coming of death to mankind, also included a whole host of ills which would lead to death. Paul tells us that someday this set of conditions will be removed, and the whole creation delivered from this "bondage to decay" (Rom. 8: 18-23).

To sum up: the potential of death was within the creation from the beginning. But the potential of eternal life was also there. Sin, in the case of Adam and each of us, means that death is no longer merely potential but actual.

We have not attempted to define physical death, although most older theologies defined it as the separation of body and soul. This definition is not fully satisfactory, for reasons indicated in our treatment of the makeup of human nature (chapter 24). We will attempt to define physical death more completely in our discussion of the last things. For the time being, we will think of it as the termination of human existence in the bodily or materialized state.

## 2. Spiritual Death

Spiritual death is both connected with physical death and distinguished from it. Spiritual death is the separation of the person, in the

14. Augustine makes a similar point in distinguishing between being "mortal" and being "subject to death" (*Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* 1.3).

entirety of his or her nature, from God. God, as a perfectly holy being, cannot look upon sin or tolerate its presence. Thus, sin is a barrier to the relationship between God and man. It brings man under God's judgment and condemnation.

The essence of spiritual death can be seen in the case of Adam and Eve. "In the day you eat of it [the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you shall die" did not mean that they would experience immediate physical death. It did mean, as we have seen, that their potential mortality would become actual. It also meant spiritual death, separation between man and God. And indeed, after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they tried to hide from God because of their shame and guilt, and God pronounced severe curses upon them. Sin results in alienation from God. This is the wages of sin of which Paul speaks in Romans 6:23.

In addition to this objective aspect of spiritual death, there is also a subjective aspect. There are numerous statements in the Bible to the effect that man apart from Christ is dead in trespasses and sins. This means, at least in part, that sensibility to spiritual matters and the ability to act and respond spiritually, to do good things, are absent or severely impaired. The newness of life which is now ours through Christ's resurrection and symbolized in baptism (Rom. 6:4), while not precluding physical death, most certainly involves a death to the sin which has afflicted us. It produces a new spiritual sensitivity and vitality.

### *3. Eternal Death*

Eternal death is in a very real sense the extending and finalizing of the spiritual death of which we have just written. If one comes to physical death still spiritually dead, separated from God, that condition becomes permanent. As eternal life is both qualitatively different from our present life and unending, so eternal death is separation 'from God which is both qualitatively different from physical death and everlasting in character.

In the last judgment the persons who appear before God's judgment seat will be divided into two groups. Those who are judged righteous will be sent into eternal life (Matt. 25:34–40, 46b). Those judged to be unrighteous will be sent into eternal punishment or eternal fire (w. 41-46a). In Revelation 20 John writes of a "second death." The first death is physical death, from which the resurrection gives us deliverance, but not exemption. Although all will eventually die the first death, the important question is whether in each individual case the second death has been overcome. Those who participate in the first resurrection are spoken of as 'blessed and holy.' Over such the second death is said to have no power (v. 6). In the latter part of the chapter, death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire (w. 13–14), into which the beast and the false prophet were earlier cast (19:20). This is spoken of as the second death (20: 14).

Anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the permanent state of what the sinner chose in life.

We have examined the results which sin has upon man's relationship with God. This is the primary area affected by sin. David had most assuredly sinned against Uriah, and in some ways against Bathsheba as well, and even against the nation of Israel. Yet in his great penitential psalm he prayed, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4). Even where there is no apparent horizontal dimension to sin, God is affected by it. The argument that certain actions are not wrong, provided they are performed by consenting adults and no one is harmed, disregards the fact that sin is primarily wrong against God, and the primary effects of sin are upon the relationship between the sinner and God.

### Effects on the Sinner

#### *Enslavement*

Although the primary effects of sin are on our relationship with God, it is vital that we investigate the other dimensions that are affected by sin. Sin has consequences for the person who commits it. These effects are varied and complex. One of the effects of sin is its enslaving power. Sin becomes a habit or even an addiction. One sin leads to another sin. For example, after killing Abel, Cain felt constrained to lie when God asked him where his brother was. Sometimes a larger sin is required to cover a smaller one. Having committed adultery, David found it necessary to commit murder to conceal what he had done. Sometimes the pattern becomes fixed, so that the same act is repeated in virtually the same way. This was the case with Abraham. In Egypt he lied about Sarah, saying that she was his sister rather than his wife, with the result that Pharaoh took her as his wife (Gen. 12: 10-20). Later Abraham repeated the same lie to Abimelech (Gen. 20). It appears that he had not learned anything from the first incident. We should also note that his son Isaac later repeated the same lie with regard to his wife, Rebekah (Gen. 26:6-11).<sup>15</sup>

15. Many Old Testament commentators regard these narrative passages as "doublets" (multiple accounts of the same incident) rather than as records of three separate events. For a conservative position on this matter see Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1949), p. 83.

What some people consider freedom to sin, freedom from the restrictions of obedience to the will of God, is actually the enslavement which sin produces. In some cases sin gains so much control and power over a person that he cannot escape it. Paul recalls that the Roman Christians “were once slaves of sin” (Rom. 6: 17). But sin’s grip on the individual is loosed by the work of Christ: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

#### *Flight from Reality*

Sin also results in an unwillingness to face reality. The harsh dimensions of life, and especially the consequences of our sin, are not faced realistically. In particular, society avoids thinking about the stark fact that sooner or later everyone must die (Heb. 9:27). One of the ways of avoiding this fact is through the use of positive language. No one ever dies anymore; instead, one simply “passes away.” Death is made to sound like a pleasant little trip. There are no longer cemeteries and most certainly no graveyards in our modern society. What we have instead are “memorial parks.” And the experience of growing old, which signals the approach of death, is carefully masked with euphemisms like “senior citizen” and “golden age.” The manifold ways in which death is disguised or ignored sometimes constitute a virtual denial of death, which in actuality is a sign of fear of death. A suppressed realization that death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23) may underlie many of our attempts to avoid thinking about it.

#### *Denial of Sin*

Accompanying our denial of death is a denial of sin. There are various ways of denying sin. It may be relabeled, so that it is not acknowledged as sin at all. It may be considered a matter of sickness, deprivation, ignorance, or perhaps social maladjustment at worst. Karl Menninger wrote of this phenomenon in his book *Whatever Became of Sin?*<sup>16</sup> Denying the existence of sin is one way of disposing of the painful consciousness of one’s wrongdoing.

Another way of denying our sin is to admit the wrongness of what we have done, but to decline to take responsibility for it. We see this dynamic at work in the case of the very first sin. When confronted by the Lord’s question, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen. 3: 1 1), Adam responded by shifting the blame: “The woman ... gave me fruit of the tree, and I

16. Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn, 1973).

ate” (v. 12). Adam’s immediate reaction was to deny personal responsibility—he had eaten only at the inducement of Eve. But Adam’s attempt to shift the blame was even more involved than that, for what he said was, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Adam tried to shift the blame even to God, for had God not given the woman to Adam, he would not have been exposed to temptation. The woman learned quickly from her husband’s example: “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate” (v. 13). The serpent had no one to blame, and so the process stopped there. Note, however, that the judgment came upon all three—Adam, Eve, and the serpent. The fact that someone else had instigated the respective sins of Eve and Adam did not remove their responsibility. Both sinner and instigator were punished.

Attempting to shift responsibility from oneself is a common practice. For deep down there is often a sense of guilt which one desperately wants to eradicate. But trying to shift responsibility compounds the sin and makes repentance more unlikely. All of the excuses and explanations which we offer for our actions are signs of the depth of our sin. Appealing to determinism to explain and justify our sin is simply a sophisticated form of denial.

#### *Self-Deceit*

Self-deceit is the underlying problem when we deny our sin. Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is deceitful [slippery, crooked] above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” (17:9). The hypocrites of whom Jesus often spoke probably fooled themselves before they tried to fool others. He pointed to the ludicrous lengths to which self-deceit can go: “Why do you see the speck that is in your brothers eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” (Matt. 7:3). David denounced the injustice of the rich man in Nathan’s parable who took the poor man’s one little ewe lamb, but he did not see the point of the parable (his own injustice in taking Uriah’s wife) until Nathan pointed it out to him (2 Sam. 12:1-15).

#### *Insensitivity*

Sin also produces insensitivity. As we continue to sin and to reject God’s warnings and condemnations, we become less and less responsive to the promptings of conscience. Whereas there may initially be a tenderness when one does wrong, the eventual effect of sin is that we are no longer stirred by the Word and the Spirit. In time even gross sins can be committed with no compunction. A shell, a spiritual callous, as it were, grows upon the soul. Paul spoke of those “whose consciences are seared”

(1 Tim. 4:2) and of those whose minds are darkened as a result of rejecting the truth (Rom. 1:21). Perhaps the clearest example in the ministry of Jesus is the Pharisees, who, having seen Jesus' miracles and heard his teaching, attributed what was the work of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.

#### *Self-Centefedness*

An increasing self-centeredness also results from sin. In many ways sin is a turning in upon oneself which is confirmed with practice. We call attention to ourselves, and to our good qualities and accomplishments, and minimize our shortcomings. We seek special favors and opportunities in life, wanting an extra little edge that no one else has. We display a certain special alertness to our own wants and needs, while we ignore those of others.

#### *Restlessness*

Finally, sin often produces restlessness. There is a certain insatiable character about sin. Complete satisfaction never occurs. Although some sinners may have a relative stability for a time, sin eventually loses its ability to satisfy. Like habituation to a drug, a tolerance is built up, and it becomes easier to sin without feeling pangs of guilt. Further, it takes a greater dosage to produce the same effects. In the process, our wants keep expanding as rapidly as, or more rapidly than, we can fulfil them. It is alleged that in answer to the question, "How much money does it take to satisfy a man?" John D. Rockefeller responded, "Just a little bit more." Like a restless, tossing sea, the wicked never really come to peace.

### **Effects on the Relationship to Other Humans**

#### *Competition*

Sin also has massive effects upon the relationships between humans. One of the most significant is the proliferation of competition. Since sin makes one increasingly self-centered and self-seeking, there will inevitably be conflict with others. We wish the same position, the same marriage partner, or the same piece of real estate that another has. Whenever someone wins, someone else loses. The loser, out of resentment, will often become a threat to the winner. The person who succeeds will always have the anxiety that others may attempt to take back what they have lost. Thus, there really are no winners in the competitive race. The

most extreme and large-scale version of human competition is war, with its wholesale destruction of property and human lives. James is quite clear as to the major factors that lead to war: "What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war" (James 4:1-2). We observed earlier that sin becomes enslaving, leading to more sin. James bears out this observation with his assertion that the sin of covetousness leads to the sins of killing and war.

#### *Inability to Empathize*

Inability to empathize with others is a major consequence of sin. Being concerned about our personal desires, reputation, and opinions, we see only our own perspective. Because what we want is so important to us, we cannot step into the shoes of others and see their needs as well, or see how they might understand a situation in a somewhat different way. This is the opposite of what Paul commanded to his readers: "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:3-5).

#### *Rejection of Authority*

Rejection of authority is often a social ramification of sin. If we find security in our own possessions and accomplishments, then any outside authority is threatening. It restricts our doing what we want. It must be resisted or ignored, so that we might be free to do as we will. In the process, of course, many others' rights may be trampled.

#### *Inability to Love*

Finally, sin results in inability to love. Since other people stand in our way, representing competition and a threat to us, we cannot really act for the ultimate welfare of others if our aim is self-satisfaction. And so suspicions, conflicts, bitterness, and even hatred issue from the self-absorption or the pursual of finite values that has supplanted God at the center of the sinner's life.

Sin is a serious matter; it has far-reaching effects-upon our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to other humans. Accordingly, it will require a cure with similarly extensive effects.

# 29

## The Magnitude of Sin

### The Extent of Sin

The Old Testament Teaching  
The New Testament Teaching

### The Intensiveness of Sin

The Old Testament Teaching  
The New Testament Teaching

### Theories of Original Sin

Pelagianism  
Arminianism  
Calvinism

Original Sin: A Biblical and Contemporary Model

**H**aving seen something of the nature of sin, its source, and its effects, we must now ask regarding its magnitude. There are two facets to this question: (1) How extensive, how common is sin? (2) How intensive, how radical is it?

### The Extent of Sin

To the question of who sins, the answer is apparent: sin is universal. It is not limited to a few isolated individuals or even to a majority of the human race. All humans, without exception, are sinners.

*The Old Testament Teaching*

The universality of sin is taught in several ways and places in Scripture. In the Old Testament, we do not usually find general statements about all men at all times, but about all men who were living at the time being written about. In the time of Noah, the sin of the race was so great and so extensive that God resolved to destroy everything (with the exception of Noah, his family, and the animals taken on board the ark). The description is vivid: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). God regretted having made man and resolved to blot out the entire human race, together with all other living things, for the corruption was worldwide: "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6: 11). Noah appears to be an exception: he found favor in the eyes of the Lord, being described as a "righteous man, blameless in his generation" (v. 9). Yet while he stands out in contrast to those surrounding him, he was guilty of the sin of drunkenness (9:21), which is condemned elsewhere in Scripture (Hab. 2: 15; Eph. 5: 18).

Even after the flood has destroyed the wicked of the earth, God still characterizes "the imagination of man's heart [as being] evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). David describes the corruption of his contemporaries in terms which Paul quotes in Romans 3. In Psalms 14 and 53, which are almost identical, human corruption is pictured as universal: "They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good. ... They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one" (Ps. 14:1, 3). Here again, there are a few righteous among the evildoers (v. 5). David does not suggest, however, that righteousness is one's own accomplishment rather than a gift of the Lord's grace. In Proverbs 20 it is implied that a quest for a righteous and faithful man will prove fruitless: "Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but a faithful man who can find?" (v. 6). "Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean; I am pure from sin?'" (v. 9). Between these two rhetorical questions are statements about a righteous man and a king who sits on the throne of judgment (w. 7-8), but apparently even they cannot claim credit for righteousness.

A categorical statement about the sinfulness of man is found in 1 Kings 8:46: "for there is no man who does not sin" (cf. Rom. 3:23). David makes a similar statement when he asks for mercy from God: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for no man living is righteous before thee" (Ps. 143:2). The same idea is implied in Psalm 130:3: "If thou, O LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" The writer of

Ecclesiastes says, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Eccles. 7:20).

These statements of the universal sinfulness of the human race should be regarded as qualifying all the scriptural references to perfect or blameless persons (e.g., Ps. 37:37; Prov. 11:5). Even those who are specifically described as perfect have shortcomings. We have already noted this in connection with Noah. The same is true of Job (cf. Job 1:8 and 14: 16-17, where Job refers to his transgressions). Abraham was a man of great faith; the Lord even bade him be blameless (Gen. 17:1). Yet his actions prove that he was not sinless. In siring a son, Ishmael, by Hagar, he showed a lack of belief in God's ability to fulfil his promise of an heir. Abraham demonstrated a lack of integrity as well in twice representing his wife Sarah as his sister (Gen. 12, 20). Moses was certainly a man of God, yet his lack of belief resulted in his not being allowed to bring the people of Israel into the Promised Land (Num. 20:10-13). David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13: 14). Yet his sins were grievous and occasioned the great penitential psalm (Ps. 5 1). Isaiah 53:6 takes pains to universalize its metaphorical description of sinners: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

*The New Testament Teaching*

The New Testament is even clearer concerning the universality of human sin. The most famous passage is, of course, Romans 3, where Paul quotes and elaborates upon Psalms 14 and 53, as well as 5:9;140:3; 10:7;36:1; and Isaiah 59:7-8. He asserts that "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (v. 9), and then heaps up a number of descriptive quotations beginning with, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one" (w. 10-12). None will be justified by works of the law (v. 20). The reason is clear: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23). Paul also makes it plain that he is talking not only about unbelievers, those outside the Christian faith, but believers as well, including himself. In Ephesians 2:3 he acknowledges that "among these [the sons of disobedience, v. 2] we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." It is apparent that there are no exceptions to this universal rule. In his statement on the law and its function, Paul makes mention of the fact that "scripture consigned all things to sin" (Gal. 3:22). Similarly, 1 John 5: 19 indicates that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one."

Not only does the Bible frequently assert that all are sinners, it also

assumes it everywhere. Note, for example, that the commands to repent relate to everyone. In his Mars' Hill address Paul said, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Although Jesus never needed to confess sin or repent, it is necessary for everyone else to do so, for it is obvious that all sin. In speaking to Nicodemus about being born again, Jesus made his statement universal: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Everyone needs the transformation which the new birth brings. It is apparent that in the New Testament each person, by virtue of being human, is regarded as a sinner in need of repentance and new birth. Sin is universal. As Ryder Smith puts it, "The universality of sin is taken as matter of fact. On examination, it will be found that every speech in Acts, even Stephen's, and every Epistle just assumes that men have all sinned. This is also the assumption of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. . . . Jesus deals with everyone on the assumption, 'Here is a sinner.'"<sup>1</sup>

Not only does the Bible affirm and everywhere assume that all humans are sinners, but it also abundantly illustrates this fact. Blatant sinners appear in the pages of Scripture. The Samaritan woman in John 4 and the thieves on the cross are obvious instances. But what is more impressive is that even the good people, the righteous, the heroes of Scripture, are presented as sinners. We have already pointed to several Old Testament examples-Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. And in the New Testament we read of the shortcomings of Jesus' disciples. Peter's sins brought him several rebukes from Jesus, the most severe being, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men" (Matt. 16:23). Selfish ambition and pride were revealed not only in the attempt of James and John to be named to the places of authority at Jesus' right and left hands, but also in the resentment and indignation of the other disciples (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27). This incident is all the more amazing in that it came not long after they had disputed which of them was the greatest, and Jesus had responded with a speech on the necessity of servanthood (Matt. 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48).

An additional proof of the universality of sin is that all persons are subject to the penalty for sin, namely, death. Except for those alive when Christ returns, everyone will succumb to death. All of us are subject to it. Romans 3:23 ("all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God") and 6:23 ("the wages of sin is death") are interconnected. The universality of the death spoken of in the latter is evidence of the universality of sin of

1. Charles Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Sin and of the Ways of God with Sinners* (London: Epworth, 1953), pp. 159-60.

which the former verse speaks. Between these two verses comes Romans 5:12: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." Here, too, sin is considered universal.

### The Intensiveness of Sin

Having seen that the extent of sin is universal, we turn now to the issue of its intensiveness. How sinful is the sinner? How deep is our sin? Are we basically pure, with a positive inclination toward the good, or are we totally and absolutely corrupt? We must look carefully at the biblical data and then seek to interpret and integrate them.

#### *The Old Testament Teaching*

The Old Testament for the most part speaks of sins rather than of sinfulness, of sin as an act rather than as a state or disposition. The condemnation pronounced by the Hebrew prophets was generally directed at acts of sin or sins. Yet this condemnation related not merely to external acts of sin, but to inward sins as well. Indeed, a distinction was drawn between sins on the basis of the motivation involved. The right of sanctuary for manslayers was reserved for those who had killed accidentally rather than intentionally (Deut. 4:42). The motive was fully as important as the act itself. In addition, inward thoughts and intentions were condemned quite apart from external acts. An example is the sin of covetousness, an internal desire which is deliberately chosen.<sup>2</sup>

There is yet a further step in the Old Testament understanding of sin. Particularly in the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel sin is depicted as a spiritual sickness which afflicts the heart. Our heart is wrong and must be changed, or even exchanged. We do not merely do evil; our very inclination is evil. Jeremiah says that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). Later on Jeremiah prophesies that God will change the hearts of his people. The day will come when the Lord will put his law within the house of Israel and "write it upon their hearts" (Jer. 3:13). Similarly, in the Book of Ezekiel God asserts that the hearts of the people need change: "And I will give them one heart [or a new heart], and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 11: 19).

It is also noteworthy that while some of the Hebrew terms for sin

2. Ibid., p. 34.

which we examined in chapter 26 point to definite and specific sins, others seem to suggest a condition, state, or tendency of the heart. One term that is particularly significant here is the verb חַשֵּׁב (*chashab*), which in various forms appears some 180 times.<sup>3</sup> While there are more than twenty different renderings in English, the basic meaning is “to plan,” which combines the ideas of thinking and devising. The term is used in connection with the thoughts and purposes of God, and especially in connection with the cunning and sinful devisings of man’s heart. In the latter case, the word calls attention not to the act of sin, but the purpose and even the scheming behind it. In Ecclesiastes 7, the preacher is reflecting upon the prevalence of the folly of wickedness. He speaks of the woman whose heart is snares and nets (v. 26), and then concludes, “Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices” (v. 29). The man who commits wicked acts is one whose heart devises evil, whose habit is to sin. The image of the scheming heart is found as early as the account of the flood; God observes of sinful man that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Later examples are abundant: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7); “I did not know it was against me they devised schemes” (Jer. 11:19); “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, the words of the pure are pleasing to him” (Prov. 15:26). Ryder Smith comments on these passages: “Here the idea of *separate* inward sins is passing into that of a habit of sin.”<sup>4</sup>

Psalm 5:1, the great penitential psalm, most fully expresses the idea of sinfulness or a sinful nature. Forgoing for the moment the question of whether sin or corruption is inherited, we note here a strong emphasis upon the idea of sin as an inward condition or disposition, and the need of purging the inward person. David speaks of his having been brought forth in iniquity and conceived in sin (v. 5). He speaks of the Lord’s desiring truth in the inward parts, and the need of being taught wisdom in the secret heart (v. 6). The psalmist prays to be washed and cleansed (v. 2), purged and washed (v. 7), and asks God to create in him a clean heart and to put a new and right (or steadfast) spirit within him (v. 10). One can scarcely find anywhere in religious literature stronger conscious expressions of need for change of disposition or inner nature. It is unmis-

3. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), pp. 362-63.

4. Smith, *Doctrine of Sin*, p. 36.

takably clear that the psalmist does not think of himself merely as one who commits sins, but as a sinful person.

#### *The New Testament Teaching*

The New Testament is even clearer and more emphatic on these matters. Jesus spoke of the inward disposition as evil. Sin is very much a matter of the inward thoughts and intentions. It is not sufficient not to commit murder; he who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment (Matt. 5:21-22). It is not enough to abstain from committing adultery. If a man lusts after a woman, he has in his heart already committed adultery with her (Matt. 5:27-28). Jesus put it even more strongly in Matthew 12:33-35, where actions are regarded as issuing from the heart: “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! how can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” Luke makes it clear that the fruit produced reflects the very nature of the tree, or of the man: no good tree bears bad fruit, nor a bad tree good fruit (Luke 6:43-45). Our actions are what they are because we are what we are. It cannot be otherwise. Evil actions and words stem from the evil thoughts of the heart: “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:18-19).

Paul’s own self-testimony also is a powerful argument that it is the corruption of human nature that produces individual sins. He recalls that “while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” (Rom. 7:5). He sees “in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members” (v. 23). In Galatians 5:17 he writes that the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit. The word here is ἐπιθυμέω, which can refer to either a neutral desire or an improper desire. There are numerous “works of the flesh”: “immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like” (v. 19-21). In Paul’s thinking, then, as in Jesus’, sins are the result of human nature. In every human being there is a strong inclination toward evil, an inclination with definite effects.

The adjective *total* is often attached to the idea of depravity. This idea derives from certain of the texts which we have already examined. Very early in the Bible we read, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man

was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Paul describes the Gentiles as "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness" (Eph. 4: 18–19). His descriptions of sinners in Romans 1: 18–32 and Titus 1: 15, as well as of the men of the last days in 2 Timothy 3:2–5, focus on their corruption and callousness and desperate wickedness. But the expression "total depravity" must be carefully used. For it has sometimes been interpreted as conveying (and on occasion has even been intended to convey) an understanding of human nature which our experience belies.<sup>5</sup>

We do not mean by total depravity that the unregenerate person is totally insensitive in matters of conscience, of right and wrong. For Paul's statement in Romans 2: 15 says that the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts, so that "their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them."

Further, total depravity does not mean that the sinful man is as sinful as he can possibly be. He does not continuously do only evil and in the most wicked fashion possible. There are unregenerate persons who are genuinely altruistic, who show kindness, generosity, and love to others, who are good, devoted spouses and parents. Some completely secular persons have engaged in acts of heroism on behalf of their country. These actions, insofar as they are in conformity with God's will and law, are pleasing to God. But they are not in any way meritorious. They do not qualify the person for salvation, or contribute to it in any way.

Finally, the doctrine of total depravity does not mean that the sinner engages in every possible form of sin. Because virtue is often, as Aristotle pointed out, a mean between two extremes, both of which are vices, the presence of one vice would automatically exclude another.<sup>6</sup>

What then do we mean, positively, by the idea of total depravity? First, sin is a matter of the entire person.<sup>7</sup> The seat of sin is not merely one aspect of the person, such as the body or the reason. Certainly several references make clear that the body is affected (e.g., Rom. 6:6, 12; 7:24; 8: 10, 13). Other verses tell us that the mind or the reason is involved (e.g., Rom. 1:2 1; 2 Cor. 3: 14–15; 4:4). That the emotions also are involved is amply attested (e.g., Rom. 1:26–27; Gal. 5:24; and 2 Tim. 3:2–4, where the ungodly are described as being lovers of self and pleasure rather than

5. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), pp. 637–38; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 246.

6. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.8–9.

7. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 247.

lovers of God). Finally, it is evident that the will is also affected. The unregenerate person does not have a truly free will. He is a slave to sin. Paul starkly describes the Romans as having once been "slaves of sin" (6:17). He is concerned that the opponents of the Lord's servant "repent and come to know the truth, and... escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:25–26).

Further, total depravity means that even the unregenerate man's altruism always contains an element of improper motive. The good acts are not done entirely or even primarily out of perfect love for God. In each case there is another factor, whether the preference of one's own self-interest or of some other object less than God. Thus, while there may appear to be good and desirable behavior, and we may be inclined to feel that it could not in any way be sinful, yet even the good is tainted. The Pharisees who so often dialogued with Jesus did many good things (Matt. 23:23), but they had no real love for God. So he said to them, "You search the scriptures [this of course was good], because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from men. But I know that you have not the love of God within you" (John 5:39–42).

Sometimes sinfulness is covered by a genteel layer of charm and graciousness. Yet, as the doctrine of total depravity indicates, under that veneer is a heart not truly inclined to God. Langdon Gilkey tells how he discovered this truth in a Japanese prison camp. He had been raised in cultured circles. His father was dean of Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago, and Langdon had attended Yale University. He had known thoughtful, generous people. But when in a prison camp with many of the same type of people, he saw a different side of human nature. Here, where there was a shortage of everything, the selfishness that is natural to humans manifested itself, sometimes in quite spectacular fashion. Space was at a premium, and so definite allotments were made, as equitably as possible for everyone. Gilkey was in charge of housing assignments. He encountered a number of people with elaborate explanations of why they should have more space than others. Some people moved their beds a fraction of an inch each night in order to gain just a bit more space. Among these offenders were even some Christian missionaries. In a moving passage he describes his discovery of something like original sin. It is a vivid reminder that what happens in situations of exigency may be a better indication of the true condition of man's heart than are the normal circumstances of life.

Such experiences with ordinary human cussedness naturally stimulated me to do a good deal of thinking in such time as I had to myself. My ideas as to what people were like and as to what motivated their actions were

undergoing a radical revision. People generally-and I know I could not exclude myself-seemed to be much less rational and much more selfish than I had ever guessed, not at all the 'nice folk' I had always thought them to be. They did not decide to do things because it would be reasonable and moral to act in that way, but because that course of action suited their self-interest. Afterward they would find rational and moral reasons for what they had already determined to do.<sup>8</sup>

Man here is not much above the level of animals which fight each other for food even if there is enough for everyone. When society functions normally, man does not appear to be so bad; what we forget is that the law-enforcement authorities are serving as a deterrent. But when an electrical blackout strikes New York City so that the police are unable to perform their duties normally, crime breaks loose in large proportions. We should not too quickly assume, then, that the relative goodness of man in normal circumstances refutes the idea of original sin. This goodness may be motivated by fear of detection and punishment.

Similar considerations apply to the puzzling problem of "Mr. Nice," the very pleasant, thoughtful, helpful, generous non-Christian. It is at times hard to think of this type of person as sinful and in need of regeneration. How can such a person be a desperately wicked, selfish, rebellious sinner? In the correct understanding of the doctrine of total depravity, sin is not defined in terms of what other human beings may regard as unpleasant. It is, rather, a matter of failure to love, honor, and serve God. Thus, even the likable and kindly person is in need of the gospel of new life, as much as is any obnoxious, crude, and thoughtless person.

Finally, total depravity means that the sinner is completely unable to extricate himself from his sinful condition.<sup>9</sup> As observed earlier, the goodness he does is tainted by less than perfect love for God and therefore cannot serve to justify him in God's sight. But apart from that, good and lawful actions cannot be maintained consistently. The sinner cannot alter his life by a process of determination, will power, and reformation. Sin is inescapable. This fact is depicted in Scripture's frequent references to sinners as "spiritually dead." Paul writes, "And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. . . . When we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive" (Eph. 2:1-2, 5). The same expression is found in Colossians 2:13. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of "dead works" (Heb. 6: 1; 9: 14). These various expressions do not mean that sinners are absolutely insensitive and unresponsive to spiritual stimuli, but, rather, that they are unable to

8. Langdon Gilkey, *Shantung Compound* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 89-90.

9. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 640-46.

do what they ought. The unregenerate person is incapable of genuinely good, redeeming works; whatever he does is dead or ineffective in relationship to God. Salvation by works is absolutely impossible (Eph. 2:8-9).

Anyone who has attempted to live a perfect life in his own strength has discovered what Paul is talking about here. Such endeavors eventually end in frustration at best. A seminary professor has described his personal attempt. He listed thirty characteristics of the Christian life. Then he assigned each one to a different day of the month. On the first day, he worked very hard on the first attribute. With a great deal of concentration, he managed to live up to his goal the entire day. On the second day of the month, he shifted to the second area, and mastered it. Then he moved on to the third area, successively mastering each in turn, until on the final day he perfectly realized the characteristic assigned to it. But just as he was reveling in the sense of victory, he looked back at the first day's goal to see how he was doing. To his chagrin, he discovered that he had completely lost sight of the goal of the first day-and of the second, third, and fourth days. While he had been concentrating on other areas, his former failures and shortcomings had simply crept back in. The professor's experience is an empirical study of what the Bible teaches us: "There is none that does good, no, not one" (Pss.14:3b; 53:3b; Rom. 3:12). The Bible also gives the reason for this: "They are all alike corrupt [depraved]" (Pss.14:3a; 53:3a). We are totally unable to do genuinely meritorious works sufficient to qualify for God's favor.

### Theories of Original Sin

All of us, apparently without exception, are sinners. By this we mean not merely that all of us sin, but that all of us have a depraved or corrupted nature which so inclines us toward sin that it is virtually inevitable. How can this be? What is the basis of this amazing fact? Must there not be some common factor at work in all of us? It is as if some antecedent or a *priori* factor in life leads to universal sinning and universal depravity. But what is this common factor, which is often referred to as original sin?<sup>10</sup> Whence is it derived, and how is it transmitted or communicated?

We find the answer in Romans 5: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—" (v. 12). This thought is repeated in several different ways in the succeeding verses: "For if many died

10. By "original sin" we mean the dimension of sin with which we begin **life**, or the effect which the sin of Adam has upon us as a precondition of our lives.

through one man's trespass" (v. 15); "For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation" (v. 16); "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man" (v. 17); "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men" (v. 18); "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (v. 19). In Paul's mind there is some sort of causal connection between what Adam did and the sinfulness of all men throughout all time. But just what is the nature of this influence exerted by Adam upon all men, and by what means does it operate?

There have been a number of attempts to understand and elucidate this Adamic influence. In the following pages, we will examine and evaluate each of these efforts in turn. We will then attempt to construct a model which does justice to the various dimensions of the biblical witness and is also intelligible within the contemporary context.

#### *Pelagianism*

The first and in some ways the most interesting of the views of the relationship between individual humans and the first sin of Adam is that of Pelagius. He was a British monk (although there is some question as to whether he actually was a monk) who had moved to Rome to teach. When, as a result of Alaric's invasion, he left Italy for Carthage in North Africa in 409, conflict with Augustine's teachings was almost inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

Pelagius was a moralist: his primary concern was for people to live good and decent lives. It seemed to him that an unduly negative view of human nature was having an unfortunate effect upon human behavior. Coupled with an emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, the estimation of human sinfulness seemed to remove all motivation to exert an effort to live a good life.<sup>12</sup>

To counteract these tendencies, Pelagius laid heavy emphasis upon the idea of free will. Unlike the other creatures, man was created free of the controlling influences of the universe. Furthermore, he is free of any determining influence from the fall. Holding to a creationist view of the origin of the soul, Pelagius maintained that the soul, created by God specially for every person, is not tainted by any supposed corruption or guilt.<sup>13</sup> The influence, if any, of Adam's sin upon his descendants is merely that of a bad example. Other than this there is no direct connection between Adam's sin and the rest of the human race. Man has no congen-

11. John Ferguson, *Pelagius* (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1956), p. 40.

12. Ibid., p. 47.

13. Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: Seabury, 1968), pp. 82-83.

ital spiritual fault. Hence, baptism does not remove sin or guilt in infants, since there is none, although it may remove the sin of adults.<sup>14</sup>

If Adam's sin has no direct effect upon every human being, there is no need for a special working of God's grace within the heart of each individual. Rather, the grace of God is simply something which is present everywhere and at every moment.<sup>15</sup> When Pelagius spoke of "grace," he meant free will, apprehension of God through reason, and the law of Moses and Jesus' instruction. There is also the grace of forgiveness given to adults in baptism. Grace is available equally to all persons. Thus, Pelagius rejected anything even faintly resembling the predestination taught by Augustine.

As Pelagius spelled out the implications of his various tenets, there emerged the idea that man can, by his own efforts, perfectly fulfil God's commands without sinning.<sup>16</sup> There is no natural inclination toward sin at the beginning of life; whatever inclination in that direction there might be in later life comes only through the building up of bad habits. A salvation by works is thus quite possible, although that is something of a misnomer. Since we are not really sinful, guilty, and condemned, this process is not a matter of salvation from something which presently binds us. It is rather a preservation or maintenance of our right status and good standing. By our own accomplishment we keep from falling into a sinful condition.

Pelagius did not eliminate infant baptism, but he regarded its significance as merely benedictory rather than regenerative. What infants receive in baptism is "spiritual illumination, adoption as children of God, citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem, sanctification and membership of Christ, with inheritance in the Kingdom of heaven."<sup>17</sup> Some of Pelagius's disciples took his teachings a bit further. Coelestius taught that children may have eternal life even without baptism, and that Adam was created mortal and would have died whether he sinned or not.<sup>18</sup> Julian of Eclanum insisted that man's free will places him in a situation of absolute independence from God.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Arminianism*

A more moderate view is the Arminian. James Arminius was a Dutch Reformed pastor and theologian who modified considerably the theolog-

14. Pelagius *Exposition of Romans* 5:15, 12.

15. Augustine *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin* 1.3.

16. Augustine *On the Proceedings of Pelagius* 16.

17. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 359.

18. Ferguson, *Pelagius*, p. 51.

19. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 361.

ical position in which he had been trained.<sup>20</sup> Arminius himself took a rather restrained stance, but subsequent statements by others went considerably further. Later modifications by John Wesley were closer to the original position of Arminius. There are considerable differences among Arminians; we will here attempt to sketch a rather moderate form of Arminianism.

We have seen that, according to Pelagianism, mankind receives neither a corrupted nature nor guilt as a result of Adam's sin. According to Arminianism, however, we receive from Adam a corrupted nature. We begin life without righteousness. Thus, all humans are unable, without special divine help, to fulfil God's spiritual commands. This inability is physical and intellectual, but not volitional.

Although some Arminians say that "guilt" is also part of original sin, they do not mean actual culpability, but merely liability to punishment. For whatever culpability and condemnation may have accrued to us through Adam's sin have been removed through prevenient grace, a doctrine which is a unique contribution of later Arminianism. Prevenient grace, a universal benefit of the atoning work of Christ, nullifies the judicial consequences of Adam's sin. Orton Wiley says: "Man is not now condemned for the depravity of his own nature, although that depravity is of the essence of sin; its culpability, we maintain, was removed by the free gift of Christ." This prevenient grace is extended to everyone, and in effect neutralizes the corruption received from Adam.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Calvinism*

Calvinists have given more attention to the question of original sin than have most other schools of theology. In general terms, the Calvinist position on this matter is that there is a definite connection between Adam's sin and all persons of all times. In some way, his sin is not just the sin of an isolated individual, but is also our sin. Because we participate in that sin, we all, from the beginning of life, perhaps even from the point of conception, receive a corrupted nature along with a consequent inherited tendency toward sin. Furthermore, all persons are guilty of Adam's sin. Death, the penalty for sin, is upon all men, having been transmitted

20. The tradition that Arminius was a convinced Calvinist who was assigned to defend the Reformed faith and in the process of defending it was "converted" to the contradictory view is highly suspect. See Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), pp. 138-41.

21. H. Or-ton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 121-28. The quotation is from p. 135.

from Adam; that is evidence of everyone's guilt. Thus, whereas in the Pelagian view God imputes neither a corrupted nature nor guilt to man, and in the Arminian view God imputes a corrupted nature but not guilt (in the sense of culpability), in the Calvinist scheme he imputes both a corrupted nature and guilt to man. The Calvinist position is based upon a very serious and quite literal understanding of Paul's statements in Romans 5: 12-19 that sin entered the world through Adam and death through that sin, and so death passed to all men because all men sinned. Through one man's sin all became sinners.

A question arises concerning the nature of the connection or relationship between Adam and us, and thus also between Adam's first sin and our sinfulness. Numerous attempts have been made to answer this question. The two major approaches see the relationship in terms of federal headship and natural headship.

The approach that sees Adam's connection with us in terms of a federal headship is generally related to the creationist view of the origin of the soul. This is the view that the human receives his physical nature by inheritance from his parents, but that the soul is specially created by God for each individual and united with the body at birth (or some other suitable moment). Thus, we were not present psychologically or spiritually in any of our ancestors, including Adam. Adam, however, was our representative. God ordained that Adam should act not only on his own behalf, but also on our behalf. The consequences of his actions have been passed on to his descendants as well. Adam was on probation for all of us as it were; and because Adam sinned, all of us are treated as guilty and corrupted. Bound by the covenant between God and Adam, we are treated as if we have actually and personally done what he as our representative did. The parallel between our relationship to Adam and our relationship to Christ (Rom. 5: 12-21) is significant here. Just as we are not actually righteous in ourselves, but are treated as if we have the same righteous standing that Jesus has, in like manner, though we are not personally sinful until we commit our first sinful act, we are, before that time, treated as if we have the same sinful standing that Adam had. If it is just to impute to us a righteousness that is not ours but Christ's, it is also fair and just to impute to us Adam's sin and guilt. He is as able to act on our behalf as is Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The other major approach sees Adam's connection with us in terms of a natural (or realistic) headship. This approach is related to the traducianist view of the origin of the soul, according to which we receive our souls by transmission from our parents, just as we do our physical natures. So we were present in germinal or seminal form in our ances-

22. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 242-43.

tors; in a very real sense, we were there in Adam. His action was not merely that of one isolated individual, but of the entire human race. Although we were not there individually, we were nonetheless there. The human race sinned as a whole. Thus, there is nothing unfair or improper about our receiving a corrupted nature and guilt from Adam, for we are receiving the just results of our sin. This is the view of Augustine.<sup>23</sup>

### Original Sin: A Biblical and Contemporary Model

The key passage for constructing a biblical and contemporary model of original sin is Romans 5: 12-19. Paul is arguing that death is the consequence of sin. The twelfth verse is particularly determinative: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." Whatever be the exact meaning of these words, Paul certainly is saying that death originated in the human race because of Adam's sin. He is also saying that death is universal and the cause of this is the universal sin of mankind. Later, however, he says that the cause of the death of all is the sin of the one man, Adam—"many died through one man's trespass" (v. 15); 'because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man" (v. 17). The problem is how to relate the statements that the universality of death came through the sin of Adam to the statement that it came through the sin of all men.

Augustine understood ἐφ' ὧ ("because") as meaning "in whom," since the Latin mistranslated the Greek at this point. Accordingly, his understanding of the last clause in verse 12 was that we were actually "in Adam," and therefore Adam's sin was ours as well.<sup>24</sup> But since his interpretation was dependent upon an inaccurate translation, we must investigate the clause more closely. In particular, we must ask what is meant by "all men sinned."

It has been suggested that in the last clause of verse 12 Paul is speaking of the personal sin(s) of all. All of us sin individually and thereby incur through our own action the same personal guilt that Adam incurred through his action. The clause would then be rendered, "so also death spread to all men because all men sin." In keeping with the principle of responsibility for one's personal actions and for them alone, the meaning would be that all die because all are guilty, and all are guilty because each one has sinned on his own.

There are several problems with this interpretation. One is the render-

23. Augustine *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants* 1. 8-11.

24. Ibid.. 3. 14.

ing of ἤμαρτον. Were this interpretation correct, the word would properly be written ἀμαρτάνονται, the present tense denoting something continually going on. Further, the sin referred to in "all men sin" would be different from that referred to in "sin came into the world through one man," as well as from that referred to in verses 15 and 17. And, in addition, the latter two clauses would still need to be explained.

There is another way of understanding the last clause in verse 12, a way that avoids these problems and makes some sense out of verses 15 and 17. The verb ἤμαρτον is a simple aorist. This tense most commonly refers to a single past action. Had Paul intended to refer to a continued process of sin, the present and imperfect tenses were available to him. But he chose the aorist, and it should be taken at face value. Indeed, if we regard the sin of all men and the sin of Adam as the same, the problems we have pointed to become considerably less complex. There is then no conflict between verse 12 and verses 15 and 17. Further, the potential problem presented by verse 14, where we read that "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam," is resolved, for it is not imitation or repetition of Adam's sin, but participation in it, that counts.

The last clause in verse 12 tells us that we were involved in some way in Adam's sin; it was in some sense also our sin. But what is meant by this? On the one hand, it may be understood in terms of federal headship-Adam acted on behalf of all persons. There was a sort of contract between God and Adam as our representative, so that what Adam did binds us. Our involvement in Adam's sin might better be understood in terms of natural headship, however. We argued in chapter 22 for a special creation of man in the entirety of his nature. We further argued in chapter 24 for a very close connection (a "conditional unity") between the material and immaterial aspects of human nature. In chapter 25 we examined several biblical intimations that even the fetus is regarded by God as a person. These and other considerations support the position that the entirety of our human nature, both physical and spiritual, material and immaterial, has been received from our parents and more distant ancestors by way of descent from the first pair of humans. On that basis, we were actually present within Adam, so that we all sinned in his act. There is no injustice, then, to our condemnation and death as a result of original sin.

There is one additional problem here, however: the condition of infants and children. If the reasoning that precedes is correct, then all begin life with both the corrupted nature and the guilt that are the consequences of sin. Does this mean that should these little ones die before making a conscious decision to "receive the abundance of grace

and the free gift of righteousness" (v. 17), they are lost and condemned to eternal death?

While the status of infants and those who never reach moral competence is a difficult question, it appears that our Lord did not regard them as basically sinful and guilty. Indeed, he held them up as an example of the type of person who will inherit the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3; 19: 14). David had confidence that he would again see his child that had died (2 Sam. 12:23). On the basis of such considerations, it is difficult to maintain that children are to be thought of as **sinful**, condemned, and lost.

To summarize the major tenets of the doctrine as we have outlined it: We have argued that the Bible, particularly in the writings of Paul, maintains that because of Adam's sin all persons receive a corrupted nature and are guilty in God's sight as well. We have, further, espoused the Augustinian view (natural headship) of the imputation of original sin. We were all present in undifferentiated form in the person of Adam, who along with Eve was the entire human race. Thus, it was not merely Adam but man who sinned. We were involved, although not personally, and are responsible for the sin. In addition, we have argued that the biblical teaching is that children are not under God's condemnation for this sin, at least not until attaining an age of responsibility in moral and spiritual matters. We must now ask whether the doctrine of original sin can be conceived of and expressed in a way which will somehow do justice to all of these factors.

The parallelism that Paul draws in Romans 5 between Adam and Christ in their relationship to us is impressive. He asserts that in some parallel way what each of them did has its influence on us (as Adam's sin leads to death, so Christ's act of righteousness leads to life). What is this parallel? If, as we might be inclined to think, the condemnation and guilt of Adam are imputed to us without there being on our part any sort of conscious choice of his act, the same would necessarily hold true of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and redeeming work. But does his death justify us simply by virtue of his identification with humanity through the incarnation and independently of whether we make a conscious and personal acceptance of his work? And do all men have the grace of Christ imputed to them, just as all have Adam's sin imputed to them? The usual answer of evangelicals is no; there is abundant evidence that there are two classes of persons, the lost and the saved, and that only a decision to accept the work of Christ makes it effective in our lives. But if this is the case, then would not the imputation of guilt based upon the action of Adam, albeit Adam as including us, require some sort of volitional choice as well? If there is no "unconscious faith," can there be "unconscious sin"? And what are we to say of infants who die? Despite

having participated in that first sin, they are somehow accepted and saved. Although they have made no conscious choice of Christ's work (or of Adam's sin for that matter), the spiritual effects of the curse are negated in their case.

The current form of my understanding is as follows: We all were involved in Adam's sin, and thus receive both the corrupted nature that was his after the fall, and the guilt and condemnation that attach to his sin. With this matter of guilt, however, just as with the imputation of Christ's righteousness, there must be some conscious and voluntary decision on our part. Until this is the case, there is only a conditional imputation of guilt. Thus, there is no condemnation until one reaches the age of responsibility. If a child dies before he or she is capable of making genuine moral decisions, there is only innocence, and the child will experience the same type of future existence with the Lord as will those who have reached the age of moral responsibility and had their sins forgiven as a result of accepting the offer of salvation based upon Christ's atoning death.

What is the nature of the voluntary decision which ends our childish innocence and constitutes a ratification of the first sin, the fall? One position on this question is that there is no final imputation of the first sin until we commit a sin of our own, thus ratifying Adams sin. Unlike the Arminian view, this position holds that at the moment of our first sin we become guilty of both our own sin *and the original sin as well*. There is another position, however, one which is preferable in that it more fully preserves the parallelism between our accepting the work of Christ and that of Adam, and at the same time it more clearly points out our responsibility for the first sin. We become responsible and guilty when we accept or approve of our corrupt nature. There is a time in the life of each one of us when we become aware of our own tendency toward sin. At that point we may abhor the sinful nature that has been there all the time. We would in that case repent of it and might even, if there is an awareness of the gospel, ask God for forgiveness and cleansing. At the very least there would be a rejection of our sinful makeup. But if we acquiesce in that sinful nature, we are in effect saying that it is good. In placing our tacit approval upon the corruption, we are also approving or concurring in the action in the Garden of Eden so long ago. We become guilty of that sin without having to commit a sin of our own.

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## The Social Dimension of Sin

The Difficulty of Recognizing Social Sin

The Biblical Teaching

The World

The Powers

Corporate Personality

Strategies for Overcoming Social Sin

Regeneration

Reform

Revolution

**F**or the most part, the sin of which we have been speaking to this point is individual sin-actions, thoughts, and dispositions which characterize individual human beings. Individual sin has often been the major object of the attention of evangelical Christians. Sin and salvation are considered matters pertaining strictly to the individual human being. The emphasis is that every person must become conscious of and confess his or her own sins. This individual repentance is followed by individual regeneration.

It is significant, however, that Scripture also makes frequent reference to group or collective sin. A case in point is the context of Isaiah 1: 18, a

text commonly cited in evangelistic appeals: "Come now, let us reason together, says the **Lord**: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." It is instructive to note the courses of action which the Lord prescribes in the two verses which immediately precede: "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." Clearly, God is speaking of oppressive conditions for which he holds society responsible. No one individual is responsible for these situations; no single person can alter them. Failures in these areas are sins of society.

### **The Difficulty of Recognizing Social Sin**

We are faced with a paradox here. We may become quite sensitized to God's displeasure with our individual sins, but be considerably less aware of the sinfulness of a group of which we are part. Thus, some persons who would never think of killing another human being, taking another's property, or cheating in a business deal, may be part of a corporation, nation, or social class which in effect does these very things. Such persons contribute to these evils through financial involvement (by paying taxes or dues), direct approval (by voting), or tacit consent (by not disagreeing or registering opposition). Indeed, they may not even realize that they are participating in these actions indirectly nor consider whether these actions are right or wrong. There are several reasons for this strange phenomenon:

1. We are not inclined to regard as our own deeds matters in which we do not have a very active choice. Someone else may be the leader or decision maker; we simply acquiesce in what is done. It therefore seems much less our own action than if we had made the decision ourselves. We are much less aware of responsibility for such an occurrence, since it would have taken place even if we were not part of the group.

2. We may be so conditioned by membership in a group that our very perception of reality is colored by it. If, for example, we are white, we may not ever have put ourselves in the situation of blacks. We view the issue exclusively from one side. This conditioning is something so subtle and thoroughgoing that we may not be aware that there is another side of a given issue, or even that there is an issue at all. Consider the statement Marie Antoinette is reputed to have made when informed that the people had no bread to eat: "Let them eat cake then." It never occurred to her that there might be people so poor that they could not afford bread, let alone cake.

3. We may not recognize group selfishness because it may actually involve individual unselfishness. As we noted in chapter 26, although there is a tendency to consider sin to be basically selfishness, we may actually sin in a rather unselfish fashion. We may not personally profit (at least not obviously and directly) from a particular action of a group to which we belong. That may blind us to the fact that the group might be acting selfishly. Thus, our sacrifice or unselfishness for the sake of the group may seem to be a virtue, but in reality we may well be profiting indirectly. Our unselfishness may be merely a highly sophisticated sublimation—we are making a short-range sacrifice for the sake of a longer-range gratification.

4. Our excesses may be much less obvious to us because we are part of a group. Observe sometime the behavior of the home-team crowd at a hotly contested athletic event. There are a boldness, a brashness, and a boastfulness on behalf of the team that probably very few individuals would think of asserting by or for themselves. People who would not display attitudes of superiority regarding themselves as individuals may think their country or their church superior to others.

5. The further removed we are from the actual evil, the less real it seems. Accordingly, we are less likely to see ourselves responsible. Many of us would find it very difficult to look directly at an enemy soldier, aim a gun at him, and pull the trigger, for we would see the person whom we are shooting and the results of our action. It might not seem quite so difficult, however, to be involved in dropping a bomb, or firing a large-bore artillery piece, situations in which we would not see the victims or the results of our actions. Further, if we have an accounting position in the factory that makes the ammunition, we will probably feel even less responsibility and guilt. If we personally misrepresent a product or cheat on a law, we will feel bad about what we have done. If, however, we are stockholders in a company that does the same thing, we will probably have much less difficulty sleeping. In many cases, we do not know what the group of which we are citizens, shareholders, or members actually does, and so we may contribute to sin, but with no real awareness or sense of responsibility.

### **The Biblical Teaching**

#### **The World**

The Bible teaches that evil has a status apart from and independent of any individual human will, a subsistence of its own, an organized or structured basis. We occasionally refer to this reality as "the world." The

Greek original here is the word *κόσμος*. Sometimes this term designates the physical object, the earth. At other times it refers to the entire population of the human race, at still other times to all those inhabiting the earth at a given time. But there are other references where *κόσμος* designates a virtual spiritual force, the antithesis, as it were, of the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> It appears to denote the very embodiment of evil. This concept is found particularly in the writings of John and Paul, although it is found elsewhere in the New Testament as well.

There are numerous references to the enmity, hostility, and opposition which the world displays toward Christ, the believer, and the church. Jesus said, "The world ... hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). He also made it clear that the world hates his disciples because they are not of it: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15: 18-19). The same idea is repeated in Jesus' high-priestly prayer (John 17: 14).

Paul pictures the antithesis between the world and the believer in terms of totally different understandings of things. The things of God are foolish to the world (1 Cor. 1:21, 27); they are low and despised in the world (v. 28). God has, on the contrary, made foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:19). The reason for the different understandings is that different "spirits" are involved: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (2:12). The impression which Paul leaves is that the things of Christ involve a mindset or frame of reference completely different from the world's way of viewing things. The things and gifts of the Spirit of God are not received (*δέχομαι*) by the "unspiritual man" because they must be spiritually discerned (v. 14). They are foreign to such a person, and therefore he cannot (or will not) accept them.

The idea of inability to perceive or understand is also found in Jesus' words about the world's not receiving him or the Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). At the same time Jesus indicated that after a little while the world would see him no more, but he would manifest himself to his disciples and they would know him (w. 19, 22).

1. Hermann Sasse, "Kosmos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 3, p. 868.

This is in keeping with the fact that the world knew neither the Father (John 17:25) nor the Son when he came (John 1:10-11).

The world may at times produce effects superficially similar to those which God produces, yet the two have very different end results. Paul speaks of a letter of his which had grieved the Corinthians, but grieved them into repentance, for they had felt a godly grief. Then he adds, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor. 7: 10).

The world represents an organized force, a power or order which is the counterpoise to the kingdom of God. Paul in Ephesians 2 describes this structure that controls the unbeliever. The Ephesians had been dead through the trespasses and sins in which they "once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (v. 2). In their former state they were controlled by "desires of body and mind," so that they "lived in the passions of the flesh" and were 'by nature the children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (v. 3). There is a permeating order of the world, a structure which affects and governs mankind. This order is also referred to as "the elemental spirits of the universe" (Col. 2:8). Paul urges the Colossians not to let themselves be made a prey of these elemental spirits, or of "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition." He points out that with Christ his readers have died to these elemental spirits; therefore the Colossians must not now submit to these forces, living as if they still belonged to the world. These elemental spirits are the rules or operating principles or regulations according to which the world is governed. Paul refers to the same idea in connection with the Galatians. He speaks of their having formerly been "in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods," and then questions how they who now know God can turn back again to become slaves of "the weak and beggarly elemental spirits" (Gal. 4:8-9).

This *κόσμος* or evil system is under the control of the devil. We have already noted this in Paul's reference to "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). John wrote that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5: 19). And just prior to betrayal Jesus said to his disciples, "The ruler of this world is coming" (John 14:30). It is apparent, then, that behind and in a sense over all of the authorities exercising control in the world, there is a far greater power; they are merely his agents, perhaps unwittingly. Satan actually is the ruler of this domain. Thus Satan's offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 4:8-9) was not idle and exaggerated boasting. These kingdoms lie within his power, although they are not rightfully his and one day will be fully delivered from that control which he now exercises as a usurper.

As evil as is the devil, so also is this world, which is the very embodi-

ment of all that is corrupt, and which defiles those who come under its control and influence. Jesus indicated that he is not of this world, and had not come from it. He contrasted himself with the Jews: ‘You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world’ (John 8:23). Jesus’ kingship also is not of this world (John 18:36). In saying this to Pilate, Jesus undoubtedly meant that his kingdom would not be established upon earth at that time. But because there is to be a future earthly kingdom of God, it appears that Jesus had more in mind, namely, his kingdom does not derive its power from such earthly forces as would fight for him.

Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated himself to be separated from the evil attitudes and practices of the world. His followers are to do likewise. James lists both positive and negative criteria of true religion: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). Later on, James notes that there is a basic mentality associated with being of the world: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). Akin to enmity with God is fixation upon self. The self-centered orientation of those who belong to the world is at such odds with the kingdom of God that it vitiates any prayer they might offer. ‘You ask and you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions’ (James 4:3). The total incompatibility between the kingdom of God and the world reminds us of Jesus’ statement that one cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The two are antithetical to one another.

Perhaps the sharpest warning is in 1 John 2:15–17. Here John commands his readers not to love the world or the things in the world, for those who love the world do not have love for the Father in them (v. 15). “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world” (v. 16). The warning is a sober one, for the issue is a matter of eternal destiny: “and the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever” (v. 17). The person who loves the transient will also pass away. The one whose loyalty is to that which is permanent will also abide forever.

The reaction of the believer to the world is not to be merely avoidance, however. That would be largely a negative and defeatist approach. Just as Christ willingly came into the world, the believer should willingly exercise and manifest righteousness before the world, so that its darkness is dispersed. Paul urged the Philippians to be ‘blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world’ (Phil.

2:15). This is not unlike Jesus’ command to his disciples to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Yet we know that in many cases when light came into the world, men preferred darkness because the light exposed their evil deeds (John 3: 19-21). Believers should therefore expect rejection and even hostility and opposition to the light that they display.

The witness of Scripture is also clear however, that the world is doomed; its judgment has already taken place, but will be executed in the future. The believer need not and indeed will not be overcome by the world. John says of the spirit of antichrist, of which there already are many manifestations in the world, “Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them” (1 John 4:4–5). It is by faith that the world is overcome. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4–5).

The use of the word overcome suggests that Jesus’ followers are not to expect that their lot will be an easy one. Indeed, being hated by the world is an indication that they belong to him rather than to the world: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). He warns and encourages simultaneously: “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In a sense, the judgment of the world has already taken place, for Christ says in John 12:31: “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.” That this judgment has been accomplished through Christ’s death is made clear in the following verses, where he speaks of being lifted up from the earth and drawing all men to himself (w. 32–33).

That the world has already been judged is also evident in the writings of Paul. He says that believers are chastened so as not to be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). He also argues that believers should not take their differences to court to be judged by unbelievers, for believers will someday judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). What has already been accomplished through the death of Christ will be made manifest at some point in the future.

The believer need not be under the control of this world. Its power has been broken. Like the judgment of the world, the breaking of its power over the believer is linked to the death of Christ, for the believer is identified with Christ in his victorious death. Paul writes, “But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which

the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6: 14). What was accomplished at the cross and will someday become complete can be experienced at least in part by the believer now.

To summarize what we have found in our examination of the biblical teaching about the world:

1. The world as a whole organized system of spiritual force is a fact. It is the very embodiment of evil. It is a pervasive entity which exists quite apart from particular evil individuals; it is the structure of all reality apart from God. It is totally antithetical and opposed to the things of Christ. It is a mindset and frame of reference totally different from that of Christ and his disciples.

2. The world is under Satan's control. Although created to serve God, it now is Satan's kingdom. He is able to use it and its resources to accomplish his purposes and oppose those of Christ. The persons and institutions that exercise negative influence in this world are not the ultimate source of the evil which occurs. Behind them is Satan's activity. At times this activity may take the form of demon possession, but it usually is more subtle.

3. The world is clearly evil. It has the ability to corrupt whatever it touches. Thus, the Christian must avoid falling under its influence. Just as Jesus was not of this world, Christians must not be a part of it. This is not merely a matter of avoiding certain worldly actions. A whole set of diametrically different attitudes and values is involved.

4. Powerful as are the world's system and ruler, they are doomed. The defeat of the world is a matter already determined. In a spiritual sense, the world was judged at the time of and through the death and resurrection of Christ. It will someday be actually judged before God's own throne. Indeed, believers will themselves be involved in judging the world, so they should not submit to the world today.

#### *The Powers*

An additional consideration which bears upon the whole issue of collective sin is the Pauline concept of "powers." Long neglected, it has recently come in for considerable attention. Hendrikus Berkhof produced the first major treatment of the subject,<sup>2</sup> which has since been followed by the studies of several other scholars.<sup>3</sup>

2. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1962).

3. E.g., John H. Yoder, *The Politics Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 140-62; Jim Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), pp. 63-77; Richard J. Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 85-116.

The idea that the world and what transpires therein are the outcome of certain unseen forces within it received a fair amount of attention in the Hellenistic world of Paul's time.<sup>4</sup> In the Jewish apocalyptic writings this idea took the form of an extensive scheme of angelology. According to this scheme, there are various classes of angels (e.g., principalities and thrones), each class occupying a different level of the heavens. A number of Jewish thinkers became virtually preoccupied with angels and their influence upon earthly events. As a result, two beliefs about angels ("powers") were fairly common in Paul's culture: (1) they are personal, spiritual beings; (2) they influence events on earth, especially within nature.<sup>5</sup>

Paul worked with this Jewish background, but he made significant changes, going beyond current conceptions by adapting (rather than adopting) them. While the terms he used were familiar to his readers, we must not assume that he used these terms with their customary meaning. For example, in Romans 8:38-39 he distinguishes powers from angels: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Angels, principalities, and powers are here treated as separate entities. All of them apparently are created realities capable of controlling or dominating our lives.

Paul's use of the term *στοιχεῖα* ("elemental spirits") in Colossians 2:8 and 20 is an indication that his concept of the powers is to some extent more impersonal than the Jewish concept, which holds that they are angels. Here in Colossians 2 the term, which literally refers to the letters of the alphabet,<sup>6</sup> designates elementary or rudimentary principles of the ordering of the universe. These "principalities and powers" (v. 15) exercise a control over persons in the world (v. 14). They appear to be regulations (often religious) of conduct. It is difficult to determine whether Paul thought of these powers as being in any way personal, but it is clear that he did not identify them with angels.<sup>7</sup> They are created realities which give an order to society and are capable of having either a constructive or detrimental effect.

It should be borne in mind that as created realities the principalities

4. Stephen Mott, "Biblical Faith and the Reality of Social Order," *Christian Scholar?* Review 9, no. 3 (1980): 228-29.

5. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, p. 11.

6. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), p. 776.

7. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, p. 17; cf. Mott, "Biblical Faith," p. 229.

and powers are not inherently evil. They are specifically mentioned in Colossians 1:16 among the “all things” created by Christ and for Christ. They are therefore to be understood as part of God’s plan for his creation. Berkhof speaks of the creation as having a visible foreground of physical things and an invisible background. This invisible background is the powers, which were created as instruments of God’s love, as bonds between God and man. “As aids and signposts toward the service of God, they form the framework within which such service must needs be carried out.”<sup>8</sup> They are ordering principles intended to keep the creation from falling into chaos.

The fall, however, has affected the entire creation. Not only are the individual human members of creation now separated and alienated from God, but so also are the powers which organize and influence them. Paul sees the powers as now allied with Satan, carrying out his purposes in the world. This is expressed quite clearly and directly in Ephesians 6:12: “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Behind the visible structures and institutions of society and culture, evil forces are at work using these invisible powers to enslave and bind believers, to attack them and do them harm.

As Paul in Colossians 2 discusses human relationships to the principalities and powers, he emphasizes that Christ is the Creator and Lord of even these realities. The Colossians, however, have shown a propensity for regarding these structures and regulations as ends in themselves rather than as means to facilitate their relationship with Christ. This is the whole point of Paul’s discussion of practices regarding food and drink, festivals and worship (w. 16-19). At Colossae these practices have taken on the status of idols, as it were.<sup>9</sup> They may be the expression of a moral code, a political or philosophical ideology, a national or racial grouping, or something similar. The problem is that what was originally intended to be a means of relating humans to God has instead become an obstacle separating them from God. These forces have actually become despotic lords over mankind.

Paul does not tell us much about the specific forms in which the powers appear. What is clear, however, is that any of the patterns of a society can be used by the forces of evil to influence the thoughts and actions of the members of that society. John Yoder has suggested that these patterns include both intellectual structures (ologies or isms) and moral structures (the tyrant, the market, the school, the courts, race, and

nation).<sup>10</sup> To the extent that they control or at least influence humans, they are powers. The term *structures* is appropriate, for the patterns utilized by the forces of evil form and constitute the very framework within which a person functions. They make their impact before or at a level below conscious influence and choice. It is characteristic of the working of these institutional structures that the individual is not really conscious of their influence. There may be no awareness that other viable options exist.

It is essential that we note what is said in the Bible about the way in which Christ and his work have dealt with the powers. Paul is very clear on this matter in Colossians 2:13-15: “And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with [Christ], having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.” Paul is asserting that Christ has gained a victory over the powers, nullifying them and their ability to dominate humans. Christ has done this in three ways:

1. Christ has disarmed the powers; their strength is now neutralized. The claims of these regulations as to what man must be and do no longer carry any force. For by his death and resurrection Christ has done for each one what is required of us. The law can therefore require nothing more. It no longer holds any terror. Much of evils strength rests upon a bluff as to what man must do, and that bluff is now called.

2. Christ has made a public example of the powers. He has revealed their true nature and function. Previously they appeared to be the ultimate realities of the universe, the ruling gods of the world. His victory has made clear that this is a great deception. It is obvious now that the powers are actually in opposition to God’s plan and working. Sin’s capability to pervert is so great that humans can be convinced that they are doing God’s will when in reality their actions are opposing it. The keeping of the law, which was once thought to be the essence of God’s will for our lives, is now seen as potentially compromising our trust in God’s grace (cf. Gal. 3:1-5).

3. Christ has triumphed over the powers. There are two dimensions to his triumph. First, Christ’s very death, which was the ultimate expression of the evil intentions and efforts of the powers, has now, ironically, become the means to their demise. Second, he triumphed over the powers by disarming and making a public example of them.

All of this is not to suggest, however, that the victory over the powers

8. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, p. 22.

9. Mouw, *Politics*, pp. 89-90.

10. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, p. 145.

and their banishment have already been completely realized. Much of the victory awaits future completion. For Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:24, "Then [at Christ's coming] comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power." The last of the enemies to be destroyed is death (v. 26). Yet Paul also affirms that death is already swallowed up in victory (w. 54-57). And what is true of death is true of the other enemies as well. The coming deliverance of the creation from its bondage is already in process (Rom. 8:18-25). We might think of the victory over the powers, then, as "already, but not yet." By his death Christ has already overcome and destroyed these enemies. Yet the full execution or application of the accomplished fact is not yet realized or experienced.

Numerous analogies can be drawn. Berkhof, who lived in the Netherlands during World War II, recalls that the Nazis during the 'hunger winter' of 1944-1945 were already defeated, yet were still able to oppress the Dutch.<sup>11</sup> So it is with the powers. Their doom has already been assured, yet they still oppress the believers.

#### **Corporate Personality**

Also important to an understanding of social sin is the biblical concept of corporate personality. Particularly in the history of the nation of Israel, the actions of individuals were not regarded as isolated actions; they could not be separated from the actions of the group. Although on occasion the actions of a subgroup were separated from those of the rest of the nation (as in the case of Korah and those who rebelled with him), at other times the whole group suffered for the actions of one or a few. An example is found in Joshua 7. Because Achan had sinned in taking forbidden items from Jericho, thirty-six men of Israel were killed at Ai, three thousand fighting men were put to flight, and the entire nation suffered the humiliation of defeat. When the wrongdoer was discovered, not only was he stoned, but also his household with him. The principle of a whole group's being bound by the actions of one of their number was not uncommon in other nations as well. Goliath and David went out to fight one another with the understanding that the results of their individual struggle would determine the outcome of the conflict between their nations.

Paul develops the idea of corporate personality most dramatically in his discussion of the effect of Adam's sin upon the entire human race. Through one man sin came into the human race, and death through sin, and this death has spread to all persons (Rom. 5:12). There is an inter-

11. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, p. 35.

locking character to the human race, so that we do not function in isolation. The sin of Adam has brought judgment, affliction, and death to each and every person who has ever lived.

Interestingly, many modern sociologists and other behavioral scientists tell us that we cannot separate the individual and his actions from society as a whole. We always find ourselves, in the decisions and actions of our lives, functioning within the context of society, and conditioned by its realities.<sup>12</sup> There are several ways in which social realities affect or even govern the Christian in this world. Some of these influences we are aware of, others we are not.

One social influence affecting every individual is simply the political realities of life. Consider life in a political entity such as the United States. While we are a democracy in which every citizen of the nation has a voice and a vote, in the final analysis the majority rules and prevails. If our government has decided upon a course of action with which we disagree on ethical grounds, we have little choice in the matter. We can express our disagreement by various forms of protest, but these are likely to have only limited effect. The country will proceed with its policies on military armament, racial treatment, and the environment, regardless of our convictions. And it will use our tax monies to finance its actions. We have no real choice, unless we are willing to suffer penalties and imprisonment. In other words, we may well find ourselves coerced to contribute to that which is contrary to our moral convictions. In some cases, the government may actually be opposed to the practice of one's Christian faith. While this is undoubtedly true for those living in oppressive Communistic societies, it may well be true, in a more limited fashion, under any governmental system.

Our vocations may also impose certain strictures or limitations upon us. We may find within a given industry certain factors so ingrained that it is difficult to avoid sinful or unethical practices.

We may also face certain moral choices where there is no good course of action available. The best that one can do is to choose the lesser of two evils. This is indeed a sad situation, a reminder of the extent to which our world is fallen and broken, twisted and distorted from what God originally intended it to be. Sometimes, indeed, one problem can be solved or alleviated only at the cost of aggravating another. We make our moral decisions from within the context of many givens. These givens, over which we have little or no control, represent very real limitations upon the freedom and options which we as individuals have.

Our making of moral decisions may also be circumscribed by intellec-

12. Langdon Gilkey, "The Political Dimensions of Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 59, no. 2 (April 1979): 155-57.

tual structures. Each of us is exposed in varying proportions to a whole host of ideologies which differ in their degree of absolutism. They give a particular bent to our minds. Someone raised in a society which emphasizes that one particular race is superior to another may have difficulty perceiving matters in any other way. Such an individual may feel that there is a great deal of justification for prejudice. A discriminatory or exploitative course of action may appear to be quite natural and proper. Similarly, the conditioning influence of one's church, religious group, or nation may severely limit one's perspective and adversely affect his or her actions in every sphere of life.

Family **influences** also impose limitations upon personal **mod freedom**. One of the most curious statements in Scripture is God's assertion that he will visit the sins of the parents upon the children (e.g., Exod. 205). This could be taken as the pledge of a vindictive God to avenge himself upon innocent descendants of guilty ancestors. Instead, it should be taken as a declaration that sinful patterns of action and their consequences are transmitted from one generation to the next. This transmission may be a genetic, hereditary matter. Or it may be an environmental matter, stemming from either example or conditioning. Counselors tell us that there are countless cases of patterns of behavior being repeated generation after generation. Most child abusers, for example, were themselves abused by their parents. And alcoholism frequently recurs in one's children.<sup>13</sup>

Even the presence of disease within the human race may induce or foster evil. We are here speaking not of the evil character of disease itself, but rather of the fact that disease may facilitate other evil conditions. For example, a population in whom worm infestations are widespread does not have the energy, determination, and ability to fight its other social ills.

The simple fact that we live where we do contributes powerfully to various evils of which we are unaware. How many Americans, for example, squandering their resources on luxuries and demanding grain-fed beef, realize how many persons are being denied an adequate diet as a result? Most of us, if we lived among the economically less fortunate, would probably find it difficult to gorge ourselves on food that could be used instead to keep them alive. Yet because they are several thousand miles removed, we do not sense the impropriety of our lifestyle. We simply do not think about what our actions are doing to the total ecosystem of which these other persons are also a part.

It should be clear by now that we are conditioned and severely limited

13. See, e.g., D. W. Goodwin, "Alcoholism and Heredity," *Archives for General Psychiatry* 36 (1979): 57-61.

by social realities. The particular social situation in which we involuntarily find ourselves—including the political and economic system, our intellectual and family background, even the geographical location in which we were born—inevitably contributes to evil conditions and in some instances makes sin unavoidable. Sin is an element of the present social structure from which the individual cannot escape.

It is important that we see all of this in the context of the fall. The account in Genesis 3 lists specific curses following from the fall, or perhaps we should say specific aspects of the curse. The toilsome character of work, thistles and thorns, and the anguished nature of childbirth are mentioned. It seems likely, however, that this list is not exhaustive. The curse certainly includes these matters, but there is no reason to believe that it is limited to them. It may well include the sort of social structures that we have been describing here. In Romans 8: 18-25 Paul speaks of the cosmic character of sin. The whole creation was subjected to futility (v. 20). It is presently waiting for the time when it "will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" (w. 21-22). If the sin of mankind has distorted the entire creation, certainly its social structures are included.

### Strategies for Overcoming Social Sin

If we are agreed from the foregoing that there is a dimension of sin and evil which goes beyond that of particular or individual human beings, it remains for us to determine what approach should be taken as we attempt to deal with corporate sin. Here we find considerable divergence of opinion.

#### *Regeneration*

One approach regards the social dimension of sin as merely the composite of the sins of individuals. Since group sin is merely the social manifestation of individual sins, social problems will not be solved by treating society. Society is not an entity with its own will and its own mind. Rather, the direction of society is determined by the minds and wills of its constituent members. Alteration of society therefore will take place only by changing the individuals who compose it. This is the strategy of regeneration, which, in its own way, is a type of utopianism. For it asserts that if all the persons within society are transformed, society itself will be transformed.<sup>14</sup>

14. Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 21, 24-25, 26-27.

Underlying this view is a thoroughgoing belief in human depravity and sinfulness. The human being is internally corrupt. Improving external circumstances or the environment will not change the inner person. And without inner transformation, the sinful conditions of society will simply return.

There also is an emphasis on the individual. Each person is an isolated, self-contained entity capable of making free choices. There is relatively little influence from conditions within society. The unit of morality is the individual person. The group is not thought of as an organic entity with characteristics of its own. It is merely a collection or assemblage of individuals.

The thrust of those who adopt and practice this strategy is strongly evangelistic. They urge individuals to make a decision and reverse the direction of their lives. There is often a strong emphasis as well upon Christian fellowship. This may take the form of quite intensive social groupings within the context of the organized church. The primary commitment is to this Christian grouping, the basic function of which is mutual support among its members. Thus there may be a tendency to withdraw from involvement with the world. Others advocate involvement in society, for example, by working in the helping professions. Generally speaking, however, these people are oriented more toward social welfare (alleviating the conditions resulting from faulty social structures) than toward social action (altering the structures causing the problems).<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that the groups which follow this strategy, generally known as evangelicals, are the most rapidly growing segment of Christianity, not only in the United States but in Latin America and Africa as well.

#### *Reform*

Other strategies have in common the conviction that the problems are larger than individual human wills, and must therefore be handled by using a broader base than individual conversion/regeneration. The structures of society must be directly altered. There are several possibilities.

The most frequently advocated possibility is modification of the political form of society. This involves working for change through political channels. Society is to be restructured by electing legislators who will pass laws changing undesirable conditions. Evil is to be made illegal. Enforcement of such laws will change the conditions which constitute

1.5. David O. Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 81-82.

structural evil. This view might be termed the approach or strategy of reform. It rests on the idea that the group structure, which may be as broad as the whole of society, has a reality of its own apart from the wills of its individual members. Thus, the structure cannot be changed simply by modifying the individuals who constitute it. While there is no guarantee, on the other hand, that individuals will necessarily be changed if the structure is, at least the conditions or circumstances within which they function will be altered.

Sometimes means of reform other than political are used. This may well involve economic pressures, such as various forms of boycott. The Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott by blacks in the mid-1950s is a notable example. There may be boycotts of specific products or of a particular manufacturer. Shareholder rebellions may change the policy of a corporation. Nonviolent resistance such as was advocated by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King is another means of seeking reform.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Revolution*

The most radical approach to changing the structures of society involves destroying or removing them and replacing them with others, using force if necessary. The idea is that the structures are so corrupt that they cannot be redeemed by transformation. There needs to be a completely fresh start; this requires radical overthrow of the existing forms. Frequently the conception here is that man, given a chance, is basically good, or at least morally neutral. Thus there is confidence that if the present structure is abolished, what will arise in its place will be basically good. Also tied in with this approach is the apparent belief that society's influence has no lasting effect upon its members. Whatever influence social structures may have on individuals is dynamic, not substantive. Thus, once a structure is removed, its influence is gone. It has not produced a perverted human nature which, unless and until regenerated, will continue to function for evil. There is every confidence, then, that once the evil structures are removed, those who rise to positions of leadership will not establish a new order favorable solely to their own interests.

This strategy, which we might term revolution, is found in the more radical political and religious philosophies. It is found in various forms of liberation theology, especially those of the more aggressive type.<sup>17</sup> It is

16. Johannes Verkuyl and H. G. Schulte Nordholt, *Responsible Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 53-59.

17. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973), p. 109.

also, of course, a tenet of Marxism and of several modern-day terrorist groups.

If, as we have argued in this and earlier chapters, evil is both individual/personal and societal in nature, it must be attacked by a combination of strategies rather than merely one. Because individual human hearts and personalities are corrupted, regeneration is necessary if a lasting change is to be effected. On the other hand, because there are structures of evil in the world which transcend individual human wills, some means of renovating these structures must be pursued. Revolution is too extreme an approach; it violates Christ's teachings regarding violence. While what strategies to adopt for dealing with evil is a topic beyond the scope of this present writing, a combination of regeneration and non-violent reform would seem to provide the best hope for combating sin and evil in our world. This would call for emphasis upon evangelism, personal ethics, and social ethics.

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## PART SEVEN

### The Person of Christ

- 31. Contemporary Issues in Christological Method
- 32. The Deity of Christ
- 33. The Humanity of Christ
- 34. The Unity of the Person of Christ
- 35. The Virgin Birth

# 31

## Contemporary Issues in Christological Method

History and Christology  
The Search for the Historical Jesus  
"Christology from Above"  
"Christology from Below"  
Evaluation  
An Alternative Approach  
The Person and the Work of Christ  
Incarnation Viewed as Mythology

We have seen that man was created to love, serve, and fellowship with God. We have also seen that man fails to fulfil this divine intention for him; in other words, all humans sin. Because God loved man, however, he chose to act through Christ to restore man to the intended condition and relationship. Thus, our understanding of the person and work of Christ grows directly out of the doctrines of man and of sin.

When we come to the study of the person and work of Christ, we are at the very center of Christian theology. For since Christians are by definition believers in and followers of Christ, their understanding of

Christ must be central and determinative of the very character of the Christian faith. All else is secondary to the question of what one thinks of Christ. This being the case, particular care and precision are especially in order in the doing of our Christology.

There are certain perennial problems of Christology. These arise at various times. There are also specific issues that appear at one point in history but not before or after. It is important that we survey and form our own conclusions regarding certain of these matters. In this chapter we will examine three contemporary issues regarding the methodology of Christology. They are the questions of (1) the relationship between faith and history, (2) the relationship between study of the person of Christ and study of the work of Christ, and (3) the literalness of the idea of incarnation. To frame these questions differently: (1) Can a proper understanding of Christ be based strictly upon historical data, or must it be posited by faith? (2) Should we first determine our understanding of Christ's nature and then apply it to our investigation of his work, or should we approach the subject of his nature through a study of his work? (3) Is the idea of the incarnation of God inherently mythological and hence untenable? The first two of these questions deal with how we are to do Christology; the third concerns whether it is possible to do Christology at all. If we are to understand the contemporary environment of christological construction, it will be necessary to examine the background of the current situation. For the present approaches to the doing of Christology represent the culmination of a long process involving reactions and counter-reactions.

### History and Christology

For a long period of time, theologians limited their discussion of Christ to the views set forth in their respective denominational or confessional traditions. These traditions in turn tended to follow the positions worked out in the ecumenical councils of the early centuries of the church. The problems of Christology were posed largely in terms of metaphysics: How can the divine nature and the human nature coexist within one person? Or, to put it differently, how can Jesus be both God and man at once? During the twentieth century, however, the focus has changed. In some circles theology is hostile (or, at the very least, indifferent) to metaphysics. So the study of Christ is now carried on largely in historical terms. In part, this shift has been motivated by a suspicion that the Christ of the theological tradition is different from the actual Jesus who walked the paths of Palestine, teaching and working among his disciples and the crowds.

### The Search for the Historical Jesus

The quest to discover what Jesus was actually like and what he did came to be known as the "search for the historical Jesus." Underlying this search was the expectation that the real Jesus would prove to be different even from the Christ who appears within the Scriptures, and who is in some sense the product of the theologizing of Paul and others. Among the more famous early "lives of Jesus" were those produced by David Strauss<sup>1</sup> and Ernest Renan.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, the earthly Jesus was depicted as basically a good man, a teacher of great spiritual truths, but not the miracle-working, preexistent Second Person of the Trinity.

Perhaps the best-known and most influential picture of Jesus is that of Adolf von Harnack. In many ways, Harnack's work represents the pinnacle and the end of the search for Jesus. He notes that the Gospels do not give us the means of constructing a full-fledged biography of Jesus, for they tell us very little about Jesus' early life.<sup>3</sup> They do provide us with the essential facts, however. Four general observations lead Harnack to set forth a nonmiraculous Jesus:

1. In Jesus' day, a time when there was no sound insight into what is possible and what is not, people felt surrounded by miracles.
2. Miracles were ascribed to famous persons almost immediately after their death.
3. We know that what happens within our world is governed by natural laws. There are, then, no such things as "miracles," if by that is meant interruptions of the order of nature.
4. There are many things that we do not understand, but they should be viewed as marvelous and presently inexplicable, not miraculous.<sup>4</sup>

Harnack's assessment of the message of Jesus has been considered the classic statement of the liberal theological position. He points out that the message of Jesus was primarily not about himself, but about the Father and the kingdom:

1. David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879).
2. Ernest Renan, *Life of Jesus*, trans. and rev. from the 23rd French ed. (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1856).
3. Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 33.
4. Ibid., pp. 27-30.

If, however, we take a general view of Jesus' teaching, we shall see that it may be grouped under three heads. They are each of such a nature as to contain the whole, and hence it can be exhibited in its entirety under any one of them.

Firstly, the Kingdom of God and its coming.

Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul.

Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.<sup>5</sup>

As the search for the historical Jesus ran its course, there was a growing uneasiness that the Jesus found within the Gospel account was being unconsciously fabricated by those searching for him, and was amazingly like the searchers. George Tyrrell, a Catholic scholar, possibly put it best: "The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well."<sup>6</sup>

Two writings in particular spelled the end of the liberal quest for Jesus. One was Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Schweitzer shared the basic historical method and goals of the liberal searchers. He differed with their conclusions, however, seriously questioning their objectivity. He felt that they approached the study of Jesus' life with their own preconceptions and then proceeded to accept or reject material on the basis of whether or not it fit these preconceptions. When Schweitzer examined the Gospels, he did not find the reflection of a typical nineteenth-century liberal. Rather, he found in Jesus a thoroughly eschatological figure who believed that the end of the world was coming soon, and that his own parousia would take place in connection with that end.<sup>7</sup> Jesus believed and taught these things. But of course, he was wrong, according to Schweitzer. The chief point for our purposes here is Schweitzer's contention that as an eschatological figure Jesus is not to be remade into a thoroughly modern person.<sup>8</sup>

Martin Kähler's *So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* struck new ground in its analysis of the problem. Kähler was dubious about the utility of the efforts which had been made to develop a picture of Jesus. Not only was the search for the historical Jesus unsuccessful, it was actually counterproductive. Kähler summarized his "cry of warning in a form intentionally audacious: *The historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ*. The Jesus of the life-

5. Ibid., p. 55.

6. George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), p. 44.

7. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 367.

8. Ibid., pp. 370-71.

of-Jesus movement' is merely a modern example of human creativity, and not an iota better than the notorious dogmatic Christ of Byzantine Christology. One is as far removed from the real Christ as is the other."<sup>9</sup> In answer to the search for the historical Jesus, Kähler proposed a major distinction. He noted that the Jesus of history, the Jesus behind the Gospels, had relatively little influence. He was able to win only a few disciples, and these to a rather shaky faith. The Christ of faith, however, has exercised a very significant influence. This is the risen Christ, believed in and preached by the apostles. This *historic* Christ, rather than the *historical* Jesus, is the basis of our faith and life today. We can never get behind the Gospel accounts to *Historie*, the objective, actual occurrences. We instead build our belief on *Geschichte*, or significant history, which pertains to the impact Jesus made upon the disciples.<sup>10</sup>

This distinction was in many ways the greatest influence upon Christology during the first half of the twentieth century. Increasingly, study was focused not upon the actual events of the life of the historical Jesus behind the Gospel accounts. Instead, the faith of the church became the object of interest. This shift is seen most clearly and fully in Rudolf Bultmann's demythologization, but it is also apparent within the Christologies written by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

A reaction to Bultmann's skeptical approach set in in turn. Thus began a new twentieth-century quest for the historical Jesus. Ernst Käsemann officially sounded the trumpet indicating this turn of events.<sup>11</sup> Others, too, have been and are at work attempting to formulate a sketch of what Jesus really was like, what he actually said and did. Ethelbert Stauffer and Joachim Jeremias have been among the more prominent persons engaged in this new search. We will take up this development shortly under the heading "Christology from Below." But first we need to examine another approach which dominated much of the early history of twentieth-century Christology.

#### "Christology from Above"

"Christology from above" was the basic strategy and orientation of the Christology of the earliest centuries of the church. It also was, to a large extent, the Christology of orthodoxy during the precritical era when there was no question as to the historical reliability of the whole of

9. Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 43.

10. Ibid., pp. 65-66.

11. Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), pp. 15-47.

Scripture. In the twentieth century, this approach to Christology has been associated especially with Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Emil Brunner in his early book *The Mediator*. (*His Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, which came later, represents a different approach.) Several key features of Christology from above are evident in *The Mediator*:

1. The basis of the understanding of Christ is not the historical Jesus, but the kerygma, the church's proclamation regarding the Christ. Brunner asserts:

We are bound to oppose the view that the Christian faith springs out of historical observation, out of the historical picture of Jesus of Nazareth. Christendom itself has always known otherwise. Christian faith springs only out of the witness to Christ of the preached message and the written word of the Scriptures. The historical picture is indeed included in the latter . . . ; but this picture itself is not the basis of knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

2. In constructing a Christology, there is a marked preference for the writings of Paul and the fourth Gospel over the Synoptic Gospels. The former contain more explicitly theological interpretations, whereas the Synoptics are basically matter-of-fact reporting of the actions and teachings of Jesus. This principle is closely tied to the first:

If once the conviction is regained that the Christian faith does not arise out of the picture of the historical **Jesus**, but out of the testimony to Christ as such—this includes the witness of the prophets as well as that of the Apostles—and that it is based upon this testimony, then inevitably the preference for the Synoptic Gospels and for the actual words of Jesus, which was the usual position of the last generation, will disappear.<sup>13</sup>

3. Faith in the Christ is not based on nor legitimized by rational proof. It cannot be scientifically proved. The content believed lies outside the sphere of natural reason and historical investigation and consequently cannot be conclusively proven. While historical investigation may serve to remove obstacles to various beliefs (e.g., belief in the deity of Jesus Christ), it cannot succeed in establishing those beliefs. “Jesus taught a group of disciples beside the sea” is a statement open to historical research; “Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity” is not. We accept historical statements by being rationally persuaded. We accept proclamation by faith.

Brunner draws a distinction which clarifies the sense in which, for

12. Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (London: Lutterworth, 1934), p. 158.

13. Ibid., p. 172.

him, Christology is historical and the sense in which it is not. This distinction is between the “Christ *in* the flesh” and the “Christ *after* the flesh.” By “Christ in the flesh” Brunner means that God became incarnate, the Word became flesh and penetrated history. The “Christ after the flesh” is the Christ known by the historiographer, the chronicler, with his methods of research. To know “Christ in the flesh” is to know something more than the “Christ after the flesh.” The believer knows Christ

as the One who has come in the flesh, as Him of whom the chronicler and the humanist historian must have something to say. But he knows this “Christ in the flesh” in a way of which they can know nothing; he knows Him therefore as someone quite different, and this is what matters. For the knowledge of others—of the chronicler and of the humanist historian—is not yet knowledge of Christ, of the “Word made flesh,” but is itself “after the flesh.”<sup>14</sup>

Brunner emphasizes the Christ in the flesh. But he does not ignore the Christ after the flesh. For although faith never arises out of the observation of facts, but out of the witness of the church and the Word of God, the fact that this Word has come “into the flesh” means that faith is in some way connected with observation. While faith arises out of the witness of the church and Scripture, that witness always includes the picture of Jesus.

#### ‘Christology from Below’

With the publication of Bultmann’s *Jesus and the Word*, Christology from above reached its zenith. Here in effect was a statement that faith in the kerygmatic Christ cannot with certainty be connected with the actual earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. In Bultmann’s view this did not really matter. The stream of negative reaction to Bultmann’s view grew into an enunciation of methodology. Probably the most significant of the early reactions was Ernst Käsemann’s “Problem of the Historical Jesus,” originally published in 1954. Käsemann asserted the necessity of building belief in Jesus upon a historical search for who he was and what he did. While this was not a resumption of the nineteenth-century search, it was dubbed “the new search for the historical Jesus.”

It might be said that the nineteenth-century searches scarcely were real Christologies. It would be better to call them “Jesusologies.” The Jesus who emerged from those studies was a human being and little more. It seemed to some in the “new quest” that this was a result of

14. Ibid., p. 158.

antisupernatural biases within the historical method itself; in other words, there was a methodological inadequacy. In the new quest for the historical Jesus, there is the possibility of a genuine Christology. That is, it is possible that the historical investigation might arrive at belief in the deity of Jesus Christ. This belief would then be a conclusion, not a presupposition, of the historical investigation.

The most instructive example for us of a contemporary "Christology from below" is undoubtedly that of Wolfhart Pannenberg. In *Jesus—God and Man* Pannenberg has produced a thoroughly christological treatment, as indicated by the title. He has carefully scrutinized and criticized the presuppositions of christological methodology in order to assure openness and objectivity. While recognizing certain benefits in the approach of Christology from above, he indicates three basic reasons why he cannot employ this method:

1. The task of Christology is to offer rational support for belief in the divinity of Jesus, for it is this which is disputed in the world today. Christology from above is unacceptable in that it *presupposes* the divinity of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>
2. Christology from above tends to neglect the significance of the distinctive historical features of Jesus of Nazareth. In particular, his relationship to the Judaism of his day, which is essential to understanding his life and message, is relatively unimportant in this approach.<sup>16</sup>
3. Strictly speaking, a Christology from above is possible only from the position of God himself, and not for us. We are limited, earth-bound human beings, and we must begin and conduct our inquiry from that perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Pannenberg constructs from the life of the man Jesus of Nazareth a full Christology, including his deity. The positive features of Pannenberg's approach make clear the basic contour of Christology from below as contrasted with Christology from above:

1. Historical inquiry behind the kerygma of the New Testament is both possible and theologically necessary. Form criticism has demonstrated that an exact chronological sequence of Jesus' life cannot be constructed. It is nonetheless possible to discover from the apostles' witness Jesus' major characteristics. Such knowledge of Jesus is neces-

15. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), p. 34.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

sary. If we rest our faith upon the kerygma alone, and not upon the historical facts of Jesus' life as well, we cannot escape the suspicion and the fear that our faith is misplaced. Pannenberg would say that we may find ourselves believing not in Jesus, but in Luke, Matthew, Paul, or someone else. A further complication if we rest our faith upon the kerygma alone is that these New Testament witnesses do not give us unity, but diversity, and on occasion even antithesis. We must penetrate beyond these varied witnesses to discern the one Jesus to whom they all refer.<sup>18</sup>

In the judgment of Pannenberg, it is extremely important to bring an openness to the task of historical investigation. The problem with many nineteenth-century searches and with Bultmann's demythologizing lay in certain rather narrow conceptions of what is historically possible and what is not. For example, the resurrection of Jesus was often excluded from belief before the search began. It is imperative, however, to approach the horizons of biblical times without our modern-day prejudices. Only when naturalistic or antisupernaturalistic presuppositions are laid aside can a Christology from below be properly constructed.<sup>19</sup>

2. History is unitary, not dualistic. The life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus, including his death and resurrection, are not part of a unique type of history distinct from history in general. There is no special realm of redemptive or sacred history, be that *Geschichte*, *Heilsgeschichte*, or whatever. For Pannenberg, the history of the Christ is one with the rest of world history. It cannot be separated or isolated from history in general. Consequently, it does not have to be approached by a method different from that used to gain a knowledge of ordinary history. The same historical method used in investigating the Napoleonic wars is to be applied in Christology.<sup>20</sup>

3. It is obvious that a Christology from below can give us a fully human Jesus. Can it, however, establish the deity of Jesus? The evidence most commonly adduced by Christology from below in trying to establish Jesus' unity with God is his pre-Easter claim to authority through declaration and deed. There is a remarkable concurrence upon this point by a large number of theologians. Werner Elert observes that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. When he spoke of his Father, Jesus referred to him as "my Father." When he had in mind the disciples' relationship to the Father, he used the phrase "your Father." He never equated his relationship to the Father with the disciples' relationship to

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–25.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Wolkart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann (Richmond: John Knox, 1964), pp. 314–15.

the Father by using the phrase “our Father.”<sup>21</sup> Paul Althaus similarly notes that the authority claimed by Jesus presupposes nearness to God that no other man has. “What Jesus does is blasphemy unless it comes from special authority. He claims this authority for himself.”<sup>22</sup> In their own ways, Friedrich Gogarten, Hermann Diem, Gunther Bornkamm, and Hans Conzelmann make essentially the same point. Pannenberg comments, “The basic agreement is striking. Dogmatics seems in this case to have preceded historical research.”<sup>23</sup>

Pannenberg believes that this effort to demonstrate Jesus’ divinity through his pre-Easter claim to authority must inevitably fail, for this claim to authority is related to a future verification of his message which will not take place until the final judgment. “Rather,” Pannenberg says, “everything depends upon the connection between Jesus’ claim and its confirmation by God.”<sup>24</sup>

This confirmation is to be found in the resurrection of Jesus. Pannenberg believes that the resurrection is a historical fact. Having examined separately the evidences—the empty tomb and the appearances of the resurrected Lord—Pannenberg concludes that the Gospel accounts of the appearances are so strongly legendary in character that one can scarcely find in them a historical kernel. Consequently, he turns to Paul’s summation in 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11 and concludes:

Thus the resurrection of Jesus would be designated as a historical event in this sense: If the emergence of primitive Christianity, which, apart from other traditions, is also traced back by Paul to appearances of the resurrected Jesus, can be understood in spite of all critical examination of the tradition only if one examines it in the light of the eschatological hope for a resurrection from the dead, then that which is so designated is a historical event, even if we do not know anything more particular about it.<sup>25</sup>

Pannenberg similarly attributes validity to the empty-tomb accounts. If this tradition and the tradition of the Lord’s appearances came into existence independently of one another, then, “by their mutually complementing each other they let the assertion of the reality of Jesus’ resurrection, in the sense explained above, appear as historically very probable, and that always means in historical inquiry that it is to be presupposed until contrary evidence appears.”<sup>26</sup>

21. Werner Elert, *Der christliche Glaube: Grundlinien der lutherischen Dogmatik*, 3rd ed. (Hamburg: Furge, 1956), p. 303.

22. Paul Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, 6th ed. (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1962), p. 430.

23. Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, p. 57.

24. *Ibid.* p. 66.

25. *Ibid.* p. 98.

26. *Ibid.* p. 105.

If the event itself were all there is to the resurrection, we would have nothing but brute facts. Their meaning or interpretation would be an open question subject to debate; perhaps it would be merely a matter of faith. Given the fact of the resurrection, there might be many possible meanings attached to it. From Pannenberg’s perspective, however, this is not so. Given its place within the history of traditions and cultural expectations, the resurrection carried with it a definite meaning. The event cannot be evaluated or understood in isolation from the traditions and expectations of the Jews. The idea of resurrection occurring apart from the will and activity of God is unthinkable for a Jew. The resurrection of Jesus means, then, that God gave his approval to the claims of Jesus and that these claims, which would be blasphemous unless Jesus really is the Son of man, are true. Thus, not only the historical fact of Jesus’ resurrection, but also the theological truth of his deity, have been established.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Evaluation*

These two types of Christology have their own distinctive strengths and weaknesses, which by now have been rather well identified. In some cases, the statement of one position has also constituted a criticism of the other approach.

Christology from above has the strength of recognizing that the real aim and value of the incarnation were the effect which the life of Jesus had upon those who believed in him. Their testimony is deserving of our closest attention for they of all people knew him most intimately and were in the best position to describe him to others. Further, this approach is committed to a genuine supernaturalism, something which has not always been true of Christologies from below. It leaves open the possibility of a divine, miracle-working Jesus.

The basic problem for a Christology from above is the question of the substantiality of the belief. Is the Christ of faith really the same person as the Jesus who walked the paths of Galilee and Judea? Is commitment to the kerygmatic Christ based upon what really is, or is it an unfounded faith? The problem of subjectivity in one form or another always plagues this type of Christology. How can we be sure that the Christ whom we know from the witness of the apostles and encounter in our own experience today is Jesus as he really is and not merely our own feelings? A second problem relates to the content of faith. While it is all well and good to say we take something on faith, how do we determine what it is

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

we are taking on faith? Without an empirical referent, the Christ of faith is somewhat unreal and vague.

Christology from below, on the other hand, blunts the charge that at best Christian theology (and specifically the teachings about the person of Jesus) is based upon faith and at worst it may be completely vacuous. This approach has attempted to eliminate undue amounts of subjectivity. Recognizing that there needs to be a subjective involvement (or commitment) by every believer, Christology from below avoids filtering it through the subjectivity of other believers, namely, the first disciples.

There is one persistent problem, however. Especially in the form in which Pannenberg has enunciated it, Christology from below depends for its success upon establishing its historical contentions with objective certainty. Objective certainty, however, is difficult to achieve. If the facts of Christology are matters of genuinely objective history, then it ought to be possible to demonstrate the divinity of Jesus to any honest objective inquirer. In practice, however, this does not always happen. Some who examine the evidences remain quite unconvinced. In addition, Paul Althaus maintains that Pannenberg's unitary view of history makes faith a function of reason.<sup>28</sup> Pannenberg has responded by contending that while faith is indeed a gift of the Spirit, not a product of reason, nonetheless, knowledge of the historical revelation is logically prior to faith, although not psychologically prior. Reason in its essential structure is sufficient to grasp God's revelation and recognize its truth. Man's reason, however, has fallen into an unnatural state and needs to be restored. This restoration is not a case of being supernaturalized, but of being naturalized through the aid of the kerygma and the Spirit.<sup>29</sup>

This distinction, however, is not very helpful. Regardless of whether human reason needs to be super-naturalized or merely naturalized, the same specter of subjectivity, which this theology attempts to avoid at all costs, still raises its head. Although the Spirit employs the historical evidences to create faith, there is still the problem of whether this faith is veridical. May not someone else, on the basis of the same evidences, come to a different conclusion? Are we not again, at least to a small extent, driven back to the Christ of faith in the attempt to arrive at the Jesus of history? The real point of Christology from below has been abandoned when one begins to appeal to such concepts as the need to naturalize reason. Although the gap between objective historical evi-

28. Paul Althaus, "Offenbarung als Geschichte und Glaube: Bemerkungen zu Wolfhart Pannenbergs Begriff der Offenbarung," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 87, no. 5 (May 1962): 32 1-30.

29. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Einsicht und Glaube: Antwort an Paul Althaus," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 88, no. 2 (February 1963): 81-92.

dences and the conclusions of faith has been narrowed a bit, it is still there.

#### *An Alternative Approach*

We have seen that each of these two seemingly mutually exclusive positions has certain strengths and weaknesses. Is there some way to unite Christology from above and Christology from below so as to preserve the best elements of both while minimizing the problems of each? Can the kerygmatic Christ and the historical Jesus, faith and reason, be held together? Evangelicals are concerned to retain both. This concern stems in part from the evangelical understanding of revelation: revelation is both the historical events *and* the interpretation of them. These are two complementary and harmonious means by which God manifests himself. Both are therefore sources of knowledge of him. We will propose here a conceptual analysis and model which may enlighten the issue.

Since the Jesus of history is approached through reason and the kerygmatic Christ is seized by faith, we are apparently dealing with a case of the classic faith-reason dichotomy. Whereas in the traditional form faith and philosophical reason are involved, here it is faith and historical reason that are involved. In both cases, the question is the utility and value of reason as a grounds for faith. In the philosophical realm there are three basic positions regarding the relative roles of faith and reason. There are three similar positions in the historical realm:

1. Christology from above is basically fideistic. Particularly in the form expounded by Brunner and other existentialist theologians, it draws heavily upon the thought of Soren Kierkegaard. According to this position, our knowledge of Jesus' deity is not grounded in any historically provable facts about his earthly life. It is a faith based upon the faith of the apostles as enunciated in the kerygma.

2. Conversely, Christology from below is primarily Thomistic. It attempts to demonstrate the supernatural character of Christ from historical evidences. Hence, the deity of Christ is not a presupposition but a conclusion of the process. The appeal is to historical reason, not to faith or authority. As faith predominates in the former model, reason does here.

3. There is another possible model, namely, the Augustinian. In this model, faith precedes but does not remain permanently independent of reason. Faith provides the perspective or starting point from which reason may function, enabling one to understand what he otherwise could not.

When this model is applied to the construction of a Christology, the starting point is the kerygma, the belief and preaching of the church

about Christ. The content of the kerygma serves as a hypothesis to interpret and integrate the data supplied by inquiry into the historical Jesus. According to this position, the early church's interpretation of or faith in Christ enables us to make better sense of the historical phenomena than does any other hypothesis. Thus, our alternative model is not Christology from below, which, ignoring the kerygma, leads to conundrums in attempting to understand the "mystery of Jesus," as theologians often referred to it in the nineteenth century. Nor is our model an unsupported Christology from above, constructed without reference to the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth; rather, it is tested and supported and rendered cogent by the ascertainable historical facts of who and what Jesus was and claimed to be.

Our model entails following neither faith alone nor historical reason alone, but both together in an intertwined, mutually dependent, simultaneously progressing fashion. Increased familiarity with the kerygmatic Christ will enable us to understand and integrate more of the data of historical research. Similarly, increased understanding of the Jesus of history will more fully persuade us that the apostles' interpretation of the Christ of faith is true.

There is biblical basis for this contention. Some of those who knew Jesus' words and deeds very well did not arrive at an accurate knowledge of him thereby. For example, the Pharisees saw Jesus perform miraculous healings through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22–32; Mark 3:20–30; Luke 11:14–23). Although they certainly were familiar with the Jewish traditions and presumably had observed Jesus for quite some time, their appraisal was, "He casts out demons by the power of Beelzebub." Somehow they had failed to draw the right conclusion, although they possessed a knowledge of the facts. Even those closest to Jesus failed to know him fully. Judas betrayed him. The other disciples did not realize the significance of his crucifixion and even his resurrection. The religious authorities obviously knew that the tomb was empty, but did not interpret this fact correctly.

On a more positive note, there are also indications that when one comes to a correct perception of Jesus, it is on the basis of something more than natural perception. For example, when in response to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus commented, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16: 15–17). While we might debate at length over the exact meaning of "flesh and blood," it is clear that Jesus is contrasting some sort of direct revelation from the Father with some purely human source such as the opinions of others.

Another case in point, proceeding from the other side of the dialectic,

is John the Baptist. In prison he began to wonder about Christ. And so he sent two of his disciples to ask the Lord, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Luke 7:19). John may have been expecting some concrete historical event (perhaps his own release from prison?) as evidence that Jesus was indeed, as John knew him to be, the Christ. Jesus' answer was to point to the deeds which he had been performing: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (v. 22). The historical Jesus was the confirmation of the Christ of faith.

In this model the two factors are held in conjunction: neither the Jesus of history alone, nor the Christ of faith alone, but the kerygmatic Christ as the key that unlocks the historical Jesus, and the facts of Jesus' life as support for the message that he is the Son of God. Faith in the Christ will lead us to an understanding of the Jesus of history.

### The Person and the Work of Christ

A second major methodological question pertains to the relationship between the study of the person and the work of Christ. May they be separated, and if so, what is the logical order of Christology? Should the understanding of the person of Christ, his nature, be developed first, and then applied in order to give us an understanding of the work of Christ? Or should we begin with the work of Christ and then deduce therefrom what type of person he is?

In the early history of the church, the two were held together in rather close connection. This approach changed during the medieval period, however. Scholastic theology separated the doctrine of the person of Christ (his divinity, humanity, and the unity of the two) from the offices and work of Christ. As a result, Christology was no longer relevant to most believers. The debates over Jesus' deity, the extent of his knowledge, and his sinlessness, as well as questions like whether he had one will or two, were very abstract. It was difficult for average Christians to see what if any effect such issues had on their lives.

An opposite tendency developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however. It built on a famous sentence of Philipp Melanchthon: "To know Christ is to know his benefits"<sup>30</sup> This in turn is linked to Luther's reaction against the scholastic concentration on the being of Christ. Luther emphasized instead Christ's saving activity *for us*.<sup>31</sup> This emphasis

<sup>30.</sup> *Melanchthon and Bucer*, Library of Christian Classics 19, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), pp. 2 1-22.

<sup>31.</sup> *What Luther Says*, comp. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), vol. 1, p. 198.

on the work of Christ is explicitly realized in the Christology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, which appeared more than two centuries later. Schleiermacher begins his discussion of each doctrine with Christian experience. This is in keeping with his general thesis that religion (or piety) is not a matter of dogma or of ethical activity, but of feeling. So for Schleiermacher the prime element in Christology is our experience of what Christ does within us. In theory, however, the person of Christ and his work are inseparable, and Christology can be approached from either angle.<sup>32</sup>

This correlating of the two considerations, but with priority given to the work of Christ, has been picked up by Bultmann and perhaps even more explicitly by Paul Tillich, who asserted that "Christology is a function of soteriology. The problem of soteriology creates the Christological question and gives direction to the Christological answer."<sup>33</sup> In keeping with Tillich's method of correlation, the theological answer is correlated with the existential question. Accordingly, we should concentrate upon the symbolism of the biblical materials, since it stresses the universal significance of the Christ event. The historical and legendary stories are to be used only as corroboration.<sup>34</sup>

It should be noted that there are two major reasons for approaching the topic of the person of Christ through study of the work of Christ. One is the desire for greater coherence between Christology and soteriology. It is possible to treat the former in isolation from the latter. But it is not possible to speak of what Christ does in our lives without relating that work to the nature of Christ, which it presupposes. The second reason is the desire to demonstrate the relevance of the doctrine of Christ. It is difficult for most persons to take an interest in the discussion of some of the issues concerning the nature of Christ unless they see how it affects them.

Certain difficulties emerge from this approach, however. One is that when the emphasis is placed upon what Christ's work does for humanity, it is the humans self-perception of need that tends to dictate or set the agenda for construction of the understanding of Christ's person or nature. There is, then, a dilemma for those who focus their attention first on Christ's work and only later on his person. Either they consider his work first and then apply their findings to the human situation, or they examine the situation first and then move back to the biblical materials

32. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York Harper and Row, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 355-75.

33. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), vol. 2, p. 150.

34. Ibid., pp. 151-52.

regarding Christ's work. In the former case, there is still the problem of potential irrelevance to the human situation. In the latter case, the danger is that the understanding of Christ's work will be tailored to the human perception of need.

We should note here that there is a problem with the concern for relevance. It assumes that the person is asking the right questions. But is this assumption always valid? There may well be questions not being asked which ought to be. Analogous to this situation is the difference between telling one's doctor about some specific symptoms and having a complete physical examination. The physical may reveal some facts of which the patient is unaware, but which are important nevertheless. Likewise, there may be significant issues of Christology which will never be considered if the agenda is set by our subjective awareness of need. Another problem is that a particular experience of Christ's work will not necessarily settle a related issue concerning Christ's person. A conclusion in soteriology may leave open more than one possible position on Christ's nature. Therefore, basing one's Christology upon "felt needs" will prove inadequate.

In spite of all these difficulties, there is an acceptable way of beginning Christology with Christ's work. While it must not be allowed to set the agenda, it can be used as the point of contact for more elaborate discussions of his nature. These discussions will in turn give answers in the area of his work. We should be aware that if we are to build a complete Christology, we must look at considerations in each area to find answers to questions in the other.

### Incarnation Mewed as Mythology

Another issue which is of growing concern in the doing of Christology is whether the idea of incarnation is mythological. According to some, the idea that God became man and entered human history, which is basically what the doctrine of the incarnation has historically signified, is not to be taken literally.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, according to this contention, it is neither necessary nor possible to do so. A number of factors have fostered this theory.

35. While this view was given particular exposure and impetus through the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), it had many earlier expressions. Stephen Neill recalls the Girton Conference of the Modern Churchmen's Union (1921) in such a way as to make *The Myth of God Incarnate* seem like a case of *déjà vu*. See Stephen Neill, "Jesus and Myth," in *The Truth of God Incarnate*, ed. Michael Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 66-67.

One is Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization. Bultmann concluded that much of the New Testament is myth. By "myth" he meant an attempt by human beings to give expression to the otherworldly in terms of symbolism drawn from the this-worldly. These conceptions are not to be thought of as a literal expression of the nature of reality. And they are not to be regarded as somehow specially revealed by God, nor is their presentation in the writings of the apostles and prophets to be regarded as being somehow divinely inspired. They are simply culturally conditioned conceptions of the nature of reality. In many cases, we can identify the sources from which they were taken: Hellenism, Judaism, Gnosticism. Bultmann insisted that these conceptions must be "demythologized." He did not mean that they are to be eliminated, but rather that they are to be reinterpreted. Myth is used by the Scripture writers to give expression to what had happened to them existentially. Consider as an example the story of Jesus' walking on the water (Matt. 14:22-33). Taken literally, it purports to tell us of an actual event, a miraculous occurrence. But when demythologized, it is seen to tell us something of what had happened to the disciples. Whatever *actually* happened is of little concern. The point is that Jesus had made a profound impact upon the Twelve. Whatever he was, he was incredibly impressive. The way they sought to give expression to the fact that Jesus had made an impression on them unequaled by anyone they had ever known was to tell this and other "miracle" stories about him. Jesus was the sort of person of whom one would have to say: "If anyone could walk on water, it would be Jesus!"<sup>36</sup>

A second influence contributing to the contention that the incarnation is mythological is the rise of a more generalized view of God's relationship to the world. Traditionally, orthodox theology saw God's contact with and involvement in the world as related especially to the person of Jesus during a thirty-year period in Palestine. By contrast, movements such as the short-lived Death of God theology posited an ongoing process through which the primordial God has become fully immanent within the world. This has taken place in steps or stages, with the most complete step occurring in Christ. From that point onward, the process has been one of diffusion outward from Christ into the rest of the human race, as his teachings and practices come to be adopted. The primordial God has ceased to exist; he is now totally immanent within the human race.<sup>37</sup>

36. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Study of the Synoptic Gospels," in Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsin, *Form Criticism Two Essays on New Testament Research* (New York: Harper, 1941), pp. 62-76; Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 34-44.

37. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), pp. 102-12.

This particular conception shows a great deal of similarity to the thought of Georg Hegel. For Hegel, the event of Christ is not of singular significance in itself. It is merely a symbol of the greater abstract truth of God's going forth into the world. It represents or symbolizes something of a more philosophical nature.<sup>38</sup>

There are many variations within the Christologies which view the incarnation as mythological. In spite of the variety and diversity, there are several points of agreement:

1. The idea that God literally became man is quite incredible and logically contradictory.<sup>39</sup>

2. The Christology of the New Testament represents the faith of the disciples rather than Jesus' teachings. The disciples sought to give expression to the profound impression which Jesus had made on them. In so doing, they utilized titles and conceptions which were common in that day, for example, the idea of God's coming to earth. These titles and ideas were not used by Jesus of himself. His message was about the kingdom of God, not about himself. The disciples were attempting to express that they had found in Jesus a man who lived a model life of trust and faith in God. They were also giving expression to their sense that God is involved with the world, with its pain and tragedy. The theological conceptions found in the Gospels, and especially the fourth Gospel, represent their meditations upon the person of Christ, not teachings which he gave. The message of Jesus and the original, earliest faith of the disciples were in no way ontological. In particular, there was no idea of a metaphysical Son of God. If there was any sort of similar idea at all, it was that God had adopted Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

3. The type of Christology which has become the traditional view of the church stems not from the New Testament, but from the church's theologizing, particularly in the fourth and fifth centuries. In so doing, the church utilized then current philosophical conceptions. As a result, the doctrines formulated resembled the philosophical dogmas of the time. The doctrines, based as they were upon a philosophy which was contrary to the biblical perspective, prevented the church from correctly understanding the New Testament witness to Christ. Furthermore, many of these formulations (e.g., that Jesus had two natures but was one person) are themselves internally self-contradictory and actually lacking in content. They are vacuous formulae. The church never really spelled

38. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: Nisbet, 1937), pp. 104-05.

39. Maurice Wiles, "Christianity Without Incarnation?" in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), pp. 3-6.

40. Ibid., pp. 15-23.

out what was meant by these expressions; whenever someone attempted to do so, the effort was pronounced heretical.<sup>41</sup>

4. The idea of Jesus as the incarnate one is not as unique as has usually been supposed. For example, Gautama Buddha also represents the coming of God to man, evidencing God's desire to be involved with his creation, and the essential unity of God and humanity? Jesus is, then, not the only expression of this religious truth. To think that Jesus is the only way, and that only those who believe what the church teaches about him will be saved, is at best parochial and at worst abhorrent. It is to say that the vast majority of all those who have lived have not been saved, indeed, had no opportunity to be saved. Rather, we must realize that the basic affirmation of Christianity—that God loves the world and desires to be reconciled to it—is also believed and expressed in differing forms in other religions. God is present in other religions as well, but there the name of his presence is not Jesus. "Jesus" is the distinctively Christian term for the presence of God.<sup>43</sup>

5. Incarnation may be understood in a narrow and a broad sense. In the narrow sense, it is the belief that at one point in time and space God entered the world, in the person of Jesus Christ, as he had never done before and has never done since. In the broad sense, incarnation signifies God's immanence in the world. Thus, the means by which man is to approach God lies in the physical world, not in escape from it. The physical world is a carrier of spiritual value. This broad sense is not unique to Christianity. It is also found in Judaism. It relates not only to Christology, but also to the doctrines of creation and providence. It means that God is in the world and is at work there.

These two senses, God's immanence in the world and the absolute uniqueness of the God-man Jesus Christ, are not inseparable. While the latter meaning of incarnation has been used by the church during much of its history to communicate the former, the former can be maintained without the latter. This is parallel to the church's ability to maintain the Eucharist without belief in transubstantiation, and to maintain the authority of the Bible without belief in inerrancy.

It is necessary to outline a reply to the contention that the incarnation is mythical. The following three chapters will clarify and elaborate the real meaning of the incarnation. Nonetheless, some suggestions need to be offered at this point.

#### 1. The idea of the incarnation of God is not inherently contradictory.

41. Frances Young, "A Cloud of Witnesses," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, pp. 27-28.

42. John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, pp. 168-70.

43. Ibid., pp. 180-84.

Brian Hebblethwaite has argued that the belief that the incarnation involves a contradiction stems from taking the incarnation too anthropomorphically. To be sure, there is a paradox here, a concept which is very difficult to assimilate intellectually.<sup>44</sup> The function of a paradox, as Ian Ramsey has shown, is to force our minds beyond the natural to the supernatural.<sup>45</sup> In this case, we are not predicating divinity of Jesus' humanity, or suggesting that God became an entirely different kind of God, or that one person was both limited and unlimited at the same time and in the same respect. Rather, we are simply claiming that God voluntarily assumed certain limitations upon the exercise of his infinity. He had similarly limited his options when he created humans.

2. There is historical evidence that the Christology of the New Testament goes back to Jesus himself rather than merely to the faith of the disciples. A number of considerations are involved here. For one thing, the theory that the disciples might have borrowed from similar myths the idea of a god's becoming incarnate is doubtful. That they had access to such myths has been shown to be highly questionable at best.<sup>46</sup> Further, the pre-Pauline Hellenistic congregations which are alleged to have fused Hellenistic ideas with the story of Christ are now known not to have existed.<sup>47</sup> Finally, there is indication that a 'high' Christology is present in the earliest of the New Testament writings.<sup>48</sup>

3. The suggestion that the incarnation of God in Jesus is paralleled in the teachings of other religions cannot be sustained. The doctrine of the incarnation is radically different from the doctrine of divine immanence. Further, it is inconceivable that, God being one, more than one person could be God incarnate.<sup>49</sup> When the full biblical meaning of the doctrine of the incarnation is understood, the incarnation of God in Jesus simply cannot be compared with, for example, Buddhism's view of Buddha.

The doctrine of the incarnation requires much fuller development. We will continue in that investigation, assured that the task we are undertaking is not an impossible one.

44. Brian Hebblethwaite, "Incarnation-The Essence of Christianity?" *Theology* 80 (March 1977): 85-91.

45. Ian Ramsey, "Paradox in Religion," in *Christian Empiricism*, ed. Jerry H. Gill (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 107.

46. Neill, "Jesus and Myth," p. 61.

47. Ibid.

48. Charles Mottle, "Three Points of Conflict in the Christological Debate," in *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, ed. Michael Goulder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 137.

49. Brian Hebblethwaite, "The Uniqueness of the Incarnation," in *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, pp. 189-91.

## The Deity of Christ

The Biblical Teaching

Jesus' Self-Consciousness

The Gospel of John

Hebrews

Paul

The Term "Lord"

The Evidence of the Resurrection

Historical Departures from Belief in the Full Deity of Christ

Ebionism

Arianism

Functional Christology

Implications of the Deity of Christ

**O**ne of the most controversial topics of Christian theology is the deity of Christ. It is at the same time one of the most crucial. It lies at the heart of our faith. For our faith rests on Jesus' actually being God in human flesh, and not simply an extraordinary human, albeit the most unusual person who ever lived.

### The Biblical Teaching

We begin our inquiry at the point where all of our doctrinal construction must begin: the witness of Scripture. Here we find a wide variety of material and emphases, but not a divergence of opinion. While it is not possible to investigate every reference which bears on this consideration, we may at least sample the data.

#### Jesus' Self-Consciousness

In looking at the biblical evidence for the deity of Christ, we begin with Jesus' own self-consciousness. What did Jesus think and believe about himself? There have been those who argue that Jesus did not himself make any claim to be God. This was not part of the message which he preached. His message was entirely about the Father, not about himself. We are therefore called to believe *with* Jesus, not *in* Jesus.<sup>1</sup> How do the actual evidences of Scripture square with this contention?

We should note that Jesus did not make an explicit and overt claim to deity. He did not say in so many words, "I am God." What we do find, however, are claims which would be inappropriate if made by someone who is less than God. For example, Jesus said that he would send 'his angels' (Matt. 13:41); elsewhere they are spoken of as "the angels of God" (Luke 12:8-9; 15: 10). That reference is particularly significant, for not only the angels but also the kingdom is spoken of as his: "The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and evildoers." This kingdom is repeatedly referred to as the kingdom of God, even in Matthew's Gospel, where one would expect to find "kingdom of heaven" instead.

More significant yet are the prerogatives which Jesus claimed. In particular, his claim to forgive sins resulted in a charge of blasphemy against him. When the paralytic was lowered through the roof by his four friends, Jesus did not respond with a comment about the man's physical condition or his need of healing. Rather, his initial comment was, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). The reaction of the scribes indicates the meaning they attached to his words: "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 7). Robert Stein notes that their reaction shows that they interpreted Jesus' comment "as the exercising of a divine prerogative, the power to actually forgive sins."<sup>2</sup> Here was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to

1. Adolf von Harnack, **What Is Christianity?** (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 144.

2. Robert H. Stein, **The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching** (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), p. 114.

clarify the situation, to correct the scribes if they had indeed misunderstood the import of his words. This he did not do, however. His response is highly instructive: "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins'-he said to the paralytic-'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home'" (w. 8-9).

Jesus claimed other prerogatives as well. In Matthew 25:31-46 he speaks of judging the world. He will sit on his glorious throne and divide the sheep from the goats. The power of judging the spiritual condition and assigning the eternal destiny of all people belongs to him. Certainly this is a power which only God can exercise.

Jesus made other direct claims. We note, in examining the Gospels, that the claims become more explicit in the latter stages of Jesus' ministry. In the beginning he allowed the people to draw inferences about him from the power of his moral teaching and his miracles. Thus this segment of Jesus' ministry lends some support to the theories of Adolf von Harnack and others. In the later portions, however, the focus is much more upon himself. We might, for example, contrast the Sermon on the Mount with the discourse in the upper room. In the former, the message is centered upon the Father and the kingdom. In the latter, Jesus himself is much more the center of attention. Thus the contention that Jesus directed our faith to the Father, but not to himself, is difficult to sustain.

The authority which Jesus claimed and exercised is also clearly seen with respect to the Sabbath. The sacredness of the Sabbath had been established by God (Exod. 20:8-11). Only God could abrogate or modify this regulation. Yet consider what happened when Jesus' disciples picked heads of grain on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees objected that the Sabbath regulations (at least their version of them) were being violated. Jesus responded by pointing out that David had violated one of the laws by eating of the bread reserved for the priests. Then, turning directly to the situation at hand, Jesus asserted: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). He was clearly claiming the right to redefine the status of the Sabbath, a right which belongs only to someone virtually equal to God.

We see Jesus also claiming an unusual relationship with the Father, particularly in the sayings reported in John. For example, Jesus claims to be one with the Father (John 10:30), and that to see and know him is to see and know the Father (John 14:7-9). There is a claim to preexistence in his statement in John 8:58, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." Note that rather than saying, "I was," he says, "I am." Leon Morris suggests that there is an implied contrast here between "a mode

of being which has a definite beginning" and "one which is eternal"<sup>3</sup> It is also quite possible that Jesus is alluding to the "I AM" formula by which the Lord identified himself in Exodus 3: 14-15. For in this case, as in Exodus, the "I am" is a formula denoting existence. The verb is not copulative (as in, e.g., "I am the good shepherd"; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"). Another allusion to preexistence is found in John 3:13, where Jesus asserts, "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man." There is also a claim to simultaneous and coterminous working with the Father: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). While some of the statements which Jesus made may seem rather vague to us, there is no doubt as to how they were interpreted by his opponents. After his statement claiming that he existed before Abraham, the immediate reaction of the Jews was to take up stones to throw at him (John 8:59). Certainly this is an indication that they thought him guilty of blasphemy, for stoning was the prescription for blasphemy (Lev. 24: 16). If they attempted to stone him merely because they were angered by his unfavorable references to them, they would, in the eyes of the law, have been guilty of attempted murder.

In some respects, the clearest indication of Jesus' self-understanding is found in connection with his trial and condemnation. The charge, according to Johns account, was that "he has made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). Matthew reports the high priest to have said at the trial, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). Jesus replied, "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." This is as clear a declaration of his deity as one can find in the Gospels. Some have argued that Jesus was speaking satirically, and saying in effect, "You said that, not I." It is true that the personal pronoun is used here to supplement the second-person singular of the verb, suggesting that the emphasis of the sentence falls on the subject- "You said that!" However, two additional observations need to be made: (1) Jesus went on to speak of his power and second coming, thus confirming rather than contradicting the charge; (2) Jesus had an ideal opportunity here to correct any misconception which may have been involved. This he did not do. He could have avoided execution simply by denying that he was the Son of God, but he did not do that. Either he desired to die, albeit on a false charge, or he did not respond because the charge brought against him was correct. The Jews' reaction

3. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Tent with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 473.

is instructive. When the high priest said, "He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" they replied, "He deserves death" (Matt. 26:5-66). The crime was that Jesus claimed what only God has the right to claim. Here we have Jesus in effect asserting, through acquiescence, his equality with the Father.

Not only did Jesus not dispute the charge that he claimed to be God, but he also accepted the attribution of deity to him by his disciples. The clearest case of this is his response to Thomas's statement, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Here was an excellent opportunity to correct a misconception, if that is what it was, but Jesus did not do so.

There are additional indications of Jesus' self-estimation. One is the way in which he juxtaposes his own words with the Old Testament, the Scripture of his time. Time and again he says, "You have heard that it was said, . . . but I say to you . . ." (e.g., Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28). Here Jesus presumes to place his word on the same level as Old Testament Scripture. It might be argued that this was merely a claim to be a prophet of the same stature as the Old Testament prophets. It is notable, however, that they based their claim to authority upon what God had said or was saying to and through them. Thus, one finds the characteristic formula, "The word of the **Lord** came to me, saying . . ." (e.g., Jer. 1:11; Ezek. 1:3). Jesus, however, does not cite any such formula in setting forth his teaching. He simply says, "I say to you. . ." Jesus is claiming to have the power in himself to lay down teaching as authoritative as that given by the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus also by implication, direct statement, and deed indicates that he has power over life and death. Hannah in her song of praise credits God with having the power to kill and to make alive (1 Sam. 2:6). In Psalm 119, the psalmist acknowledges about a dozen times that it is Jehovah who gives and preserves life. In John 5:21 Jesus claims this power for himself: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will." Perhaps the most emphatic statement is found in his words to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

Jesus specifically applied to himself expressions which conveyed his self-understanding. One of these is "Son of God." Form critics find this title in all the Gospel strata-undeniable proof that Jesus used it of himself. While the title is capable of various different meanings, Jesus "poured into it a new content to describe His own unique person and relationship to God."<sup>4</sup> It signified that Jesus had a relationship to the

4. George E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 177.

Father distinct from that of any other human. That Jesus was thereby claiming a unique sonship differing “not merely quantitatively but qualitatively, not merely in degree but in kind,”<sup>5</sup> was understood by the Jews. We read in John 5:2–18, for example, that they reacted with great hostility when, in defense of his having healed on the Sabbath, Jesus linked his work with that of the Father. As John explains, “This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God” (v. 18). From all of the foregoing, it seems difficult, except on the basis of a certain type of critical presupposition, to escape the conclusion that Jesus understood himself as equal with the Father, and as possessing the right to do things which only God has the right to do.

#### The Gospel of John

When we examine the whole of the New Testament, we find that what its writers say about Jesus is thoroughly consistent with his own self-understanding and claims about himself. The Gospel of John is, of course, noted for its references to the deity of Jesus. The prologue is particularly expressive of this idea. John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” What John actually says is, “Divine [or God] was the Word” (*θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος*). By placing *θεὸς* first, in contrast to the word order of the preceding clause, he makes the term particularly forceful.<sup>6</sup> He has both identified the Word as divine and distinguished the Word from God. It is not a simple monotheism or a modalistic monarchianism that he is describing here. The remainder of the Gospel supports and amplifies the thrust of the prologue.

#### Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews is also most emphatic regarding Jesus’ divinity. In the opening chapter the author speaks of the Son as the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of his nature (*χαρακτήρ*

5. Stein, *Method and Message*, p. 132.

6. There has been considerable discussion of the significance of the anarthrous construction. Whereas the anarthrous construction ordinarily indicates “quality of,” it is often used to distinguish the predicate from the subject in cases where the order is inverted. Note, however, that in the statements “the Word was the God” and “the God was the Word,” the subject and the predicate are coextensive. There would therefore have been no point, if the order was inverted, in omitting the definite article unless the author was expressing quality rather than identity. This is underscored by the companion clause, “The Word was with God.”

*τῆς νόοστάσεως αὐτοῦ*, Heb. 1:3). This Son, through whom God created the world (v. 2), also upholds (or carries) all things by his word of power (v. 3). In verse 8, which is a quotation of Psalm 45:6, the Son is addressed as “God.” The argument here is that the Son is superior to angels (1:4–2:9), Moses (3:1–6), and the high priests (4: 14–5: 10). He is superior for he is not merely a human or an angel, but something higher, namely, God.

#### Paul

Paul frequently witnesses to a belief in the deity of Jesus. In Colossians 1:15–20 Paul writes that the Son is the image (*εἰκών*) of the invisible God (v. 15); he is the one in whom and through whom and for whom all things hold together (v. 17). In verse 19 Paul brings this line of argument to a conclusion: “For in him all the fulness [*πλήρωμα*] of God was pleased to dwell.” In Colossians 2:9 he states a very similar idea: “For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily.”

Paul also confirms some of the claims which Jesus had earlier made. Judgment is in the Old Testament ascribed to God. In Genesis 18:25 Abraham refers to God as “the Judge of all the earth.” In Joel 3: 12 Jehovah proclaims, “For there I will sit to judge all the nations round about.” We have already observed that Jesus claimed that he will himself judge the nations (Matt. 25:31–46). Paul confirms this claim. Although he on occasion refers to the judgment of God (e.g., Rom. 2:3), he also speaks of “Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim. 4:1) and of the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

One Pauline passage which addresses the status of Jesus has become a subject of considerable controversy. On the surface Philippians 2:5–11 is a clear assertion of the deity of Christ Jesus, since it speaks of him as being or existing in the “form” (*μορφή*) of God. In biblical and classical Greek this term refers to “the whole set of characteristics which makes something what it is.”<sup>7</sup> In recent scholarship, however, this view of the passage has been questioned. Much of the modern interpretation of Philippians 2:5–11 goes back to Ernst Lohmeyer, who proposed that what we have here is actually a quotation of a liturgical hymn—the passage can be divided into two strophes, each consisting of three stanzas of three lines.<sup>8</sup> Further, according to Lohmeyer, the hymn is not Hellenistic but Aramaic in origin, that is, it can be traced back to the early Hebrew Christians. As proof he points out four parallels with the Old Testament:

7. See our earlier discussion of this passage (p. 325).

8. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5–11*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1961).

1. "In the form of God" (v. 6)-"in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26).
2. "Emptied himself" (v. 7)-"poured out his soul" (Isa. 53: 12).
3. The image of Jesus as a servant-Lsaiah 53.
4. "In the likeness of men" (v. 7)-"one like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13).

The major point for our purposes is that "in the form of God" has come to be equated with an Old Testament reference to the image and likeness of God. That the Septuagint sometimes uses *μορφή* in the sense of *εἰκών* is presented as evidence that the "form of God" is to be understood as the image of God which is found in all men. Accordingly, some scholars hypothesize that the early Christian hymn which Paul borrowed did not depict Jesus as preexistent God, but merely as a second Adam. They interpret "[he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" in light of Adam's attempt to become like God. Unlike Adam, Jesus did not attempt to seize equality with God.

There are numerous problems with Lohmeyer's interpretation:

1. There is no agreement as to the specific division of the passage into stanzas.
2. Even if the passage does represent a hymn, interpretation cannot be governed by form.
3. The origin of a portion of material is not the sole factor explaining its meaning. To proceed as if it were is to commit a genetic fallacy.
4. Interpreting *μορφή* as an equivalent of *εἰκών* is tenuous at best. Based on a few rare occurrences of *μορφή* in the Septuagint, this argument ignores the fundamental classical sense of the word—the substance, the genuine meaning of a thing.

We conclude, then, that Philippians 2:6 does indeed teach an ontological preexistence of the Son. And the whole passage, as Reginald Fuller maintains, presents a "threefold christological pattern": Jesus, being God, emptied himself, became man, and then was again exalted to the status of deity or of equality with the Father.<sup>9</sup>

#### *The Term "Lord"*

There is a more general type of argument for the deity of Christ. The New Testament writers ascribe the term *κύριος* ("Lord") to Jesus, particularly in his risen and ascended state. While the term can most certainly

9. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner, 1965). p. 232.

be used without any high christological connotations, there are several considerations which argue that the term signifies divinity when it is applied to Jesus. First, in the Septuagint *κύριος* is the usual translation of the name יְהוָה (*Yehovah*) and of the reverential אֲדֹנִי (*'Adonai*) which was ordinarily substituted for it. Further, several New Testament references to Jesus as "Lord" are quotations of Old Testament texts employing one of the Hebrew names for God (e.g., Acts 2:20-21 and Rom. 10:13 [cf. Joel 2:31-32]; 1 Peter 3: 15 [cf. Isa. 8: 13]). These references make it clear that the apostles meant to give Jesus the title *Lord* in its highest sense. Finally, *κύριος* is used in the New Testament to designate both God the Father, the sovereign God (e.g., Matt. 1:20; 9:38; 11:25; Acts 17:24; Rev. 4:11), and Jesus (e.g., Luke 2:11; John 20:28; Acts 10:36; 1 Cor. 2:8; Phil. 2:11; James 2:1; Rev. 19:16). William Childs Robinson comments that when Jesus "is addressed as the exalted Lord, he is so identified with God that there is ambiguity in some passages as to whether the Father or the Son is meant (e.g., Acts 1:24; 2:47; 8:39; 9:31; 11:21; 13:10-12; 16:14; 20:19; 21:14; cf. 18:26; Rom. 14:11)."<sup>10</sup> For the Jews particularly, the term *κύριος* suggested that Christ was equal with the Father.

#### *The Evidence of the Resurrection*

To some, the approach we have been taking in our effort to demonstrate Jesus' deity may appear to be uncritical in nature, to use the Bible without taking into consideration the findings of the more radical methods of biblical investigation. There is, however, another way to establish Jesus' deity, a way which will not enmesh us in contesting critical issues point for point. We noted in chapter 31 the methodology known as "Christology from below." We now turn once again to the Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, especially as it is developed in his book *Jesus—God and Man*. Some contemporary theologians have sought to develop a Christology resting upon Jesus' preresurrection conceptions of himself; among them are Werner Elert, Paul Althaus, Ernst Käsemann, and Gunther Bornkamm.<sup>11</sup> This is not the course which Pannenberg chooses to take, however. His Christology rests very heavily upon the resurrection of Jesus.

Pannenberg sees a strongly eschatological dimension in Jesus' ministry. Together with Bornkamm, Rudolf Bultmann, Heinz Eduard Tödt, and others, he maintains that the oldest stratum of the New Testament

10. William Childs Robinson, "Lord," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), pp. 328-29.

11. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), pp. 53-58.

sayings about the Son of man, who will come on the clouds of heaven to judge men, is from Jesus himself; they are not a formulation of the early Christian community.<sup>12</sup> The whole of Jesus' ministry had a proleptic character. Like the prophetic utterances of the apocalyptic background, his claims required future confirmation. Thus, he did not respond to the demands of the Pharisees for an immediate "sign from heaven." And although, in reply to John the Baptist's disciples, Jesus did point out that the saving deeds of the end time were happening in his ministry, establishing his identity, the real verification still lay in the future.

Pannenberg's argument can be understood only in light of his view of revelation and of history. To Pannenberg, the whole of history is revelatory. Thus, revelation can be said to have fully taken place only when history has run its course, because it is only then that we can see where it has been going. One would therefore expect that history has no revelatory value for us now, since we have only incomplete parts, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The resurrection, however, because it is the end of history, having taken place proleptically, does give us revelation, even within time.<sup>13</sup>

Pannenberg holds that the resurrection must be understood from the viewpoint of the historical traditions of which it is a part. Whereas it has become commonplace to regard an event as a constant and its interpretation as a variable changing with time, he unites the two. The meaning of an event is the meaning attached to it by the persons into whose history it comes. Pannenberg points out what the fact of Jesus' resurrection would have meant to his Jewish contemporaries:<sup>14</sup>

1. To a Jew of the time Jesus' resurrection would have meant that the end of the world had begun. Paul expected that the resurrection of all men, and particularly of believers, would quickly follow that of Jesus. Therefore he spoke of Jesus as the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20) and the "first-born from the dead" (Col. 1:18).<sup>15</sup>

2. The resurrection would have been evidence that God himself confirmed Jesus' pre-Easter activity. To the Jews, Jesus' claim to authority, putting himself in God's place, was blasphemous. If he was raised from the dead, however, it must have been the God of Israel, the God who had presumably been blasphemed, who raised him. Hence, contemporary

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

13. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," in *Revelation us History*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 134.

14. Pannenberg actually has six steps in his presentation, but we have here simplified somewhat the case which he makes.

15. Pannenberg, *Jesus*, p. 67.

Jews would have regarded the resurrection as God's confirmation that Jesus really was what he claimed to be.<sup>16</sup>

3. The resurrection would have established that the Son of man is none other than the man Jesus. Before Easter, Jesus was understood to be a man who walked visibly upon the earth; the Son of man was a heavenly being who would come in the future on the clouds of heaven. After Easter, however, the two were regarded as identical.<sup>17</sup>

4. The resurrection would have meant that God has been ultimately revealed in Jesus. Only at the end of time can God be fully revealed in his divinity. The end of the world is already present in Jesus' resurrection; therefore God is revealed in him. In Jesus, God has already appeared on earth. While this concept lacks the precision found in later orthodox Christology, "Jesus' divinity is already implied in some way in the conception of God's appearance in him."<sup>18</sup>

Having seen that, to Jews of Jesus' time, his resurrection would have signified divinity, we must ask about the evidence for it. Pannenberg points to the emergence of Christianity, which Paul traced back to the appearances of the resurrected Christ. If the emergence of Christianity can be understood "only if one examines it in the light of the eschatological hope for a resurrection from the dead, then that which is so designated is a historical event, even if we do not know anything more particular about it."<sup>19</sup>

Pannenberg agrees with Paul Althaus that the proclamation of the resurrection in Jerusalem so soon after Jesus' death is very significant. Within the earliest Christian community there must have been a reliable testimony to the empty tomb. Pannenberg also observes that in the Jewish polemic against the Christian message of Jesus' resurrection there is no claim at all that Jesus' grave was not empty.<sup>20</sup>

In Pannenberg's judgment, the evidence of 1 Corinthians 15 is really more significant than that of the Gospels. He concedes that some legendary elements may have filtered into the Gospel accounts. An example is Jesus' eating fish after his resurrection. Yet, for the most part we have adequate evidence to establish the historicity of the resurrection, which is proof in itself of Jesus' deity.<sup>21</sup>

#### Historical Departures from Belief in the Full Deity of Christ

As the church struggled to understand who and what Jesus is, and particularly how he is related to the Father, some heretical views arose.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-01.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

*Ebionism*

One group, known as the Ebionites, solved the tension by denying the real or ontological deity of Jesus. The name *Ebionite*, which is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “poor,” was originally applied to all Christians. Later, it was more narrowly applied only to Jewish Christians, and then to a particular group or sect of heretical Jewish Christians.

The roots of Ebionism can be traced to *Judaizing* movements within the apostolic or New Testament period. Paul’s letter to the Galatians was written to counter the activity of one such group. Judaizers had come to the Galatian Christians and attempted to undermine Paul’s apostolic authority. They taught that in addition to accepting by faith the grace of God in Jesus, it was necessary to observe all the regulations of Jewish law, for example, circumcision. The Ebionites were a continuation of or offshoot from the Judaizers. Being strongly monotheistic, they focused their attention upon the problematic deity of Christ. They rejected the virgin birth, maintaining that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary in normal fashion.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus was, according to the Ebionites, an ordinary man possessed of unusual but not superhuman or supernatural gifts of righteousness and wisdom. He was the predestined Messiah, although in a rather natural or human sense. The baptism was the significant event in Jesus’ life, for it was then that the Christ descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. This was understood more as the presence of God’s power and influence within the man Jesus than as a personal, metaphysical reality. In this respect, the Ebionites anticipated dynamic monarchianism with its teaching that God was in Jesus influentially. Near the end of Jesus’ life, the Christ withdrew from him. Thus Jesus was primarily a man, albeit a man in whom, at least for a time, the power of God was present and active to an unusual degree. The Ebionites maintained their position partly through a denial or rejection of the authority of Paul’s letters.<sup>23</sup>

The Ebionite view of Jesus had the virtue of resolving the tension between belief in the deity of Jesus and the monotheistic view of God. This reduction of the tension came with a high price tag, however. Ebionism had to ignore or deny a large body of scriptural material: all of the references to the preexistence, the virgin birth, and the qualitatively unique status and function of Jesus. In the view of the church, this was far too great a concession.

22. Justin Martyr Dialogue with *Trypho* 47.

23. Origen Against *Celsus* 1.65. For a discussion of the varied types of Ebionite views, see J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 63–68.

*Arianism*

A much more thoroughly developed and subtle view sprang up in the fourth century around the teaching of an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius. It became the first major threat to the views implicitly held by the church regarding Jesus’ deity. Because Arianism arose in a period of serious theological reflection and because it represented a much more thorough and systematic construction than Ebionism, this movement had a real chance of becoming the official view. Although it was condemned by the church at the Council of Nicea in 325 and at subsequent councils, it lingers on to our day in various forms. One large and aggressive variety of Arianism in popular form is the movement known as Jehovah’s Witnesses.

A central conception in the Arian understanding of Jesus is the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God.<sup>24</sup> God is the one source of all things, the only uncreated existent in the whole universe. He alone possesses the attributes of deity. They cannot be predicated of any other being. Further, he cannot share his being or essence with anyone else. It simply cannot be communicated. Were he able to impart something of his essence to any other being, he would be divisible and subject to change; that is, he would not be God. If any other being participated in the divine nature, it would be necessary to speak of a duality or multiplicity of divine beings. But this would contradict the one absolute certainty of monotheism, the uniqueness and oneness of God. Nothing else that exists, then, can have originated as some sort of emanation from the essence or substance of God. Everything other than God has, rather, come into being through an act of creation by which he called it into existence out of nothing. Only God (by which Arius meant the Father) is uncreated and eternal. All other existents are created beings.

The Father, however, while creating everything that is, did not directly create the earth. It could not bear his direct contact. Rather, the Father worked through the Word, the agent of his creation of and continuing work in the world. The Word is also a created being, although the first and highest of the beings. He is not an emanation from the Father, but a fiat creation out of nothing. The word *γεννάω* (“beget”), when used in reference to the Father’s relationship to the Word, is to be understood as a *figure of speech* for *ποιέω* (“make”). While the Word is a perfect

24. Athanasius On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia 16.

creature, not really in the same class with the other creatures, he is not self-existent.

From this followed two other conceptions regarding the Word. First, the Word must have had a beginning. He must have been created at some finite point. The slogan of Arianism therefore became, "There was a time when he was not." (Yet the Word may well have been created before the existence of time, since he was the means of the creation of time along with everything else created.) It seemed to the Arians that if the Word were coeternal with the Father, there would be two self-existent principles. This would be irreconcilable with monotheism, which was the one absolute tenet of their theology.

Second, the Son has no communion with or even direct knowledge of the Father. Although he is God's Word and Wisdom, he is not of the very essence of God; being a creature, he bears these titles only because he participates in the word and wisdom of the Father. Totally different in essence from the Father, the Son is liable to change and even sin. When pressed as to how they could then refer to the Word as God or the Son of God, the Arians indicated that these designations were merely a matter of courtesy.

The Arians did not formulate their view upon an a priori philosophical or theological principle. Rather, they based it upon a rather extensive collection of biblical references?

1. Texts which suggest that the Son is a creature. Among these are Proverbs 8:22 (in the Septuagint); Acts 2:36 ("God has made him both Lord and Christ"); Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15 ("the first-born of all creation"); and Hebrews 3:2.
2. Texts in which the Father is represented as the only true God. Most significant is Jesus' prayer in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."
3. Texts which seem to imply that Christ is inferior to the Father. The most notable of these is John 14:28, where Jesus says, "The Father is greater than I." The fact that this verse and the one cited in the preceding point are from the Book of John, the most theological of the Gospels, and the Gospel containing the most frequently cited proof-texts for the deity of Christ, makes the argument the more impressive.
4. Texts which attribute to the Son such imperfections as weakness, ignorance, and suffering. One of the foremost is Mark 13:32: "But

25. Athanasius *Four Discourses Against the Arians*

of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

The result of all this was that the Word was given the status of a demigod. He was seen as the highest of all the creatures, greatly transcending all others. Yet, in relation to the Father, he was merely a creature. He was an intermediate being between God the Father and the rest of the creation, the agent by whom the Father had created them and continued to relate to them, but not God in the full sense. He might be called God as a courtesy, but he is at most a god, a created god, not the God, the eternal, uncreated being. Somewhat less extreme were the semi-Arians, who stressed the similarity rather than the dissimilarity between the Word and the Father. They were willing to say that the Word is similar in nature (or essence) to the Father (*όμοιός*), but not that he is of the same essence as the Father (*όμούσιος*).

There are two major responses to Arian theology. One is to note that the types of evidence appealed to earlier in this chapter, in substantiating the deity of Christ, are either ignored or inadequately treated by the Arians. The other is to take a closer look at the passages that have been appealed to in support of the Arian view. In general, it must be said that the Arians have misconstrued various biblical statements referring to the Son's subordination during his incarnation. Descriptions of his temporary functional subordination to the Father have been misinterpreted as statements about the essence of the Son.

It will be seen upon closer examination that the passages which seem to speak of Jesus as made or created teach no such thing. For example, the references to Jesus as the "first-born" of creation are assumed by the Arians to have a temporal significance. In actuality, however, the expression "first-born" does not primarily mean first' in time, but first in rank or preeminent. This is indicated, for example, by the context of Colossians 1: 15, for the following verse notes that Jesus was the means of origination of all created beings. Paul certainly would have qualified this statement (e.g., by writing "all other things" instead of "all things" were created in him) if the Son was one of them. Further, Acts 2:36 does not say anything about creation of the Son. It says that God made him to be Lord and Christ, references to his office and function. This verse asserts that Jesus has fulfilled his messianic task, not that he was created by the Father's conferring of a particular essence upon him.

John 17:3 must also be seen in context. We must evaluate it in the light of the numerous other references in this Gospel to the deity of Christ. In speaking of the Father as the only genuine (*ἀληθινός*) God, Jesus is contrasting the Father, not with the Son, but with the other claimants to deity, the false gods. Indeed Jesus links himself very closely with the

Father here. Eternal life is not only knowing the Father, but also knowing the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ.

John 14:28, the passage in which Jesus says that the Father is greater than he is, must be seen in the light of the Son's functional subordination during the incarnation. In his earthly ministry Jesus was dependent upon the Father, particularly for the exercise of his divine attributes. But when he states that he and the Father are one (John 10:30) and prays that his followers may be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:21), he is expressing a great closeness, if not an interchangeability, between the two. Further, the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19) and the Pauline benediction of 2 Corinthians 13: 14 indicate a finking of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in equality; none of the members of the Trinity is superior or inferior to the others.

Finally, the passages referring to weakness, ignorance, and suffering must be seen as statements confirming the genuineness of the incarnation. Jesus was fully human. This does not mean that he ceased to be God, but that he took upon himself the limitations of humanity. During the earthly stay of his first coming he genuinely did not know the time of his second coming. This does not mean that he was not God, but that his deity was exercised and experienced only in concert with his humanity. While the problem of the relationship of his two natures will be closely examined in chapter 34, it needs to be observed at this point that a temporary limitation, not a permanent finitude, was involved. For a short period of time Jesus did not have absolute knowledge and physical ability. Thus, while on earth it was possible for him to develop physically and grow intellectually.

The church, forced to evaluate the Arian view, came to its conclusion at the Council of Nicea in 325. On the basis of considerations such as those we have just cited, it concluded that Jesus is as much and as genuinely God as is the Father. He is not of a different substance or even of a similar substance; he is of the very same substance as the Father. Having decided on this formulation, the council condemned Arianism, a condemnation repeated by later councils.

### Functional Christology

Not all modifications of the doctrine of the full deity of Jesus are found in the first centuries of the history of the church. One of the interesting christological developments of the twentieth century has been the rise of "functional Christology." By this is meant an emphasis upon what Jesus did rather than upon what he is. Basically, functional Christology claims to work on the basis of purely New Testament grounds rather than the

more metaphysical or speculative categories of a later period of reflection, which are viewed as rooted in Greek thought.

One clear example of functional Christology is Oscar Cullmann's *Christology of the New Testament*. He points out that the christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries were concerned with the person or nature of Christ.<sup>26</sup> These concerns centered on two issues: first, the relationship between the nature of Jesus and that of God; second, the relationship between Jesus' divine and human natures. These, however, are not the issues with which the New Testament is concerned. Cullmann feels it is necessary to discard these later issues from our examination of the New Testament; if we do not, we will have a false perspective on Christology from the very beginning of our examination. This is not to say, according to Cullmann, that the church did not need to deal with those issues at that later time, or that its treatment of them was improper. But we must remember that the fourth- and fifth-century church was wrestling with problems resulting from "the Hellenizing of the Christian faith, the rise of Gnostic doctrines, and the views advocated by Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches and others."<sup>27</sup> These are problems which simply did not arise in New Testament times.

Cullmann presses us to ask, "What are the orientation and the interest of the New Testament with respect to Christ?" His own response is that the New Testament hardly ever speaks of the person of Christ without at the same time speaking of his work. "When it is asked in the New Testament, 'Who is Christ?' the question never means exclusively, or even primarily, 'What is his nature?' but first of all, 'What is his function?'"<sup>\*\*8</sup>

The church fathers approached the person and work of Christ somewhat differently. They had to deal with questions raised by heretics. In the process of combating these views, which related primarily to the nature of Christ or his person, they subordinated the discussion of Jesus' work to that of his nature. Thus, the discussions of the church fathers, which took place in a Greek intellectual milieu, were given a quite different cast from the biblical setting. While granting the necessity of these efforts by the church fathers, Cullmann nonetheless warns us to be alert to the shift: "Even if this shifting of emphasis was necessary against certain heretical views, the discussion of 'natures' is none the less ultimately a Greek, not a Jewish or biblical problem."<sup>\*\*9</sup>

Cullmann's approach is to use "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*) as

26. Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), p. 3.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

29. Ibid., p. 4.

an organizing principle for his examination of the various New Testament titles for Jesus. Cullmann's Christology, then, is centered on what Jesus has done in history: "It is characteristic of New Testament Christology that Christ is connected with the total history of revelation and salvation, beginning with creation. There can be no *Heilsgeschichte* without Christology; no Christology without a *Heilsgeschichte* which unfolds in time. Christology is the doctrine of an 'event,' not the doctrine of natures."<sup>30</sup>

There are two ways in which advocates of a functional Christology interpret its role:

1. A functional Christology of the New Testament, as opposed to an ontological Christology, is the truly biblical view, but it can be used to construct a more ontological Christology, since ontological concepts are implicit within the functional.
2. It is neither necessary nor desirable to go beyond the functional approach taken by the New Testament. The New Testament Christology is normative for our Christology.

Although Cullmann does not explicitly state that he holds the second of these positions, one might draw such an inference. A similar inference can be drawn concerning those who maintain that the theology necessitated by the present milieu has a far greater affinity with the functional approach than with fourth- and fifth-century Greek metaphysics.<sup>31</sup>

Space does not permit a complete and thorough exposition and evaluation of the whole of Cullmann's or any other functional Christology. Several observations need to be made by way of response, however.

1. It is true that the biblical writers were very interested in the work of Christ and that they did not engage in sheer speculation on the nature of Jesus. However, their interest in his nature is not always subordinated to their interest in his work. Note, for example, how John in his first epistle refers to the humanity of Jesus: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God" (4:2–3a). It may, of course, be maintained that the coming of Jesus is his work, but the primary thrust in this passage is that he came "in the flesh." We should also call attention to the prologue of the Gospel of John. Cullmann counters that even here "the Word was with God, and the Word was God," is connected with "all things were made through him."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), pp. 271–72; and *The Divine-Human Encounter*, trans. Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Cullmann, *Christology*, p. 3.

But while it is one **thing to claim** this as evidence that in asking, "Who is Christ?" the New **Testament** never means exclusively, "What is his nature?" it is quite another thing to claim, as Cullmann does, that the New Testament never means this *primarily*. In the light of passages like John 1:1 and 1 John 4:2–3a, it is impossible to maintain that in the New Testament the functional always has priority over the ontological.

2. The assumption that the discussion of natures is "ultimately a Greek, not a Jewish or biblical problem," reflects the common presupposition of the biblical-theology movement that there is a marked difference between Greek and Hebrew thinking, and that the Hebrew is the biblical mentality. James Barr's monumental work *Semantics of Biblical Language* demonstrates that this and several other conceptions held by the biblical-theology movement are untenable.<sup>33</sup> Brevard Childs maintains that the loss of credibility of these conceptions constitutes the "cracking of the walls" of the biblical-theology movement.<sup>34</sup> Whether one accepts Barr's evaluation or not, it simply is not possible to ignore it and mouth uncritical statements about the Hebraic mentality.

3. Consequently, the assumption that the mentality of the Hebrews was nonontological or nontheoretical must be called into question. George Ladd considers Paul's use of *mar* in 1 Corinthians 16:22 very significant: "That Paul should use an Aramaic expression in a letter to a Greek-speaking church that knew no Aramaic proves that the use of *mar* (*Kyrios*) for Jesus goes back to the primitive Aramaic church and was not a product of the Hellenistic community"<sup>35</sup> This text, as well as *Didache* 10:9, "testifies to a worship of Jesus as Lord in the Aramaic speaking community which looked for his coming rather than that of the Father? Clearly, then, there was an ontological element in the Hebrew concept of Christ."

4. There is broad agreement that the fourth-century Christologists were influenced by Greek presuppositions as they came to the Scripture. No doubt they believed that those presuppositions reflected what was within the minds of the Hebrew Christians. But one searches in vain for any admission by Cullmann and other functional Christologists that to their study of the New Testament they bring presuppositions colored by the intellectual milieu of their own day. Even less do they indicate consciousness of what those presuppositions might be. The assumption

<sup>33</sup> James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University, 1961).

<sup>34</sup> Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp. 70–72.

<sup>35</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 341.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, "Lord," p. 329.

throughout is that from their vantage point in the twentieth century they are better able to understand the mind of the first-century writers than were the fourth- and fifth-century theologians. Presumably the possession of superior historical methods enables them to gain special insight. But may it not be that the Chalcedonian theologians, standing so much closer to the time of the New Testament, actually understood it as well as or better than do modern theologians?

In particular, one should scrutinize the work of functional theologians to see whether categories drawn from contemporary functionalism (i.e., pragmatism) may not be coloring their interpretation of the Bible. The conclusion of Barr and others that the mentality of the Hebrews was not as nonmetaphysical as it is sometimes thought should prompt us at least to consider the possibility that Cullmann's exegesis may be affected by contemporary functionalism.

5. Cullmann warned against distorting the biblical perspective by analyzing it under the categories of a later period. But what of his basic organizational principle of *Heilsgeschichte*? It is noteworthy how few times that concept appears in either the Old or the New Testament. Of course, the concept is there, but does the Bible so enlarge on it as to warrant using it as an organizing principle? Cullmann answers yes and documents his contention by appealing to his *Christ and Time*, but that work has also been severely criticized by Barr.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that Barr's case is conclusive, but it should warn us against uncritically assuming that Cullmann uses no category extraneous to the biblical text. In practice, Cullmann appears to work in a circular fashion: *Heilsgeschichte* validates functional Christology, and functional Christology validates *Heilsgeschichte*. But the statement that "Christology is the doctrine of an 'event,' not the doctrine of natures," needs more evidence from outside the circle.

6. Even if we grant that the early Christian church was more concerned with what Jesus had done than with what kind of person he is, we cannot leave our Christology there. Whenever we ask how something functions, we are also asking about the presuppositions of the function, for functions do not happen in abstraction. Function assumes some sort of form. To fail to see this and to rest content with a functional Christology is to fall into a "Cheshire cat Christology." Like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat which gradually faded away until only its grin remained, functional Christology gives us formless functions. Setting aside for the moment the question of whether the early Christians asked ontological questions about Jesus, we cannot afford not to, if we wish to be respon-

37. James Barr, **Biblical Words for Time** (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), pp. 47-81.

sible and contemporary.<sup>38</sup> To fail to do so is to fall into one of Henry Cadbury's categories of "archaizing ourselves": the substituting of biblical theology for theology.<sup>39</sup> We simply do not live in the first century. We must go on, as Cullmann suggests the theologians of the fourth century properly did, to pose questions concerning the nature of Jesus.

To sum up: because functional Christology overlooks some features of the biblical witness and distorts others, it is not an adequate Christology for today. It is questionable whether, as Cullmann maintains, the New Testament puts far more stress on Jesus' function or work than on his person or nature. Ontological concepts are implicit if not explicit in the New Testament. Any Christology to be fully adequate must address and integrate ontological and functional matters.

### Implications of the Deity of Christ

In introducing this chapter, we contended that the deity of Christ is of vital importance to the Christian faith. The dispute between the orthodox (who maintained that Jesus is *homoousios*—of the same nature as the Father) and the semi-Arians (who contended that Jesus is *homoiousios*—of a similar nature) has at times been ridiculed. It is but a dispute over a diphthong.<sup>40</sup> Yet a very small change in spelling makes all the difference in meaning.<sup>41</sup>

There are several significant implications of the doctrine of Christ's deity:

1. We can have real knowledge of God. Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Whereas the prophets came bearing a message from God, Jesus was God. If we would know what the love of God, the holiness of God, the power of God are like, we need only look at Christ.

2. Redemption is available to us. The death of Christ is sufficient for all sinners who have ever lived, for it was not merely a finite human, but an infinite God who died. He, the Life, the Giver and Sustainer of life, who did not have to die, died.

3. God and man have been reunited. It was not an angel or a human

38. Fuller does not agree with Cullmann that the Christology of the New Testament is purely functional. He maintains that the mission to the Gentiles involved ontic affirmations which in turn raised ontological questions (*Foundations*, pp. 247-57).

39. Henry J. Cadbury, "The Peril of Archaizing Ourselves," *Interpretation* 3 (1949): 332.

40. Edward Gibbon, *History of Christianity* (New York: Peter Eckler, 1891), p. 371.

41. I once produced a church bulletin in which congratulations were extended to a couple who had been "untied in marriage." The inversion of letters was corrected and the faulty bulletins destroyed before becoming public.

who came from God to man, but God himself crossed the chasm created by sin.

4. Worship of Christ is appropriate. He is not merely the highest of the creatures, but he is God in the same sense and to the same degree as the Father. He is as deserving of our praise, adoration, and obedience as is the Father.

One day everyone will recognize who and what Jesus is. Those who believe in the deity of Christ already recognize who he is and act accordingly:

Beautiful Savior!  
Lord of the nations!  
Son of God and Son of Man!  
Glory and honor,  
Praise, adoration,  
Now and forevermore be Thine!

33

## The Humanity of Christ

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**T**he topic of the humanity of Jesus Christ does not, in some ways, arouse quite the attention and controversy that his deity does. It seems on first glance to be something of a self-evident matter, for whatever Jesus was, he most surely must have been human. In this century Jesus' humanity has not received the close and extensive attention paid to his deity, which has been a major topic of dispute between fundamentalists and modernists. For what is not disputed tends not to be discussed, at least not in as much depth as are major controversies. Yet, historically,

the topic of Jesus' humanity has played at least as important a role in theological dialogue as has his deity, particularly in the earliest years of the church. And in practical terms, it has in some ways posed a greater danger to orthodox theology.

### The Importance of the Humanity of Christ

The importance of Jesus' humanity cannot be overestimated, for the issue in the incarnation is soteriological, that is, it pertains to our salvation. The problem of man is the gap between himself and God. The gap is, to be sure, ontological. God is high above man, so much so that he cannot be known by unaided human reason. If he is to be known, God must take some initiative to make himself known to man. But the problem is not merely ontological. There also is a spiritual and moral gap between the two, a gap created by man's sin. Man is unable by his own moral effort to counter his sin, to elevate himself to the level of God. If there is to be fellowship between the two, they have to be united in some other way. This, it is traditionally understood, has been accomplished by the incarnation, in which deity and humanity were united in one person. If, however, Jesus was not really one of us, humanity has not been united with deity, and we cannot be saved. For the validity of the work accomplished in Christ's death, or at least its applicability to us as human beings, depends upon the reality of his humanity, just as the efficacy of it depends upon the genuineness of his deity.

Furthermore, Jesus' intercessory ministry is dependent upon his humanity. If he was truly one of us, experiencing all of the temptations and trials of human existence, then he is able to understand and empathize with us in our struggles as humans. On the other hand, if he was not human, or only incompletely human, he cannot effect the kind of intercession that a priest must make on behalf of those whom he represents.

### The Biblical Evidence

There is ample biblical evidence that the man Jesus was a fully human person, not lacking any of the essential elements of humanity that are found in each of us. The first item to be noted is that he had a fully human body. He was born. He did not descend from heaven and suddenly appear upon earth, but was conceived in the womb of a human mother and nourished prenatally like any other child. Although his conception was unique in that it did not involve a male human, the process

from that point on was apparently identical to what every human fetus experiences.<sup>1</sup> The birth in Bethlehem, although under somewhat remarkable circumstances, was nonetheless a normal human delivery. The terminology employed in recording his birth is the same as is found in descriptions of ordinary human births. Jesus also had a typical family tree, as is indicated by the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. He had ancestors and presumably received genes from them, just as every other human being receives genes from his or her forebears.

Not only Jesus' birth, but also his life indicates that he had a physical human nature. We are told that he increased "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). He grew physically, nourished by food and water. He did not have unlimited physical strength. Yet his body may have been more nearly perfect in some respects than ours, because there was in him none of the sin (neither original sin nor the personal sin common to every human) that affects health.

Jesus was subject to the same physical limitations as other men, for he had the same physiology. Thus he experienced hunger when he fasted (Matt. 4:2). He also experienced thirst (John 19:28). In addition, he experienced fatigue when he traveled (John 4:6), and presumably on many other occasions as well. Thus, he was justifiably dismayed when his disciples fell asleep while he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, for he experienced the same type of weariness they did. He rightfully expected that they would be able to watch and pray with him, for he was asking of them nothing that he did not require of himself (Matt. 26:36, 40-41).

Finally, Jesus suffered physically and died, just like everyone else. This is evident in the entire crucifixion story, but perhaps most clearly in John 19:34, where we read that a spear was thrust into his side, and water and blood mingled came out, indicating that he had already died. Surely he had felt physical suffering (as genuinely as would you or I) when he was beaten, when the crown of thorns was placed on his head, and when the nails were driven through his hands (or wrists) and feet.

That Jesus had a physical body is evident in the fact that his contemporaries had a genuine physical perception of him. John puts it very vividly in 1 John 1:1: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life." John is here establishing the reality of the human nature of Jesus. He actually heard, saw, and touched Jesus. Touch was thought by the Greeks to be the most basic and most reliable of the senses, for it is a direct perception-no medium intervenes between the perceiver and the object perceived.

1. The subject of the virgin birth will be discussed at length in chapter 35.

Thus, when John speaks of having “touched with our hands,” he is emphasizing just how thoroughly physical was the manifestation of Jesus.

Rudolf Bultmann, among others, has objected to the idea of a physical perception of Jesus. Citing 2 Corinthians 5: 16—“Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh [*κατὰσάρκα*]; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” (NASB)—Bultmann argues that we cannot know Jesus through ordinary human means of perception or empirical historical research.<sup>2</sup> However, as we have already seen (pp. 598–99), “flesh” is not used of bodily physiology in Paul’s writings. Rather, it refers to the natural man’s orientation away from God. It is the unregenerate human’s way of doing or viewing things. So what Paul is speaking of is better rendered, as the Revised Standard Version has it, “from a human point of view.” The phrase *κατὰσάρκα* does not refer to a possible way of gaining knowledge about Jesus, but rather to a perspective, an outlook, an attitude toward him. In contradiction to Bultmann, then, it is our position that the possibility of acquiring historical information about Jesus cannot be excluded on the basis of this particular text of Paul.

If Jesus was a true human being in the physical sense, he also was fully and genuinely human in the psychological sense. This is seen in the fact that Scripture attributes to him the same sort of emotional and intellectual qualities that are found in other men. He thought, reasoned, and felt.

When we examine the personality of Jesus, we find the full gamut of human emotions. He loved, of course. One of his disciples is referred to as the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). When Lazarus was ill and Mary and Martha sent for Jesus, their message was, “Lord, he whom you love is ill” (John 11:3). When the rich young man asked about inheriting eternal life, Jesus looked upon him and ‘loved him’ (Mark 10:2 1). Jesus had compassion or pity on those who were hungry, ill, or lost (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). The Greek word is *σπλαγχνίζομαι*, which literally means “to be moved in one’s internal or visceral organs.” Jesus was internally moved by human predicaments.

Jesus reacted to differing situations with appropriate emotions. He could be sorrowful and troubled, as he was just before his betrayal and crucifixion (Matt. 26:37). He also experienced joy (John 15:11; 17:13; Heb. 12:2). He could be angry and grieved with people (Mark 3:5), and even indignant (Mark 10:14).

It should be borne in mind, of course, that some of these emotions do

<sup>2</sup>. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951), vol. 1, pp. 236–39.

not in themselves prove that Jesus was human. For God certainly feels love and compassion, as we observed in our discussion of his nature, as well as anger and indignation toward sin. Some of Jesus’ reactions, however, are uniquely human. For example, he shows astonishment in response to both positive and negative situations. He marvels at the faith of the centurion (Luke 7:9) and the unbelief of the residents of Nazareth (Mark 6:6).

Instructive as well are the references to Jesus’ being troubled. Here we see his peculiarly human reaction to a variety of situations, especially his sense of the death to which he had to go. He acutely felt the necessity and importance of his mission—“how I am constrained until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). Awareness of what it would entail troubled his soul (John 12:27). In the Garden of Gethsemane, he was obviously in struggle and in stress, and apparently did not want to be left alone (Mark 14:32–42). At the cross, his outcry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), was a very human expression of loneliness.

One of Jesus’ most human reactions occurred at the death of Lazarus. Seeing Mary and her companions weeping, Jesus “was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (John 11:33); he wept (v. 35); at the tomb he was “deeply moved again” (v. 38). The description here is very vivid, for to depict Jesus’ groaning in the spirit, John chose a term that is used of horses snorting (*έμβριμάομαι*). Obviously Jesus possessed a human nature capable of feeling sorrow and remorse as deeply as we do.

When we turn to the subject of Jesus’ intellectual qualities, we find that he had some rather remarkable knowledge. He knew the past, present, and future to a degree not available to ordinary human beings. For example, he knew the thoughts of both his friends (Luke 9:47) and his enemies (Luke 6:8). He could read the character of Nathanael (John 1:47–48). He “knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:25). He knew that the Samaritan woman had had five husbands and was presently living with a man to whom she was not married (John 4: 18). He knew that Lazarus was already dead (John 11:14). He knew that Judas would betray him (Matt. 26:25) and that Peter would deny him (Matt. 26:34). Indeed, Jesus knew all that was to happen to him (John 18:4). Truly he had a remarkable knowledge of the past, the present, the future, human nature and behavior.

Yet this knowledge was not without limits. Jesus frequently asked questions, and the impression given by the Gospels is that he asked because he did not know. There are, to be sure, some persons, particularly teachers, who ask questions the answers to which they already know. But Jesus seemed to ask because he needed information which he

did not possess.<sup>3</sup> For example, he asked the father of the epileptic boy, "How long has he had this?" (Mark 9:21). Apparently Jesus did not know how long the boy had been afflicted, information which was necessary if the proper cure was to be administered.

The biblical witness goes even further. There is at least one case where Jesus expressly declared that he did not know a particular matter. In discussing the second coming, he said, "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). This is a straightforward declaration of ignorance on the subject.

It is difficult to account for the fact that Jesus' knowledge was extraordinary in some matters, but definitely limited in others. Some have suggested that he had the same limitations we have with respect to matters of discursive knowledge (knowledge gained by the process of reasoning or by receiving piecemeal information from others), but had complete and immediate perception in matters of intuitive knowledge.<sup>4</sup> That does not seem to fit completely, however. It does not explain his knowledge of the past of the Samaritan woman, or the fact that Lazarus was dead. Perhaps we could say that he had such knowledge as was necessary for him to accomplish his mission; in other matters he was as ignorant as we are.<sup>5</sup>

Having said this, we need to note that ignorance and error are two very different things. There are some modern scholars who contend that Jesus actually erred in some of his affirmations, for example, in his attribution of the books of the Pentateuch to Moses (Mark 12:26). Moreover, they contend that he asserted that he would return within the lifetime of some of those who heard him. Among the predictions singled out are Mark 9:1 ("there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power"; cf. Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27) and Mark 13:30 ("this generation will not pass away before all these things take place"; cf. Matt. 24:34; Luke 21:32). Since these predictions were not fulfilled as he claimed, he obviously erred. In the former case, Jesus' attribution of the Pentateuch to Moses does not conflict with any statement in the Bible itself, but only with the conclusions of critical methodologies, which many evangelical scholars reject. In the latter case, Jesus was not making statements about the time of his return. While he confessed ignorance, he never made an erroneous statement.

3. Leon Morris, *The Lord from Heaven: A Study of the New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 45.

4. E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1955), pp. 68-69.

5. Morris, *Lord from Heaven*, p. 48.

Ignorance should not be confused with error, as James Orr has pointed out: "Ignorance is not error, nor does the one thing necessarily imply the other. That Jesus should use language of His time on things indifferent, where no judgment or pronouncement of His own was involved, is readily understood; that He should be the victim of illusion, or false judgment, on any subject on which He was called to pronounce, is a perilous assertion."<sup>6</sup> Of course, we humans not only are subject to ignorance, but also commit errors. Part of the wonder of the incarnation is that although Jesus' humanity involved his not knowing certain things, he was aware of this limitation and did not venture assertions on those matters. We must be careful to avoid the assumption that his humanity involved all of our shortcomings. That, as Leonard Hodgson has observed, is to measure Jesus' manhood by ours, rather than ours by his.<sup>7</sup>

We must note also the 'human religious life' of Jesus. While that may sound strange and perhaps even a bit blasphemous to some, it is nonetheless accurate. He attended worship in the synagogue, and did so on a regular or habitual basis (Luke 4:16). His prayer life was a clear indication of human dependence upon the Father. Jesus prayed regularly. At times he prayed at great length and with great intensity, as in the Garden of Gethsemane. Before the important step of choosing his twelve disciples, Jesus prayed all night (Luke 6: 12). It is evident that Jesus felt himself dependent upon the Father for guidance, for strength, and for preservation from evil.

Further, we note that the word *man* is actually used by Jesus of himself. When tempted by Satan, Jesus replies, "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). It is apparent that Jesus is applying this quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 to himself. A clearer statement is found in John 8:40, where Jesus says to the Jews, "Now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God." Others also use the word *man* in reference to Jesus. In his Pentecost sermon Peter speaks of "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). Paul, in his argument regarding original sin, compares Jesus and Adam and uses the expression "one man" of Jesus three times (Rom. 5: 15, 17, 19). We find a similar thought and expression in 1 Corinthians 15:2 1, 47-49. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul emphasizes the practical significance of Jesus' humanity: "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

6. James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952 reprint), pp. 150-51.

7. Leonard Hodgson, *And Was Made Man: An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (London: Longmans, Green, 1928), p. 27.

Scripture also refers to Christ's taking on flesh, that is, becoming human. Paul spoke of Jesus as "manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). John said, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14). John was particularly emphatic on this matter in his first letter, one of the purposes of which was to combat a heresy which denied that Jesus had been genuinely human: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God" (1 John 4:2–3a). In these cases, it is apparent that "flesh" is not used in the Pauline sense of humanity's orientation away from God, but in the more basic sense of physical nature. The same idea is found in Hebrews 10:5: "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me.'" Paul expresses the same thought in more implicit fashion in Galatians 4:4: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law."

It is apparent, then, that for the disciples and the authors of the New Testament books, there was no question about Jesus' humanity. The point was not really argued, for it was scarcely disputed (with the exception of the situation to which 1 John was addressed). It was simply assumed. Those who were closest to Jesus, who lived with him every day, regarded him as being as fully human as themselves. They were able to verify for themselves that he was human; and when, on one occasion after Jesus' resurrection, there was some question as to whether he might be a spirit, he invited them to ascertain the genuineness of his humanity for themselves: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). He did everything they did, except sin and pray for forgiveness. He ate with them, he bled, he slept, he cried. If Jesus was not human, then surely no one ever has been.

#### Early Heresies Regarding the Humanity of Jesus

Early in the life of church, however, there came several departures from the understanding of Jesus as fully human. These heresies forced the church to think through thoroughly and enunciate carefully its understanding of this matter.

##### *Docetism*

From quite early in the life of the church, there was a stream of thought denying the reality of Jesus' humanity. We see it already in the

situation which John's first letter vigorously opposed. In addition to a specific group of Christians known as Docetists, a basic denial of Jesus' humanity permeated many other movements within Christianity, including Gnosticism and Marcionism.<sup>8</sup> In many ways, it was the first full-fledged heresy, with the possible exception of the Judaizing legalism which Paul had to combat in Galatia. It was the diametrical opposite of Ebionism. Whereas that movement denied the actuality of the deity of Christ, Docetism denied his humanity.

Docetism is in essence a Christology heavily influenced by basic Greek assumptions of both the Platonic and Aristotelian varieties. Plato taught the idea of gradations of reality. Spirit or mind or thought is the highest. Matter or the material is less real. With this distinction of ontological gradations of reality, there came to be ethical gradations as well. Thus, matter came to be thought of as morally bad. Aristotle emphasized the idea of divine impassibility, according to which God cannot change, suffer, or even be affected by anything that happens in the world. These two streams of thought have significant differences, but both maintain that the visible, physical, material world is somehow inherently evil. Both emphasize God's transcendence and absolute difference from and independence of the material world.<sup>9</sup>

Docetism takes its name from the Greek verb *δοκέω*, which means "to seem or appear." Its central thesis is that Jesus only seemed to be human. God could not really have become material, since all matter is evil, and he is perfectly pure and holy. The transcendent God could not possibly have united with such a corrupting influence. Being impassible and unchangeable, God could not have undergone the modifications in his nature which would necessarily have occurred with a genuine incarnation. He could not have exposed himself to the experiences of human life. The humanity of Jesus, his physical nature, was simply an illusion, not a reality. Jesus was more like a ghost, an apparition, than a human being.<sup>10</sup>

Like the Ebionites, the Docetists had difficulty with the idea of the virgin birth, but at a different point. The Docetists had no problem with the belief that Mary was a virgin; it was the belief that Jesus had been born to her which was unacceptable to them. For if Mary had truly borne Jesus, as other mothers carry their children for nine months and then give birth to them, she would have contributed something material to him, and that would have been a perversion of the moral goodness of deity. Consequently, Docetism thought more in terms of a transmission

8. Tertullian On the Flesh of Christ 5.

9. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 141.

10. J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1903), p. 80.

through Mary than a birth to her. Jesus merely passed through her, like water passing through a tube. She was only a vehicle, contributing nothing.<sup>11</sup>

This particular Christology resolved the tension in the idea that deity and humanity were united in one person. It did so by saying that while the deity was real and complete, the humanity was only appearance. But the church recognized that this solution had been achieved at too great a price, the loss of Jesus' humanity and thus of any real connection between him and us. Ignatius and Irenaeus attacked the various forms of Docetism, while Tertullian gave particular attention to the teachings of Marcion, which included docetic elements. It is difficult today to find pure instances of Docetism, although docetic tendencies occur in many and varied schemes of thought.

#### *Apollinarianism*

Docetism is a denial of the reality of Jesus' humanity. Apollinarianism, by contrast, is a truncation of Jesus' humanity. Jesus took on genuine humanity, but not the *whole* of human nature.

Apollinarianism is an example of taking a good thing too far. Apollinarius was a close friend and associate of Athanasius, the leading champion of orthodox Christology against Arianism at the Council of Nicea. As so often happens, however, the reaction against heresy became an overreaction. Apollinarius was very concerned to maintain the unity of the Son, Jesus Christ. Now if Jesus, reasoned Apollinarius, had two complete natures, he must have had a human *νοῦς* (soul, mind, reason) as well as a divine *νοῦς*. Apollinarius thought this duality absurd. So he constructed a Christology based upon an extremely narrow reading of John 1: 14 ("the Word became flesh," i.e., flesh was the only aspect of human nature involved).<sup>12</sup> According to Apollinarius, Jesus was a compound unity; part of the composite (some elements of Jesus) was human, the rest divine. What he (the Word) took was not the whole of humanity, but only flesh, that is, the body. This flesh could not, however, be animated by itself. There had to be a "spark of life" animating it. This was the divine Logos; it took the place of the human soul. Thus Jesus was man physically, but not psychologically. He had a human body, but not a human soul. His soul was divine.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, Jesus, although human, was a bit different from other

11. Ibid., p. 81.

12. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 291.

13. Ibid., p. 292. There is a dispute as to whether Apollinarius was a dichotomist or trichotomist. For purposes of simplicity, we will treat him here as a dichotomist.

human beings, for he lacked something which they have (a human *νοῦς*). Thus in him there was no possibility of any contradiction between the human and the divine. There was only one center of consciousness, and it was divine. Jesus did not have a human will. Consequently, he could not sin, for his person was fully controlled by his divine soul.<sup>14</sup> Loraine Boettner draws the analogy of a human mind implanted into the body of a lion; the resulting being is governed, not by lion or animal psychology, but by human psychology. That is a rough parallel to the Apollinarian view of the person of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

Apollinarius and his followers thought that they had discovered the ideal solution to the orthodox view of Jesus, which appeared to them to be grotesque. As Apollinarius interpreted orthodoxy's Christology, Jesus consisted of two parts humanity (a body and a soul [this is an oversimplification]) and one part deity (a soul). But  $2 + 1 = 3$ , as everyone knows. Thus, as a two Souled person, Jesus would have been some sort of a freak, for we have only one soul and one body ( $1 + 1 = 2$ ). As Apollinarius saw his own view, Jesus was a composite of one part humanity (a body) and one part deity (a soul). Since  $1 + 1 = 2$ , there was nothing bizarre about him. The divine soul simply took the place occupied by the human soul in ordinary human beings. As orthodoxy saw its own Christology, however, Jesus did in fact consist of two parts humanity (a body and a soul) and one part deity (a soul), but the resulting formula is  $2 + 1 = 2$ . This is of course a paradox, but one which the orthodox felt constrained to accept as a divine truth beyond their human capacity to understand. The underlying idea is that Jesus lacked nothing of humanity, which means that he had a human soul as well as a divine soul, but that fact did not make him a double or divided personality.<sup>16</sup>

Apollinarianism proved to be an ingenious but unacceptable solution to the problem. For since the divine element in Jesus was not only ontologically superior to the human element, but also constituted the more important part of his person (the soul rather than the body), the divine was doubly superior. Thus, the dual nature of Jesus tended to become one nature in practice, the divine swallowing up the human. The church concluded that while not as thoroughgoing a denial of the humanity of Jesus as Docetism, Apollinarianism had the same practical effect. The church's theologians challenged the assumption that the human and the divine, as two complete entities, cannot combine in such a way as to form a real unity. They noted that if, as Apollinarius claimed, Christ lacked the most characteristic part of man (human will, reason,

14. Ibid., p. 293.

15. Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), p. 263.

16. Bethune-Baker, *Early History of Christian Doctrine*, p. 242.

mind), it hardly seemed correct to call him human at all. And specifically, they concluded that the Apollinarian rejection of the belief that Jesus took on the psychological components of human nature clashed with the accounts in the Gospels.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the Apollinarian doctrine was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

### Recent Depreciations of the Humanity of Jesus

We noted earlier that outright theoretical denials of Jesus' humanity tend to be quite rare in our time. In fact, Donald Baillie refers to "the end of Docetism."<sup>18</sup> There are, however, Christologies which, in one way or another, minimize the significance of the humanity of Jesus.

#### Karl Barth

As developed in his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth's Christology is related to his view of revelation as well as to his Kierkegaardian understanding of the role of history for faith.<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard maintained that from the standpoint of Christian faith, it is believers, not eyewitnesses, who are the real contemporaries of Jesus. Thus, there was no advantage in being an eyewitness to what Jesus did and said. Kierkegaard spoke of the "divine incognito," meaning that the deity of Christ was thoroughly hidden in the humanity. As a result, observation and even detailed description of the man Jesus and what he did and said yield no revelation of his deity.<sup>20</sup>

Barth fully grants the humanity of Jesus, though he sees nothing remarkable about it. He observes that it is difficult to get historical information about Jesus, and even when we do, it has no real significance for faith: "Jesus Christ in fact is also the Rabbi of Nazareth, historically so difficult to get information about, and when it is got, one whose activity is so easily a little commonplace alongside more than one other founder of a religion and even alongside many later representatives of His own 'religion.'"<sup>21</sup> To Barth, the human life of Jesus, what he both said

17. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 296.

18. Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1948), pp. 1-20.

19. It should be observed that Barth in his later writing modified some of his more extreme views of the transcendence of God. See *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960), p. 47.

20. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1946).

21. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), vol. 1, part 1, p. 188.

and did, is not very revealing of the nature of God. Indeed, the information we obtain about Jesus by the use of the historical method serves more to conceal than to reveal his deity. This is, of course, consistent with Barth's view of revelation, according to which the events reported in Scripture are not revelatory per se. Each event is revelatory only when God manifests himself in an encounter with someone who is reading or hearing about it. The events and the words recording them are the vehicle by which revelation occurs; they are not objective revelation.<sup>22</sup>

According to Barth, then, even if we were to ascertain correctly everything Jesus said and did, we would not thereby know God. Some popular forms of apologetics attempt to argue from Jesus' miracles, conduct, and unusual teachings, that he must have been God. These items are set forth as indisputable proofs of his deity, if one will but examine the evidence. In Barth's view, however, even if a complete chronicle of Jesus' life could be constructed, it would be more opaque than transparent. Evidence of this appeared within Jesus' own lifetime.<sup>23</sup> Many of those who saw what he did and who heard what he said were not thereby convinced of his deity. Some were merely amazed that he, the son of Joseph the carpenter, could speak as he did. Some acknowledged that what he did was supernatural, but they did not meet God through what they observed. On the contrary, they concluded that what Jesus did he did by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. Flesh and blood did not reveal to Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; rather, it was the Father in heaven who convicted Peter of this truth. And so it must also be with us. We cannot know God through knowledge of the Jesus of history.

#### Rudolf Bultmann

With regard to the significance of the history of the earthly Jesus for faith, the thought of Rudolf Bultmann is even more radical than that of Barth. Following the lead of Martin Kähler, Bultmann divides the history of Jesus into *Historie* (the actual events of his life) and *Geschichte* (significant history, i.e., the impact Christ made upon believers). Bultmann believes that we have very little chance of getting back to the *Historie* through the use of the normal methods of historiography. That does not really matter, however, for faith is not primarily concerned with either cosmology, the nature of things, or with history in the usual sense of what actually happened. Faith is not built upon a chronicle of events, but

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

upon the record of the early believers' preaching, the expression of their creed.<sup>24</sup>

Bultmann's Christology, therefore, does not focus on an objective set of facts about Jesus, but on his existential significance. The crucial matter is what he does to us, how he transforms our lives. Thus, for example, the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion is not that a man, Jesus of Nazareth, was put to death on a cross outside of Jerusalem. It is rather to be found in Galatians 6: 14—"the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."<sup>25</sup> The question faith asks is not whether the execution of Jesus actually took place, but whether we have crucified our old nature, its lusts and earthbound striving for security. Similarly, the real significance of the resurrection has to do with us, not the historical Jesus. The question is not whether Jesus came to life again, but whether we have been resurrected-lifted from our old, self-centered life to an openness in faith to the future.

The views of Barth and Bultmann have characteristic features which distinguish the one from the other. But both are agreed that the historical facts of the earthly life of the man Jesus are not significant for faith. Then what is significant or determinative for faith? Barth says it is the supernatural revelation; Bultmann says it is the existential content of the preaching of the early church.

We should note that Barth's Christology suffers at this point from the same difficulties as does his doctrine of revelation. The basic criticisms are well known and were summarized in an earlier chapter of this work.<sup>26</sup> In Barth's Christology there are, in terms of accessibility and objectivity, problems concerning our knowledge and experience of Christ's deity. Further, the force of the statement "God became man" is severely diminished.

In the case of Bultmann, there is a separation of *Historie* and *Geschichte* which scarcely seems justified on biblical grounds. Paul's statements connecting the fact and impact of Christ's resurrection are especially pointed (1 Cor. 15: 12-19). And both Bultmann and Barth appear to disregard Jesus' postresurrection statements calling direct attention to his humanity (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:24-29).

### The Sinlessness of Jesus

One further important issue concerning Jesus' humanity is the question of whether he sinned or, indeed, whether he could have sinned. In

24. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 37.

25. Ibid., pp. 37-38.

26. See pp. 193-96.

both didactic passages and narrative materials, the Bible is quite clear upon this matter.

The didactic or directly declaratory passages are considerable in number. The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4: 15). Jesus is described as "a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (7:26), and as "without blemish" (9: 14). Peter, who of course knew Jesus well, declared him to be "the Holy One of God" (John 6:69), and taught that Jesus "committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips" (1 Peter 2:22). John said, "In him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Paul also affirmed that Christ 'knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus himself both explicitly and implicitly claimed to be righteous. He asked his hearers, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8:46); no one replied. He also maintained, "I always do what is pleasing to him [who sent me]" (John 8:29). Again, "I have kept my Father's commandments" (John 15:10). He taught his disciples to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness, but there is no report of his ever confessing sin and asking forgiveness in his own behalf. Although he went to the temple, we have no record of his ever offering sacrifice for himself and his sins. Other than blasphemy, no charge of sin was brought against him; and, of course, if he was God, then what he did (e.g., his declaring sins to be forgiven) was not blasphemy. While not absolute proof of Jesus' sinlessness, there are ample testimonies of his innocence of the charges for which he was crucified. Pilate's wife warned, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man" (Matt. 27: 19); the thief on the cross said, "This man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41); and even Judas said, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4).

Jesus' sinlessness is confirmed by the narratives in the Gospels. There are reports of temptation, but none of sin. Nothing reported of him is in conflict with God's revealed law of right and wrong; everything he did was in conjunction with the Father. Thus, on the basis of both direct affirmation and silence on certain points, we must conclude that the Bible uniformly witnesses to the sinlessness of Jesus.<sup>27</sup>

One problem arises from this consideration, however. Was Jesus fully human if he never sinned? Or to put it another way, was the humanity of Jesus, if free from all sin of nature and of active performance, the same as our humanity? For some this seems to be a serious problem. For to be

27. There are, of course, those who contend that Jesus did sin. Among them is Nels Ferré, who detects in Jesus' behavior a lack of perfect trust in the Father, which constitutes the sin of unbelief. But Ferré's exegesis is faulty, and his view of sin heavily influenced by existential, rather than biblical, concepts. See *Christ and the Christian* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), pp. 110-14.

human, by their definition, is to be tempted and to sin. Does not sinlessness then take Jesus completely out of our class of humanity? This question casts doubt on the genuineness of the temptations of Jesus.

A. E. Taylor has stated the case directly and clearly: "If a man does not commit certain transgressions ... it must be because he never felt the appeal of them."<sup>28</sup> But is this really so? The underlying assumption seems to be that if something is possible, it must become actual, and that, conversely, something that never occurs or never becomes actual must not really have been possible. Yet we have the statement of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews that Jesus was indeed tempted in every respect as we are (4: 15). Beyond that, the descriptions of Jesus' temptations indicate great intensity. For example, think of his agony in Gethsemane when he struggled to do the Father's will (Luke 22:44).

But could Jesus have sinned? Scripture tells us that God does no evil and cannot be tempted (James 1: 13). Was it really possible, then, for Jesus, inasmuch as he is God, to sin? And if not, was his temptation genuine? Here we are encountering one of the great mysteries of the faith, Jesus' two natures, which will be more closely examined in our next chapter. Nonetheless, it is fitting for us to point out here that while he could have sinned, it was certain that he *would not*.<sup>29</sup> There were genuine struggles and temptations, but the outcome was always certain.

Does a person who does not succumb to temptation really feel it, or does he not, as Taylor has contended? Leon Morris argues that the reverse of Taylor's contention is true. The person who resists knows the full force of temptation. Sinlessness points to a more intense rather than less intense temptation. "The man who yields to a particular temptation has not felt its full power. He has given in while the temptation has yet something in reserve. Only the man who does not yield to a temptation[,] who, as regards that particular temptation, is sinless, knows the full extent of that temptation."<sup>30</sup>

One might have questions about some points of Morris's argument. For example, "Is the strength of temptation measured by some objective standard or by its subjective effect?" "Is it not possible that someone who has yielded to temptation may have yielded at the point of its maximum force?" But the argument that he is making is nonetheless valid. One simply cannot conclude that where sin has not been committed, temptation has not been experienced; the contrary may very well be true.

28. A. E. Taylor, in *Asking Them Questions*, ed. Ronald Selby Wright (London: Oxford University, 1936), p. 94.

29. This is reminiscent of our discussion of free will-while we are free to choose, God has already rendered our choice certain. See pp. 357-58.

30. Morris, *Lord from Heaven*, pp. 51-52.

But the question remains, "Is a person who does not sin truly human?" If we say no, we are maintaining that sin is part of the essence of human nature. Such a view must be considered a serious heresy by anyone who believes that man has been created by God, since God would then be the cause of sin, the creator of a nature which is essentially evil. Inasmuch as we hold that, on the contrary, sin is not part of the essence of human nature, instead of asking, "Is Jesus as human as we are?" we might better ask, "Are we as human as Jesus?" For the type of human nature that each of us possesses is not pure human nature. The true humanity created by God has in our case been corrupted and spoiled. There have been only three pure human beings: Adam and Eve (before the fall), and Jesus. All the rest of us are but broken, corrupted versions of humanity. Jesus is not only as human as we are; he is more human. Our humanity is not a standard by which we are to measure his. His humanity, true and unadulterated, is the standard by which we are to be measured.

### Implications of the Humanity of Jesus

The doctrine of the full humanity of Jesus has great significance for Christian faith and theology:

1. The atoning death of Jesus can truly avail for us. It was not some outsider to the human race who died on the cross. He was one of us, and thus could truly offer a sacrifice on our behalf. Just like the Old Testament priest, Jesus was a man who offered a sacrifice on behalf of his fellows.

2. Jesus can truly sympathize with and intercede for us. He has experienced all that we might undergo. When we are hungry, weary, lonely, he fully understands, for he has gone through it all himself (Heb. 4: 15).

3. Jesus manifests the true nature of humanity. While we are sometimes inclined to draw our conclusions as to what humanity is from an inductive examination of ourselves and those around us, these are but imperfect instances of humanity. Jesus has not only told us what perfect humanity is, he has exhibited it.

4. Jesus can be our example. He is not some celestial superstar, but one who has lived where we live. We can therefore look to him as a model of the Christian life. The biblical standards for human behavior, which seem to us to be so hard to attain, are seen in him to be within human possibility. Of course, there must be full dependence upon the grace of God. The fact that Jesus found it necessary to pray and depend upon the Father is indication that we must be similarly reliant upon him.

5. Human nature is **good**. When we tend toward asceticism, regarding

human nature, and particularly physical nature, as somehow inherently evil or at least inferior to the spiritual and immaterial, the fact that Jesus took upon himself our full human nature is a reminder that to be human is not evil, it is good.

6. God is not totally transcendent. He is not so far removed from the human race. If he could actually live among us at one time as a real human person, it is not surprising that he can and does act within the human realm today as well.

With John we rejoice that the incarnation was real and complete: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14).

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# 34

## The Unity of the Person of Christ

The Importance and Difficulty of the Issue

The Biblical Material

Early Misunderstandings

Nestorianism

Eutychianism

Other Attempts to Solve the Problem

Adoptionism

Anhypostatic Christology

Kenoticism

The Doctrine of Dynamic incarnation

Basic Tenets of the Doctrine of Two Natures in One Person

### The Importance and Difficulty of the Issue

Having concluded that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, we still face a large issue: the relationship between these two natures in the one person, Jesus. This is one of the most difficult of all theological problems, ranking with the Trinity and the seeming paradox of human free will and divine sovereignty. It is also an issue of the greatest importance. We have already explained that Christology in general is important because

the incarnation involved a bridging of the metaphysical, moral, and spiritual gap between God and man. The bridging of this gap depended upon the unity of deity and humanity within Jesus Christ. For if Jesus was both God and man but the two natures were not united, then, although smaller, the gap remains. The separation of God and man is still a difficulty that has not been overcome. If the redemption accomplished on the cross is to avail for mankind, it must be the work of the human Jesus. But if it is to have the infinite value necessary to atone for the sins of all human beings in relationship to an infinite and perfectly holy God, then it must be the work of the divine Christ as well. If the death of the Savior is not the work of a unified God-man, it will be deficient at one point or the other.

The doctrine of the unification of divine and human within Jesus is difficult to comprehend because it posits the combination of two natures which by definition have contradictory attributes. As deity, Christ is infinite in knowledge, power, presence. If he is God, he must know all things. If he is God, he can do all things which are proper objects of his power. If he is God, he can be everywhere at once. But, on the other hand, if he was man, he was limited in knowledge. He could not do everything. And he certainly was limited to being in one place at a time. For one person to be both infinite and finite simultaneously seems impossible.

The issue is further complicated by the relative paucity of biblical material with which to work. We have in the Bible no direct statements about the relationship of the two natures. What we must do is draw inferences from Jesus' self-concept, his actions, and various didactic statements about him.

In view of what we have said, it will be necessary to work with particular care and thoroughness. We will have to examine very meticulously the statements which we do have, and note the various ways in which different theologians and schools of thought have sought to deal with the issue. Here theology's historical laboratory will be of particular significance.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Biblical Material**

We begin by noting the absence of any references to duality in Jesus' thought, action, and purpose. There are, by contrast, indications of multiplicity within the Godhead as a whole, for example, in Genesis 1:26,

1. See pp. 26-27; see also Millard J. Erickson, "The Church and Stable Motion," *Christianity Today*, 12 October 1973, p. 7.

"Then God said [singular], 'Let us make [plural] man in our [plural] image.'" Similar references, without a shift in number, are found in Genesis 3:22 and 11:7. There are instances of one member of the Trinity addressing another, in Psalms 2:7 and 40:7-8 as well as Jesus' prayers to the Father. Yet Jesus always spoke of himself in the singular. This is particularly notable in the prayer in John 17, where Jesus says that he and the Father are one (w. 21-22), yet makes no reference to any type of complexity within himself.

There are references in Scripture which allude to both the deity and humanity of Jesus, yet clearly refer to a single subject. Among these are John 1:14 ("And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth"); Galatians 4:4 ("God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law"); and 1 Timothy 3:16 ("He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory"). The last text is particularly significant, for it refers to both Jesus' earthly incarnation and his presence in heaven before and after.

There are other references which focus upon the work of Jesus in such a way as to make it clear that it is the function not of either the human or the divine exclusively, but of one unified subject. For example, Paul says of the atoning work of Christ that it unites Jew and Gentile and "reconcile[s] us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:16-18). And in reference to the work of Christ, John says, "But if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2: 1-2). This work of Jesus, which assumes both his humanity (4:2) and deity (4: 1.5; 5:5), is the work of one person, who is described in the same epistle as the Son whom the Father has sent as the Savior of the world (4:14). Throughout all of these references, one unified person whose acts presuppose both humanity and deity is in view.

Further, several passages in which Jesus is designated by one of his titles are highly revealing. For example, we have situations in Scripture where a divine title is used in a reference to Jesus' human activity. For example, Paul says, "None of the rulers of this age understood this [the secret and hidden wisdom of God]; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). In Colossians 1:13-14, Paul writes, "[The Father] has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Here the kingly status of the Son of God is juxtaposed with the redemptive work of his bodily crucifixion and

resurrection. Conversely, the title “Son of man,” which Jesus often used of himself during his earthly ministry, appears in passages pointing to his heavenly status; for instance, in John 3:13, “No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.” Another reference of the same type is John 6:62: “Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?” Nothing in any of these references contradicts the position that the one person, Jesus Christ, was both earthly man and preexistent divine being who became incarnate. Nor is there any suggestion that these two natures took turns directing his activity.<sup>2</sup>

### Early Misunderstandings

Reflection upon the relationship between the two natures arose comparatively late in church history. Logically prior were the discussions about the genuineness and completeness of the two natures. Once the church had settled these questions, at the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381), it was appropriate to inquire into the precise relationship between the two natures. In effect, the matter at issue was, “What is really meant by declaring that Jesus was fully God and fully man?” In the process of suggesting and examining possible answers, the church rejected some of them as inadequate.

#### Nestorianism

One of the answers was offered by Nestorius and those who followed his teachings. There are several reasons why it is particularly difficult to understand and to evaluate Nestorianism. One is that this movement arose in a period of intense political rivalry in the church.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it is not always clear whether the church rejected a view because of its ideas or because of opposition between its chief proponent and someone with superior ecclesiastical influence. Further, the language used by Nestorius himself was somewhat ambiguous and inconsistent. It is clear that the view condemned by the church as Nestorian fell short of the full orthodox position, and was probably held by some of Nestorius’s followers.<sup>4</sup> It is the judgment of leading scholars, however, that Nestorius

2. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 293.

3. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 311-12.

4. J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 274-75.

himself was not a “Nestorian,” but that some poorly chosen terminology, coupled with the opposition of an aggressive opponent, led to an unjust condemnation of his views.<sup>5</sup>

Two main types of Christology had emerged in the fourth century—the “Word-flesh” and “Word-man” Christologies. The former regarded the Word as the major element in the God-man and the human soul as relatively unimportant (Apollinarianism, it will be recalled, held that Jesus had a divine soul and human body). The latter, less sure that the Word occupied a dominant position in the God-man, affirmed that Jesus assumed human nature in its entirety. This difference in views is the ideological background to the Nestorian affair,

Soon after Nestorius was installed as the patriarch of Constantinople in 428, he was obliged to rule upon the suitability of referring to Mary as *theotokos* ('God-bearing'). This Nestorius was reluctant to do, unless *theotokos* was accompanied by the term *anthrōpotokos* ("man-bearing"). While his ideas were not unique in that time, the choice of some rather unfortunate language caused problems for Nestorius. He observed that God cannot have a mother, and certainly no creature could have generated a member of the Godhead. Mary, therefore, did not bear God; she bore a man who was a vehicle for God. God simply could not have been borne for nine months in a mother's womb, nor been wrapped in baby clothes; he could not have suffered, died, and been buried. Nestorius felt that the term *theotokos* contained implicitly either the Arian view of the Son as a creature, or the Apollinarian concept of the incompleteness of Jesus' humanity.<sup>6</sup>

The statement of Nestorius alarmed other theologians, among them Cyril of Alexandria, who was Nestorius's rival. Eusebius, later bishop of Dorylaeum, upon hearing that Mary was reputed to have borne a mere man, concluded that Nestorius was an adoptionist (i.e., that Nestorius believed that the man Jesus became divine at some point in his life after birth, probably at his baptism). From the statements of Nestorius and the reactions to his views came the traditional picture of Nestorianism as a heresy which split the God-man into two distinct persons. It was this heresy which was condemned. Cyril was the leader of the opposition, and at the Council of Ephesus (431) proved his skill in political maneuvering. The papal legates approved the position of the group of bishops dominated by Cyril.<sup>7</sup>

5. Friedrich Loofs, *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Lenox Hill, 1975), pp. 41, 60-61; J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1908), pp. 82-100.

6. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 311.

7. Loofs, *Nestorius*, pp. 45-53.

It is virtually impossible to determine exactly what Nestorius's view was. This is particularly so in light of the twentieth-century discovery of the *Book of Heracleides*, which Nestorius apparently wrote some twenty years after his condemnation. In this book he professed to agree with the Chalcedonian formulation (two natures united in one person). It is true, however, that he was impatient with the "hypostatic union" which Cyril taught, feeling that this concept eliminated the distinctness of the two natures. Nestorius preferred to think in terms of a "conjunction" (*συνάφεια*) rather than a union (*ἕνωσις*) between the two. Perhaps the best possible summation of Nestorius is to say that while he did not consciously hold nor overtly teach that there was a split in the person of Christ, what he said seemed to imply it.\* If Nestorius himself was not a proponent of Nestorianism, his views logically led to it and would have been adopted by many if the church had made no statement on the matter.

#### Eutychianism

Similarly difficult to ascertain is the Christology of Eutychianism. After the Council of Ephesus (431), a document was produced in an attempt to arrive at healing within the church. Actually originating with the Oriental (Antiochene) bishops who had been supportive of Nestorius at Ephesus, this document was sent by John of Antioch to Cyril. Cyril accepted it in 433, although it contained some language favorable to the Nestorian position. Thus, something of a compromise appeared to have been reached.

Some of the right-wing supporters and allies of Cyril felt, however, that he had conceded too much to Nestorianism. The compromise's strong emphasis upon two natures seemed to them to undermine the unity of the person of Jesus. As a result, the idea that he did not possess two natures, a divine and a human, but only one nature, began to grow in popularity among them. After Cyril's death in 444, the disaffected group launched an attack upon the teachings of Theodoret, who had probably drafted the compromise document, and who was now the leading theologian of the Antiochene school. Dioscorus, Cyril's successor, led the opposition to the teaching that Jesus had two natures. Dioscorus believed that the church fathers overwhelmingly supported the idea of but one nature in the person of Jesus and that Cyril had compromised it in a moment of weakness. Whether this was a correct understanding of Cyril's position or whether he himself had actually espoused the belief

8. A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ in Its Physical, Ethical, and Official Aspects*, 2nd ed. (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1892), pp. 50-51.

that Jesus had only one nature is debatable. In any event, there was a growing insistence upon the "one-nature formula."

An elderly archimandrite named Eutyches became the focus of the controversy. All who had been displeased with the compromise agreement of 433 and who rejected the idea of two natures in Jesus made Eutyches the symbol of their position. He was denounced at a meeting of the standing Synod of Constantinople. This led to formal discussions which culminated in the condemnation and deposition of Eutyches. At this final session Eutyches did not defend himself, but only heard his sentence pronounced.<sup>9</sup>

It is not easy to ascertain exactly what Eutyches's doctrine was. At a preliminary examination before the synod, he declared that the Lord Jesus Christ after his birth possessed only one nature, that of God made flesh and become man. Eutyches rejected the idea of two natures as contrary to the Scripture and to the opinions of the Fathers. He did, however, subscribe to the virgin birth and affirmed that Christ was simultaneously perfect God and perfect man. His basic contention seems to have been that there were two natures before the incarnation, one after.<sup>10</sup>

Eutyches was apparently not a very precise or clear thinker. Historically, however, his views constituted the foundation of a movement which taught that the humanity of Jesus was so absorbed into the deity as to be virtually eliminated. In effect, Eutychianism was a form of Docetism. There was a variant interpretation of the nature as a fusion of Jesus' deity and humanity into something quite different, a third substance, a hybrid as it were. It may be that this is what Eutyches himself held, although his thought was confused (at least in the way he expressed it). In 449, a council meeting at Ephesus reinstated Eutyches and declared him orthodox. At the same time, the idea that there were two natures after the incarnation was anathematized. This council has come to be known as the "Robber Synod."<sup>11</sup>

The Robber Synod had not been held under proper imperial authority, however. The succession of a new emperor sympathetic to the position that Jesus had two natures led to the convening of yet another council, in Chalcedon in 451. This council affirmed the Nicene Creed, and issued a statement which was to become the standard for all of Christendom. Regarding the relationship between the two natures, this statement speaks of

9. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 330-31.

10. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 262-63.

11. Bethune-Baker, *Early History of Christian Doctrine*, p. 284.

one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis*—not parted or divided into two *prosopa*, but one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets of old and Jesus Christ Himself have taught us about Him and the creed of our fathers has handed down.<sup>12</sup>

This statement avoids both the heresy of Nestorianism and that of Eutychianism. Both the unity of the person and the integrity and separateness of the two natures are insisted upon. But this only serves to heighten the tension. For what is the precise relationship between the two natures? How can both be maintained without splitting Jesus into two persons, each having a separate and unique set of attributes? And how can we maintain that Jesus is one person, with one center of consciousness, without fusing the two natures into a mixture or hybrid?

I once asked on an essay examination for the students to state the orthodox understanding of the two natures and one person of Christ. One student wrote, “There is no orthodox doctrine of the two natures and one person. Every attempt that has ever been made to give some content to the formula has been declared heretical. There is no content, only an abstract statement.” To an extent that student was correct. For the Chalcedonian conclusion is essentially negative—“without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” It tells us what “two natures in one person” does not mean. In a sense, Chalcedon is not the answer; it is the question. We must ask further what is to be understood by the formula.

#### Other Attempts to Solve the Problem

Before we attempt to elucidate the formula “two natures in one person,” we need to note some of the other attempts at understanding this union which have been made since the Council of Chalcedon. Before we set forth our own construction, it will be instructive to note various types of strategies that have been tried. Once again, the verdict of history will be profitable for us. Four attempts are representative: (1) the idea that the man Jesus became God (adoptionism); (2) the idea that the divine

12. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), vol. 2, p. 62.

being, God, took on impersonal humanity rather than an individual human personality (anhypostatic Christology); (3) the idea that the Second Person of the Trinity exchanged his deity for humanity (kenoticism); and (4) the idea that the incarnation was the power of God present in a human (the doctrine of dynamic incarnation).

#### Adoptionism

An early and recurrent attempt to solve the problem “two natures in one person” is adoptionism. Put in its simplest form, this is the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was merely a man during the early years of his life. At some point, however, probably Jesus’ baptism (or perhaps his resurrection), God “adopted” him as his Son. Whether this adoption was an act of pure grace on the part of God, or a promotion in status for which Jesus had qualified by virtue of his personal attributes, it was more a case of a man’s becoming God than of Gods becoming man.<sup>13</sup>

In support of their position, adoptionists concentrate on the scriptural idea that Jesus was begotten by God. He is even referred to as the “only-begotten” (*μονογενής*, John 3:16). When did this ‘begetting’ take place? Adoptionists call attention to the fact that the writer to the Hebrews twice quotes Psalm 2:7, “You are my son, today I have begotten you,” and applies it to the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:5; 5:5). They note the considerable similarity between this statement and that of the Father at Jesus’ baptism: “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). So it is assumed that the Spirit’s descent upon the Son at this point represents the coming of deity upon the man Jesus.

This position gives the human Jesus an independent status. He would simply have lived on as Jesus of Nazareth if the special adoption by God had not occurred. This was more a matter of God’s entering an existent human being than of a true incarnation. Sometimes this event is regarded as unique to the life of Jesus; sometimes it is compared to the adoption of other human beings as children of God.

Adoptionism has made recurrent appearances during the history of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Those who take seriously the full teaching of Scripture, however, are aware of major obstacles to this view, including the pre-existence of Christ, the prebirth narrative, and the virgin birth.

13. Robert L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: Methuen, 1896), vol. 2, pp. 151-61.

14. A. Hauck, “Adoptionism,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), vol. 1, pp. 48-50.

*Anhypostatic Christology*

Another attempt to clarify the relationship between the two natures might be termed “anhypostatic Christology.” This view insists that the humanity of Jesus was impersonal and had no independent subsistence, that is, the divine Word was not united with an individual human person. Originally, anhypostatic Christology was intended to guard against the Nestorian division of Jesus into two persons and the related belief that Mary was mother of only the human person. It also served to negate adoptionism, which posited that Jesus as a human being with independent existence was elevated to deity. The major point of anhypostatic Christology is that the man Jesus had no subsistence apart from the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. It supports this thesis by denying that Jesus had any individual human personality.<sup>15</sup>

The problem with this position is that to think of Jesus as not being a specific human individual suggests that the divine Word became united with the whole human race or with human nature; taken literally, this idea is absurd. It is true that we occasionally say that Jesus was united with the whole of the human race, but we do so figuratively on the grounds of basic characteristics shared by all its members. We do not have in mind a literal physical uniting with the whole human race. An additional difficulty with anhypostatic Christology is that in attempting to avoid one heresy, it may fall into another. The insistence that Jesus is personal only in his divine dimension manifestly excludes something vital from his humanity. Denying the individual humanness of Jesus intimates that he was predominantly divine. And that smacks of Apollonianism.<sup>16</sup>

*Kenoticism*

The modern period has produced one distinctive attempt to solve the problem of the relationship between the two natures. Particularly in the nineteenth century, it was propounded that the key to understanding the incarnation is to be found in the expression “[Jesus] emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7). According to this view, what Jesus emptied himself of was the form of God (*μορφὴ θεοῦ*, v. 6). The Second Person of the Trinity laid aside his distinctly divine attributes (omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.) and took on human qualities instead. In effect, the incarnation consisted

15. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), vol. 1, part 1, pp. 149–50.

16. Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1948), pp. 92–93.

of an exchange of part of the divine nature for human characteristics.<sup>17</sup> His moral qualities, such as love and mercy, were maintained. While this may seem like an act of the Son alone, in actuality it involved the Father as well. The Father, in sending forth his Son, was like a father who sends his son to the mission field. A part of him went forth as well.<sup>18</sup>

What we have here is a parallel, in the realm of Christology, to the solution offered by modalistic monarchianism to the problem of the Trinity. Jesus is not God and man simultaneously, but successively. With respect to certain attributes, he is God, then he is man, then God again. The solution to the Chalcedonian formula is to maintain that Jesus is God and man in the same respect, but not at the same time. While this view solves some of the difficulty, it does not account for the evidence we cited earlier to the effect that the biblical writers regarded Jesus as both God and man. Moreover, the indications of an apparent continuing incarnation (see, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:16) militate against the maintenance of this theory, innovative though it be.

*The Doctrine of Dynamic Incarnation*

A final attempt to resolve the problem of two natures in one person might be termed the doctrine of dynamic incarnation. This holds that the presence of God in the God-man was not in the form of a personal hypostatic union between the Second Person of the Trinity and an individual human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, the incarnation should be thought of as the active presence of the power of God within the person Jesus.

This view is akin to dynamic monarchianism. The power of God entered into the man Jesus. This means that the incarnation was not so much a case of Jesus’ being united with God in some sort of hypostatic union as it was an indwelling in him of the power of God.

A recent form of this view is found in Donald Baillie’s *God Was in Christ*. Baillie bases his theology upon 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” Note that instead of saying, “Christ was God,” this verse emphasizes that “God was in Christ.”

To explain the paradox of the incarnation, Baillie uses the model of God’s indwelling the believer in what is called the paradox of grace. When the believer does the right thing, or makes the right choice, he typically says, “It was not I, but God that did it.” In Galatians 2:20 and

17. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1914), pp. 463–90.

18. Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Scribner, 1891), p. 172.

Philippians 2: 12-13 Paul speaks of the internal working of God. This power of God within the believer Baillie presents as a model of the incarnation. His statements, however, imply that the incarnation of Jesus is actually an instance, albeit the most complete one, of the paradox of indwelling grace:

This paradox in its fragmentary form in our own Christian lives is a reflection of that perfect union of God and man in the Incarnation on which our whole Christian life depends, and may therefore be our best clue to the understanding of it. In the New Testament we see the man in whom God was incarnate surpassing all other men in refusing to claim anything for Himself independently and ascribing all the goodness to God.<sup>19</sup>

Given this interpretation of the incarnation, the difference between Christ and us is only quantitative, not qualitative. But, it must be noted, this interpretation conflicts with several emphases of Scripture: the fullness (*πλήρωμα*) of God dwelling in Jesus bodily (Col. 2:9); the preexistence of Christ (John 1:18; 858); and the uniqueness of his sonship (*μονογενής*, John 3:16). While the doctrine of dynamic incarnation lessens the tension suggested by the Chalcedonian formula, it encounters difficulty because of its implicit reduction of the deity.

#### Basic Tenets of the Doctrine of Two Natures in One Person

We have reviewed several attempts to resolve the difficult christological problem of two natures in one person and noted the deficiencies of each. We must, then, present an alternative statement. What are the essential principles of the doctrine of the incarnation, and how are they to be understood? Several crucial points will help us understand this great mystery.

1. The incarnation was more a gaining of human attributes than a giving up of divine attributes. Philippians 2:6-7 is often conceived of as meaning that Jesus emptied himself of some of his divine attributes, perhaps even his deity itself. According to this interpretation, he became man by becoming something less than God. Part of his divinity was surrendered and displaced by human qualities. The incarnation, then, is more a subtraction from his divine nature than an addition to it.

In our interpretation of Philippians 2:6-7, however, what Jesus emptied himself of was not the divine *μορφή*, the nature of God. At no point does

<sup>19</sup> Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, p. 117.

this passage say that he ceased to possess the divine nature. This becomes clearer when we take Colossians 2:9 into account: "For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily." The kenosis of Philippians 2:7 must be understood in the light of the pleroma of Colossians 2:9. What does it mean, then, to say that Jesus "emptied himself"? Some have suggested that he emptied himself by pouring his divinity into his humanity, as one pours the contents of one cup into another. This, however, fails to identify the vessel from which Jesus poured out his divine nature when he emptied it into his humanity.

A better approach to Philippians 2:6-7 is to think of the phrase "taking the form of a servant" as a circumstantial explanation of the kenosis. Since *λαβών* is an aorist participle adverbial in function, we would render the first part of verse 7, 'he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.' The participial phrase is an explanation of how Jesus emptied himself, or what he did that constituted kenosis. While the text does not specify what he emptied himself of, it is noteworthy that "the form of a servant" contrasts sharply with "equality with God" (v. 6). We conclude that it is equality with God, not the form of God, of which Jesus emptied himself. While he did not cease to be in nature what the Father was, he became functionally subordinated to the Father for the period of the incarnation. Jesus did this for the purposes of revealing God and redeeming man. By taking on human nature, he accepted certain limitations upon the functioning of his divine attributes. These limitations were not the result of a loss of divine attributes but of the addition of human attributes.

2. The union of the two natures meant that they did not function independently. Jesus did not exercise his deity at times and his humanity at other times. His actions were always those of divinity-humanity. This is the key to understanding the functional limitations which the humanity imposed upon the divinity. For example, he still had the power to be everywhere (omnipresence). However, as an incarnate being, he was limited in the exercise of that power by possession of a human body. Similarly, he was still omniscient, but he possessed and exercised knowledge in connection with a human organism which grew gradually in terms of consciousness, whether of the physical environment or eternal truths. Thus, only gradually did his limited human psyche become aware of who he was and what he had come to accomplish. Yet this should not be considered a reduction of the power and capacities of the Second Person of the Trinity, but rather a circumstance-induced limitation on the exercise of his power and capacities.

Picture the following analogy. The world's fastest sprinter is entered in a three-legged race, where he must run with one of his legs tied to a leg of a partner. Although his physical capacity is not diminished, the condi-

tions under which he exercises it are severely circumscribed. Even if his partner in the race is the world's second fastest sprinter, their time will be much slower than if they competed separately; for that matter, it will be slower than the time of almost any other human running unencumbered. Or think of the world's greatest boxer fighting with one hand tied behind his back. Or a softball game in which parents, competing with their children, reverse their usual batting stance (i.e., right-handed batters bat left-handed, and left-handed batters bat right-handed). In each of these cases, ability is not in essence diminished, but the conditions imposed on its exercise limit actual performance.

This is the situation of the incarnate Christ. Just as the runner or the boxer could unloose the tie, but chooses to restrict himself for the duration of the event, so Christ's incarnation was a voluntary, self-chosen limitation. He did not have to take on humanity, but he chose to do so for the period of the incarnation. During that time his deity always functioned in connection with his humanity.

3. In thinking about the incarnation, we must begin not with the traditional conceptions of humanity and deity, but with the recognition that the two are most fully known in Jesus Christ. We sometimes approach the incarnation with an antecedent assumption that it is virtually impossible. We know what humanity is and what deity is, and they are, of course, by definition incompatible. They are, respectively, the finite and the infinite. But this is to begin in the wrong place—with a conception of humanity drawn from our knowledge of *existential* rather than *essential* humanity. Our understanding of human nature has been formed by an inductive investigation of both ourselves and other humans as we find them about us. But none of us are humanity as God intended it to be, or as it came from his hand. Humanity was spoiled and corrupted by the sin of Adam and Eve. Consequently, we are not true human beings, but impaired, broken-down vestiges of essential humanity, and it is difficult to imagine this kind of humanity united with deity. But when we say that in the incarnation Jesus took on humanity, we are not talking about this kind of humanity. For the humanity of Jesus was not the humanity of sinful human beings, but the humanity possessed by Adam and Eve from their creation and before their fall. There is no doubt, then, as to Jesus' humanity. The question is not whether Jesus was fully human, but whether we are (see p. 721). He was not merely as human as we are; he was more human than we are. He was, spiritually, the type of humanity that we will possess when we are glorified. His humanity was certainly more compatible with deity than is the type of humanity that we now observe. We should define humanity, not by integrating our present empirical observations, but by examining the human nature of Jesus, for he most fully reveals the true nature of humanity.

Jesus Christ is also our best source for knowledge of deity. We assume that we know what God is really like. But it is in Jesus that God is most fully revealed and known. As John said, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). Thus, our picture of what deity is like comes primarily through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

We sometimes approach the incarnation the wrong way. We define deity and humanity abstractly and then say, "They could not possibly fit together." We assume that divine nature simply cannot be assimilated with human nature, but that assumption is based upon the Greek conception of the impossibility of deity rather than upon the Bible. If, however, we begin with the reality of the incarnation in Jesus Christ, we not only see better what the two natures are like, but recognize that whatever they are, they are not incompatible, for they once did coexist in one person. And what is actual is of course possible.<sup>20</sup>

In connection with the possibility of unity between deity and humanity, we need to bear in mind the distinctive picture of humanity given us in the Bible. As the image of God, man is already the creature most like God. The assumption that man is so dissimilar from God that the two cannot coexist in one person is probably based upon some other model of human nature. It may result from thinking of man as basically an animal which has evolved from lower forms of life. We know from the Bible, however, that God chose to become incarnate in a creature very much like himself. It is quite possible that God's purpose in making man in his own image was to facilitate the incarnation which would someday take place.

4. It is important to think of the initiative of the incarnation as coming from above, as it were, rather than from below. Part of our problem in understanding the incarnation may come from the fact that we view it from below, from the human perspective. From this standpoint, incarnation seems very unlikely, perhaps even impossible. The difficulty lies in the fact that we are in effect asking ourselves how a human being could ever be God, as if it were a matter of a human being's becoming God or somehow adding deity to his humanity. We are keenly aware of our own limits, and know how hard or even impossible it would be to go beyond them, particularly to the extent of becoming God. For God to become man (or, more correctly, to add humanity to his deity), however, is not impossible. He is unlimited and therefore is able to descend to the lesser, whereas the lesser cannot ascend to the greater or higher. (It is possible for us as human beings to do many of the things which a cat or a dog does; for instance, to imitate its sounds or behavior. To be sure, we

20. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960), pp. 46-47.

do not actually take on feline or canine nature, and there are certain limitations, such as a less acute sense of sight or smell; but it is still much easier for us to imitate animals than for them to imitate human behavior.) The fact that man did not ascend to divinity, nor did God elevate a man to divinity, but, rather, God condescended to take on humanity, facilitates our ability to conceive of the incarnation and also effectively excludes adoptionism. It will be helpful to keep in mind here that the heavenly Second Person of the Trinity antedated the earthly Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, there was no such being as the earthly Jesus of Nazareth prior to the moment of conception in the womb of the virgin Mary.

5. It is also helpful to think of Jesus as a very complex person. Of the people whom we know, some are relatively simple. This is not a reference to their level of intelligence, but rather to the straightforwardness of their personality. One comes to know them fairly quickly, and they may therefore be quite predictable. Other persons, on the other hand, have much more complex personalities. They may have a wider range of experience, a more varied educational background, or a more complex emotional makeup. There are many facets to their personalities. When we think we know them quite well, another dimension of their lives appears, a dimension which we did not previously know existed. Now if we imagine complexity expanded to an infinite degree, then we have a bit of a glimpse into the "personality of Jesus" as it were, his two natures in one person. For Jesus' personality included the qualities and attributes which constitute deity. There were within his person dimensions of experience, knowledge, and love that are not found in human beings. To be sure, there is a problem here, for these qualities differ from the human not merely in degree, but in kind. This point serves to remind us that the person of Jesus was not simply an amalgam of human and divine qualities merged into some sort of *tertium quid*. Rather, his was a personality that in addition to the characteristics of divine nature had all the qualities or attributes of perfect, sinless human nature as well.

We have noted several dimensions of biblical truth which will help us better understand the incarnation. Someone has said that there are only seven basic jokes, and every joke is merely a variation on one of them. A similar statement can be made about heresies regarding the person of Christ. There are basically six, and all of them appeared within the first four Christian centuries. They either deny the genuineness (Ebionism) or the completeness (Arianism) of Jesus' deity, deny the genuineness (Docetism) or the completeness (Apollinarianism) of his humanity, divide his person (Nestorianism), or confuse his natures (Eutychianism). All departures from the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ are simply variations of one of these heresies. While we may have difficulty specifying exactly the content of this doctrine, full fidelity to teaching of Scripture will carefully avoid each of these distortions.

# 35

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## The Virgin Birth

### The Significance of the Issue

### Evidence for the Virgin Birth

- Biblical Evidence
- Early Church Tradition

### Objections to the Virgin Birth

- Unexpected Ignorance Regarding the Virgin Birth
- The Possibility of Its Precluding Full Humanity
- Parallels in Other Religions
- Incompatibility with the Preexistence of Christ
- Conflict with Natural Law

### The Theological Meaning of the Virgin Birth

### The Significance of the Issue

Next to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, perhaps the one event of his life that has received the greatest amount of attention is the virgin birth. Certainly, next to the resurrection, it is the most debated and controversial.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the virgin birth was at the forefront of debate between the fundamentalists and

modernists. The fundamentalists insisted upon the doctrine as an essential belief. The modernists either rejected it as unessential or untenable, or reinterpreted it in some nonliteral fashion. To the former it was a guarantee of the qualitative uniqueness and deity of Christ, while to the latter it seemed to shift attention from his spiritual reality to a biological issue.<sup>1</sup>

One reason why there was so much emphasis upon this teaching which is mentioned only twice in Scripture is that there were shifting conceptions of various other doctrines. One of the tendencies of the liberals was to redefine doctrines without changing the terminology. John Randall, Jr., has referred to the virtual dishonesty of such a practice.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the practice of redefining various doctrines without changing the terminology, subscription to those doctrines was no longer positive proof of orthodoxy. Thus it was no longer possible to assume that what a theologian meant by the "divinity" or "deity" of Christ was a qualitative uniqueness distinguishing him from other humans. We mentioned in chapter 14 the case of W. Robertson Smith, who, when accused of denying the divinity of Christ, reportedly said, "How can they accuse me of that? I've never denied the divinity of any man, let alone Jesus!" In the face of such views, assent to the doctrine of Jesus' deity did not necessarily entail the traditional meaning: that Jesus was divine in the same sense and to the same degree as the Father, and in a way that is not true of any other person who has ever lived. Thus, not surprisingly, the deity of Christ does not appear in some lists of the fundamentals of orthodoxy. Instead, the bodily resurrection and the virgin birth are to be found there. The fundamentalists reasoned that if one could subscribe to the virgin birth, it probably was not necessary to inquire into his position on the other evidences of Jesus' deity, as these are generally less difficult to accept than the virgin birth. That is why one's position on the virgin birth became asked of candidates for ordination, for it was a relatively quick and efficient way of determining whether they held Christ to be supernatural.

There was an even larger issue here, however. For the virgin birth became a test of one's position on the miraculous. If one could subscribe to the virgin birth, he probably could accept the other miracles reported in the Bible. Thus, this became a convenient way of determining one's attitude toward the supernatural in general. But even beyond that, it was

1. Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Man from Nazareth as His Contemporaries Saw Him* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 158-60.

2. John Herman Randall, Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), p. 542.

a test of one's world-view, and specifically of one's view of God's relationship to the world.

One of the major points of disagreement between the conservative and the liberal had to do with God's relationship to the world. Generally speaking, the liberal or modernist stressed the immanence of God. God was seen as everywhere present and active. He was believed to be at work accomplishing his purposes through natural law and everyday processes rather than in direct and unique fashion.<sup>3</sup> The conservative or fundamentalist, on the other hand, stressed the transcendence of God. According to this view, God is outside the world, but intervenes miraculously from time to time to perform a special work. The fundamentalist saw the virgin birth as a sign of God's miraculous working,<sup>4</sup> whereas the liberal saw every birth as a miracle. The virgin birth was, then, a primary battleground between the supernaturalistic and naturalistic views of God's relationship to the world.

The virgin birth means different things to different theologians. What we are speaking of here is really the 'virgin conception.' By this we mean that Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary was not the result of sexual relationship. Mary was a virgin at the time of the conception, and continued so up to the point of birth, for the Scripture indicates that Joseph did not have sexual intercourse with her until after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25). Mary became pregnant through a supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon her, but that does not mean that Jesus was the result of copulation between God and Mary. It also does not mean that there was not a normal birth. Some theologians, particularly Catholics, interpret the virgin birth as meaning that Jesus was not born in normal fashion. In their view, he simply passed through the wall of Mary's uterus instead of being delivered through the normal birth canal, so that Mary's hymen was not ruptured. Thus, there was a sort of miraculous Caesarean section. According to the related Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, she at no point engaged in sexual intercourse, so that there were no natural sons and daughters born to Joseph and Mary.<sup>5</sup> Certain theologians, for example, Dale Moody, in order to distinguish their interpretation of the virgin birth from that of traditional Catholi-

3. Borden P. Bowne, *The Immanence of God* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), pp. 5-32.

4. James Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1907), pp. 1-29.

5. Until recently, Roman Catholic theologians adhered to the fourth-century three-fold formula regarding Mary's virginity: *ante par-tum, in partu, et postpartum* ('before, in, and after birth'). See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 517-18. The "brothers and sisters" of Jesus have been explained either as children of Joseph by an earlier marriage or as Jesus' cousins. See J. Blizer, *Die Brüder und Schwestern Jesu* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967).

cism, have proposed the use of the expression "virginal conception" or "miraculous conception" in place of "virgin birth."<sup>6</sup> However, because of the common usage of the expression "virgin birth," we will employ it here, with the understanding that our interpretation differs from the traditional Roman Catholic dogma.

There are also disagreements as to the importance of the virgin birth, even among those who insist that belief in the doctrine must be maintained. Some have argued that the virgin birth was essential to the incarnation.<sup>7</sup> If there had been both a human mother and a human father, Jesus would have been only a man. Others feel that the virgin birth was indispensable to the sinlessness of Christ.<sup>8</sup> For if there had been two human parents, Jesus would have inherited a depraved or corrupted human nature in its fullness; there would have been no possibility of sinlessness. Yet others feel that the virgin birth was not essential for either of these considerations, but that it has great value in terms of symbolizing the reality of the incarnation.<sup>9</sup> It is an evidential factor, in much the same way that the other miracles and particularly the resurrection function to certify the supernaturalness of Christ. On this basis, the virgin birth was not necessary ontologically, that is, the virgin birth was not necessary for Jesus to be God. It is, however, necessary epistemologically, that is, in order for us to know that he is God.

On the other hand, some have contended that the doctrine of the virgin birth is dispensable.<sup>10</sup> It could be omitted with no disruption of the essential meaning of Christianity. While few evangelicals take this position actively, it is interesting to note that some evangelical systematic-theology texts make little or no mention of the virgin birth in their treatment of Christology.<sup>11</sup> In fact, much of the discussion of the virgin birth has come in separate works which deal at length with the subject.

It will be necessary for us, once we have examined the positive arguments or evidence for the virgin birth, to ask what the real meaning of

6. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 417. Raymond Brown uses the term "Virginal Conception"-*The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973), pp. 27-28.

7. Tertullian *Adversus Marcionem* 4. 10.

8. Orr, *Virgin Birth*, pp. 190-201.

9. Edward J. Carnell, "The Virgin Birth of Christ," *Christianity Today*, 7 December 1959, pp. 9-10.

10. L. Harold De Wolf, *A Theology of the Living Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 230-32.

11. E.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953); Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 2.

the doctrine is, and what its importance is. Then, and only then, will we be able to draw its practical implications.

## Evidence for the Virgin Birth

### Biblical Evidence

The doctrine of the virgin birth is based upon just two explicit biblical references-Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38. There are other passages in the New Testament which some have argued refer to or at least allude to or presuppose the virgin birth, and there is the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 which is cited by Matthew (1:23). But even when these passages are taken into consideration, the number of relevant references is quite few.

We might simply stop at this point and assert that since the Bible affirms the virgin birth not once but twice, that is sufficient proof. Since we believe that the Bible is inspired and authoritative, Matthew 1 and Luke 1 convince us that the virgin birth is fact. However, we must also be mindful that inasmuch as a claim of historical truthfulness is made for the virgin birth, that is, inasmuch as it is represented as an event occurring within time and space, it is in principle capable of being confirmed or falsified by the data of historical research.

In trying to determine the historicity of the virgin birth, we note, first, the basic integrity of the two pertinent passages. Both of the explicit references, and specifically Matthew 1:20-21 and Luke 1:34, are integral parts of the narrative in which they occur; they are not insertions or interpolations. Moreover, Raymond Brown finds that between each of the infancy narratives and the rest of the book in which it appears there is a continuity in style (e.g., the vocabulary, the general formula of citation) and subject matter.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, it can be argued that the two accounts of Jesus' birth, although clearly independent of one another, are similar on so many points (including Mary's virginity) that it must be concluded that for those points both draw independently upon a common narrative earlier than either of them; having greater antiquity, it also has a stronger claim to historicity. Brown has compiled a list of eleven points which the accounts in Matthew and Luke have in common.<sup>13</sup> Among the significant items in which they differ Brown notes Luke's references to the story of

12. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, pp. 48-51, 239-43.

13. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the birth of John the Baptist, the census, the shepherds, the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple, and his teaching there at age twelve. Matthew, on the other hand, has the story of the Magi's being guided to the child by the star, the slaughter of the infants by Herod, and the flight into Egypt.<sup>14</sup> That despite this diversity both accounts specifically refer to the virginal conception is a strong hint that for this particular item both depended on a single earlier tradition. An additional point of authentication relates to the Jewish character of these portions of the two Gospels. From the perspective of form criticism, then, the tradition of the virgin birth appeared within the church at an early point in its history, when it was under primarily Jewish, rather than Greek, influence.<sup>15</sup>

Whence did this tradition derive? One answer that has been given is that it arose from extrabiblical, extra-Christian sources. Both myths found in pagan religions and pre-Christian Judaism have been suggested as the source for the tradition. We will examine these suggestions a little later (pp. 752-53). We note here, however, that the parallels with other religions are rather superficial and the alleged sources differ from the biblical accounts in very significant ways. Further, there is real doubt whether most of them would have been known or acceptable to early Christians. Thus, this theory must be discarded.

In the past it was common to attribute the tradition to Joseph and Mary, who, after all, would have been the only ones with firsthand knowledge. Thus, Matthew's account was attributed to Joseph, and Luke's to Mary.<sup>16</sup> When looked at from the perspective of what is mentioned and what omitted, this hypothesis makes considerable sense. But Brown argues that Joseph, who was apparently dead by the time of Jesus' public ministry, cannot be considered a source for the tradition. And Mary does not seem to have been close to the disciples during Jesus' ministry, although she apparently was part of the postresurrection community. Brown states that while it is not impossible that she was the source of the material in Luke's infancy narrative, it is most unlikely that she supplied the material for Matthew's account, since it does not seem to be told from her standpoint. So Brown concludes that "we have no real

14. Ibid., p. 35.

15. Raymond E. Brown, "Virgin Birth," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), supplementary volume, p. 941. While we have expressed reservations about the utility of form criticism (pp. 91-95), it is significant that even on its premises, there is support for the early existence of this tradition.

16. Orr, *Virgin Birth*, p. 83.

knowledge that any or all of the infancy material came from a tradition for which there was a corroborating witness."<sup>17</sup>

Despite Brown's arguments it is difficult to accept his conclusion. The argument that Joseph cannot be considered a source of the tradition of the virgin birth because he was already dead by the time of Jesus' ministry, while an argument from silence, is probably technically correct. He was not a direct source. It does not follow, however, that there is no way in which his personal experiences in connection with Jesus' birth could have become known to the early community. Did Joseph have no acquaintances in whom he might have confided and who might have eventually become believers and part of the Christian community? And, as someone has well questioned, did he and Mary never talk with one another? There also is a too hasty dismissal of the role of Mary. If, as Brown concedes, there is New Testament evidence that she was part of the postresurrection community (Acts 1:14), is she not a likely source of the tradition?

Nor should we too easily dismiss the possibility that other members of Jesus' family may have played a role. It has been observed that the *Protevangelium of James*, supposedly an account of Jesus' birth by one of his brothers, is highly folkloric and makes elementary mistakes about matters of temple procedure. But does it follow from the undependability of this apocryphal writing that the actual James, who is conceded by Brown to have survived into the 60s,<sup>18</sup> could not have been a reliable source of an accurate tradition? Brown himself made a cogent suggestion in this regard in an earlier writing:

A family tradition about the manner of Jesus' conception may have lent support to the theological solution [to the problem of how Jesus could have been free from sin]. While there is no way of proving the existence of such a private tradition, the prominence of Jesus' relatives in the Jerusalem church-e.g., James, the brother of the Lord-should caution us about the extent to which Christians were free, at least up through the 60s, to invent family traditions about Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

17. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, p. 33.

18. Ibid.

19. Brown, "Virgin Birth," p. 941; cf. *Birth of the Messiah*, p. 35n. In the latter work, Brown supports his basic argument (that Joseph and Mary were not the source of the tradition) by emphasizing the differences between Matthew and Luke. He assumes, for instance, that if Joseph had told Mary of the annunciation to him, it would have appeared in Luke's account. Similarly, if Mary supplied Luke with information, she must have mentioned the Magi and the flight into Egypt. Despite his acquaintance with redaction criticism, Brown seems to ignore the possibility that Luke may have made selections from what Mary told him. Note also that if the virgin conception is true, James should be thought of as Jesus' *half* brother, not his brother.

If we exclude the family as the source of the tradition, we have the knotty problem as to where it in fact did come from. We have noted that the hypothesis of an extrabiblical source will not suffice. We therefore conclude that "it is difficult to explain how the idea arose if not from fact."<sup>20</sup> While it is not necessary for us to establish the exact source of the tradition, Jesus' family still seems to be a very likely possibility.

We should note also that apparently there was an early questioning of Jesus' legitimacy. There is in Celsus's anti-Christian polemic (about 177-180) a charge that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera, and that Jesus had himself created the story of his virgin birth.<sup>21</sup> That Celsus's work is believed to be based upon Jewish sources argues for an early tradition of the virgin birth.

Even within the New Testament, however, there are indications of a questioning of Jesus' legitimacy. In Mark 6:3 Jesus is identified by his fellow townspeople as "the son of Mary," whereas we would expect to find the designation "the son of Joseph." This is considered by some a reference to a tradition that Joseph was not Jesus' father; their view is fortified by the statement that the townspeople took offense at Jesus. Generally, when a man in those times was being identified, it was in terms of who his father was. A man was identified in terms of who his mother was only if his paternity was uncertain or unknown.<sup>\*\*</sup> Brown argues that the fact that Jesus' brothers are also mentioned in Mark 6:3 as a sign of his ordinariness militates against understanding the designation "the son of Mary" as evidence that Jesus was regarded as illegitimate, for the legitimacy of his brothers and sisters would thus be called into question as well.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not Browns inference is valid, it is apparent that the evidence of the text is not conclusive. The existence of variant readings (e.g., "the son of the carpenter") is another warning against drawing hasty conclusions.

One other text bearing upon this issue is John 8:41, where the Jews say to Jesus, "We were not born of fornication." The use of the emphatic pronoun *ἡμεῖς* could be construed as an innuendo: "It is not we who are illegitimate."

It would not be surprising if there was a rumor that Jesus was illegitimate, for according to both Matthew's and Luke's account, Jesus was conceived after Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they had officially come together. Therefore, Jesus was born embarrassingly early.

20. Brown, "Virgin Birth," p. 941.

21. Origen *Against Celsus* 1.28, 32, 69.

22. Ethelbert Stauffer, "Jeschu ben Mirjam," in *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, ed. E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1969), pp. 119-28.

23. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, p. 541.

Matthew in particular may have included the story found in 1: 18-25 because a rumor of illegitimacy was in circulation. He may well have been motivated by a desire to preserve both respect for Jesus' parents and the conviction of Jesus' sinlessness. Certainly the indications that Jesus may have been thought illegitimate cohere with the virgin conception. They do not, of course, verify it, since another option consistent with those indications would be that he indeed was illegitimate. But at the very least we can assert that all the biblical evidence makes it clear that Joseph was not the natural father of Jesus.

#### *Early Church Tradition*

Another evidence of the virgin birth is its strong tradition in the early church. While this tradition does not in itself establish the virgin birth as a fact, it is the type of evidence that we would expect if the doctrine is true.

A beginning point is the Apostles' Creed. The form which we now use was produced in Gaul in the fifth or sixth century, but its roots go back much further. It actually is based upon an old Roman baptismal confession. The virgin birth is affirmed in the earlier as well as the later form.<sup>24</sup> By shortly after the middle of the second century the early form was already in use, not only in Rome, but by Tertullian in North Africa and Irenaeus in Gaul and Asia Minor. The presence of the doctrine of the virgin birth in an early confession of the important church of Rome is highly significant, especially since such a creed would not have incorporated any new doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

One other important early testimony is that of Ignatius, bishop of Syrian Antioch, who was martyred not later than 117. Arguing against Docetists, he produced a summary of the chief facts about Christ. Adolf von Harnack called Ignatius's summary a kerygma of Christ.<sup>26</sup> It included a reference to the virginity of Mary as one of the "mysteries to be shouted about."<sup>27</sup> Several observations make this reference the more impressive: (1) inasmuch as Ignatius was writing against Docetism, the expression 'born of woman' (as in Gal. 4:4) would have been more to his purpose than was "born of a virgin"; (2) it was written not by a novice, but by the bishop of the mother church of Gentile Christianity; (3) it was written no

24. A. C. McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed Its Origin, Its Purpose, and its Historical Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1902), pp. 122-28.

25. J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), p. 4.

26. See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, p. 7.

27. Ignatius *Ephesians* 18.2- 19.1.

later than 117. As J. Gresham Machen has observed, "when we find [Ignatius] attesting the virgin birth not as a novelty but altogether as a matter of course, as one of the accepted facts about Christ, it becomes evident that the belief in the virgin birth must have been prevalent long before the close of the first century."<sup>28</sup>

It is true, of course, that there is also early evidence of denials of the virgin birth. Some of these, naturally, were by pagans. More significant, however, are the objections from Jews, who were in a better position to be aware of the facts and might reflect a more accurate picture of the tradition. There were also objections raised by some who claimed to be Christian believers. Among these various types of opponents of the doctrine were Celsus, Cerinthus, Carpocrates, and the Ebionites. It is significant that we do not find denial of the virgin birth by anyone who is otherwise orthodox (i.e., who holds to all the other basic doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith). Machen aptly summarizes the negative testimony from the second century: "The denials of the virgin birth which appear in that century were based upon philosophical or dogmatic prepossession, much more probably than upon genuine historical tradition."<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, the existence of strong positive testimony from the second century, coupled with the other types of evidence already cited, argues forcefully for the historicity and factuality of the virgin birth. While the evidence is not unambiguous or overwhelming, it is sufficient to support belief in the biblical testimony on this important topic.

#### Objections to the Virgin Birth

In response to the positive arguments for the virgin birth a large number of objections have been raised. We will investigate several of the more notable obstacles to belief in this doctrine.

##### *Unexpected Ignorance Regarding the Virgin Birth<sup>30</sup>*

It has been argued that persons who were close to Jesus, most especially Mary, but also his brothers, had no knowledge of a miraculous birth. On the basis of Mark 3:21, 31, it is assumed that they were the ones who came to take him away, believing that he was beside himself. Aware-

28. Machen, *Virgin Birth*, p. 7.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

30. Brown, *Virginal Conception*, p. 54; G. A. Danell, "Did St. Paul Know the Tradition About the Virgin Birth?" *Studia Theologica* 4, fasc. 1 (1951): 94.

ness of a miraculous birth would certainly have gone a long way toward explaining his behavior which appeared so bizarre to them here.

It has also been pointed out that most of the New Testament is silent on the subject of the virgin birth. How could Mark, the author of the earliest and most basic of the Gospels, omit mentioning this subject if he was aware of it? And why would John's Gospel, the most theological of the four, be silent on an important issue of this type? Further, it is incredible that Paul, with all of his exposition of the significance of Christ and with his strong orientation toward doctrine, should be ignorant of this matter if it really was a fact and part of the early church tradition. For that matter, the preaching of the early church, recorded in the Book of Acts, is strangely silent on this subject. Is it not peculiar that only two books make mention of the virgin birth, and then only in brief accounts? Even Matthew and Luke do not make any further use of or reference to the virgin birth. These are serious charges which demand reply, for if taken at face value, they undercut or neutralize the claim that there was early testimony to the virgin birth.

We must look first at Mark 3. There is no assurance that Mary and Jesus' brothers (v. 3 1) were the "friends" who thought him to be beside himself (v. 2 1). Literally, the Greek reads "the ones from his," presumably a reference to persons from his own home. Just who these were, however, is by no means clear. And it is noteworthy that in verse 3 1 there is no mention of the incident of verse 21. It is likely, then, that the one is not a sequel to the other. Rather, the two verses are reporting disconnected occurrences. There is no indication that when Mary and Jesus' brothers came seeking him, they were concerned about his mental condition or the stability of his actions. No connection is established with the terminology of verse 2 1, nor is there any hint that this was a second approach by Jesus' mother and brothers. Moreover, a verbal exchange with scribes from Jerusalem intervenes between the two verses. And Jesus' reference to "my mother and my brothers" contains no hint of an unfavorable reflection upon them (w. 33-35). There is no warrant, then, to believe that the "friends" who thought Jesus to be beside himself were his mother and brothers.

Even if Mary had been among those who thought Jesus to be beside himself, however, that surely would not be incompatible with knowledge of the virgin birth. If Mary had expected that Jesus was someday to sit upon the throne of David, there might easily have been perplexity on her part. For the ministry in which Jesus was now engaged seemed to produce opposition and rejection. Yet she may also have been mindful of the fact that, during the period from Jesus' infancy to adulthood, she had been in a position of superiority over him—caring for him, training him, teaching and counseling him. There had no doubt been times when she

had found it necessary to advise him regarding wiser courses of action for his personal life, if indeed his incarnation was genuine. She may have regarded this episode as simply another occasion when her guidance was needed.

Regarding the brothers, some of the same considerations apply. In their case, however, we also have an explicit reference indicating that they did not believe upon Jesus during his ministry, or at least at some point during his ministry (John 7:5). Their lack of belief has been cited as evidence that they had no knowledge of a virgin birth and therefore it had not occurred. But we have no reason to assume that they had in fact been told of the virgin birth by Mary and Joseph. While that truth may well have been shared with them at a later point, and may even have had something to do with their coming to faith in him, it is quite possible that they, being younger than Jesus, at the time of their unbelief knew nothing of his unusual birth.

But what of the silence of the other books of the New Testament? The Gospel according to Mark is thought to be particularly significant in this respect, since it presumably is an early and basic document upon which the other Synoptic Gospels built. But one must always be careful in arguing from silence, and especially in this case. Mark does not give any account of the birth and infancy of Jesus. The very design of the book seems to have been to provide a report of the events that had been a matter of public observation, not to give the intimate details of Jesus' life. In writing as relatively compact a book as he did, Mark inevitably had to make selections from the material available. There are no extended discourses reported by Mark, such as we find in Matthew, and the type of incident that would be known and reportable by only one or two persons is not found here either. The tradition that Mark based his Gospel upon information supplied by Peter suggests that Mark may have chosen to include only what the apostle had personally observed. These considerations, if accurate, would account for the absence of any reference to the virgin birth. They do not imply either that Mark did not know of it or that the tradition was spurious.

There is, indeed, one item in Mark's Gospel that some see as a hint that the author did know about the virgin birth. That occurs in 6:3. In the parallel passage Matthew reports that the people of Nazareth asked, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55); and Luke has, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (4:22). However, the report in Mark reads, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" It is as if Mark is taking pains to avoid referring to Jesus as the son of Joseph. Unlike Matthew's and Luke's readers, who had been made aware of the virgin birth in the opening chapter of each of those Gospels, Mark's readers would have no

way of knowing about it. So he chose his words very carefully in order not to give the wrong impression. The crucial point for us is that Mark's account gives no basis whatsoever for concluding that Joseph was the father of Jesus. Thus, although Mark does not tell us of the virgin birth, he certainly does not contradict it either.

John also makes no mention of the virgin birth in his Gospel. As with Mark, it should be observed that the nature of John's Gospel is such that there is no birth narrative. True, the prologue does speak of Jesus' origin, but this passage is theologically oriented rather than historical, and it is followed immediately by a picture of Jesus and John the Baptist at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. There is nothing even approaching a narrative account of the events of Jesus' life prior to the 'age of thirty. While some have sought to find an allusion to the virgin birth in John 1:13, that interpretation depends upon a disputed textual reading.

As we observed earlier, there are no references to the virgin birth in the sermons in the Book of Acts. We should note, however, that those sermons were delivered to hostile or uninformed audiences. It would therefore have been unnatural to include references to the virgin birth, for they might introduce an unnecessary obstacle to acceptance of the message and the one on whom it centered.

The remaining consideration is the writing of Paul. Because of his dominant role in the formulation of the theology of the early church, what he says or does not say is of considerable importance. A close reading will find nothing in the writings or speeches of Paul that deals directly with the question of the virgin birth, from either a positive or a negative perspective. Some have seen evidence for and others evidence against the virgin birth in Galatians 4:4, but their arguments do not carry much weight. Some have found Romans 1:3 to be inconsistent with the idea of virgin conception, but it is hard to see any definite contradiction.

The absence of any reference to the virgin birth is nonetheless of concern to us, for if it is a matter of great importance, it seems strange that Paul did not make more of it. We need to see Paul's writings for what they were, however: not general discourses of a catechetical nature, but treatments of particular problems in the life of a church or an individual. If the occasion did not call for exposition or argument on a particular topic, Paul did not deal with it. Among the great issues about which he did argue are grace and the law, the nature of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ, and personal morality. He did not go into detail on issues concerning the person of Christ, for they were evidently not matters of dispute in the churches or for the individuals to whom he wrote.

To sum up our point: there is nothing in the silence of many New Testament writers on the subject of the virgin birth to militate against it.

Somewhat later, however, in view of all this silence, we may have to ask just what the importance of the doctrine is. Is it indispensable to Christian faith, and, if so, in what way?

#### *The Possibility of Its Precluding Full Humanity*

Some have raised the question of whether Jesus was fully human if he had but one human parent.<sup>31</sup> But this confuses the essence of humanity with the process which transfers it from one generation to another. Adam and Eve did not have a human father or mother, yet were fully human; and in the case of Adam, there was no prior human from whom his human nature could in any sense have been taken.

It may be objected that the absence of the male factor would somehow preclude full humanity. This, however, with its implicit chauvinism, does not follow. Jesus was not produced after the genetic pattern of Mary alone, for in that case, he would in effect have been a clone of her, and would necessarily have been female. Rather, a male component was contributed. In other words, a sperm was united with the ovum provided by Mary, but it was specially created for the occasion instead of being supplied by an existent male.

#### *Parallels in Other Religions*

It has been suggested that the biblical accounts of the virgin birth are nothing more than an adaptation of similar accounts occurring in the literature of other religions. Plutarch suggests that a woman can be impregnated when approached by a divine *pneuma*.<sup>32</sup> This remark occurs in his retelling of the legend of Numa, who after the death of his wife withdrew into solitude to have intercourse with the divine being Egeria. There are stories of how Zeus begat Hercules, Perseus, and Alexander, and of Apollo's begetting Ion, Asclepius, Pythagoras, Plato, and Augustus. These myths, however, are nothing more than stories about fornication between divine and human beings, which is something radically different from the biblical accounts of the virgin birth. Dale Moody comments: "The yawning chasm between these pagan myths of polytheistic promiscuity and the lofty monotheism of the virgin birth of Jesus is too wide for careful research to cross."<sup>33</sup> The similarity is far less than

31. Brown, *Virginal Conception*, pp. 56-61.

32. Plutarch Numa 4.4.

33. Dale Moody, "Virgin Birth," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 4, p. 791.

the differences. Therefore, the idea that pagan myths might have been incorporated into the Gospel accounts must be rejected.

A variation of this view connects the biblical accounts with Judaism instead of with pagan religion. The accounts in Matthew and Luke are considered too Jewish to have allowed any direct pagan influence. What we must recognize, however, say proponents of this variant theory, is that in Judaism there was an expectation of a virgin birth. Somehow Judaism had picked up this idea from paganism and incorporated it. It then was transmitted into the Christian documents in its Judaized form.

The problem with this theory is that there is no substantive evidence that Judaism espoused a belief in a virgin birth. It appears that the theory has been constructed on the presupposition that virgin birth is a pagan idea and that, since it would not have been accepted directly, it must have come to Christianity through Judaism. Therefore, it is assumed that such a belief must have existed within Judaism.

#### *Incompatibility with the Preexistence of Christ*

An additional major objection to the idea of virgin birth is that it cannot be reconciled with the clear and definite evidence of the preexistence of Christ. If we hold the one, it is claimed, we cannot hold the other. They are mutually exclusive, not complementary. The most articulate recent statement of this objection is that of Wolfhart Pannenberg.<sup>34</sup>

Is this objection valid, however? In the orthodox Christian understanding, Jesus is fully divine and fully human. His preexistence relates to his divinity and the virgin birth to his humanity. The Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, always has been. At a finite point in time he assumed humanity, however, and was born as the man Jesus of Nazareth. There is no reason why the preexistence and virgin birth should be in conflict if one believes that there was a genuine incarnation at the beginning of Jesus' earthly life.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Conflict with Natural Law*

A final objection to the virgin birth results from a fundamental resistance to the possibility of miracles and the intrusion of the supernatural

34. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), p. 143.

35. Otto Piper argues that the church fathers, particularly Tatian and the Valentinian Gnostics, thought of the preexistence of Christ and the virgin birth in tandem—"While in the writings of John and Paul the preexistence of Christ is practically a substitute of the Virgin Birth, it serves in those fathers as evidence of the preexistence" (Otto A. Piper, "The Virgin Birth: The Meaning of the Gospel Accounts," *Interpretation* 18, no. 2 [April 1964]: 132).

into the realm of history. In actuality, this objection may well lie behind some of the others. Here, however, we will bring it out into the open: normal human birth always requires sexual reproduction involving both a male and a female parent.

We considered the subject of miracles in our chapter on God's providence.<sup>36</sup> We will here simply point out that one's position on the possibility of miracles is largely a matter of basic world-view. If one believes that all that happens is a result of natural forces, and that the system of nature is the whole of reality, then there *cannot* be any "miraculous" occurrences. If, on the other hand, one is open to the possibility of a reality outside of our closed system, then there is also the possibility that a supernatural power can intervene and counter the normal functioning of immanent laws. In an open universe, or one that is regarded as open, any event and its contradictory have an equal possibility of occurring. In such a situation, one's position on particular issues like the virgin birth is a matter of determining on historical grounds what actually happened. It is not a matter of theorizing as to what can or cannot happen. Our contention is that there is an adequate amount of historical evidence that Jesus was indeed the son of a virgin who conceived without the normal human sexual relationship. If we have no antecedent objection to the possibility of such an event, we are driven to the conclusion that it did indeed occur.

### The Theological Meaning of the Virgin Birth

Having examined the evidence for and against the virgin birth and concluded that there is adequate basis for holding to the doctrine, we must now ask what it means. Why is it important?

On one level, of course, the virgin birth is important simply because we are told that it occurred. Whether or not we can see a necessity for the virgin birth, if the Bible tells us that it happened, it is important to believe that it did because not to do so is a tacit repudiation of the authority of the Bible. If we do not hold to the virgin birth despite the fact that the Bible asserts it, then we have compromised the authority of the Bible and there is in principle no reason why we should hold to its other teachings. Thus, rejecting the virgin birth has implications reaching far beyond the doctrine itself.

But, we must ask, is not the virgin birth important in some more specific way? Some have argued that the doctrine is indispensable to the incarnation. Without the virgin birth there would have been no union of

36. See pp. 406–09.

God and man.<sup>37</sup> If Jesus had been simply the product of a normal sexual union of man and woman, he would have been only a human being, not a God-man. But is this really true? Could he not have been God and man if he had had two human parents, or none? Just as Adam was created directly by God, so Jesus could also have been a direct special creation. And accordingly, it should have been possible for Jesus to have two human parents and to have been fully the God-man nonetheless. To insist that having a human male parent would have excluded the possibility of deity smacks of Apollinarianism, according to which the divine Logos took the place of one of the normal components of human nature (the soul). But Jesus was fully human, including everything that both a male and a female parent would ordinarily contribute. In addition, there was the element of deity. What God did was to supply, by a special creation, both the human component ordinarily contributed by the male (and thus we have the virgin birth) and, in addition, a divine factor (and thus we have the incarnation). The virgin birth requires only that a normal human being was brought into existence without a human male parent. This could have occurred without an incarnation, and there could have been an incarnation without a virgin birth. Some have called the latter concept "instant adoptionism," since presumably the human involved would have existed on his own apart from the addition of the divine nature. The point here, however, is that, with the incarnation occurring at the moment of conception or birth, there would never have been a moment when Jesus was not both fully human and fully divine. In other words, his being both God and man did not depend on the virgin birth.

A second suggestion frequently made is that the virgin birth was indispensable to the sinlessness of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> If he had possessed both that which the mother contributes and what the father ordinarily contributes, he would have had a depraved and hence sinful nature, like the rest of us. But this argument seems to suggest that we too would be sinless if

37. Tertullian *Adversus Marcionem* 4. 10. Carl Henry comes close to this position when he says, "It may be admitted, of course, that the Virgin Birth is not flatly identical with the Incarnation, just as the empty tomb is not flatly identical with the Resurrection. The one might be affirmed without the other. Yet the connection is so close, and indeed indispensable, that were the Virgin Birth or the empty tomb denied, it is likely that either the Incarnation or the Resurrection would be called in question, or they would be affirmed in a form very different from that which they have in Scripture and historic teaching. The Virgin Birth might well be described as an essential, historical indication of the Incarnation, bearing not only an analogy to the divine and human natures of the Incarnate, but also bringing out the nature, purpose, and bearing of this work of God to salvation" ("Our Lord's Virgin Birth," *Christianity Today*, 7 December 1959, p. 20).

38. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), pp. 79–86.

we did not have a male parent. And this in turn would mean one of two things: either (1) the father, not the mother, is the source of depravity, a notion which in effect implies that women do not have a depraved nature (or if they do, they do not transmit it), or (2) depravity comes not from the nature of our parents, but from the sexual act by which reproduction takes place. But there is nothing in the Scripture to support the latter alternative. The statement in Psalm 51:5, "in sin did my mother conceive me," simply means that the psalmist was sinful from the very beginning of life. It does not mean that the act of conception is sinful in and of itself. Unfortunately, this misapprehension that the reproductive act is intrinsically sinful has led some Christians to have unhealthy attitudes about sex. We think, for example, of the effect of Augustine's censure of "concupiscence."

We are left, then, with the former alternative, namely, that the transmission of sin is related to the father. But this does not have any scriptural grounding either. While some support might be found in Paul's statement that it was the sin of *Adam* (Rom. 5:12) which made all men sinners, Paul also indicates that Eve, not Adam, "was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:14). There are no signs of greater sinfulness among men than among women.

The question arises, If all of the human race is tainted by the original sin, would not Mary have contributed some of its consequences to Jesus? It has been argued that Jesus did have a depraved nature, but he committed no *actual sin*.<sup>39</sup> We would point out in reply that the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). It seems likely that the influence of the Holy Spirit was so powerful and sanctifying in its effect that there was no conveyance of depravity or of guilt from Mary to Jesus. Without that special sanctifying influence, he would have possessed the same depraved nature that all of us have. Now if the Holy Spirit prevented corruption from being passed from Mary to Jesus, could not he have prevented it from being passed on by Joseph as well? We conclude that Jesus' sinlessness was not dependent upon the virgin conception.

We noted earlier that the virgin birth is not mentioned in the evangelistic sermons in the Book of Acts. It may well be, then, that it is not one of the first-level doctrines (i.e., indispensable to salvation). It is a subsidiary or supporting doctrine; it helps create or sustain belief in the indis-

<sup>39</sup> Karl Barth appears to have held the position that Jesus took upon himself the same fallen nature which we now possess; his sinlessness consisted in his never committing actual sin (*Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956], vol. 1, part 2, pp. 151-55).

pensable doctrines, or reinforces truths which are found in other doctrines. Like the resurrection, it is at once a historical event, a doctrine, and an evidence. It is quite possible to be unaware or ignorant of the virgin birth and yet be saved. Indeed, a rather large number of persons evidently were. But what, then, is the significance of this teaching?

1. The doctrine of the virgin birth is a reminder that our salvation is supernatural. Jesus, in telling Nicodemus about the necessity of new birth, said that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5b-6). John stated that those who believe and receive authority to become children of God are born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). The emphasis is that salvation does not come through man's effort, nor is it his accomplishment. So also the virgin birth points to the helplessness of man to initiate even the first step in the process. Not only is man unable to secure his own salvation, but he could not even introduce the Savior into human society.

The virgin birth is, or at least should be, a check upon our natural human tendency towards pride. While Mary was the one who gave birth to the Savior, she would never have been able to do so, even with the aid of Joseph, if the Holy Spirit had not been present and at work. The virgin birth is evidence of the Holy Spirit's activity. Paul wrote in another connection, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). The virgin birth is a reminder that our salvation, though it came through humanity, is totally of God.

2. The virgin birth is also a reminder that God's salvation is fully a gift of grace. There was nothing particularly deserving about Mary. There were probably countless Jewish girls who could have served to give birth to the Son of God. Certainly Mary manifested qualities which God could use, such as faith and dedication (Luke 1:38, 46-55). But she really had nothing special to offer, not even a husband. That someone apparently incapable of having a child should be chosen to bear God's Son is a reminder that salvation is not a human accomplishment but a gift from God, and an undeserved one at that.

3. The virgin birth is evidence of the uniqueness of Jesus the Savior. Although there could have been an incarnation without a virgin birth, the miraculous nature of the birth (or at least the conception) serves to show that Jesus was, at the very least, a highly unusual man singled out by God in particular ways.

4. Here is another evidence of the power and sovereignty of God over nature. On several occasions (e.g., the births of Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist) God had provided a child when the mother was barren or

past the age of childbearing. Surely these were miraculous births. Even more amazing, however, was this birth. God had pointed to his tremendous power when, in promising a child to Abraham and Sarah, he had asked rhetorically, “Is anything too hard for the **LORD?**” (Gen. 18:14). God is all-powerful, able to alter and supersede the path of nature to accomplish his purposes. That God was able to work the seemingly impossible in the matter of the virgin birth is symbolic of his ability to accomplish the seemingly impossible task of granting a new birth to sinners. As Jesus himself said in regard to salvation: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

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**PART EIGHT**

## The Work of Christ

- 36. Introduction to the Work of Christ
- 37. Theories of the Atonement
- 38. The Central Theme of Atonement
- 39. The Extent of the Atonement

# 36

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## Introduction to the Work of Christ

The Functions of Christ

The Revelatory Role of Christ

The Rule of Christ

The Reconciling Work of Christ

The Stages of Christ's Work

The Humiliation

Incarnation

Death

Descent into Hades

The Exaltation

Resurrection

Ascension and Session at the Father's Right Hand

Second Coming

**I**t has been important to make a thorough study of Christ's person, his deity and humanity, so that we might better understand what his unique nature enabled him to do for us. He always was, of course, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity. He became incarnate, however, because of the task that he had to accomplish-saving us from our sin. While some have argued that Jesus would have become incarnate whether man sinned or not, that seems rather unlikely.

We have chosen, in this treatment, to regard the person of Christ as not only ontologically prior to his work, but also epistemologically prior. The view of revelation we have espoused allows for this possibility of acquiring knowledge about Christ's person before knowledge about his work. For revelation about God is twofold. We believe that revelation has taken place through and as the acts of God in historical events. We also hold that a more direct revelation of his person came to the biblical writers, whether in dreams, visions, or concursive inspiration. Thus, we need not infer the meaning of Jesus' acts from their basic character. We have been told in the biblical revelation who and what Jesus Christ is; we do not have to deduce his nature from the ministry that he performed. This gives us certain advantages. For without prior understanding of the person and nature of Jesus Christ, one cannot fully understand the work which he did. Who he was especially fitted him for what he was to do. With this knowledge we are in a much better position to understand Christ's work than if we had to interpret from our mere human perspective all that he has done.

### The Functions of Christ

Historically, it has been customary to categorize the work of Christ in terms of three "offices": prophet, priest, and king. While some of the church fathers spoke of the offices of Christ, it was John Calvin who gave special attention to this concept.<sup>1</sup> The concept of offices then came to be commonly employed in dealing with the work of Christ.

However, many recent treatments of Christology do not categorize the many-faceted work of Jesus as that of prophet, priest, and king. In part this is because some modern theologies have a different perspective on one or more of the types of work so characterized. It is important, however, to retain the truths that Jesus reveals God to man, reconciles God and man to one another, and rules and will rule over the whole of the creation, including man. These truths, if not the exact titles, must be maintained if we are to recognize the whole of what Christ accomplishes in his ministry.

There are several reasons why there has been a hesitation to use the term "offices of Christ" in recent theology. One reason is the tendency, particularly in Protestant scholasticism, to view the offices in sharp distinction or isolation from one another. Sometimes, as G. C. Berkouwer points out, there has been objection to the concept of offices on the

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 2, chapter 15.

grounds that distinctions of any kind are artificial and scholastic.<sup>2</sup> Another reason for the hesitation is that occasionally the idea of office has been taken in too formal a fashion.<sup>3</sup> This stems from particular connotations which the term *office* carries outside the Scriptures. The result is a clouding over of the dynamic and personal character of Christ's work.

Behind the concept of the offices of Christ is the basic idea that Jesus was commissioned to a task. The dimensions of that task (prophetic, priestly, kingly) are biblical, not an imposition upon the biblical material of a foreign set of categories. In order to preserve a unified view of the work of Christ, Berkouwer has referred to the *office* (singular) of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Dale Moody refers to the offices, using the terms *prophet*, *priest*, and *potentate*.<sup>5</sup> In so doing, he expands upon the office of king, while retaining the general idea.

We have chosen to speak of the three *functions* of Christ-revealing, ruling, and reconciling. It is appropriate to think of these aspects of Christ's work as his commission, for Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one. In the Old Testament, people were anointed to particular roles which they were to perform (e.g., priest or king). So when we speak of Jesus as the Christ, or anointed one, we must ask to what role(s) he was anointed. It will be important to maintain all three aspects of his work, not stressing one so that the others are diminished, nor splitting them too sharply from one another, as if they were separate actions of Christ.

### The Revelatory Role of Christ

Many references to the ministry of Christ stress the revelation which he gave of the Father and of heavenly truth. And indeed, Jesus clearly understood himself to be a prophet, for when his ministry in Nazareth was not received, he said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house" (Matt. 13:57). That he was a prophet was recognized by those who heard him preach, at least by his followers. Moreover, at the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus of Nazareth of Galilee" (Matt. 21:11). When, at the end of a discourse later that week, the Pharisees wanted to arrest him they feared to do so because the multitudes held him to be a prophet (Matt. 21:46). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus referred

2. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 58-59.

3. Ibid., p. 58.

4. Ibid., pp. 58-65. Berkouwer speaks of a "threefold office" (p. 6.5) and of three aspects of the one office.

5. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 366-86.

to Jesus as "a prophet mighty in deed and word" (Luke 24: 19). The Gospel of John tells us that the people spoke of Jesus as "the prophet" (6:14; 7:40). The blind man whom Jesus had healed identifies him as a prophet (9:17). And the Pharisees responded to Nicodemus, "Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee" (7:52). They were evidently trying to refute the opinion that Jesus was a prophet.

That Jesus was a prophet was in itself a fulfilment of prophecy. Peter specifically identifies him with Moses' prediction in Deuteronomy 18: 15: "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up" (Acts 3:22). Thus the prophecies about Jesus spoke of him as the successor not only to David as king, but also to Moses as prophet.

Jesus' prophetic ministry was like that of the other prophets in that he was sent from God. Yet there was a significant difference between him and them. He had come from the very presence of God. His preexistence with the Father was a major factor in his ability to reveal the Father, for he had been with him. So it is said by John, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus himself made the claim of preexistence: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). When Philip requested that the disciples be shown the Father, Jesus answered, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He told Nicodemus, "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man" (John 3:13).

The uniqueness of Jesus' prophetic ministry notwithstanding, there were a number of respects in which it was similar to the work of the Old Testament prophets. His message in many ways resembled theirs. There was declaration of doom and judgment, and there was proclamation of good news and salvation. In Matthew 11:20–24 Jesus declares woes upon Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, much like those of Amos against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Moab, and other places, finally culminating in the denunciation of Israel (Amos 1-3). In Matthew 23 Jesus pronounces judgments upon the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, serpents, vipers. Certainly the prophetic message of condemnation of sin was prominent in his preaching.

Jesus also proclaimed good news. Among the Old Testament prophets Isaiah in particular had spoken of the good tidings from God (Isa. 40:9; 52:7). Similarly, in Matthew 13 Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in terms which make it indeed good news: the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field (v. 44) and like a pearl of great price (v. 46). But even in the midst of these glad tidings there is a word of warning, for the kingdom is also like a net which gathers all kinds of fish to be sorted, the good being kept in the boat, but the bad thrown away (w. 47-50).

There is also good news in Jesus' comforting message in John 14: after

going to prepare a place he will come and take his followers to be with him (w. 1-3); those who believe in him will do greater works than he does (v. 12); he will do whatever they ask in his name (vv. 13-14); he and the Father will come to those who believe (w. 18-24); he will give them his peace (v. 27). The tone of this passage is very much like that of Isaiah 40, which begins with "Comfort, comfort my people," and goes on to assure them of the Lord's presence and blessing and care.

Some have noted a similarity of style and type of material between Jesus' teaching and the utterances of the Old Testament prophets. Much of Old Testament prophecy is in poetry rather than prose. C. F. Burney, Joachim Jeremias, and others have pointed out the poetic structure of much of Jesus' teaching, and in many cases have been able to get behind the Greek text to the underlying Aramaic.<sup>6</sup> Jesus also followed and went beyond the Old Testament prophets in the use of parables. In one case he even adapted a parable of Isaiah for his own use (cf. Isa. 5:1-7; Matt. 21:33-41).

Christ's revealing work covers a wide span of time and forms. He first functioned in a revelatory fashion even before his incarnation. As the Logos, he is the light which has enlightened everyone coming into the world; thus, in a sense all truth has come from and through him (John 1:9). There are indications that Christ himself was at work in the revelations which came through the prophets who bore a message about him. Peter writes that the prophets who foretold a coming salvation "inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory" (1 Peter 1:11). Although not personally incarnate, Christ was already making the truth known. It is also quite possible that the Second Person of the Trinity was involved in (or may have been manifested in) the theophanies of the Old Testament.

A second and most obvious period of Jesus' revelatory work was, of course, his prophetic ministry during his incarnation and stay upon earth. Here two forms of revelation come together. He spoke the divine word of truth. Beyond that, however, he was the truth and he was God, and so what he did was a showing forth, not merely a telling, of the truth and of the reality of God. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declares that Jesus is the highest of all the revelations of God (1:1-3). God, who had spoken by the prophets, had now, in the last days, spoken by his Son, who is superior to angels (v. 4) and even to Moses (3:3-6). For Jesus not only has a word from God, but bears the very stamp of his nature, reflecting the glory of God (1:3).

<sup>6</sup> C. F. Burney, *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925); Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 1-41.

There is, third, the continuing revelatory ministry of Christ through his church.<sup>7</sup> He promised them his presence in the ongoing task (Matt. 28:20). He made clear that in many ways his ministry would be continued and completed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would be sent in Jesus' name, and would teach his followers all things and bring to remembrance all that he had said to them (John 14:26). The Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16: 13). But the revealing work of the Holy Spirit would not be independent of the work of Jesus. For Jesus said that the Spirit "will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (w. 13-15). In a very real sense, Jesus was to continue his revelatory work through the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this is why Luke makes the somewhat puzzling statement that his first book pertained to all that Jesus 'began to do and teach' (Acts 1:1). Another suggestion of Jesus' continuing revelatory work is to be found in assertions like "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), which occurs in connection with the imagery of Jesus as the vine and his disciples as the branches. We conclude that when the apostles proclaimed the truth, Jesus was carrying out his work of revelation through them.

The final and most complete revelatory work of Jesus lies in the future. There is a time coming when he will return; one of the words for the second coming of Christ is "revelation" (*ἀποκάλυψις*).<sup>8</sup> At that time we will see clearly and directly (1 Cor. 13:12). When he appears, we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Then all barriers to a full knowledge of God and of the truths of which Christ spoke will be removed.

The revelatory work of Jesus Christ is a teaching which has persisted through varying fortunes of Christology. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries some theologians made it serve as virtually the entire doctrine of the work of Christ and thus of his person or nature as well. While liberalism has had various ways of understanding who Jesus was and what he did, their central thrust is that Jesus was basically a highly significant revealer of the Father and of spiritual truth. This does not necessarily mean that there was some sort of special or miraculous communication of unknown truth to him. Liberals have generally regarded him as merely a spiritual genius who was to religion what Einstein was to theoretical physics. Thus, Jesus was able to discover more about God than had anyone before him.<sup>9</sup>

7. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 2, p. 463.

8. See George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 65-67.

9. William Hordern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 92.

Often correlated with the view that Christ's work is essentially revelatory is the theory that the atonement is to be understood in terms of its moral influence on man (see pp. 785-88). According to this theory, the major effect of the atoning death of Christ is revelatory. Man's problem is that he is alienated from God. He has quarreled with God and believes that God is angry with him. He may also feel that God has mistreated him, sending undeserved evils into his life; consequently, man may look upon God as a malevolent, not a benevolent, being. The purpose of Christ's death was to demonstrate the greatness of God's love—he sent his Son to die. Shown this proof of God's love and impressed by this demonstration of its depth, man is moved to respond to God's love. Whoever has heard the teachings of Jesus, understood his death to be a sign of God's great love, and responded appropriately, has fully experienced Christ's work, a work which is primarily revelatory.

In the view of those who hold Jesus' work to be primarily revelatory, his message consists of (1) basic truths about the Father, the kingdom of God, and the value of the human soul, and (2) ethical teachings.<sup>10</sup> This concentration on the revelatory role of Christ neglects his kingly and priestly roles, and is therefore unacceptable. All three roles belong inseparably together. For if one examines with care the content of Jesus' revelatory teaching, it becomes apparent that much of it deals with his own person and ministry, and specifically with either his kingdom or the reconciling death which he was to undergo. At his trial he spoke of his kingdom (John 18:36). Throughout his ministry he had proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). He said that he had come "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Thus, in Jesus' own view his revelatory function is inextricably bound with his ruling and reconciling functions. It is true that there are some teachings of Jesus which do not deal directly with his kingdom or his atoning death (e.g., the parable of the prodigal son speaks primarily of the Father's love); yet, when the whole biblical picture of Jesus is taken into account, his work as revealer cannot be split from his work as ruler and reconciler.

#### *The Rule of Christ*

The Gospels picture Jesus as a king, the ruler over all of the universe. Isaiah had anticipated a future ruler who would sit upon David's throne (Isa. 9:7). The writer to the Hebrews applies Psalm 45:6-7 to the Son of God: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom" (Heb. 1:8). Jesus himself said that in the new

10. Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 124-3 1.

world the Son of man would sit on a glorious throne (Matt. 19:28). He claimed that the kingdom of heaven was his (Matt. 13:41).

A problem arises here. Just as there is a tendency to think of the revelatory role of Jesus as being in the past, there is also a tendency to think of his rule as being almost exclusively in the future. For as we look about us at the present time, we do not see his rule being very actively enforced. True, the Bible states that he is a king and that the Jerusalem crowd so hailed him on what we now call Palm Sunday. It is as if the door of heaven was opened a bit so that for a brief time his true status was seen. But how do we fit this picture with the fact that at the present time there seems to be little evidence that our Lord rules over the entire creation and particularly the human race?

First of all, we need to note that, on the contrary, there is evidence that Christ is ruling today. In particular, the natural universe obeys him. Since Christ is the one through whom all things came into being (John 1:3) and through whom all things continue (Col. 1:17), he is in control of the natural universe. It was therefore appropriate for him to say that, had the people kept silent on Palm Sunday, the stones would have cried out; this is but another form of the truth expressed in the psalmist's affirmation that the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1).

But is there evidence of a reign of Christ over modern-day humans? Indeed there is. The kingdom of God, over which Christ reigns, is present in the church. He is the head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18). When he was on earth, his kingdom was present in the hearts of his disciples. And wherever believers today are following the lordship of Christ, the Savior is exercising his ruling or kingly function.

In light of the foregoing, we can see that the rule of Jesus Christ is not a matter merely of his final exaltation, as some have thought to be the case. It is, however, in connection with the final step in his exaltation, when he returns in power, that his rule will be complete. The hymn in Philippians 2 emphasizes that Christ has been given a "name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (vv. 9-10). There is a time coming when the reign of Christ will be complete; then all will be under his rule, whether willingly and eagerly, or unwillingly and reluctantly.

#### **The Reconciling Work of Christ**

Finally, there is Christ's work as reconciler, which is the theme of the following chapters. For the moment we will confine our discussion to the topic of his intercessory ministry.

The Bible records numerous instances of Jesus' interceding for his disciples while he was here upon the earth. The most extended is his high-priestly prayer for the group (John 17). Here Jesus prayed that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves (v. 13). He did not pray that they be taken out of the world, but that they be kept from the evil one (v. 15). He also prayed that they might all be one (v. 21). In addition this last prayer was for those who would believe through the word of the disciples (v. 20). Also on the occasion of the Last Supper Jesus mentioned specifically that Satan desired to have Peter (and apparently the other disciples as well) "that he might sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31). Jesus, however, had prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail, and that when he had turned again (or converted), he might strengthen his brethren (v. 32).

What Jesus did for his followers while he was on earth, he continues to do for all believers during his heavenly presence with the Father. In Romans 8:33-34 Paul raises the question of who might be condemning us or bringing a charge against us. Surely it cannot be Christ, for he is at the right hand of God, interceding for us. In Hebrews 7:25 we are told that he ever lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through him, and in 9:24 we are told that he appears in the presence of God on our behalf.

What is the focus of this intercession? On the one hand, it is justificatory. Jesus presents his righteousness to the Father for our justification. He also pleads the cause of his righteousness for believers who, while previously justified, continue to sin. And finally, it appears, particularly from the instances during his earthly ministry, that Christ beseeches the Father that believers might be sanctified and kept from the power of the evil tempter.

#### **The Stages of Christ's Work**

When we delve more deeply into Jesus' work, we find that it was done in two basic stages, which are traditionally referred to as the state of his humiliation and the state of exaltation. Each of these stages in turn consists of a series of steps. What we have are a series of steps down from his glory, then a series of steps back up to his previous glory, and even something beyond that.

##### ***The Humiliation***

###### ***Incarnation***

The fact of Jesus' incarnation is sometimes stated in straightforward fashion, as in John 1: 14 where the apostle says simply, "The Word became

flesh." At other times there is emphasis upon either what Jesus left behind or what he took upon himself. An instance of the former is Philippians 2:6-7: Jesus Christ "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man." An example of the latter is Galatians 4:4: "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law."

What Jesus gave up in coming to earth was immense. From a position of "equality with God," which entailed the immediate presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit as well as the continuous praise of the angels, he came to earth, where he had none of these. The magnitude of what he gave up is beyond our power even to imagine, for we have never seen what heaven is like. When we arrive there, we will probably be overwhelmed by the splendor of what he left. He who became a pauper was certainly in the fullest sense a prince.

Even if Christ had come to the highest splendor that earth could afford, the descent would still have been immense. The greatest of riches, the highest of honors in any potentate's court, would be as nothing in comparison with the conditions which he left. But it was not to the highest of human circumstances that he came. Rather, he took the form of a servant, a slave. He came into a very common family. He was born in the very obscure little town of Bethlehem. And even more striking, he was born in the very humble setting of a stable and laid in a manger. The circumstances of his birth seem to symbolize the lowliness of estate to which he came.

He was born under the law. He who had originated the law, who was the Lord of it, became subject to the law, fulfilling all of it. It was as if an official, having enacted a statute which those under him had to follow, himself stepped down to a lower position where he too had to obey. Jesus' stepping down and becoming subject to the law were complete. Thus he was circumcised at the age of eight days, and at the proper time he was brought to the temple for the rite of the mother's purification (Luke 2:22-40). By becoming subject to the law, says Paul, Jesus was able to redeem those who are under the law (Gal. 4:5).

What of the attributes of deity during the period of the humiliation? We have already suggested (p. 73.5) that the Second Person of the Trinity emptied himself of equality with God by adding or taking on humanity. There are several possible positions as to what Jesus did with his divine attributes during that time:

1. The Lord gave up his divine attributes. In effect, he ceased to be God, changing from God into man.<sup>11</sup> The divine attributes were replaced

11. Wolfgang Friedrich Gess, *Die Lehre von der Person Christi, Entwickelt aus dem Selbstbewusstsein Christi und aus dem Zeugnis der Apostel* (Basel: Bahnmaier, 1856), p. 304.

by human attributes. But this amounts to metamorphosis rather than incarnation and is contradicted by various affirmations of Jesus' deity during the time of his earthly residence.

2. The Lord gave up certain divine attributes, either the natural attributes or the relative attributes.<sup>12</sup> To say that Jesus gave up his natural divine attributes means that he retained the moral attributes, such as love, mercy, and truth. What he gave up included omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. To say that Jesus gave up his relative divine attributes means that he retained the absolute qualities which he possessed in and of himself, such as immutability and self-existence, but relinquished the qualities which related to the creation, such as omnipotence and omniscience. But this likewise seems to make him, at least partially, no longer God. If the nature of something is the sum of the attributes comprising it, it is difficult to conceive of how Jesus could actually have given up some of his divine attributes without ceasing to be God.

3. Jesus gave up the independent exercise of his divine attributes. This does not mean that he surrendered some (or all) of his divine attributes, but that he voluntarily gave up the ability to exercise them on his own. He could exercise them only in dependence upon the Father and in connection with possession of a fully human nature.<sup>13</sup> Thus, he was able to utilize his divine power, and did so on numerous occasions—he performed miracles and read the thoughts of others. But in exercising his own power, he had to call upon the Father to enable him to do so. Both wills, the Father's and his, were necessary for him to utilize his divine attributes. A fair analogy is a safe-deposit box; two keys are necessary if it is to be opened—the banks and the depositor's. In like manner, if Jesus was to exercise divine power, both wills had to agree upon an action for it to take place. We might say, then, that Jesus still possessed omniscience, but it was within the unconscious part of his personality; he could not bring it back into conscious awareness without the assistance of the Father. An analogy here is a psychologist's enabling a counselee (through the administration of drugs, hypnosis, or other techniques) to recall material buried in the subconscious.

4. Christ gave up the use of his divine attributes.<sup>14</sup> This means that

12. Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Scribner, 1891), p. 172.

13. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), pp. 703-04.

14. This was the view of the divines of the University of Giessen in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. See Clarence A. Beckwith, "Christology," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), vol. 3, pp. 57-58.

Jesus continued to possess his divine attributes and the power to exercise them independently, but chose not to utilize them. He was not, then, dependent upon the Father for their use. But if this is the case, how do we explain his prayers to and apparent dependence upon the Father?

5. Although Jesus still possessed his divine attributes, he acted as if he did not.<sup>15</sup> He pretended to have limitations. If this were the case, however, then Jesus was guilty of misrepresentation or outright dishonesty when, for example, he claimed ignorance of the time of his second coming (Mark 13:32).

Of these various views of what Jesus did with his attributes during the period of his humanity, the third one is most in keeping with the total data—he surrendered his ability to exercise divine power independently. There was, then, an immeasurable humiliation involved in assuming human nature. He could not freely and independently exercise all of the capabilities which he had when he was in heaven.

The humiliation entailed all of the conditions of humanity. Thus, Jesus was capable of feeling fatigue and weariness, pain and suffering, hunger, even the anguish of betrayal, denial, and abandonment by those closest to him. He experienced the disappointment, discouragement, and distress of soul that go with being fully human. His humanity was complete.

#### *Death*

The ultimate step downward in Jesus' humiliation was his death. He who was "the life" (John 14:6), the Creator, the giver of life and of the new life which constitutes victory over death, became subject to death. He who had committed no sin suffered death, which is the consequence or "wages" of sin. By becoming human, Jesus became subject to the possibility of death, that is, he became mortal; and death was not merely a possibility, but it became an actuality.

And what is more, Jesus suffered not only death, but a humiliating one at that! He experienced a type of execution reserved by the Roman Empire for grievous criminals. It was a slow, painful death, virtually death by torture. Add to this the ignominy of the circumstances. The mockery and taunting by the crowds, the abuse by the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers, and the challenges to each of his functions compounded the humiliation. His status as a prophet was challenged during his appearance before the high priest: "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?" (Matt. 26:68). His kingship and rule were mocked by the inscription put on the cross ("The King of the Jews") and by the taunts of the soldiers ("If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"—Luke 23:37). His priestly role was called into question by the scoffing

15. Anselm Cur Deus homo 2. 10.

remarks of the rulers: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" (Luke 23:35). Thus the crucifixion was a contradiction to everything he claimed for himself.

Sin seemed to have won; the powers of evil appeared to have defeated Jesus. Death seemed to be the end of his mission; he had failed in his task. No longer would disciples heed his teachings and carry out his commands, for they were all scattered and defeated. His voice was stilled, so that he could no longer preach and teach, and his body was lifeless, unable to heal, raise from the dead, and quiet the storms.

#### *Descent into Hades*

Some theologians believe that there was another step in the humiliation. Not only was Jesus buried, and in a borrowed tomb (an indication of his poverty), but there is, in the Apostles' Creed, a reference to a descent into hell or Hades. On the basis of certain biblical texts, primarily Psalm 16:10; Ephesians 4:8-10; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18-19 and 4:4-6, and the statement in the creed, it is maintained that part of the humiliation involved an actual descent by Jesus into hell or Hades during the period between his death on the cross on Friday and his resurrection from the tomb on Sunday morning. This is a point of considerable controversy; indeed, certain theologians categorically reject it. Among them are Rudolf Bultmann, who objects to the belief on the grounds that it implies an obsolete cosmology (i.e., a three-tiered universe). But his objection has the same defects as do other aspects of his program of demythologization.<sup>16</sup>

Among the reasons for the controversy is the fact that there is no single biblical text which treats the doctrine of a descent into hell completely, or states the issue clearly and unambiguously. Furthermore, the doctrine is not found in the earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed, but first appeared in the Aquileian form of it, which dates from about A.D. 390.<sup>17</sup> The belief was formulated by piecing the several biblical texts into a composite picture: Jesus descended into Hades; there he preached to the imprisoned spirits before he was removed on the third day. Note that in this version of the doctrine the descent into Hades is both the final step of the humiliation and the first step of the exaltation, since it involves a triumphant proclamation to spirits enslaved by sin, death, and hell, that Jesus has vanquished those oppressive forces.

16. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 2-4. See such critiques as John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and His Critics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

17. A. C. McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed Its Origin, Its Purpose, and Its Historical Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1902), pp. 6-7.

We must now examine each of the relevant biblical passages in order to determine just what they do say. The first passage to be considered, and the only one in the Old Testament, is Psalm 16:10: "For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit" (cf. Ps. 30:3). Some have seen this as a prophecy that Jesus would descend to and return from hell. However, when closely examined, this verse appears to be a reference merely to deliverance from death, not from hell. "Sheol" was frequently used simply of the state of death, to which it was presumed that all persons go. Both Peter and Paul interpreted Psalm 16:10 as meaning that the Father would not leave Jesus under the powers of death so that he would see corruption or, in other words, his body would decompose (Acts 2:27–31; 13:34–35). Rather than teaching that Jesus would descend into and then be delivered from some place called Hades, the psalmist was stating that death would have no permanent power over Jesus.

The second passage is Ephesians 4:8–10. Verses 8 and 9 read, "Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' (In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?)" Verse 10 makes it clear that the ascent was to "far above all the heavens," that is, it was a return from earth to heaven. The descent, therefore, was from heaven to earth, not to somewhere beneath the earth. Thus, "of the earth" (v. 9) is to be understood as a simple appositive—he had also descended into the lower parts [of the universe], that is, the earth."

First Timothy 3: 16 reads, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." It has been suggested that the angels in view are fallen angels who saw Jesus when he descended into hell. It should be noted, however, that unless some qualification attaches to the word angels, it always refers to good angels. It would seem more in keeping with the remainder of the passage to regard the phrase "seen by angels" as simply part of a list of witnesses, both earthly and heavenly, of the important fact that God was manifested in the flesh, than as evidence that Jesus descended into hell, where he was seen by fallen angels or demons.

The most important and in many ways the most difficult passage is 1 Peter 3: 18–19: "Christ also died for sins ... being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison." There are several different interpretations of this passage. (1) The Roman Catholic view is that Jesus went to *limbus patrum*, the abode of saints who had already lived and died; declared to them the good news of his victory over sin, death, and hell; and then led them

out of that place.<sup>18</sup> (2) The Lutheran view is that Jesus descended into Hades not to announce good news and offer deliverance to those who were there, but to declare and complete his victory over Satan and pronounce a sentence of condemnation.<sup>19</sup> (3) The traditional Anglican view is that Jesus went to Hades, to the specific part called paradise, and there declared to the righteous a fuller exposition of the truth.<sup>20</sup> None of these interpretations is adequate. (1) The Roman Catholic idea of a second chance to accept the gospel message after death seems inconsistent with other teachings of Scripture (e.g., Luke 16: 19–3 1). (2) Whereas elsewhere in Scripture the word *κηρύσσω* ("to preach") consistently refers to proclamation of the gospel, in the Lutheran interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19 it apparently refers to a declaration of judgment. (3) The Anglican interpretation has difficulty explaining why the righteous in paradise are described as "spirits in prison."

It is certainly difficult to come up with an interpretation of 1 Peter 3: 18–19 which is at once internally consistent and consistent with the teaching of the rest of Scripture. One possibility is to understand this passage in the light of verse 20: Jesus preached to the spirits in prison, "who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water." According to this interpretation, Jesus was made alive in the same spirit in which he had preached through Noah to the people who lived in the days before the flood. Those people had failed to heed his message and hence were destroyed. This preaching was an instance of the preincarnate prophetic ministry of Jesus (see p. 765). Some expositors would say, on the other hand, that the reference to Noah's day is figurative or illustrative. Jesus had preached in the power of the Spirit to the sinners of his day. They were as inattentive to the message as the sinners in the days of Noah had been, and as unheedful as others will be just before the second coming (Matt. 24:37–39). The same Spirit that had led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Matt. 4:1), empowered him to cast out demons (Matt. 12:28), and brought him to life again, was the source of his preaching during his lifetime to those who were imprisoned in sin. Note that there is no indication of a time sequence with respect to the Spirit's bringing him to life and his preaching to the spirits in prison.

18. Joseph Pohle, *Eschatology; or, The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1917), p. 27.

19. Friedrich Loofs, "Descent to Hades (Christ's)," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), vol. 4, pp. 656–57.

20. Edgar C. S. Gibson, *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London: Methuen, 1906), p. 159.

The final passage is 1 Peter 4:4–6, especially verse 6: “For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God.” It has been suggested that this verse points to a descent by Jesus into hell to preach to the spirits there. However, to suppose that Peter means that the gospel was preached to people who were already physically dead encounters one of the same difficulties mentioned in connection with 1 Peter 3:18–19—nowhere else in Scripture is there a hint of a second chance for the dead. In addition, there is no indication that the preaching Peter has in view was done by Christ. It seems best, then, to see in 1 Peter 4:6 a general reference to proclamation of the gospel message either to persons who had since died or to people who were spiritually dead (cf. Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13).

To sum up the passages cited as evidence of a descent into Hades: they are at best vague or ambiguous, and the attempt to piece them together into a doctrine is unconvincing. While they may be interpreted as implying that Jesus descended into hell, there is insufficient evidence here to warrant setting forth a descent into hell as an incontrovertible doctrine of Christianity. In light of the difficulties which attend interpreting these verses as proof of an actual descent of the spirit of Jesus into Hades between the crucifixion and the resurrection, it is best not to be dogmatic on this matter.

#### *The Exaltation*

#### *Resurrection*

We have seen that the death of Jesus was the low point in his humiliation; the overcoming of death through the resurrection was the first step back in the process of his exaltation. The resurrection is particularly significant, for inflicting death was the worst thing that sin and the powers of sin could do to Christ. In the inability of death to hold him is symbolized the totality of his victory. What more can the forces of evil do if someone whom they have killed does not stay dead?

Because the resurrection is so important, it has occasioned a great deal of controversy. There were, of course, no human witnesses to the actual resurrection, since Jesus was alone in the tomb when it took place. We do find, however, two types of evidence. First, the tomb in which Jesus had been laid was empty, and the body was never produced. Second, a great variety of persons testified that they had seen Jesus alive. He was seen on several different occasions and in various locations. The most natural explanation of these testimonies is that Jesus was indeed alive again. Moreover, there is no other (or, at least, better) way of

accounting for the transformation of the disciples from frightened, defeated persons to militant preachers of the resurrection.<sup>21</sup>

One question that needs special attention is the nature of the resurrection body. There seems to be conflicting evidence on this matter. On the one hand, we are told that flesh and blood are not going to inherit the kingdom of God, and there are other indications that we will not have a body in heaven. On the other hand, Jesus ate after the resurrection, and apparently he was recognizable. Furthermore, the marks of the nails in his hands and the spear wound in his side suggest that he still had a material body (John 20:25–27). If we are to reconcile this seeming conflict, it is important to bear in mind that Jesus was at this point resurrected, but not ascended. At the time of our resurrection our bodies will be transformed in one step. In the case of Jesus, however, the two events, resurrection and ascension, were separated rather than collapsed into one. So the body that he had at the point of resurrection was yet to undergo a more complete transformation at the point of the ascension. It was yet to become the “spiritual body” of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15:44. We might say, then, that the Easter event was something of a resuscitation, such as that of Lazarus, rather than a true resurrection, as will be the case for us. Jesus’ postresurrection body may well have been like the body with which Lazarus came out of the tomb—Lazarus could still (and presumably did again) die. If this was the case with Jesus, he may have needed to eat to remain alive.

But just as the virgin birth should not be thought of as essentially a biological matter, neither should the resurrection be conceived of as primarily a physical fact. It was the triumph of Jesus over sin and death and all of the attendant ramifications. It was the fundamental step in his exaltation—he was freed from the curse brought on him by his voluntary bearing of the sin of the entire human race.

#### *Ascension and Session at the Father-5 Right Hand*

The first step in Jesus’ humiliation involved giving up the status which he had in heaven and coming to the conditions of earth; the second step in the exaltation involved leaving the conditions of earth and reassuming his place with the Father. Jesus himself on several occasions foretold his return to the Father (John 6:62; 14:2, 12; 16:5, 10, 28; 20:17). Luke gives the most extended accounts of the actual ascension (Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:6–11). Paul also writes regarding the ascension (Eph. 1:20; 4:8–10;

21. Daniel Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 181–82; cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), pp. 96–97.

1 Tim. 3: 16), as does the writer of the letter to the Hebrews (1:3; 4: 14; 9:24).

In premodern times the ascension was usually thought of as a transition from one place (earth) to another (heaven). We now know, however, that space is such that heaven is not merely upward from the earth, and it also seems likely that the difference between earth and heaven is not merely geographical. One cannot get to God simply by traveling sufficiently far and fast in a rocket ship of some kind. God is in a different dimension of reality, and the transition from here to there requires not merely a change of place, but of state. So, at some point, Jesus' ascension was not merely a physical and spatial change, but spiritual as well. At that time Jesus underwent the remainder of the metamorphosis begun with the resurrection of his body.

The significance of the ascension is that Jesus left behind the conditions associated with life on this earth. Thus the pain, both physical and psychological, experienced by persons here is no longer his. The opposition, hostility, unbelief, and unfaithfulness which he encountered have been replaced by the praise of the angels and the immediate presence of the Father. God has exalted him and given him a "name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-1 1). The angels have resumed their song of praise, for the Lord of heaven has returned. What a contrast to the abuse and insults he endured while on earth! Yet the song of praise now goes beyond that which was sung before his incarnation. For a new stanza has been added. Jesus has done something which he had not done previous to his incarnation: personally experienced and overcome death.

There is a difference in another respect as well. For now Jesus is the God-man. There is a continuing incarnation. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul says, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." This gives every indication that Jesus currently is a man who mediates between God and us. His, however, is not the type of humanity that we have, or even the humanity that he had while he was here. It is a perfected humanity of the type which we will have after our resurrection. Thus, his continuing incarnation imposes no limitation upon his deity. Just as our bodies will have many of their limitations removed, so it has been with the perfect, glorified humanity of Jesus, which continues to be united with the deity, and thus will forever exceed what we will ultimately be.

There were definite reasons why Jesus had to leave the earth. One was in order to prepare a place for our future abode. Although he did not specify just what was involved, he made it quite clear to his disciples that he had to leave them in order to carry out this work (John 14:2-3).

Another reason he had to go is that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, might come. Again, the disciples were not told why the one was requisite to the other, but Jesus did say that such was the case (John 16:7). The sending of the Holy Spirit was important, for whereas Jesus could work with the disciples only through external teaching and example, the Holy Spirit could work within them (John 14:17). Having more intimate access to the centers of their lives, he would be able to work through them more freely. As a result, the believers would be able to do the works which Jesus did, and even greater ones (John 14: 12). And through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Triune God would be present with them; thus Jesus could say that he would be with them forever (Matt. 28:20).

Jesus' ascension means that he is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Jesus himself predicted this in his statement before the high priest (Matt. 26:64). The session at the Fathers right hand was referred to by Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:33-36) and before the council (Acts 5:3 1). It is also mentioned in Ephesians 1:20-22; Hebrews 10: 12; 1 Peter 3:22; and Revelation 3:21; 22:1. The significance of all this is that the right hand is the place of distinction and power. Recall how James and John desired to sit at Christ's right hand, and at his left as well (Mark 10:37-40). Jesus' sitting at the right hand of God should not be interpreted as a matter of rest or inactivity. It is a symbol of authority and active rule. The right hand is also the place where Jesus is ever making intercession with the Father on our behalf (Heb. 7:25).

#### *Second Coming*

One dimension of the exaltation remains. Scripture indicates clearly that Christ will return at some point in the future; the exact time is unknown to us. Then his victory will be complete. He will be the conquering Lord, the judge over all. At that point his reign, which at present is in some ways only potential, and which many do not accept, will be total. He himself has said that his second coming will be in glory (Matt. 25:31). The one who came in lowliness, humility, and even humiliation, will return in complete exaltation. Then, indeed, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2: 10- 11).

## Theories of the Atonement

The Significance of the Atonement

The Manifold Theories of the Atonement

The Socinian Theory: The Atonement as Example

The Moral-Influence Theory: The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Love

The Governmental Theory: The Atonement as a Demonstration of Divine Justice

The Ransom Theory: The Atonement as Victory over the Forces of Sin and Evil

The Satisfaction Theory: The Atonement as Compensation to the Father

### **The Significance of the Atonement**

In the atonement, we come to the crucial point of Christian faith. It is, of course, essential that our understanding of God the Father and of his Son be correct, and that our conception of the nature of man and his spiritual condition be accurate. But the doctrine of the atonement is the most critical for us, because it is the point of transition, as it were, from the objective to the subjective aspects of Christian theology. Here we shift our focus from the nature of Christ to his active work in our behalf; here systematic theology has direct application to our lives. The atonement has made our salvation possible. It is also the foundation of major doctrines which await our study: the doctrine of the church deals with

the collective aspects of salvation, the doctrine of the last things with its future aspects.

Most theologians have in one way or another acknowledged the essential nature of the atonement or, to make a play on words, the "cruciality of the cross." Emil Brunner, for example, said, "He who understands the Cross aright... understands the Bible, he understands Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris wrote, "The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere."<sup>2</sup> In view of the importance of this doctrine, it behooves us to work very carefully in examining it.

In the doctrine of the atonement we see perhaps the clearest indication of the organic character of theology, that is, we see that the various doctrines fit together in a cohesive fashion. The position taken on any one of them affects or contributes to the construction of the others. Here the doctrines of God, man, sin, and the person of Christ come together to define man's need and the provision that had to be made for that need. And from our understanding of these other doctrines issues our understanding of the various facets of salvation: our being given a righteous standing in the sight of God (justification); the instilling of spiritual vitality and direction into our lives (regeneration); the development of godliness (sanctification). Theology, when properly done, possesses an aesthetic quality. There is a symmetry, a balance, among the different facets of doctrine which is surely impressive. There is an interconnectedness reminding us of the beauty of a smoothly functioning machine, or the beauty of a painting where each color complements the others, and the lines and shapes are in correct and pleasing proportion to the remainder of the picture.'

Our doctrines of God and of Christ will color our understanding of the atonement. For if God is a very holy, righteous, and demanding being, then man will not be able to satisfy him easily, and it is quite likely that something will have to be done in man's behalf to satisfy God. If, on the other hand, God is an indulgent, permissive Father who says, "We have to allow humans to have a little fun sometimes," then it may be sufficient simply to give man a little encouragement and instruction. If Christ is merely a man, then the work that he did serves only as an example; he was not able to offer anything in our behalf beyond his perfect example of doing everything he was required to do, including dying on the cross.

1. Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (London: Lutterworth, 1934), pp. 435-36.

2. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 5.

3. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 28.

If, however, he is God, his work for us went immeasurably beyond what we are able to do for ourselves; he served not only as an example but as a sacrifice for us. The doctrine of man, broadly defined to include the doctrine of sin, also affects the picture. If man is basically spiritually intact, he probably can, with a bit of effort, fulfil what God wants of him. Thus, instruction, inspiration, and motivation constitute what man needs and hence the essence of the atonement. If, however, man is totally depraved and consequently unable to do what is right no matter how much he wishes to or how hard he tries, then a more radical work had to be done in his behalf.

### The Manifold Theories of the Atonement

The meaning and impact of the atonement are rich and complex. Consequently, various theories of the atonement have arisen. Given the abundance of biblical testimony to the fact of atonement, different theologians choose to emphasize different texts. Their choice of texts reflects their views on other areas of doctrine. We will examine several of the theories, thus gaining an appreciation for the complexity of the meaning of the atonement. At the same time we will come to see the incompleteness and inadequacy of each one of them by itself.

#### *The Socinian Theory:*

#### *The Atonement as Example*

Faustus and Laelius Socinus, who lived in the sixteenth century, developed a teaching which is best represented today by the Unitarians. They rejected any idea of vicarious satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> They made a formal acknowledgment of the threefold offices of Christ, but in practice neutralized the priestly office in two ways. First, they maintained that the ministry of Jesus during his earthly days was prophetic rather than priestly. Second, they maintained that his priestly role, the seat of which is in heaven, is coincident with his kingly office rather than distinct from it. The new covenant of which Jesus spoke involves an absolute forgiveness rather than some sort of substitutionary sacrifice. The real value of the death of Jesus lies in the beautiful and perfect example which it supplies us, epitomizing the type of dedication which we are to practice. The resurrection of Jesus is important because it is, as it were, the confirmation of what he taught, thus validating to us the promises which he gave. For proof that the meaning of Christ's death rests in its effect as an example

4. Faustus Socinus De *Jesu Christo servatore* 1. 1.

to us the Socinians pointed to 1 Peter 2:2 1: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Other passages appealed to include 1 John 2:6: "he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." It is, however, only in 1 Peter 2:21 that we find an explicit connection drawn between Christ's example and his death.<sup>5</sup>

Several conceptions feed into the Socinian understanding of the atonement. One is the Pelagian view of the human condition: the human is spiritually and morally capable of doing God's will, of fulfilling God's expectations. Another is the conception that God is not a God of retributive justice, and therefore he does not demand some form of satisfaction from or in behalf of those who sin against him. Finally, there is the conception of Jesus as merely human. The death which he experienced was simply that of an ordinary human being in a fallen and sinful world. It is important, not in some supernatural way, but as the ultimate extension of his role as the great teacher of righteousness. His death was the supreme example of man's fulfilling what Jehovah requires of him—"to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8). Jesus did not simply tell us that the first and great commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27); he also demonstrated what that involves, and has proven that a human being can do it. The death of Jesus is, then, the perfect illustration and realization of what he sought to teach throughout his life. As an extension of his teachings, it is only quantitatively different from them.

From the Socinian perspective the death of Jesus fills two human needs. First, it fills the need for an example of that total love for God which we must display if we are to experience salvation. Jesus loved God so fully that he was willing to die, if need be, for the principles of the kingdom of God. Second, the death of Jesus gives us inspiration. The ideal of total love for God is so lofty as to seem virtually unattainable. The death of Jesus is proof that such love does lie within the sphere of human accomplishment. What he could do, we can also! We will probably not have to undergo the sort of death that he suffered, but we can be assured that we are capable of enduring whatever a total commitment to God might lead to in our cases.

The Socinian view, of course, must come to grips with the fact that numerous portions of Scripture seem to regard Jesus' death quite differently. They speak of ransom, sacrifice, priesthood, sin bearing, and the like. Note, in fact, the statement which follows just three verses after the favorite text of the Socinians (1 Peter 2:21): "He himself bore our sins in

5. Faustus Socinus *Christiana religionis brevissima institutio* 1. 667.

his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (v. 24). How is such a statement to be understood? The usual reply of the Socinians and others of their conviction is that atonement is only a metaphorical concept.<sup>6</sup> All that is necessary, according to them, for God and man to have fellowship is that man have faith in and love for God. For God to have required something more would have been contrary to his nature, and to have punished the innocent (Jesus) in place of the guilty would have been contrary to justice. Rather, God and man are restored to their intended relationship by our personal adoption of both the teachings of Jesus and the example he set in life and especially in death.

*The Moral-Influence Theory:  
The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Love*

Another view which emphasizes that the primary effect of Christ's death is a direct impact upon humans is termed the "moral-influence theory" of the atonement. Unlike the Socinian view, however, which emphasizes the human nature of Christ and regards his death as an example of the love we are to show for God, the moral-influence theory sees Christ's death as a demonstration of God's love; it emphasizes Christ's divine dimension.

The moral-influence theory was first developed by Peter Abelard in reaction to the view of Anselm. Anselm thought of the incarnation as necessitated by the fact that our sin is an offense against God's moral dignity and, consequently, there must be some form of compensation to God. Abelard, on the other side, emphasized the primacy of God's love and insisted that Christ did not make some sort of sacrificial payment to the Father to satisfy his offended dignity. Rather, Jesus demonstrated to man the full extent of the love of God for him. It was man's fear and ignorance of God that needed to be rectified. This was accomplished by Christ's death. So the major effect of Christ's death was upon man rather than upon God.<sup>7</sup>

This theory did not receive much immediate support. Long afterward, however, it gained popularity when it was expounded by other advocates. Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) popularized it in the United States, while probably the leading proponent of it in Great Britain was Hastings Rashdall. It is especially from the thought of these men that our exposition will be drawn.

In the view of the advocates of the moral-influence theory of the

6. *Socinus De Jesu Christo servatore* 1.3.

7. Peter Abelard *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 3:26; 5:5.

atonement, God's nature is essentially love. They minimize such qualities as justice, holiness, and righteousness. Accordingly, they conclude that man need not fear God's justice and punishment. Thus, man's problem is not that he has violated God's law and God will (indeed, must) punish him. Rather, man's problem is that his own attitudes keep him apart from God.

Our separation and alienation from God may take many different forms. We may not realize that our disobedience is a source of pain to God. Or we may not realize that despite all that has transpired, God still loves us. We may fear God, or we may blame him for the problems in our relationship with him, or even for the problems of the world in general. If we were to repent and turn to God in trust and faith, however, there would be reconciliation, for the difficulty does not lie with God's ability to forgive. There is nothing in his nature that would require satisfaction for or rectification of our sins. The difficulty lies in us.\* Bushnell regards sin as a *type of sickness from which we must be healed*. It is to correct this defect in us that Christ came.

Bushnell strongly stresses Christ's empathy. It is proper to think of Christ as having great love for man even before the incarnation; he already had the burden of man upon him. Whereas the more objective theories of the atonement (i.e., those theories which emphasize that the primary effect of Christ's death is on something external to the human) understand Jesus' death as being the reason for his coming, Bushnell holds that Jesus came to demonstrate divine love. His death was merely one of the modes (albeit the most impressive one) in which his love was expressed. Thus, Jesus' death was an incident or circumstance which allowed him to demonstrate his love. As Bushnell puts it, "[Jesus'] sacrifice, taken as a fact in time, was not set before him as the end, or object of his ministry—that would make it a mere pageant of suffering, without rational dignity, or character—but, when it came, it was simply the bad fortune such a work, prosecuted with such devotion, must encounter on its way? His death was not the purpose of his coming; it was a consequence of his coming.

It is clear that in Bushnell's view the end or object of Jesus' coming was not to "square up the account of our sin" or to "satisfy the divine justice for us." Bushnell notes that, although presented in various contexts and in association with diverse images and ideas, the purpose of the death as well as the life of Jesus is explained in a consistent fashion

8. Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 26.

9. Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York: Scribner, 1866), pp. 130-31.

throughout Scripture. The aim of Jesus is found in his own words: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10); "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). Paul said that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5: 19). While the form of expression varies, all of these passages bear a common idea. Bushnell summarizes: "Taking hold of these and all such varieties of Scripture, we conceive a transaction moving on character in souls; a regenerative, saving, truth-subjecting, all-restoring, inward change of the life-in one word the establishing of the kingdom of God, or of heaven, among men, and the gathering finally of a new-born world into it."<sup>10</sup>

A healing of souls is the real work that Jesus came to do. Man is in dire need of such healing. This need is greater than was the need of those who came to Jesus during his lifetime with their physical ailments. But it is not enough for God to absolve man of sin. It is also important for sin to let go of man, so to speak. The brokenness within man can now be removed and man reconstituted, as it were, because of the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus. His death has brought fulfilment of man's three most basic needs into the realm of possibility:

1. Man needs an openness to God, an inclination to respond to him. When God makes his advance, in a call to repentance, man must not turn away from God, but must turn toward him. Think of the situation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had sinned. They did not want to see God; they were afraid of him and tried to hide from or escape him. This is the natural response of a sinner to the approach of God: dread, fear, avoidance. Christ understands our response. Accordingly, he does not show us foremost his infinite holiness and purity. Rather, he shows his concern for us by entering into our situation, dying the bitterest conceivable death. His love cannot let us go. Bushnell describes its powerful effect upon us: "In a word we see him entered so deeply into our lot, that we are softened and drawn by him, and even begin to want him entered more deeply, that we may feel him more constrainingly. In this way a great point is turned in our recovery. Our heart is engaged before it is broken. We like the Friend before we love the Savior? Thus Jesus through his death has fulfilled the first need of us sinful human beings—removal of our fear of God.

2. The second need of man is for a genuine and deep conviction of personal sin and a resultant repentance. We have, to be sure, a surface feeling of regret whenever we do wrong. We also know that God's law passes a rugged and blunt sentence on sin. What is needed, however, is a

10. Ibid., p. 132.

11. Ibid., p. 154.

better, more tender, and so more penetrating conviction of sin. In addition to the objective, intellectual awareness of wrongdoing such as the law gives, what we need is a profound internal conviction that leads to a genuine sense of sorrow for what we have done to God. When we see him whom we have pierced by our sin, then we are softened. Unlike Judas, who went out and committed suicide, we will not be chilled, hardened, or repelled by the pain that accompanies recognition of our sin; rather, we will welcome the anguish. Like Paul upon hearing the words, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5), we will find our resistance to God gone. We will turn to Jesus in love.<sup>12</sup>

3. Man also needs inspiration. While we have abstract descriptions of the holiness which we are to embody, it is when we see it in a practical and personal exposition that it becomes real for us. We do not want theological definitions of God, says Bushnell. Rather, "we want a friend, whom we can feel as a man, and whom it will be sufficiently accurate for us to accept and love."<sup>13</sup>

Bushnell speaks much of the change that needs to be made in us.<sup>14</sup> He speaks of our being reborn, new-created, quickened. This change was made possible through the work done by Christ especially in his death. He humanized God, bringing him onto our plane. Jesus acted with us and for us. We know him in just the same way we know one another.<sup>15</sup>

According to Bushnell, one of the most powerful inducements to love for and trust in God is the realization that he also has suffered on account of evil. There is a human tendency to ask why God does not remove the evil in the world, or perhaps even to blame him for it. The knowledge that God is great and all-sufficient leads us in this direction and also to the assumption that God cannot suffer, being infinite and unchangeable. The death of Christ, however, is evidence that the sin of the world does not meet God's eye in the way a disgusting spectacle would meet a glass eye. Christ's death makes it clear that God has a sensitivity to the pain which sin brings upon us. God is not to be blamed for the suffering in the world. For he feels the power and the tragedy of it. His basic response is not condemnation, but compassion.<sup>16</sup> Such a God elicits our love and trust.

#### *The Governmental Theory:*

#### *The Atonement as a Demonstration of Divine Justice*

The preceding views of the atonement have pictured God as basically a sympathetic, indulgent being. They hold that in order to be restored to

12. Ibid., pp. 154-55.

13. Ibid., p. 155.

14. Ibid., p. 156.

15. Ibid., p. 220.

16. Ibid., pp. 223-25.

God's favor, it is necessary only to do one's best or to respond to God's love. Embracing such a view might lead one to antinomianism. The law of God, however, is a serious matter, and violation or disregard of it is not to be taken lightly. The so-called governmental theory emphasizes the seriousness of sin. It is a mediating view with both objective elements (the atonement is regarded as satisfying the demands of justice) and subjective elements (Christ's death is seen as a deterrent to sin in that it impresses upon the sinner the gravity of what is involved in sin).

The major proponent of the governmental view was Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), by training a lawyer rather than a clergyman. Consequently, he brought to his examination of the atonement the type of considerations which would be important to a jurist. He developed his theory in response to the Socinians, whose view of the atonement he regarded as much too man-centered.<sup>17</sup> He had been brought up in the Calvinistic teaching, but became an Arminian.<sup>18</sup>

To understand Grotius's view we must begin with his conception of the nature of God. God is a very holy and righteous being who has established certain laws. Sin is a violation of those laws. Violations of the law, however, are not to be thought of as attacks upon the person of God as a private individual. Rather, his concern with the law is as a ruler, the administrator of the law. It is to the office of ruler that the right to punish attaches. Thus God as ruler has the right to punish sin, for sin is inherently deserving of punishment.<sup>19</sup>

The actions of God must be understood, however, in light of his dominant attribute, namely, love. God loves the human race. Although he has the right to punish it for its sin, it is not necessary or mandatory that he do so. He can forgive sin and absolve man of guilt. The way in which he has done this, however, is the issue. He has chosen to do it in such a way that it manifests at once both his clemency and severity. God can forgive sin, but he also takes into consideration the interests of his moral government.<sup>20</sup>

According to Grotius, it is possible for God to relax the law so that he need not exact a specific punishment or penalty for each violation. He has, however, acted in such a way as to maintain the interests of government. It is important to understand that the role of God here is as a ruler rather than as a creditor or a master. A creditor may cancel a debt if he

17. L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: University Press, 1920), p. 290.

18. John Miley, *The Atonement in Christ* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1879), p. 199.

19. Hugo Grotius *Defensio fidei catholicae de satisfactione Christi adversus Faustum Socinum 5.*

20. Ibid.

so chooses. A master may punish or not punish, according to his will. A ruler, however, may not simply ignore or overlook violations of the rules. He cannot act on his own caprice, his personal feelings at the time. He must, rather, act with a view to the best interests of those under his authority.\*<sup>1</sup>

It was in the best interests of humankind for Christ to die. Forgiveness of their sins, if too freely given, would have resulted in undermining the law's authority and effectiveness. It was necessary, therefore, to have an atonement which would provide grounds for forgiveness and simultaneously retain the structure of moral government. Christ's death served to accomplish both ends. In describing Christ's death, Grotius used the term "penal substitution." He did not mean that Christ's death was a penalty inflicted on him as a substitute for the penalty which should have attached to the sins of humanity. Rather, Grotius saw the death of Christ as a substitute for a penalty.<sup>\*\*</sup> What God did through Christ's death was to demonstrate what God's justice will require us to suffer if we continue in sin. Underscoring the seriousness of breaking God's law, the heinousness of sin, this demonstration of God's justice is all the more impressive in view of who and what Christ was. The spectacle of the sufferings Christ bore is enough to deter us from sin. And if we turn from sin, we can be forgiven and God's moral government preserved. Because of Christ's death, then, it is possible for God to forgive sins without a breakdown of the moral fiber of the universe.

According to the governmental theory, the sufferings of Christ are an atonement for sin. However, Grotius's interpretation of this statement is far different from that of someone like Anselm. In Anselm's view, which is sometimes called the "satisfaction theory" of the atonement, the death of Christ was an actual penalty inflicted on him as a substitute for the penalty which should have attached to the breaking of the law by individual sinners. Grotius disagrees. He believes that the death of Christ was not a punishment; on the contrary, it made punishment unnecessary. In fact, according to Grotius, no penalty could be attached or transferred to Christ, for punishment cannot be transferred from one person to another. Punishment is personal to the individual. If it could be transferred, the connection between sin and guilt would be severed. Christ's suffering, then, was not a vicarious bearing of our punishment, but a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, a demonstration intended to induce in us a horror of sin. As we turn from sin, we can be forgiven. Thus, even in the absence of punishment, justice and morality are maintained.

One of the implications of Grotius's view is that God does not inflict

21. Ibid., 2-3.

22. Ibid., 5.

punishment as a matter of strict retribution. Sin is not punished simply because it deserves to be. It is punished because of the demands of moral government. The point of punishment is not retribution, but deterrence of further commission of sins, either by the one punished, or by third parties who have observed the punishment. Sin, to be sure, is deserving of punishment (indeed, it is the only grounds for punishment), and God would not be unjust to apply the penalty for sin in every case. So it is not an injustice when someone is punished. But punishment need not be applied in every case nor to the fullest extent.

It should be apparent from the foregoing that Grotius was an active opponent of antinomianism in all its forms, as have been the later advocates of the governmental view. As he saw it, the Socinian theory that the atonement is essentially a beautiful example of how we should live is an insufficient basis for genuinely godly living, for no consequences are attached to failure to live a holy life. There have to be both encouragement to goodness and deterrence from evil. Even the satisfaction theory fosters a disregard for the law. For if the death of Christ is an exact equivalent of the penalty for all our sins, then there is no real possibility of future punishment for us and we can do whatever we want. Once Christ died in our behalf, there was no longer a need to punish us. Grotius felt that his scheme, to the contrary, had the advantage of impressing upon mankind the seriousness of all sin.

There is in the governmental theory an objective element. The death was a real offering made by Christ to God. By this act God was once and for all made able to deal mercifully with man. The atonement had an impact on God. But in the main the governmental theory is a subjective theory of the atonement—the chief impact was on man. The purpose of Christ's death was not to satisfy the demands of God's just nature so that he might be enabled to do what he otherwise could not have done, namely, forgive sins. Rather, Christ's death enabled God to forgive sins or remit punishment in a way which would not have unfavorable consequences or adverse effects upon humans. Christ's suffering serves as a deterrent to sin by impressing upon us the gravity of sin. As we then turn from sin, we can be forgiven. The need for us to be punished has been eliminated, and yet, at the same time, moral government and the authority of the law have been upheld. Thus, in the long run, the chief impact of the atonement is upon man.

In Grotius's view, Christ's offering of himself was a satisfaction sufficient to uphold moral government, and thus God was enabled to remit sin in such a way that there were no adverse consequences for man. The Socinians objected that satisfaction and remission are mutually exclusive. If God requires or accepts satisfaction for sins, there is no real mercy or grace. But Grotius distinguished between full payment of a

debt and satisfaction. He studiously avoided the legalistic notion that God in every case requires a penalty equivalent to the offense. If there were full and complete payment, there would be no actual pardon. But a satisfaction accepted as sufficient for purposes of government does not exclude and preclude clemency on God's part. He does not exact the full penalty. There is therefore true remission. Instead of insisting upon the payment of every ounce of every penalty, the loving nature of God wishes to forgive. It is almost as if, in his desire to forgive sin, God was looking for an excuse not to enforce the full consequences. He found his opportunity in the death of Christ, regarding it as sufficient to preserve his moral government.

One of the things that strike us as we examine the governmental theory is its lack of explicit scriptural basis. We search in vain in Grotius for specific biblical texts setting forth his major point. Rather, we see the lawyer's mind at work, focusing on general principles of Scripture and drawing certain inferences from them. The one verse that is cited as a direct support of the theory that the death of Christ was demanded by God's concern to preserve his moral government and law as he forgives sin is Isaiah 42:21: "The **Lord** was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious." Other Scriptures are cited as evidence of the background elements of the governmental theory of the atonement. In this respect John Miley's exposition of the atonement is quite revealing. He lists texts which speak of divine wrath, divine righteousness, and atonement through suffering, but he does not mention texts which deal with the idea of atonement in itself or, more correctly, which define atonement.<sup>23</sup> The verses he cites describe various aspects (e.g., the suffering of Christ), but do not get into the essential character of the atonement or the way in which it works. Thus, whereas other theories take an explicit biblical statement concerning the nature of the atonement and emphasize it more than others, the governmental theory works inferentially from some of the general teachings and principles of Scripture.

#### *The Ransom Theory*

#### *The Atonement as Victory over the Forces of Sin and Evil*

The theory with the greatest claim to having been the standard view in the early history of the church is probably the so-called ransom theory. Gustaf Aulen has called it the classic view,<sup>24</sup> and in many ways that

23. Miley, *Atonement*, pp. 245-65.

24. Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 20.

designation is correct, for in various forms it dominated the church's thinking until the time of Anselm and Abelard. It was even the primary way in which Augustine understood the atonement, and thus it enjoyed the immense prestige that his name accorded.

The two major early developers of the ransom theory were Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Origen saw biblical history as the depiction of a great cosmic drama. For this reason his view of the atonement has also been termed the "dramatic" view. In the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, Satan established control over man. Irenaeus, among others, suggested that it was by an act of unjust aggression that this control was established.<sup>25</sup> But regardless of how it was gained, Satan now is the governing power in the world. As world ruler, his rights cannot simply be set aside, for God will not stoop to using techniques employed by the devil; God will not "steal" man back, as it were. Man's major problem, then, is his enslavement to an unfit owner, namely, Satan.

Origen makes much of Paul's statement that we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). But, Origen asks, from whom were we bought? It must certainly have been from the one whose servants we were. He would have named the price.

Now it was the devil that held us, to whose side we had been drawn away by our sins. He asked, therefore, as our price the blood of Christ. But until the blood of Jesus, which was so precious that alone it sufficed for the redemption of all, was given, it was necessary that those who were established in the Law should give each for himself his blood (i.e., in circumcision) as it were in imitation of the redemption that was to be.<sup>26</sup>

The text on which Origen and others who hold the ransom theory rely most heavily is Jesus' statement that he had come to offer his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). To whom was this ransom paid? Certainly not to God. He would not pay a ransom to himself. Rather, it must have been paid to the evil one, for it was he who held us captive until the ransom, namely, the soul of Jesus, was paid.<sup>27</sup>

Note that in Origen's formulation of the doctrine, it was Satan rather than God who demanded Christ's blood, thus initiating this aspect of the transaction. So the ransom was determined by, paid to, and accepted by Satan. This mitigates to some extent the charge that the ransom theory makes God somewhat of a dishonest dealer. True, Satan was deceived, but it is more correct to say he deceived himself, and that in two ways,

25. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5. 1. 1.

26. Origen *Commentary on Romans* 2:13.

27. Origen *Commentary on Matthew* 13:28.

according to Origen. First, Satan thought that he could be the lord of the soul of Jesus; Jesus' resurrection proved otherwise. Second, Origen suggests elsewhere that the devil did not perceive that mankind, partially freed by Christ's teachings and miracles, would be completely delivered by his death and resurrection. So Satan released man, only to find that he could not hold Christ, whom he had accepted in exchange for man.<sup>28</sup>

A century later, Gregory of Nyssa fleshed out Origen's view of the atonement. Gregory's prime concern was to maintain God's justice. He reasoned that since the slavery in which we find ourselves is our own doing, our own free choice, it would have been unjust to deprive Satan of his captives by some arbitrary method.<sup>29</sup> That would have been to steal from Satan what was rightfully his. So a transaction had to take place. Because of his own pride and greed, Satan was quick to accept a prize which he perceived to be far more valuable than the souls which he held captive, namely, the life of Christ. Satan did not realize, however, that the deity of Christ was enveloped in his human flesh.<sup>30</sup> Christ's deity was deliberately concealed from Satan so that he would accept Jesus as the ransom.

Gregory acknowledges that God deceived Satan: "The Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh."<sup>31</sup> Beyond acknowledging the deception, Gregory justifies it. He argues that two things are requisite for an act to be just. One is that all should have their due; the other is that the motivation behind the act should be love of man. In the redemption accomplished by God both conditions were met. It is fitting that deception should have been used on Satan, for he gained his power over man by deception, using the bait of sensual pleasure. While there may seem to be a problem in that God's use of deception is condoned while Satan's is condemned, Gregory emphasizes the difference in aim and purpose:

But as regards the aim and purpose of what took place, a change in the direction of the nobler is involved; for whereas he, the enemy, effected his deception for the ruin of our nature, He who is at once the just, and good, and wise one, used His device, in which there was deception, for the salvation of him who had perished, and thus not only conferred benefit on the lost one, but on him too who had wrought our ruin.<sup>32</sup>

28. Ibid.

29. Gregory of Nyssa *Great Catechism* 22.

30. Ibid., 23.

31. Ibid., 24.

32. Ibid., 26.

God's deception of Satan is justified on the grounds of its being for a good purpose, which almost seems to suggest that "the end justifies the means." The cryptic remark that the act of deception was for Satan's benefit as well as ours is not explained further.

Gregory and Rufinus particularly liked the image of the fishhook and the bait. They even thought that Job 41:1 ("Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?") may have been an anticipation of the atonement.<sup>33</sup> Gregory the Great compared the cross to a net for catching birds,<sup>34</sup> and even Augustine likened the cross to a mousetrap, with Christ's blood serving as the bait.<sup>35</sup>

As Western theology developed, the idea of justice was worked out more thoroughly. This is not surprising, given the pervasive influence of the Roman judicial system. By maintaining that the deception of Satan should not be thought of as something that God did, but rather as something that he justly permitted, Augustine disarmed the charge that God had been unjust or dishonest.<sup>36</sup> There is in Augustine no hint that Christ's deity had been veiled in order to trick Satan. Rather, Satan was a victim of his own pride, for he thought that he could overcome and hold Christ, when in reality he had no such power. Because Jesus had never sinned, and therefore was not liable to death, he was not under Satan's control; it was an arrogant miscalculation on Satan's part to think that he could hold the Son of God.<sup>37</sup>

In whatever form the theory was expressed in this early period, the dominant theme was victory over Satan and deliverance of mankind from bondage to him. About the only notable theologians of this period who did not adopt the ransom theory were Gregory of Nazianzus and Athanasius. A somewhat later figure who also felt the incongruity of the idea that God would make such a deal with Satan was John of Damascus. He found repugnant the belief that God would offer Christ to the enemy. Having no other theory to fall back on, John agreed that the atonement was in essence a triumph of God, but he held that the power that had ensnared man and was then in turn ensnared by God was death rather than the devil. God by offering his Son destroyed death:

God forbid that the blood of the Lord should have been offered to the tyrant. Wherefore death approaches, and swallowing up the body as a bait is transfixed on the hook of divinity, and after tasting of a sinless and life-giving body, perishes, and brings up again all whom of old he swal-

33. Ibid., 24.

34. Gregory the Great *Morals of Job* 33. 15.

35. See Peter Lombard *Sententiae* 3.19.

36. Augustine *De trinitate* 13. 12.

37. Ibid., 13. 14.

lowed up. For just as darkness disappears on the introduction of light, so is death repulsed before the assault of life, which brings life to all, but death to the destroyer.<sup>38</sup>

With the rise of the theories of Anselm and Abelard, the ransom theory, at least in the form in which we have stated it, lost its large following. In recent times, Gustaf Aulen has reinstated it. He terms it the classic view, maintaining that, whatever the form in which the theory is expressed, the essential point is God's triumph.<sup>39</sup>

Inasmuch as the ransom theory holds that Christ's atoning work was not directed primarily toward man, it is an objective theory of the atonement. To be sure, the ultimate purpose of Christ's death was the liberation of man. This, however, was accomplished through a work which related primarily to another party; as a result of that work, there was an alteration of man's condition. The ransom theory is unique among the theories of the atonement in that it holds that the direct effects of Christ's atoning death were neither upon God nor upon man. Rather, in the earliest and most common form of the view, it was the devil toward whom Christ's death was directed. Christ's work in relationship to God was secondary at this point.

#### *The Satisfaction Theory:*

#### *The Atonement as Compensation to the Father*

Of all of the theories that we are examining in this chapter, the one that most clearly regards the major effect of Christ's death as objective is usually termed the commercial or satisfaction theory. It emphasizes that Christ died to satisfy a principle in the very nature of God the Father. Not only was the atonement not primarily directed at man, but it also did not involve any sort of payment to Satan.

Some of the later Latin theologians had anticipated the satisfaction theory. For in maintaining that the transaction with Satan served the cause of (or at least was not inconsistent with) God's justice, they recognized a Godward dimension in the atonement. Augustine and Gregory the Great had even argued that there was something in the very nature of God that required the atonement, but they did not develop this thought?

It should be noted that the Latin theologians worked in the setting of Roman law, which gave to their statements a judicial cast. Anselm (1033-

38. John of Damascus *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 3.27.

39. Aulen, *Christus Victor* pp.26-27.

40. Grensted, *Short History* pp.120-21.

1109), archbishop of Canterbury, lived in a different milieu. By the time of his writing, the political structure had changed. It was not the Roman Empire, but the feudal system that was the most powerful force in the structuring of society. Justice and law had become more of a personal matter; violations of the law were now thought of as offenses against the person of the feudal overlord.

In addition, there was a growing emphasis upon the concept of satisfaction. The Catholic church had been gradually developing its penitential system-by rendering some form of satisfaction, one could avoid punishment for his offenses. This was in keeping with a legal principle of the time: in matters of private offense, various forms of satisfaction could be substituted for punishment. By Anselm's time the concept of satisfaction had become an integral part of the feudal structure. We therefore find in Anselm's thought a shift in imagery from the earlier treatments of the atonement. Anselm pictures God as a feudal overlord who, to maintain his honor, insists that there be adequate satisfaction for any encroachment upon it.<sup>41</sup>

Anselm deals with the atonement in his major work, *Cur Deus homo?* The title indicates the basic direction of the treatise. Anselm attempts to discover why God became man in the first place. The method Anselm employs is to show that there was a logical necessity for the atonement, and therefore there was a logical necessity for the incarnation.

Anselm clearly and definitely rejects the standard form of the ransom theory, and even the modification of it which Augustine had developed. The problem lay in the contention that Satan had a "right of possession" over man. Anselm denies this supposed right. Man belongs to God and to no one but God. Even the devil belongs to God. Neither man nor the devil has any power apart from him. Therefore, God did not have to purchase man from Satan. God's only obligation was to punish his former servant who had convinced a fellow servant to follow him in leaving their common Lord. There was absolutely no necessity to pay ransom to the devil.<sup>42</sup>

Anselm's understanding of the atonement builds fundamentally upon his doctrine of sin, for what sin is understood to be will strongly influence one's view of what must be done to counter it. To Anselm, sin is basically failure to render God his due. By failing to give God his due, we take from God what is rightfully his and dishonor him. We sinners must restore to God what we have taken from him. But it is not sufficient merely to restore to God what we have taken away. For in taking from God what is his, we have injured him; and even after what we have taken has been returned, there must be some additional compensation or

41. Ibid., p. 123.

42. Anselm *Cur Deus homo* 1.7.

reparation for the injury that has been done.<sup>43</sup> A good comparison is modern judicial rulings which stipulate that a thief, in addition to restoring his victim's property, must pay punitive damages or serve a prison sentence.

God being God, he not only may act to preserve his own honor; he must do so. He cannot simply disregard it. Thus, he cannot merely forgive or remit sin without punishing it. Nor is it enough for us to restore to God his due. There must be additional reparation. Only with some form of added compensation can the things that have been disturbed by sin be restored to equilibrium. Sin left unpunished would leave God's economy out of order.<sup>44</sup>

God's violated honor can be put right again either by his punishing men (condemning them) or by accepting satisfaction made in their behalf.<sup>45</sup> Anselm carefully distinguishes the two concepts. Why did not God simply inflict punishment? Some theologians would say that because God is love, he would rather receive satisfaction than condemn humans. That is not Anselm's approach, however. Remember that he is trying to demonstrate the necessity of the incarnation. The way in which he proceeds is to contend that some men must necessarily be saved. He adopts Augustine's argument that some men must be saved to compensate God for the loss of the fallen angels. Because fallen angels cannot be restored or saved, they must be replaced by an equal number of men. Thus, God cannot inflict punishment on all humans; at least some of them must be restored. Satisfaction has to be rendered in their behalf.<sup>46</sup>

But what of the nature and means of this satisfaction? How was it to be accomplished? Man could not possibly have rendered satisfaction in his own behalf, for even if he were to do his best, that would be nothing more than giving God his due. Since God had been wronged, some greater compensation was required. Further, man had permitted himself to be overcome by the devil, God's enemy. This was an especially grievous offense. The satisfaction also had to include some special compensation for this wrong, namely, the defeat of the devil. How could this have been rendered by man, weakened as he was by sin and already defeated by Satan? If things were to be set right in the economy of God's kingdom, something had to be done for man by someone qualified to represent him. Note how closely Anselm's doctrine of man and sin is tied up with his doctrine of atonement.

This, then, was man's predicament. He was made for God and was

43. Ibid., 1. 11.

44. Ibid., 1. 12.

45. Ibid., 1. 13.

46. Ibid., 1. 16-18.

intended to choose, love, and serve the highest good, God. This, however, he did not do; consequently, death came upon him. God, however, necessarily had to save at least some of fallen humanity. Satisfaction had to be made, if this was to be accomplished. But how was it to be done? To be effective, the satisfaction rendered had to be greater than what all created beings are capable of doing, since they can do only what is already required of them. This being the case, only God could make satisfaction. However, if it was to avail for man in relationship to God, it had to be made by man. Therefore, the satisfaction had to be rendered by someone who is both God and man. Consequently, the incarnation is a logical necessity. Without it there could be no satisfaction and, therefore, no remission of punishment.<sup>47</sup>

Christ, being both God and sinless human, did not deserve death. Therefore, his offering his life to God in behalf of the human race of which he was a part went beyond what was required of him. Thus, it could serve as a genuine satisfaction to God for man's sins. But was it sufficient to accomplish what was needed? Was the payment enough? Yes, it was. For the death of the God-man himself, inasmuch as he, being God, had power over his own life (John 10:18) and did not have to die, has infinite value. Indeed, for his body to have suffered even the slightest harm would have been a matter of infinite value.<sup>48</sup>

Anselm's argument was heavily based on logic. Except at a few points, we have not paid much attention to this fact. It is important to keep in mind, however, that he believed and represented each point in his theological system—the atonement, the incarnation—to be a matter of logical necessity.

We have seen that Christ's death is interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Each of the theories we have examined seizes upon a significant aspect of his work. While we may have major objections to some of the theories, we recognize that each one possesses a dimension of the truth. In his death Christ (1) gave us a perfect example of the type of dedication God desires of us, (2) demonstrated the great extent of God's love, (3) underscored the seriousness of sin and the severity of God's righteousness, (4) triumphed over the forces of sin and death, liberating us from their power, and (5) rendered satisfaction to the Father for our sins. All of these things we as humans needed done for us, and Christ did them all. Now we must ask, Which of these is the most basic? Which one makes the others possible? We will turn to that question in the next

47. Ibid., 2. 8.

48. Ibid., 2. 10.

chapter. As we do so, it will be with a profound appreciation for the full measure of what Christ did to bring us into fellowship with the Father.

And can it be that I should gain  
 An interest in the Savior's blood?  
 Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
 For me, who Him to death pursued?  
 Amazing love! how can it be  
 That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

(Charles Wesley, 1738)

38

## The Central Theme of Atonement

### Background Factors

- The Nature of God
- Status of the Law
- The Human Condition
- Christ
- The Old Testament Sacrificial System

### The New Testament Teaching

- The Gospels
- The Pauline Writings

### The Basic Meaning of Atonement

- Sacrifice
- Propitiation
- Substitution
- Reconciliation

### Objections to the Penal-Substitution Theory

- The Objection to the Concept of the Necessity of Atonement
- The Objection to the Concept of Substitution
- The Objection to the Concept of Propitiation
- The Objection to the Concept of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

### The Penal-Substitution Theory in Relation to the Other Theories

- The Atonement as Example
- The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Love
- The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Justice
- The Atonement as Triumph over Evil

### The Implications of Substitutionary Atonement

**I**n examining the several theories of the atonement in the preceding chapter, we noted that each seizes upon a significant aspect of Christ's atoning work. We must now ask which of those aspects is the primary or most basic dimension of that work, the one to which the others adhere, or upon which they depend.

#### Background Factors

As we indicated at the beginning of chapter 37, the doctrine of the atonement is the point at which the organic character of theology is most apparent. Our views on the other doctrines influence strongly our conclusions in this area. So we begin by reviewing the background against which we will construct our doctrine of the atonement.

##### *The Nature of God*

Just as biblical passages appear in contexts, so also do doctrines. If we attempt to abstract a doctrine from its context, the result will be distortion. In every matter for theological study, the broadest context is, of course, the doctrine of God. This is particularly the case when we are dealing with matters involving a relationship in which one of the parties is God. The doctrine of salvation comes immediately to mind, as does the atonement.

The nature of God is perfect and complete holiness. This is not an optional or arbitrary matter; it is the way God is by nature. He has always been absolutely holy. Nothing more need or can be said. It is useless to ask, "Why is God this way?" He simply is so. Being contrary to God's nature, sin is repulsive to him. He is allergic to sin, so to speak. He cannot look upon it. He is compelled to turn away from it.

##### *Status of the Law*

The second major factor to be considered as we construct our theory of the atonement is the status of God's moral and spiritual law. The law should not be thought of as something impersonal and foreign to God. Rather, it should be seen as the expression of God's person and will. He does not command love and forbid murder simply because he decides to do so. His very nature issues in his enjoining certain actions and

prohibiting others. God pronounces love good because he himself is love. Lying is wrong because God himself cannot lie.

This means that, in effect, the law is something of a transcript of the nature of God. When we relate to it, whether positively or negatively, we are not relating to an impersonal document or set of regulations. Rather, it is God himself whom we are obeying or disobeying. Disobeying the law is serious, not because the law has some inherent value or dignity which must be preserved, but because disobeying it is actually an attack upon the very nature of God himself. Thus, legalism—the attitude that the law is to be obeyed for its own sake—is unacceptable. Rather, the law is to be understood as a means of relating to a personal God.

Some have objected to the idea that God's nature can be expressed in propositional form, that God's will is somehow codifiable. Behind this objection there seems to lie a kind of Kantian skepticism: We can never know the ultimate realities, for the only valid basis of knowledge is sense perception. Certainly statements claiming to express God's will (the law) transcend sense experience and hence must be regarded by us as without foundation. There frequently is also an objection along the lines of Friedrich Schleiermacher's conception that religion is not primarily a matter of doctrine, but rather of feelings. But if we hold that God is an objective reality, and that he has revealed rational, objective truth about himself, surely there is also room for the law as an objective representation of his will and, even more, of his nature.

A further point to be borne in mind is that violation of the law, whether by transgressing or by failing to fulfil it, carries the serious consequences of liability to punishment, and especially death. Adam and Eve were told that in the day that they ate of the fruit of the tree they would surely die (Gen. 2:15–17). The Lord told Ezekiel that "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). According to Paul, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and "he who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8). There is a definite link between sin and liability to punishment. Particularly in the last of the citations (Gal. 6:7–8) a virtual cause-effect connection between sin and punishment is in evidence. In each case, however, it is understood that punishment is an inevitability rather than a possibility.

##### *The Human Condition*

Another crucial factor in our understanding of the atonement is the nature and condition of man. We noted earlier (pp. 627–31) the fact of total depravity, by which we meant not that man is as wicked as he can possibly be, but rather that he is utterly unable to do anything to save himself or to extricate himself from his condition of sinfulness. Since this

is true, it follows that the atonement, to accomplish for man what needed to be done, had to be made by someone else in man's behalf. It had to do for man what he cannot do for himself.

#### *Christ*

Our understanding of Christ's nature is crucial here. We earlier stated that Christ is both God and man (chapters 32-34). He is the eternal, preexistent Second Person of the Trinity. He is God in the same sense and to the same degree as is the Father, a sense in which no other human has ever been or will ever be divine. To his deity he added humanity. He did not subtract from his deity. When he became human, he did not give up his deity in any respect, but only the independent exercise of his divine attributes.

In our understanding, Jesus' humanity means that his atoning death is applicable to human beings. Because Jesus was really one of us, he was able to redeem us. He was not an outsider attempting to do something for us. He was a genuine human being representing the rest of us. What he took upon himself he could redeem. This is implied in what Paul says in Galatians 4:4-5: "God sent forth his Son ... born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law."

Not only is Jesus human, he is completely human. He took not merely the physical nature of a human being, but the full psychological equipment of humanity as well. He felt the full gamut of normal human emotions. Thus he was able to redeem all of human nature, for he assumed all of what it means to be truly human.

In addition, Jesus' death is of sufficient value to atone for the entire human race. The death of an ordinary human could scarcely have sufficient value to cover his own sins, let alone those of the whole race. But Jesus' death is of infinite worth. As God, Jesus did not have to die. In dying he did something which God would never have to do. Because he was sinless, he did not have to die in payment for his own sins. Inasmuch as he is an infinite being who did not have to die, his death can serve to atone for the sins of all of mankind.

#### *The Old Testament Sacrificial System*

The atoning death of Christ must also be seen against the background of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Before Christ's atoning death it was necessary for sacrifices to be regularly offered to compensate for the sins which had been committed. These sacrifices were necessary, not to work a reformation in the sinner, nor to deter the sinner or others from committing further sin, but to atone for the sin, which was inher-

ently deserving of punishment. There had been offense against God's law and hence against God himself, and this had to be set right.

The Hebrew word most commonly used in the Old Testament for the various types of atonement is קַפֵּר (*kaphar*) and its derivatives. The word literally means "to cover."<sup>1</sup> One was delivered from punishment by the interposing of something between his sin and God. God then saw the atoning sacrifice rather than the sin. The covering of the sin meant that the penalty no longer had to be exacted from the sinner.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that the sacrifice had an objective effect. Sacrifices were offered to appease God. Job's friends, for example, were instructed to bring sacrifice so that God would not deal with them according to their folly. He had been angered by the fact that they had not spoken of him what is right (Job 42:8). It should also be noted that a sacrifice was offered as a substitute for the sinner.<sup>3</sup> It bore the sinner's guilt. For the sacrifice to be effective, there had to be some connection, some point of commonality, between the victim and the sinner for whom it was offered.

Several other factors were necessary for the sacrifice to accomplish its intended effect. The sacrificial animal had to be spotless, without blemish. The one for whom atonement was being made had to present the animal and lay his hands upon it: "he shall offer it at the door of the tent of meeting ... he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev. 1:3-4). This bringing of the animal and laying on of hands constituted a confession of guilt on the part of the sinner. The laying on of hands symbolized a transfer of the guilt from the sinner to the victim.<sup>4</sup> Then the offering or sacrifice was accepted by the priest.

While the legal portions of the Old Testament typify with considerable clarity the sacrificial and substitutionary character of Christ's death, the prophetic passages go even further. They establish the connection between the Old Testament sacrifices and Christ's death. Isaiah 53 is the clearest of all. Having described the person of the Messiah and indicated the nature and extent of the iniquity of sinners, the prophet makes an allusion to Christ's sacrifice: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6). The iniquity of sinners is to be transferred to the

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), pp. 497-98.

2. R. Laird Harris, *תִּקְפֵּה*, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 452-53.

3. Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), p. 307.

4. Ibid., p. 274.

suffering servant, just as in the Old Testament rites the sins were transferred to the sacrificial animal. The laying on of hands was an anticipation of the believer's active acceptance of Christ's atoning work.

### The New Testament Teaching

#### *The Gospels*

The New Testament is much more detailed on the subject of Christ's atonement. We will look first at our Lord's own testimony regarding the nature and purpose of his death. Although Jesus did not have a great deal to say about his death during the first part of his ministry, toward the end he began to speak about it quite explicitly. The teachings are very clear, for they are not found in obscure statements, or even in parables, which might be quite ambiguous. Further, they were not elicited by chance questions from Jesus' disciples or challenges by his enemies. Rather, they were delivered purposely, at his own initiative. They were spoken clearly and directly.

Jesus had a profound sense that the Father had sent him, and that he had to do the Father's work. He declares in John 10:36 that the Father had sent him into the world. In John 6:38 he says, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." The apostle John expressly relates the sending by the Father to the Son's redemptive and atoning work: "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3: 17). The purpose of the coming was atonement, and the Father was involved in that work. The point in stressing that the Son was sent by the Father is to make it clear that the Son's work is not independent of, or in contrast to, what the Father does. Nor was the death of Christ a punishment administered by an impassive judge upon an innocent third party. The Father was personally involved, for the penalty fell on his own Son, whom he had voluntarily sent.

Jesus had a powerful conviction that his life and death constituted a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. In particular, he interpreted his own life and death as a clear fulfilment of Isaiah 53. At the Last Supper he said, "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfilment" (Luke 22:37). He was citing Isaiah 53: 12, thus identifying himself as the suffering servant. His frequent references to his suffering make it clear that he saw his death as the primary reason for his having come. He plainly told his disciples that the Son of man must suffer many things, be rejected by the religious authorities and be killed (Mark 8:3 1).

Even early in his ministry he alluded to his suffering by speaking of the time when the bridegroom would be taken away (Matt. 9: 15; Mark 2:19-20). And indeed, upon descending from the mount of transfiguration, at one of the high points in his ministry, he said, "So also [like Elijah] the Son of man will suffer at their hands" (Matt. 17: 12).

Jesus saw his death as constituting a ransom. Without specifying to whom the ransom was to be paid, or from whose control the enslaved were to be freed, Jesus indicated that his giving of his life was to be the means by which many would be freed from bondage (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). The word *λύτρον* ("ransom") with its cognates is used nearly 140 times in the Septuagint, usually with the thought of deliverance from some sort of bondage in exchange for the payment of compensation or the offering of a substitute.<sup>5</sup>

Christ also saw himself as our *substitute*. This concept is particularly prominent in the Gospel of John. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15: 13). He was, of course, stating a principle of broad application; he was commanding to his disciples that they show to one another such love as he had shown them. But inasmuch as he was speaking on the eve of his crucifixion, there can be little doubt of what was on his mind. Certainly he was thinking of the substitutionary death which he was soon to undergo.

There are other indications that Jesus saw himself in the role of a sacrifice. He said in his great high-priestly prayer, "And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth" (John 17:19). The verb here is *ἀγιάζω*, a term common in sacrificial contexts. C. K. Barrett says, "The language is equally appropriate to the preparation of a priest and the preparation of a sacrifice; it is therefore doubly appropriate to Christ."<sup>6</sup>

The statement of John the Baptist at the beginning of Jesus' ministry carries similar connotations—"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The apostle John also records Caiaphas's sneering remark to the Sanhedrin: "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish" (John 11:49-50). The point of interest is not the attitude of Caiaphas, but the deep truth which Caiaphas had unknowingly spoken. Jesus would die not merely in the place of the nation, but of the entire world. It is noteworthy that John calls attention to this remark of Caiaphas a second time (18: 14).

5. Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983 reprint), pp. 890-9 1.

6. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), p. 571.

Jesus had a profound sense that he was the source and giver of true life. He says in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." The giving of eternal life is here linked to both the Father and the Son. We can receive this life through an especially close relationship to the Son, which he also symbolically referred to as "eating his flesh." In John 6 he speaks of "the true bread" (v. 32), "the bread of life" (vv. 35, 48), "the bread which comes down from heaven" (v. 50). He then makes clear what he has been talking about: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (v. 51). To have eternal life, we must eat his flesh and drink his blood (w. 52-58). It is evident that Jesus saw a definite connection between our having life and his giving his life for us.

To sum up what Jesus and the Gospel writers said about his death: Jesus saw a close identification between himself and his Father. He spoke regularly of the Father's having sent him. He and the Father are one, and so the work that the Son did was also the work of the Father. Jesus came for the purpose of giving his life as a *ransom*, a means of liberating those people who were enslaved to sin. He offered himself as a *substitute* for them. Paradoxically, his death gives life; we obtain it by taking him into ourselves. His death was a *sacrifice* typified by the Old Testament sacrificial system. These various motifs are vital elements in our construction of the doctrine of the atonement.

#### *The Pauline Writings*

When we turn to the writings of Paul, we find a rich collection of teaching on the atonement, teaching which conforms with what the Gospels say on the subject. Paul also identifies and equates Jesus' love and working with the love and working of the Father. Numerous texts can be cited: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5: 19); "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8); "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3); "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom. 8:32). Thus, like the Gospel writers and Jesus himself, Paul does not view the atonement as something Jesus did independently of the Father; it is the work of both. Furthermore, what Paul says of the Father's love, he also says of the Sons: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died" (2 Cor. 5: 14); "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us"

(Eph. 5:2). The love of the Father and that of the Son are interchangeable. George Ladd comments: "The idea that the cross expresses the love of Christ for us while he wrings atonement from a stern and unwilling Father, perfectly just, but perfectly inflexible, is a perversion of New Testament theology."<sup>7</sup>

Having said this, however, we must note that the theme of divine wrath upon sin is also prominent in Paul. It is important to realize, for example, that Romans 3:21-26, which is a passage about the redemption which God has provided in Jesus Christ, is the culmination of a process of reasoning which began with the pronouncement of God's wrath against sin: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men" (Rom. 1:18). The holiness of God requires that there be atonement if the condemned condition of sinners is to be overcome. The love of God provides that atonement.

Paul frequently thought of and referred to the death of Christ as a sacrifice. In Ephesians 5:2 he describes it as "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." In 1 Corinthians 5:7 he writes, "For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed." His numerous references to Christ's blood are also suggestive of a sacrifice: there was "expiation by his blood" (Rom. 3:25); "we are now justified by his blood" (Rom. 5:9); "in him we have redemption through his blood" (Eph. 1:7); we 'have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13); he has reconciled to himself all things, "making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). Ladd has pointed out, however, that there was very little actual shedding of Christ's blood as such.<sup>8</sup> While there was a loss of blood when the crown of thorns was put on his head and when the nails were driven into his flesh, it was not until after he had died that blood (mixed with water) gushed forth (John 19:34). So the references to Christ's blood are not to his actual physical blood per se, but to his death as a sacrificial provision for our sins.

The apostle Paul also maintains that Christ died for us or in our behalf. God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32); "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8); "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2); Christ became a "curse for us" (Gal. 3:13); he "died for us" (1 Thess. 5:10). Later in this chapter we will inquire whether Christ's death was merely for our sakes, that is, in our behalf, or actually substitutionary, that is, in our place.

Finally, Paul regards the death of Christ as propitiatory, that is, Christ died to appease God's wrath against sin. This point has been questioned,

7. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 424.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 425.

especially by C. H. Dodd in his book *The Bible and the Greeks*. Dodd bases his argument upon the way in which the verb *ἱλάσκομαι* and its cognates are used in the Septuagint. He contends that it is not propitiation but expiation that is in view in verses like Romans 3:25: "The meaning conveyed (in accordance with LXX usage which is constantly determinative for Paul) is that of expiation, not that of propitiation. Most translators and commentators are wrong."<sup>9</sup> God was not appeased by the death of Christ. Rather, what Christ accomplished in dying was to cleanse sinners of their sin, to cover their sin and uncleanness. Dodd builds his case not only upon linguistic but also upon more generally theological considerations. A. G. Hebert adds that "it cannot be right to think of God's wrath as being 'appeased' by the sacrifice of Christ, as some 'transactional theories of the atonement have done ... because it is God who in Christ reconciles the world to himself. ... It cannot be right to make any opposition between the wrath of the Father and the love of the Son."<sup>10</sup>

Despite the position taken by Dodd, Ladd has argued that *ἱλάσκομαι* does indeed refer to propitiation. He makes four points in rebuttal:<sup>11</sup>

1. In nonbiblical Hellenistic Greek authors such as Josephus and Philo, the word uniformly means "to propitiate." This is also true of its use in the apostolic fathers. Leon Morris has said, "If the LXX translators and the New Testament writers evolved an entirely new meaning of the word group, it perished with them and was not resurrected until our own day."<sup>12</sup>
2. There are three places in the Septuagint where *ἔξιλάσκομαι* refers to propitiating or appeasing God (Zech. 7:2; 8:22; Mal. 1:9). Dodd's comment on these passages is that there appears to be something exceptional about the usage of the word here.<sup>13</sup>
3. While the word is seldom used in the Septuagint with "God" as its direct object, it must also be noted that it is *never* used in the Old Testament with the word *sin* as its direct object.

9. C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), p. 94.

10. A. G. Hebert, "Atone, Atonement," in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 26.

11. Ladd, *Theology*, pp. 429-30. For a more extensive refutation of Dodd's view see Roger Nicole, "C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1955): 117-57.

12. Leon Morris, "The Use of *Hiluskethai* in Biblical Greek," *Expository Times* (1950-1951): 233.

13. Dodd, *Bible and the Greeks*, pp. 86-87.

4. There are many places in the Old Testament where, while not actually used of appeasing the wrath of God, the word appears in a context in which the wrath of God is in view.

From the foregoing considerations, it appears questionable whether Dodd's conclusions, influential though they have been, are accurate. His conclusions may well have resulted from an inaccurate conception of the Trinity, a misconception which betrays itself in his failure to take very seriously the contrary evidence in such passages as Zechariah 7:2; 8:22; and Malachi 1:9.

In contradiction to Dodd, we note that there are passages in Paul's writings which cannot be satisfactorily interpreted if we deny that God's wrath needed to be appeased. This is particularly true of Romans 3:25-26. In the past, God had left sins unpunished. He could conceivably be accused of overlooking sin since he had not required punishment for it. Now, however, he has put forth Jesus as *ἱλαστήριον*. This proves both that God is just (his wrath required the sacrifice) and that he is the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (his love provided the sacrifice for them).

The numerous passages that speak of the wrath of God against sin are evidence that Christ's death was necessarily propitiatory. We read of the wrath (*όργη*) of God against sin in Romans 1: 18; 2:5, 8; 4: 15; 5:9; 9:22; 12: 19; 13:4-5; Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; and 1 Thessalonians 1: 10; 2:16; 5:9. So then, Paul's idea of the atoning death (Christ as *ἱλαστήριον*) is not simply that it covers sin and cleanses from its corruption (expiation), but that the sacrifice also appeases a God who hates sin and is radically opposed to it (propitiation).-

### The Basic Meaning of Atonement

Having reviewed the Bible's direct teaching on the subject of the atonement, we need now to concentrate on its basic motifs.

#### Sacrifice

We have already noted several references to the death of Christ as a sacrifice. These occur in the Old Testament (specifically Isa. 53), in Christ's teachings and the Gospel narratives, and in Paul. We will now supplement our understanding of this concept by noting particularly what the Book of Hebrews says on the subject. In Hebrews 9:6-15 the work of Christ is likened to the Old Testament Day of Atonement. Christ is depicted as the

high priest who entered into the Holy Place to offer sacrifice. But the sacrifice which Christ offered was not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood (v. 12). Thus he secured "an eternal redemption." A vivid contrast is drawn between the sacrifice of animals, which had only a limited effect, and of Christ, whose death has eternal effect. Whereas the Mosaic sacrifices had to be offered repeatedly, Christ's death is a once-for-all atonement for the sins of all mankind (v. 28).

A similar thought is expressed in Hebrews 10:5-18. Here again the idea is that instead of burnt offerings, the body of Christ was sacrificed (v. 5). This was a once-for-all offering (v. 10). Instead of the daily offering by the priest (v. 11), Christ "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (v. 12). In chapter 13, the writer likens the death of Christ to the sin offering of the Old Testament. He died in order to sanctify the people through his blood. We are therefore exhorted to go to him outside the camp, and bear the abuse he endured (w. 10-13).

What is unique about Christ's sacrifice, and very important to keep in mind, is that Christ is both the victim and the priest who offers it. What were two parties in the Levitical system are combined in Christ. The mediation which Christ began with his death continues even now in the form of his priestly intercession for us.

#### *Propitiation*

In our discussion of the Pauline material on the atonement, we noted the controversy over whether Christ's death was propitiatory. Here we must note that the concept of propitiation is not limited to Paul's writings. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, the offering was made before the Lord and there it took effect as well: "The priest shall burn it on the altar, upon the offerings by fire to the LORD; and the priest shall make atonement for [the sinner] for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven" (Lev. 4:35). Can there be any doubt, especially in view of God's anger against sin, that this verse points to an appeasement of God? How else can we interpret the statement that the offering should be made to the Lord and forgiveness would follow?

#### *Substitution*

We observed that Christ died for our sake or in our behalf. But is it proper to speak of his death as substitutionary, that is, did he actually die in our place?

Several considerations indicate that Christ did indeed take our place. First there is a whole set of passages which tell us that our sins were "laid upon" Christ, he "bore" our iniquity, he "was made sin" for us. One

prominent instance is in Isaiah 53: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6); he "was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (v. 12b). On seeing Jesus, John the Baptist exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Paul said, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21), and "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews said, "So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28). And evidently having Isaiah 53:5-6, 12, in mind, Peter wrote, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). The common idea in these several passages is that Jesus bore our sins—they were laid on him or transferred from us to him. Because he has come to be sin, we have ceased to be sin or sinners. The idea of substitution is unmistakable.

A further line of evidence is the prepositions used to designate the precise relationship between Christ's work and us. The preposition which most clearly suggests substitution is *ἀντὶ*. This word in nonsoteriological contexts clearly means "instead of" or "in the place of." For example, Jesus asked, "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?" (Luke 11:11). In Matthew 2:22 the word *ἀντὶ* is used in connection with a son's succeeding his father: "Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod." And in 1 Corinthians 11:1.5 Paul observes that, it being improper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered (v. 13), she has been given her hair in place of a covering. When we look at passages where the preposition *ἀντὶ* is used to specify the relationship between Christ's death and sinners, this same idea of substitution is clearly present. A. T. Robertson observes that *ἀντὶ* means "in place of" or "instead of" when it occurs in contexts where "two substantives placed opposite to each other are equivalent and so may be exchanged."<sup>14</sup> Thus, just as substitution is in view in the "eye for an eye" statement of Matthew 5:38, it is also in view in cases like Matthew 20:28: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Robertson says that important doctrinal passages like Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 "teach the substitutionary conception of Christ's death, not because *ἀντὶ* of itself means 'instead,'

<sup>14</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar Of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 2nd ed. (New York: George H. Doran, 1915), p. 573.

which is not true, but because the context renders any other resultant idea out of the question.”<sup>15</sup> The same idea emerges in 1 Timothy 2:6, where a different preposition (*ὑπέρ*) is used, but *ἀντὶ* appears in a compounded form in the noun *ἀντίληντρον* (“ransom”).

The other pertinent preposition is *ὑπέρ*. It has a variety of meanings, depending in part upon the case with which it is used. It is the instances of *ὑπέρ* with the genitive case that are of particular interest to us here. It has been asserted that *ἀντὶ* literally means “instead of” and *ὑπέρ* means “in behalf of.” G. B. Winer, however, has said, “In most cases one who acts in behalf of another appears for him [ 1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:15], and hence *ὑπέρ* sometimes borders on *ἀντὶ*, instead of.”<sup>16</sup> On this idea that one who acts in behalf of another appears for him Robertson comments: “Whether he does or not depends on the nature of the action, not on *ἀντὶ* or *ὑπέρ*.<sup>17</sup> Yet in the case of ostraca and papyri, the word *ὑπέρ* clearly means “instead of.”<sup>18</sup>

In some biblical passages, for example, Romans 5:6–8; 8:32; Galatians 2:20; and Hebrews 2:9, *ὑπέρ* may be taken in the sense of “in behalf of,” although it probably means “instead of.” In several other passages, however, notably John 11:50; 2 Corinthians 5:15; and Galatians 3: 13, the meaning is more obvious. Regarding these verses Robertson says, “*ὑπέρ* has the resultant notion of ‘instead’ and only violence to the context can get rid of it.”<sup>19</sup> It is not necessary that the meaning “instead of” be overt in every instance. For there is sufficient scriptural evidence that Christ’s death was substitutionary. Leon Morris comments:

Christ took our place, as the sacrificial victim took the place of the worshipper. I realize that the significance of sacrifice is widely disputed, and that there are some who reject any substitutionary aspect. Here there is no space to go into the matter fully. I can only state dogmatically that in my judgment sacrifice cannot be satisfactorily understood without including an aspect of substitution. And Christ died as our sacrifice. He died accordingly as our Substitute.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Reconciliation*

The death of Christ also brings to an end the enmity and estrangement which exist between God and mankind. Our hostility toward God is

15. Ibid.

16. G. B. Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. rev. (9th English ed.) (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1882), p. 479.

17. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 630.

18. Ibid., p. 631.

19. Ibid.

20. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 175.

removed. The emphasis in Scripture is usually that we are reconciled to God, that is, he plays the active role; he reconciles us to himself. On this basis, the advocates of the moral-influence theory have contended that reconciliation is strictly God’s work.<sup>21</sup> Are they right?

To answer, we need to note, first, that when the Bible entreats someone to be reconciled to another, the hostility does not necessarily lie with the person who is being addressed.<sup>22</sup> Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:23–24 bears out this contention: “So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Note that the brother is the one who feels wronged and bears the animosity; there is no indication that the one who is offering the gift feels any such hostility. Yet it is the latter who is urged to be reconciled to the brother. Similarly, although God is not the one bearing animosity, it is he who works to bring about reconciliation.

Another notable biblical reference in this regard is the word of Paul in Romans 11: 15. The reconciliation of the world is now possible because of the casting off of the Jews. Note that in casting off the Jews, God takes the initiative, rejecting Israel from divine favor and the grace of the gospel. The reconciliation of the world (Gentiles) stands in contrast to the rejection of Israel. Reconciliation, then, is presumably God’s act as well, his act of receiving the world into his favor and of dealing specially with them. As important as it is for man to turn to God, the process of reconciliation is primarily God’s turning in favor toward man.

#### **Objections to the Penal-Substitution Theory**

We have seen that the doctrine of the atonement encompasses many themes-sacrifice, propitiation, substitution, reconciliation. Obviously, of the several theories which we examined in the preceding chapter, it is the satisfaction theory which seizes upon the essential aspect of Christ’s atoning work. Christ died to satisfy the justice of God’s nature. He rendered satisfaction to the Father so that we might be spared from the just deserts of our sins. In view of the other basic themes of the satisfaction theory, which have been more fully spelled out in this chapter, it is also commonly referred to as the “penal-substitution theory” of the atonement. By offering himself as a sacrifice, by substituting himself for us,

21. Peter Abelard *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 5:5.

22. John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 34-38.

actually bearing the punishment which should have been ours, Jesus appeased the Father and effected a reconciliation between God and man.

Although careful investigation of the relevant Scripture passages points clearly in the direction of the penal-substitution theory of the atonement, several objections have been raised. They deal with various aspects of the doctrine as we have stated it. We turn now to a brief consideration of those objections.

#### **The Objection to the Concept of the Necessity of Atonement**

The first objection questions the necessity of the atonement. Why does God not simply forgive sins? Why does he require the payment of a pound of flesh as it were? We humans are capable of forgiving one another simply by an act of good will. We do not require that persons who have wronged us make reparation before we are willing to take them back into our favor. If this is possible for Christians to do, should not God be able to do the same?<sup>23</sup>

Those who make this objection have failed to consider who God really is. God is not merely a private person who has been wronged, but he is also the official administrator of the judicial system. As a private person he could in a sense forgive offenses against himself, just as humans forgive one another. But for God to remove or ignore the guilt of sin without requiring a payment would in effect destroy the very moral fiber of the universe, the distinction between right and wrong. An additional problem is that God is a being of infinite or perfect holiness and goodness. An offense against him is much more serious than an offense against an ordinary sinful human. When someone sins against us, we are aware that the fault may at least in part be ours, and that we have on numerous other occasions sinned against others, and probably against the very person who is presently wronging us. But with God, who does not tempt or do wrong, there is no such element of imperfection to make our sin seem less dreadful.

#### **The Objection to the Concept of Substitution**

The second objection questions the morality or rightness of substitution. The whole idea of the Father's substituting his Son to bear our penalty smacks of unfairness and injustice. To use a courtroom analogy: suppose that a judge, upon finding a defendant guilty, proceeds to punish not the defendant, but an innocent party. Would this not be improper?<sup>24</sup>

23. Faustus Socinus *De Jesu Christo servatore* 1.1.

24. Racovian Catechism, trans. Thomas S. Rees (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818; Lexington, Ky.: American Theological Library Association, 1962), section 5, chapter 8.

There are two answers to this objection. One is the voluntary character of the sacrifice. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He put it in even more explicit fashion in John 10:17–18: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father." Jesus was not compelled by the Father to lay down his life. He did so voluntarily and thus pleased the Father. It hardly need be said that taking someone who willingly volunteers is preferable to conscripting someone for punishment.

The second answer is that the work of Jesus Christ in giving of his life also involved the Father. We have noted several texts which indicate that because the Father and the Son are one, Christ's work is also the Father's. Thus, the Father did not place the punishment upon someone other than himself. Although the exact nature of the relationships among the persons of the Trinity is not known to us, it is clear that God is both the judge and the person paying the penalty. In terms of out-courtroom analogy, it is not as if the judge passes sentence on the defendant, and some innocent and hitherto uninvolved party then appears to pay the fine or serve the sentence. Rather, it is as if the judge passes sentence upon the defendant, then removes his robes and goes off to serve the sentence in the defendant's place.

#### **The Objection to the Concept of Propitiation**

Another objection relates to the concept of propitiation. That the loving Son wins over the Father from his anger and wrath against sin to a loving, forgiving spirit is seen as an indication of internal conflict within the mind of God or between the persons of the Trinity.<sup>25</sup>

In answering this objection it is helpful to recall the numerous references indicating that the Father sent the Son to atone for sin. Christ was sent by the *Father's* love. So it is not the case that the propitiation changed a *wrathful* God into a *loving* God. As John Murray puts it, "It is one thing to say that the wrathful God is made loving. That would be entirely false. It is another thing to say the wrathful God is loving. That is profoundly true."<sup>26</sup> The love which prompted God to send his Son was always there. While the Father's holiness and righteousness and justice required that there be a payment for sin, his love provided it. The

25. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1900), vol. 3, p. 473.

26. Murray, *Redemption*, p. 31.

propitiation is a fruit of the Fathers divine love. This is indicated quite clearly in 1 John 4:10: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (KJV).

Propitiation therefore does not detract from God's love and mercy. It rather shows how great is that love. He could not overlook sin and still be God. But he was willing to go as far as to offer his own Son in order to appease his wrath against sin. Had this wrath not been appeased, there would be no remission of sins. Thus, by requiring the payment of the penalty, God demonstrated how great are his holiness and justice. By providing that payment himself, he manifested the extent of his love. As Paul puts it in Romans 3:26, "it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus." The cross is a fitting symbol of the atonement, for it represents the intersecting of two attributes or facets of God's nature. Here it is that the love of God meets the holiness of God. The holiness requires payment of the penalty, and the love provides that payment.

#### *The Objection to the Concept of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness*

Just as it is sometimes argued that Christ cannot bear our guilt, it is also argued that we cannot bear his righteousness. There is objection to the idea that Christ's righteousness can be imputed to us. One person cannot be good in another's stead. We are responsible for ourselves. Transferring credit, as it were, from one person to another is a very external and formal type of transaction, quite inappropriate in the matter of our spiritual standing before God.

This objection would be to a considerable extent valid if our relationship with Christ were this detached and he were quite aloof from us. Then it would be as if a total stranger paid the fine for a convicted criminal. But the individual believer is actually united with Christ. As we will see even more completely when we examine the doctrine of justification, the transfer of the righteousness of Christ, and of what was accomplished by the atonement, is not an arm's-length transaction. Rather, it is a matter of the two, Christ and the believer, becoming one in the sight of God. Thus, Paul is able to speak of the believer's having died with Christ and having been made alive with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4).

It is as if, with respect to one's spiritual status, a new entity has come into being. It is as if Christ and I have been married, or have merged to form a new corporation. Thus, the imputation of his righteousness is not so much a matter of transferring something from one person to another, as it is a matter of bringing the two together, so that they hold all things

in common. In Christ I died on the cross, and in him I was resurrected. Thus, his death is not only in my place, but with me.

#### **The Penal-Substitution Theory in Relation to the Other Theories**

We observed, in the preceding chapter, that each of the theories of the atonement contains a valid insight. It is our contention that the penal-substitution theory maintains those valid insights. Beyond that, we would contend that it is only on the basis of the substitutionary view that those other insights bear force.

#### *The Atonement as Example*

Let us take first the Socinian theory of the atonement. This theory maintains that the value of Christ's death is in giving us an example of the kind of life that we should live, and especially the type of dedication that should characterize us. But would that example have any real validity if Christ had not died *for us*? Suppose that we could have been saved apart from his substitutionary death. What, then, would have been the purpose of his dying? Would it not have been a foolish thing for Christ to do? And what of the moral character of the Father, if he had required Christ to die even though man owed no payment for sin?

Consider this illustration. Suppose that a house is on fire. The parents have escaped, only to find that their infant child is still within the burning house. Physically overcome, they are unable to reenter the home. A fireman, however, rushes into the house, saves the child, but in the process is himself overcome and dies. This would certainly be considered a beautiful example of love for one's fellow human at a disregard for one's own safety. It would indeed be inspiring to others. But suppose there is no child in the house, and the parents insist that there is no child, and the fireman himself believes that no one is in the house. If he nonetheless rushed into the house and died, would we be impressed by the example, or would we consider it to be a case of foolhardiness? No one would want to emulate such an example and, indeed, no one ought to. And what of a superior who would order a fireman into the flames just to give an example of how dedicated firemen should be and to what lengths they should be willing to go in the call of duty? Should anyone follow such an order? Yet we stumble into precisely this type of ridiculous situation if we hold that the purpose of the atonement was not to pay the penalty for our sins, but simply to give us an example. On the other hand, if there really is a child in the house, not only is the child saved, but we are given an example of bravery and unselfishness. Similarly, if man is

guilty of sin and condemned to death, and Christ has laid down his life in the place of man, not only are we saved, but we are given an example of how to live. The death of Christ is an example, but only if it also is a substitutionary sacrifice.

#### *The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Love*

A similar argument holds with respect to the moral-influence theory of the atonement. It is true that the death of Christ is a powerful demonstration of the love of God and therefore a great motivating incentive to us to love God and be reconciled to God. But once again, the valid insight of the theory is dependent upon the fact that he died **for us**.

According to the moral-influence theory, Christ's death was not necessary in an objective sense. That is to say, God could have forgiven us our sins without the death of Jesus. There was no inherent obstacle to his simply forgiving us or, more correctly, simply accepting us back into fellowship with him. There was no need for retribution. But in that case, would we look upon Christ's death as a demonstration of love or an act of foolishness?

If you and I are having an argument on the bank of a stream, and you fall into the water and are in danger of drowning, and I, at great danger to my life, leap into the water to rescue you, my action will be regarded as a demonstration of love. But if you are standing safely on the bank of the stream, and I say, "See how much I love you!" and leap into the water and begin to thrash around, my action will not move you to love me or forgive me or be reconciled to me. You will more likely conclude that I am emotionally and mentally unstable.

So it is with the atonement. The death of Christ is a beautiful demonstration of God's love and thus a powerful incentive to us to abandon our hostility toward God and respond in repentance and faith to the offer of grace. But it is effective as a demonstration of love precisely because we were lost and God cared enough about our condition to offer his Son as a sacrifice. If the atonement were not needed to rescue us from our sins, then it would be less of a demonstration of God's concern for man than of concern for himself. For in that case its prime purpose would be to put an end to our grudges.

#### *The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Justice*

The prime concern of the governmental theory is to maintain the justice of God. It sees the atonement as essentially a demonstration of God's justice. To establish that the law is righteous and that violation of the law has serious consequences, God had to make an example of

someone. Hence the death of Christ. It was not that Christ in any sense took our place or offered a sacrifice that had to be made. Nor was any element of punishment involved. It was simply to demonstrate the serious consequences of sin and thus to move us to repentance that Christ was put to death.

But, we must ask, is violation of the law or, in other words, sin really so serious if God can forgive without requiring some form of penalty or punishment? And if he can, was Christ's death really necessary? It would seem, rather, that a great and unnecessary injustice has been done, and Christ was the victim. Would anyone really be moved to love and serve such a God? If Christ's death did not involve his bearing our punishment in order to redeem us, there was no justice in it!

In the substitutionary theory, by contrast, there is no such problem, because it sees the death of Christ as something required by the law, unless, of course, the law was to be carried out in the strictest sense, namely, the suffering and death of all sinners. Here the seriousness of the law is seen in the fact that it required something as radical as the death of the very Son of God. Would Christ have offered himself to death if there had been any other way of resolving man's problem? Thus, the substitutionary theory puts heavy emphasis on the righteousness and holiness of God. But the fullness of his love is also clearly seen in what God was willing to do to redeem us.

#### *The Atonement as Triumph over Evil*

Finally, we note that the theme of the triumph of God over Satan and the forces of evil is also preserved by the penal-substitution theory. According to the ransom or classic theory, this victory was obtained by offering Jesus as a ransom to Satan, who, under the self-delusion that he would be able to hold the Son of God, agreed to release mankind. The penal-substitution theory likewise affirms that victory over evil was won by Christ's giving of himself as a ransom—but to the requirements of God's justice, not to Satan.

Would the payment of Jesus as a ransom to Satan have in itself been sufficient to break the evil one's power? To answer that question, it is necessary (1) to determine the root of Satan's power, what it is that enabled him to hold man under his control and domination, and (2) to specify what had to be done to liberate humans from his grasp. We note that the name *Satan* literally means "accuser." He induces us to sin so that he can lay accusations against us and bring us under the condemnation and curse of the law. This is the essence of his power over us. Accordingly, if we are to be liberated from his power, we must be freed from the condemnation of the law.

Now the message of the cross is that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and thus freed us from the slavery in which Satan held us. The Bible makes it clear that we are freed from the curse of the law precisely because Christ took our place; in him our penalty has been paid; in him we have died and been made alive again. In dying with Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin (Rom. 6:6-8). “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). There is no one (including Satan) who can condemn, for God justifies us, and Christ, who died and was raised from the dead, intercedes for us (vv. 31-34). Thus, Paul can challenge the power of death and sin (1 Cor. 15:55-57). Christ has fulfilled the law for us, and therefore sin no longer has the power of death.

If Christ’s death, on the other hand, had been nothing more than the payment of a ransom to Satan, the law would not have been fulfilled in the process and Satan would not have been defeated. It was not the payment of a ransom to Satan that ensured his defeat and the triumph of God, but Christ’s taking our place to free us from the curse of the law. By bearing the penalty of our sin and thus satisfying once and for all the just requirements of the law, Christ nullified Satan’s control over us at its root—the power to bring us under the curse and condemnation of the law. Christ’s death, then, was indeed God’s triumph over the forces of evil, but only because it was a substitutionary sacrifice.

#### The Implications of Substitutionary Atonement

The substitutionary theory of the atoning death of Christ, when grasped in all its complexity, is a rich and meaningful truth. It carries several major implications for our understanding of salvation:

1. The penal-substitution theory confirms the biblical teaching of the total depravity of all humans. God would not have gone so far as to put his precious Son to death if it had not been absolutely necessary. Man is totally unable to meet his need.

2. God’s nature is not one-sided, nor is there any tension between its different aspects. He is not merely righteous and demanding, nor merely loving and giving. He is righteous, so much so that sacrifice for sin had to be provided. He is loving, so much so that he provided that sacrifice himself.

3. There is no other way of salvation but by grace, and specifically, the death of Christ. It has an infinite value and thus covers the sins of all mankind for all time. A finite sacrifice, by contrast, cannot even fully cover the sins of the individual offering it.

4. There is security for the believer in his or her relationship to God. For the basis of the relationship, Christ’s sacrificial death, is complete and permanent. Although our feelings might change, the ground of our relationship to God remains unshaken.

5. We must never take lightly the salvation which we have. Although it is free, it is also costly, for it cost God the ultimate sacrifice. We must therefore always be grateful for what he has done; we must love him in return and emulate his giving character.

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NIV).

## The Extent of the Atonement

For Whom Did Christ Die?

Particular Atonement

Universal Atonement

A Balanced Evaluation

For What Did Christ Atone?

**H**aving arrived at our conclusion regarding the nature of the atonement, we still have a determination to make as to its extent. There are two issues here. The first is a classical issue: for whom did Christ die? Did he die for the sins of the entire world, or only for those of the select group chosen by God to be recipients of his saving grace, namely, the elect? The second is an issue that has attained some prominence in the twentieth century, namely, for what did Christ die? Was the purpose of his death solely to deliver us from our sins, from spiritual evils? Or did he die to deliver us from sickness as well? That is, did he die to remove physical as well as spiritual evils?

### **For Whom Did Christ Die?**

When evangelicals ask the question, “For whom did Christ die?” they are not asking whether the death of Christ has value sufficient to cover

the sins of all persons. There is total agreement on this matter.' Since the death of Christ was of infinite value, it is sufficient regardless of the number of elect. Rather, the question is whether God sent Christ to die to provide salvation for all persons, or simply for those whom he had chosen. In effect our answer depends upon our understanding of the logical order of God's decrees. If, as supralapsarians and infralapsarians hold, God's decision to save some (i.e., the elect) logically precedes his decision to provide salvation through Christ, then the atonement is limited to providing salvation for the elect.<sup>2</sup> If, on the other hand, the decision to provide salvation logically precedes the decision to save some and allow others to remain in their lost condition, then one is likely to hold that the death of Christ was unlimited or universal in its intention. This is the position of Arminians and sublapsarian Calvinists.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Particular Atonement*

Most Calvinists believe that the purpose of Christ's coming was not to make possible the salvation of all humans, but to render certain the salvation of the elect. There are several elements in their argument.

First we must consider the Scripture passages which teach that

1. See, e.g., Loraine Boettner, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), p. 92.

2. Some theologians, such as Louis Berkhof and Loraine Boettner, recognize only supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. Others, such as Augustus Strong, mention only supralapsarianism and sublapsarianism. These three systems differ in their view of the logical order of God's decrees:

##### Supralapsarianism

1. The decree to save (elect) some and reprobate others.
2. The decree to create both the elect and the reprobate.
3. The decree to permit the fall of both the elect and the reprobate.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.

##### Infralapsarianism

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to elect some and reprobate others.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.

##### Sublapsarianism

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to provide salvation sufficient for all.
4. The decree to save some and reprobate others.

See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 118-25; Loraine Boettner, "Predestination," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), pp. 415-17; Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), pp. 777-79; Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 343.

3. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures*, p. 343; Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 777.

Christ's death was "for his people"; from such passages particularists infer that Christ did not die for everyone. Among the verses they cite is the angel's promise to Joseph in Matthew 1:2 1: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." They also point to a whole collection of statements by Jesus regarding his sheep, his people, his friends. In John 10 Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11); "I lay down my life for the sheep" (v. 15). In verses 26-27 Jesus makes clear who "the sheep" are: "But you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." It is apparent that Jesus gives his life for those who respond to him. We do not read here that he is giving his life for any others, for those who are not numbered among his sheep. Moreover, in urging his disciples to emulate his love, Jesus does not speak of dying for the whole world, but for one's friends: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15: 13).

The imagery varies. Christ is also spoken of as having died for the church or for his church. Paul urged the Ephesian elders "to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The same apostle encouraged husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). And Paul wrote to the Romans that God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). It is apparent from both the preceding (w. 28-29) and the following (v. 33) contexts that those for whom God gave up his Son are those who believe in him, that is, the elect.

Another line of argument for the particularist view deduces the concept of limited atonement from other doctrines, for example, the doctrine of the intercessory work of Christ. R. B. Kuiper argues that John 17:9, which deliberately limits to the elect the focus of Christ's high-priestly prayer ("I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine"), sheds a great deal of light on the issue currently under discussion. Kuiper contends that inasmuch as Christ's intercession and sacrifice are both priestly activities, they are simply two aspects of his atoning work. Therefore, the one cannot apply to more people than does the other. Since Christ prayed exclusively for those whom the Father had given him, it follows that they are the only ones for whom he died.<sup>4</sup> Thus Kuiper maintains that what is taught explicitly in the other passages cited is implicit within this passage, namely, that Christ died only for the elect.

Louis Berkhof takes this argument even further, stressing that atonement is the basis of the intercessory work of Christ. Part of Christ's

4. R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959). p. 64.

intercessory work consisted of the presentation of his atoning sacrifice to the Father. It was on the basis of the atonement that he expected all of the blessings of salvation to be applied to those for whom he was praying. And his prayers were always effective (see John 11:42—"I knew that thou hearest me always"). In John 17:9 he is praying that the work of redemption will be realized in all those for whom he will make atonement. Note that, the efficacy of the intercession being dependent upon the atonement, he does not pray for those not covered by the atonement. Since the intercession is limited in extent, the atonement must be too. Similarly, in John 17:24 he prays, "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am." Here again we must conclude that since Christ prays only for those whom the Father has given him, it must be only for them that he died.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Hodge argues for the coextensiveness of intercession and atonement on the basis of the Old Testament priesthood. He notes that the priest in the old dispensation interceded for all those for whom he offered sacrifice. The unity of the office rendered these two functions inseparable. Since Christ is the fulfilment of the Aaronic priesthood, what was true of the Old Testament priest must also be true of him. Moreover, since the Father always hears Christ's prayers, "he cannot be assumed to intercede for those who do not actually receive the benefits of his redemption."<sup>6</sup> In other words, he prays only for those for whom he atones, and atones only for those for whom he prays.

A second inferential argument is from the nature of the atonement. The imagery of Jesus' giving his life as a ransom (Matt. 20:28 and Mark 10:45) suggests limited atonement. The nature of a ransom is such that, when paid and accepted, it automatically frees those for whom it is intended. No further obligation can be charged against them. Now if the death of Christ was a ransom for all alike, not just for the elect, then it must be the case that all are set free by the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Yet Scripture tells us that those who do not accept Christ are not redeemed from the curse of the law. If the death of Christ was a universal ransom, it seems that in their case a double payment for sin is required.

An additional consideration is that the doctrines of atonement and election have historically been linked together. Augustine taught that God had elected some persons to salvation and had sent Christ into the world to die for them. Since Augustine, these two teachings, limited atonement

5. Louis Berkhof, *Vicarious Atonement Through Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), p. 160.

6. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 2, p. 553.

7. Ibid., p. 548.

and the election of individuals to salvation, have been affirmed or denied together. When the semi-Pelagians denied the one, they denied the other also. Throughout the Middle Ages, whenever the church affirmed special election, it also maintained that the atoning death of Christ was only for the elect. The two were never separated. A similar statement can be made about the Lutheran church during and after the Reformation. Further, it was only when the Remonstrants rejected the other points of Calvinism, such as total depravity, the election of God based upon his own sovereign will, human inability, and perseverance of the saints, that they also rejected limited atonement.<sup>8</sup> These historical considerations suggest that being a consistent Calvinist requires holding to particular or limited atonement.

Recent advocates of particular atonement contend that the connection is not merely one of historical fact, but also of logical necessity. As Hodge puts it, "if God from eternity determined to save one portion of the human race and not another, it seems to be a contradiction to say that the plan of salvation had equal reference to both portions; that the Father sent his Son to die for those whom He had predetermined not to save, as truly as, and in the same sense that He gave Him up for those whom He had chosen to make the heirs of salvation."<sup>9</sup> The argument almost seems to be that it would have been a waste and a lack of foresight on the part of God to have Christ die for those whom he had not chosen to salvation. The underlying assumption is that in view of the economy of God's work, separating particular election from limited atonement involves an inherent contradiction.

#### *Universal Atonement*

In contrast with the foregoing position is the contention that God intended the atonement to make salvation possible for all persons. Christ died for all persons, but his atoning death becomes effective only when accepted by the individual. While this is the view of all Arminians, it is also the position of some Calvinists, who are sometimes referred to as sublapsarians.<sup>10</sup>

Those who hold Christ's death to be universal in intent also appeal to Scripture for support. They point first of all to various passages which speak of the death of Christ or the atonement in universal terms. In particular, they point to those which speak of Christ as dying for the sins "of the world." John the Baptist introduced Jesus with the words, "Behold,

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 777.

the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The apostle John explains the coming of Christ in universal terms: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3: 16-17). Paul speaks in a similar fashion of Jesus' dying for all: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). In 1 Timothy 4: 10 he speaks of the living God, "who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." This is a particularly interesting and significant verse, since it brackets as being saved by God both believers and others, but indicates that a greater degree of salvation attaches to the former group.<sup>11</sup>

The General Epistles likewise speak of Christ's death as universal in intent. The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus "for a little while was made lower than the angels ... so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one" (Heb. 2:9). There are in 1 John two statements reminiscent of the Gospel of John in that they refer to Christ's death as being for the world: "Jesus Christ the righteous ... is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (2: 1-2); "the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world" (4:14).

Two additional passages are to be noted as being especially significant. The first is the prophetic passage in Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the **Lord** has laid on him the iniquity of us all." This passage is especially powerful from a logical standpoint. It is clear that the extent of sin is universal; it is specified that every one of us has sinned. It should also be noticed that the extent of what will be laid on the suffering servant exactly parallels the extent of sin. It is difficult to read this passage and not conclude that just as everyone sins, everyone is also atoned for.

Equally compelling is 1 Timothy 2:6, where Paul says that Christ Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all." This is to be compared with the original statement in Matthew 20:28, where Jesus had said that the Son of man came "to give his life as a ransom for many." In 1 Timothy, Paul makes a significant advance upon the words of Jesus. "His life" (*τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ*) becomes "himself" (*εαυτὸν*); the word for "ransom" (*λύτρον*) appears in compound form (*ἀντιλύτρον*). But most significantly here, "for many" (*ἀντὶ πολλῶν*) becomes "for all" (*ὑπὲρ πάντων*). When Paul wrote, the words of the tradition (i.e., as they appear in Matthew)

11. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures*, p. 330.

may well have been familiar to him. It is almost as if he made a deliberate point of emphasizing that the ransom was universal in its purpose.

A second class of biblical material is those passages which seem to indicate that some of those for whom Christ died will perish. Two passages speak of a brother's being injured or ruined or destroyed by the actions of a believer. In Romans 14: 15 Paul says, "If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died." Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 8:11 he concludes, "And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died." An even stronger statement is Hebrews 10:29: "How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?" While there may be some dispute as to both the exact spiritual condition of the persons referred to in these verses and the precise results for them of the acts therein described, 2 Peter 2:1 seems to point out most clearly that people for whom Christ died may be lost: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." Taken together, these texts make an impressive presentation that there is a distinction between those for whom Christ died and those who are finally saved.<sup>12</sup>

The third class of Scripture passages appealed to by the proponents of universal or unlimited atonement consists of passages indicating that the gospel is to be universally proclaimed. Prominent examples are Matthew 24: 14 ("this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world") and 28:19 ("Go therefore and make disciples of all nations"). In Acts there are two significant passages bearing upon this issue: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (1:8); and "the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent" (17:30). Paul affirms that "the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men" (Titus 2:11).

Citing such texts, the proponents of universal atonement ask, If Christ died only for the elect, how can the offer of salvation be made to all persons without some sort of insincerity, artificiality, or dishonesty being involved? Is it not improper to offer salvation to everyone if in fact Christ

12. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1958), vol. 2, p. 296.

did not die to save everyone?<sup>13</sup> The problem is intensified when one observes the number of passages in which the offer of salvation is clearly unrestricted. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Peter describes the Lord as “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). But how can this be if Christ died only for the elect? It scarcely can be the case that he is unwilling for the nonelect to perish, or that his invitation to all to come is sincere, if some are not really intended to come.

A final point is that there seems to be a contradiction between the scriptural indications of God’s love for the world, for all persons, and the belief that Christ did not die for all of them. There are several passages which apply here, the best-known being John 3: 16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Moreover, Jesus’ statement that we are to love not only our friends (those who love us), but also our enemies (those who do evil to us), would seem rather empty if Jesus were here requiring of his disciples what is not true of God himself. But Paul assures us that God does indeed love his enemies: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). This love for one’s enemies is seen particularly in Christ’s conduct on the cross when he implored the Father, “Forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). It is difficult to believe, when reading this, that Jesus was not dying for those people who actually crucified and tormented him, many or most of whom would presumably never come to be believers in him.

One problem that plagues those who hold to universal atonement is the danger that their position on this matter might lead to belief in universal salvation. If Christ atoned for all persons, is it not possible that all men will be saved? This seems logical, especially in view of certain statements where the concepts of atonement and salvation are juxtaposed, for example, Romans 5:18: “Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” The usual response is to say that Christ’s death does not lead to “acquittal and life” in every case, but only for those who accept him.<sup>14</sup> This particular passage must be understood in the light of Scripture’s other teachings on the subject.

#### *A Balanced Evaluation*

When we examine and evaluate the claims and arguments advanced by the two parties in this discussion, we note that much of what they say

13. Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1869), p. 383.

14. Ibid., p. 376.

is not fully persuasive. One of the arguments for universal atonement consists of those verses stating that Christ died for “the world,” or for “all men,” or something similar. But such statements have to be interpreted in the light of their contexts. For example, the context of Romans 8:32, a verse stating that God gave up his Son “for us all,” makes it clear that Paul actually has in view all those “who are called according to his [God’s] purpose” (v. 28), the predestined. In similar fashion the statement about God’s so loving the world that he gave his Son (John 3:16) has to be understood in the light of the following clause—“that whoever *believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life.”

Conversely, the statements about Jesus’ loving and dying for his church or his sheep need not be understood as confining his special love and salvific death strictly to them. Here, also, the context is important. Whenever Jesus is talking about his sheep and his relationship to them, it is only to be expected that he will connect his death specifically with their salvation; he will not comment on his relationship to those who are not his sheep. Similarly, when he is discussing the church and its Lord, it is to be expected that he will speak of his love for the church, not of his love for the world outside. Thus, it does not follow from a statement that Christ died for his church, or for his sheep, that he did not die for anyone else, unless, of course, the passage specifically states that it was *only* for them that he died.

The advocates of unlimited atonement also produce in support of their view various passages suggesting that some of those for whom Christ died shall perish. Many of those passages, however, are ambiguous. This is particularly true of Romans 14: 15, where it is not at all clear what is meant by the brother’s ‘being injured’ or brought to “ruin.” It is by no means certain that this entails actually being lost or failing to come to salvation. While the statement in 1 Corinthians 8:11 is stronger (the brother “is destroyed”), its meaning, too, is not obvious.

On the other side of the ledger, the attempt to establish limited atonement by deduction from other doctrines is not very persuasive either. We mentioned the attempt to link the intercessory work of Christ so closely with the sacrificial work that the extent of the one is necessarily regarded as identical to the extent of the other. From the fact that both are aspects of the priestly function, however, it does not follow (as Kuiper contends) that they are simply two aspects of atonement. And while Christ’s intercession in John 17 did, to a large extent, focus on concern that his atoning work be applied to those whom the Father had given him, it does not follow that this was his sole concern. Intercession is not limited to prayers that the work of redemption be realized, nor is it always dependent on atonement. Believers are urged to intercede for one another; apparently it is possible for them to make intercession

without having to make some form of atonement as well. In other words, there is a suppressed (and unsubstantiated) assumption present in Berkhof's argument.

Nor is the attempt to deduce limited atonement from the doctrine of election successful. For even if one holds that God has from all eternity chosen some members of the human race to be saved and others to be lost, it does not follow that the decision as to who are to be saved is logically prior to the decision to provide salvation in the person of Christ. It is generally assumed that all Calvinists regard the decision to save certain persons as logically prior to the decision to provide salvation. Berkhof, for example, takes this position when he writes, "What consistency would there be in God's electing certain persons unto life everlasting, then sending Christ into the world to make salvation possible for all men but certain for none?"<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Augustus Strong contests the assumption that all Calvinists regard the decision to elect as logically prior. He himself holds that the decision to provide salvation is prior, and he maintains that Calvin in his commentaries took a similar position.<sup>16</sup> Unless it can be proved that the decision to elect is prior, limited atonement cannot be inferred from the doctrine of election.

Further, the argument from history is not persuasive. The fact that special election and limited atonement have always been linked together historically does not establish an indisputable logical connection between the two. At least in practice Calvin himself separated the two when he was interpreting relevant passages of Scripture.

Having eliminated those considerations which are not persuasive, we must now attempt to sift through the remaining arguments to come to some sort of conclusion. We find that some of the verses which teach a universal atonement simply cannot be ignored. Among the most impressive is 1 Timothy 4: 10, which affirms that the living God "is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." Apparently the Savior has done something for all persons, though it is less in degree than what he has done for those who believe. Among the other texts which argue for the universality of Christ's saving work and cannot be ignored are 1 John 2:2 and Isaiah 53:6. In addition, we must consider statements like 2 Peter 2: 1, which affirms that some for whom Christ died do perish.

To be sure, there are also those texts which speak of Christ's dying for his sheep and for the church. These texts, however, present no problem if we regard the universal passages as normative or determinative. Certainly if Christ died for the whole, there is no problem in asserting that he died for a specific part of the whole. To insist that those passages

15. Berkhof, *Vicarious Atonement*, p. 157.

16. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 777-78.

which focus on his dying for his people require the understanding that he died only for them and not for any others contradicts the universal passages. We conclude that the hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited atonement.

The underlying issue here is the question of the efficacy of the atonement. Those who hold to limited atonement assume that if Christ died for someone, that person will in actuality be saved. By extension they reason that if Christ in fact died for all persons, all would come to salvation; hence the concept of universal atonement is viewed as leading to the universal-salvation trap. The basic assumption here, however, ignores the fact that our inheriting eternal life involves two separate factors: an objective factor (Christ's provision of salvation) and a subjective factor (our acceptance of that salvation). In the view of those who hold to unlimited atonement, there is the possibility that someone for whom salvation is available may fail to accept it. In the view of those who hold to limited atonement, however, there is no such possibility. Although John Murray wrote of *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied*, in actuality he and others of his doctrinal persuasion collapse the latter part, the application, into the accomplishment. This leads in turn to the conception that God regenerates the elect person who then and therefore believes.

Advocates of limited atonement face the somewhat awkward situation of contending that while the atonement is sufficient to cover the sins of the nonelect, Christ did not die for them. It is as if God, in giving a dinner, prepared far more food than was needed, yet refused to consider the possibility of inviting additional guests. Advocates of unlimited atonement, on the other hand, have no difficulty with the fact that Christ's death is sufficient for everyone, for, in their view, Christ died for all persons.

The view that we are adopting here should not be construed as Arminianism. It is rather the most moderate form of Calvinism or, as some would term it, a modification of Calvinism. It is the view that God logically decides first to provide salvation, then elects some to receive it. This is essentially the sublapsarian position of theologians like Augustus Strong. Those who would construe this position as Arminianism need reminding that what distinguishes Calvinism from Arminianism is not the view of the relationship between the decree to provide salvation and the decree to confer salvation upon some and not upon others. Rather, the decisive point is whether the decree of election is based solely upon the free, sovereign choice of God himself (Calvinism) or based also in part upon his foreknowledge of merit and faith in the person elected (Arminianism).

### For What Did Christ Atoned?

The discussion to this point has assumed that the purpose of Christ's death was to remove the effects of sin, that is, guilt and condemnation. Thus, forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation are the major results when the atonement is accepted and applied. But are these the only results that the atonement was intended to accomplish? In the twentieth century another emphasis has emerged.

The twentieth century has seen a remarkable growth in interest in the subject of spiritual healing of the body. This has come in two related but distinct stages or movements. The Pentecostal movement, which arose and grew in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, emphasized the return of certain of the more spectacular gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then, at about the middle of the century, the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement began; it had many of the same emphases. These movements put greater stress on miracles of spiritual healing than does Christianity in general. In many cases they make no real attempt to give a theological explanation or basis for these healings. But when the question of the theological basis is raised, one of the answers often given is that healing, no less than forgiveness of sins and salvation, is to be found within the atonement. Christ died to carry away not only sin, but sickness as well. Among the major advocates of this view was A. B. Simpson, founder of what is today known as the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

One of the salient features of the view that Christ's death brings healing for the body is the idea that the presence of illness in the world is a result of the fall. When sin entered the human race, a curse (actually a series of curses) was pronounced upon humanity; diseases were part of that curse. According to Simpson and others, since illness is a result of the fall, not simply of the natural constitution of things, it cannot be combated solely by natural means. Being of spiritual origin, it must be combated in the same way that the rest of the effects of the fall are combated: by spiritual means, and specifically by Christ's work of atonement. Intended to counter the effects of the fall, his death covers not only guilt for sin but sickness as well. Healing of the body is therefore part of our great redemption right.<sup>17</sup>

Certain biblical texts are used to support this view, most notably Matthew 8:17. After the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, many sick people were brought to Jesus. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. Matthew informs us, "This was to fulfil what was

17. A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (New York: Christian Alliance, 1880), pp. 30-31.

spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.' It appears that in quoting Isaiah 53:4 Matthew is tying Christ's healings to his death, for the following verse in Isaiah clearly refers to the atoning death of the Savior. On this basis it is concluded that Christ's death, in addition to reversing the curse of sin, reversed the curse of disease as well, a curse which had been occasioned by the fall.

We must note here that Matthew 8:17 has been interpreted in several ways:

1. The reference in Isaiah is to a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses. Matthew interprets Isaiah's statement literally and sees its fulfilment in Christ's work on the cross.<sup>18</sup>
2. The reference in Isaiah is to a vicarious bearing of figurative sicknesses (our sins). Matthew interprets literally what was intended figuratively by Isaiah. What Matthew has done is to apply to Jesus' healing ministry an Old Testament passage concerning his bearing our sins.<sup>19</sup>
3. Both Isaiah and Matthew are thinking of actual physical illnesses. In this respect both references are to be understood literally. In each case, however, what is in view is not a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses, a taking away of disease. Rather, what is in view is an empathy with our illnesses, a sharing in our hardships. There is a figurative element—but it has to do with Christ's bearing of our diseases, not the diseases themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Before we attempt to draw our own conclusions concerning Matthew 8:17 (and Isa. 53:4) and to evaluate the position that Christ's death covered sickness as well as sin, there are some basic issues which must be resolved: What is the origin and cause of sickness? And is there some intrinsic connection between sickness and sin, and thus between Jesus' healing of physical ailments and forgiveness of sin?

It appears that the origin of sickness in general was the fall. As a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, a whole host of evils entered the world. Illnesses were among the curses which God pronounced upon the people of Israel for their evildoing (Deut. 28:22). The whole creation was subjected to bondage and futility because of sin (Rom. 8:20-23). While some of the biblical descriptions of the curse on sin lack specificity, it seems

18. George L. Cole, *God's Provision for Soul and Body* (Los Angeles: George L. Cole, 1947), p. 8.

19. Rowland V. Bingham, *The Bible and the Body: Healing in the Scriptures* (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1952), pp. 56-57.

20. A. C. Gaebelein, *The Healing Question* (New York: "Our Hope," 1925), p. 74.

reasonable to trace the troubles now found among humans, including illness or disease, to this source.

In the ancient world there was a widespread belief that illness was either sent by the Deity or caused by evil spirits. Even the people of Israel were subject to this superstition and took to the wearing of amulets to ward off sickness. Some of them also believed that disease was a specific sign of divine disapproval, punishment for the individual's sin. Jesus did not accept or endorse this view. When, in the case of the man born blind, the disciples raised the question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus gave a straightforward reply: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (John 9:2-3). Obviously Jesus did not believe that illness is caused by an individual's sin—at least not in this particular instance.

Nor did Jesus link his healings of physical ailments to forgiveness of sin. In the instance mentioned, nothing is said about forgiveness. Jesus simply healed the blind man. To be sure, in many cases Jesus did correlate healing with forgiveness of sin, but it certainly cannot be said that he saw an intrinsic connection between sin and sickness. That is, he did not view sickness as essentially a penalty for individual sin.

We should note here the basis on which Jesus healed people. In many cases, faith was required. This is what we would expect if sickness is the result of individual sin, for in that case physical healing would require forgiveness of the sin causing the sickness. Since faith is necessary for sins to be forgiven, faith would also be necessary for healing to occur. And indeed there are many cases where Jesus' act of healing depends upon an exercise of faith by the person to be healed: the woman with an issue of blood for twelve years (Matt. 9:20-22), the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), and Bartimaeus, the blind beggar (Mark 10:46-52). Occasionally, however, healing occurs upon the exercise of faith by some third party: the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30), of the centurions servant (Matt. 8:5-13), and of the demoniac boy (Mark 9: 14-29). In some of these cases, the person healed was capable of exercising faith himself or herself. In the matter of forgiveness of sin, however, the faith required is always that of the subject, not some other party. It therefore seems unlikely that the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter, the centurions servant, and the demoniac boy was connected with forgiveness of sins.

Let us now summarize what we have said to this point. The contention of Simpson and others of his persuasion is that diseases are a result of the fall and that Jesus by his atoning death negated not only the spiritual but also the physical consequences of sin. The underlying assumption seems to be that there is an intricate connection between sickness and sin, and hence they are to be combated in the same way. We have noted,

however, that Jesus did not attribute disease (i.e., every instance of it) to individual sin, nor were his acts of healing always connected with forgiveness of sin. For while faith appears to have been just as necessary for healing as for forgiveness, in the case of healing, unlike that of forgiveness, it did not always have to be faith on the part of the recipient of the blessing. We conclude that there is not as intimate a connection between sickness and individual sin, and hence between Jesus' acts of healing and forgiveness of sins, as Simpson assumed.

All of this, however, is merely preliminary to our examination of Matthew 8:17 and Isaiah 53:4. If the Bible teaches that Jesus by his death bore and took away our diseases, then healing is a blessing to which we are entitled, a gift we should claim. We begin our investigation with the passage in Isaiah: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." The first noun is *חָלֵל* (*chali*). The predominant meaning of the word is "physical sicknesses," although it can be used metaphorically, as in Isaiah 1:5 and Hosea 5:13.<sup>21</sup> Isaiah placed it in an emphatic position in the sentence. The basic meaning of the verb *אָשַׁף* (*nasa'*) is "to lift (up)." The lexicon of Brown, Driver, and Briggs lists almost two hundred instances in which the word has this meaning. It also lists about sixty cases in which the word means "to take (away)" and nearly one hundred verses where it means "to bear, carry." Of those one hundred verses, only about thirty have reference to the bearing of guilt, and only six have reference to a vicarious bearing of guilt, one of them being the twelfth verse of Isaiah 53:22. So while *אָשַׁף* can refer to vicarious bearing, the more likely rendering in Isaiah 53:4 would be "has taken." It should also be noted that Isaiah did not put the verb in an emphatic position; it seems that what is really important is what the suffering servant has taken, not how he has taken it. The second substantive, *מְקֻרְבָּן* (*mak'ov*), appears only fifteen times in the Old Testament; in three of those cases it seems to refer to physical pain.<sup>22</sup> The basic idea conveyed by the word is mental pain, sorrow, or distress resulting from the toilsomeness of life, including its physical burdens. The likeliest meaning here, then, is mental sickness or distress (sorrow), perhaps as a result of physical infirmities. The second verb is *סָבַל* (*saval*). It means basically "to carry a heavy load."<sup>23</sup> Of nine occurrences in the Old Testament, two, Isaiah 53:11 and Lamentations 5:7, convey the idea of vicarious bearing, the former being the clearer. In the remaining instances, *סָבַל* means merely "carrying a load";

**21.** Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), p. 318.

**22.** *Ibid.*, pp. 669-71.

**23.** *Ibid.*, p. 456.

**24.** *Ibid.*, p. 687.

there is no connotation of vicariousness. Here again, just as in the first clause, the emphasis is on what the suffering servant has carried rather than on how he has carried it.

To summarize Isaiah 53:4: while several interpretations can be justified, the one that seems to suit the linguistic data best is that the prophet is referring to actual physical and mental illnesses and distresses, but not necessarily to a vicarious bearing of them. In Matthew's quotation of this passage, we find something very similar. The two nouns are *ἀσθενείας* and *νόσους*, both of which refer to physical conditions, the former emphasizing especially the idea of weakness. The first verb, *λαμβάνω*, is very common and colorless.<sup>25</sup> It basically means "to take, lay hold of; to receive."<sup>26</sup> Nowhere is it used in connection with vicarious bearing of guilt or anything similar. The second verb, *βαστάζω*, is very close in meaning to *לכַּז*. It means "to bear or carry"; in none of its usages does it signify "to bear vicariously." In Galatians 6:2 it has the sense of "bearing one another's burdens sympathetically," and this is the likeliest meaning in Matthew 8:17 as well.<sup>27</sup> Matthew, who frequently quoted from the Septuagint, has here changed the verbs, substituting the neutral *λαμβάνω* for *φέρω*, which could conceivably be translated "bore vicariously."

What we are suggesting here, then, is that both Matthew and Isaiah are referring to actual physical sicknesses and mental distresses rather than sins. They do not have in view, however, a vicarious bearing of these maladies. It seems likelier that they are referring to a sympathetic bearing of the troubles of this life. If this is the proper interpretation, Jesus "took our infirmities and bore our diseases" by becoming incarnate rather than by offering atonement. By coming to earth, he entered into the very conditions that we find here, including sorrow, sickness, and suffering. Experiencing sickness and sorrow himself, and sympathizing as he did (*σπλαγχνίζομαι*) with human suffering, he was moved to alleviate the miseries of this life.

Note that this explanation of how Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled entails no chronological difficulties. On the other hand, there is a problem if we believe that the atonement is in view in the prophecy. For in that case it is hard to explain why Matthew quotes this verse in a context where he is describing acts of healing which occurred some time before Christ's death.

One other question that remains to be dealt with is the relationship of

<sup>25.</sup> W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1897), pp. 578-81.

<sup>26.</sup> G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), pp. 263-64.

<sup>27.</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

1 Peter 2:24 to the passages which we have been discussing. This text reads: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." It is clear that Peter is here speaking of sins, because he uses the most common word for sin, *ἀμαρτία*, which is also the first noun in the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 53:4. And the verb which he chooses, *ἀναφέρω*, can definitely be used of substitutionary bearing. It is not at all clear, however, as some have supposed, that Peter is quoting Isaiah 53:4. He gives no indication that he is quoting. We do not find here the words "It is written" or any similar formula. It seems likelier that he is referring to the whole of Isaiah 53, and particularly to verse 12.

To summarize: Jesus healed during his ministry on earth, and he heals today. That healing, however, is not to be thought of as a manifestation or application of a vicarious bearing of our sicknesses in the same fashion that he bore our sins. Rather, his healing miracles are simply a matter of introducing a supernatural force into the realm of nature, just like any other miracle.<sup>28</sup> In a general sense, of course, the atonement cancels all the effects of the fall. But some of the benefits will not be realized until the end of time (Rom. 8:19-25). We cannot expect, then, that in every case healing is to be granted upon request, as is forgiveness of sins. Paul learned this lesson (2 Cor. 12: 1-10), and we must learn it as well. It is not always God's plan to heal. That fact will not trouble us if we but remember that we are not intended to live forever in this earthly body (Heb. 9:27).

<sup>28.</sup> See pp. 406-09.

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## I PART NINE

# The Holy Spirit

40. The Person of the Holy Spirit

41. The Work of the Holy Spirit



# 40

## The Person of the Holy Spirit

The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Difficulties in Understanding the Holy Spirit

The History of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The Nature of the Holy Spirit

    The Deity of the Holy Spirit

    The Personality of the Holy Spirit

Implications of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

**A**s we come to the concluding parts of our survey of systematic theology, it is well to place in their proper context those matters which are to be examined. We began with an examination of God, the supreme being, and of his work in planning, creating, and caring for all that is. We then examined the highest of the creatures, the human, in terms of his divinely intended destiny and his departure from that divine plan. We saw as well the consequences which came upon the human race and the provision that God made for their redemption and restoration. Creation, providence, and the provision of salvation are the objective work of God. We come now to the subjective work of God- the application of his divine saving work to humans. We will be examining the

actual character of the salvation received and experienced by human beings. Next we will investigate the collective form which faith takes, that is, the church. And we will be looking, finally, at the completion of God's plan, that is, the last things.

One other way of viewing our survey of systematic theology is to see it as focusing upon the work of the different members of the Trinity. The Father is highlighted in the work of creation and providence (parts 1–4), the Son has effected redemption for sinful humanity (parts 5–8), and the Holy Spirit applies this redemptive work to God's creature, thus making salvation real (parts 9–I 1). It is therefore important that we spend some time studying the Third Person of the Trinity before going on to the products of his endeavors.

### The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

There are several reasons why the study of the Holy Spirit is of special significance for us. One is that the Holy Spirit is the point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer. We generally think of the Father as transcendent and far off in heaven; similarly, the Son seems far removed in history and thus also relatively unknowable. But the Holy Spirit is active within the lives of believers; he is resident within us. The Holy Spirit is the particular person of the Trinity through whom the entire Triune Godhead works in us.

A second reason why the study of the Holy Spirit is especially important is that we live in the period in which the Holy Spirit's work is more prominent than that of the other members of the Trinity. The Father's work was the most conspicuous within the Old Testament period, as was the Son's within the period covered by the Gospels and up to the ascension. The Holy Spirit has occupied the center of the stage from the time of Pentecost on, that is, the period covered by the Book of Acts and the Epistles, and the ensuing periods of church history. If we are to be in touch with God today, then, we must become acquainted with the Holy Spirit's activity.

A third reason for the importance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that current culture stresses the experiential, and it is primarily through him that we experience God. It is through the Holy Spirit's work that we feel God's presence within and the Christian life is given a special tangibility. Consequently, it is vital for us to understand the Holy Spirit.

### Difficulties in Understanding the Holy Spirit

While study of the Holy Spirit is especially important, it is also quite difficult. Understanding is often more incomplete and confused here

than with most of the other doctrines. Among the reasons for this is that we have less explicit revelation in the Bible regarding the Holy Spirit than we find about either the Father or the Son. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that a large share of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to declare and glorify the Son (John 16:14). Unlike other doctrines there are no systematic discussions regarding the Holy Spirit. Virtually the only extended treatment is Jesus' discourse in John 14–16. On most of the occasions when the Holy Spirit is mentioned, it is in connection with another issue.

A further problem is the lack of concrete imagery. God the Father is understood fairly well because the figure of a father is familiar to everyone. The Son is not hard to conceptualize, for he actually appeared in human form and was observed and reported upon. But the Spirit is intangible and difficult to visualize. Complicating this matter is the unfortunate terminology of the King James and other older English translations in referring to the Holy Spirit as the "Holy Ghost." Many persons who grew up using these versions of the Bible conceive the Holy Spirit as something inside a white sheet.

In addition, a problem arises from what Scripture reveals concerning the nature of the Holy Spirit's ministry in relationship to that of the Father and the Son. During the present era, the Spirit performs a ministry of serving the Father and Son, carrying out their will (which of course is also his). In this respect, we are reminded of the Son's earthly ministry, during which he was subordinate in function to the Father. Now this temporary subordination of function—the Son's during his earthly ministry and the Spirit's during the present era—must not lead us to draw the conclusion that there is an inferiority in essence as well. Yet in practice many of us have an unofficial theology which looks upon the Spirit as being of a lower essence than are the Father and the Son. In effect the Trinity is visualized as FATHER, SON, and holy spirit, or as

Father

Son

Holy Spirit

This error is similar to that of the Arians. From the biblical passages which speak of the Son's subordination to the Father during his earthly ministry, they concluded that the Son is of a lesser status and essence than is the Father.

In the last half of the twentieth century, there has been considerable controversy regarding the Holy Spirit. Indeed it may be that on the popular or lay level, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been the most controversial of all doctrines during this period. As a result, there has been some reluctance to discuss the Spirit, for fear that such discussion

might lead to dissension. Since Pentecostalists make so much of the Holy Spirit, certain non-Pentecostalists, anxious that they not be mistaken for Pentecostalists, avoid speaking of him altogether. Indeed, while in certain circles "charismatic Christian" is a badge of prestige, in others it is a stigma.

### The History of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

It will be easier to see the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in contemporary context if we examine its earlier history. Particular doctrines have developed at varying rates.<sup>1</sup> This, of course, is because doctrines are most fully elaborated when there are challenges to the traditional formulation or when novel forms of the doctrine are constructed and proposed. This has been especially true of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

In the earliest period of the church, relatively little was said about the Holy Spirit. One early emphasis was upon the Spirit as the guiding, moving force that produced the Bible, the Word of God. Origen, for example, spoke of the Bible as "written by the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup> At that time it was assumed that everything within the Bible had been delivered by a special working of the Holy Spirit. The general view was that Scripture contained not only no errors, but also nothing superfluous. Although no complete theory of inspiration was propounded, there were a number of Christian theologians who endorsed the view of Philo and the other Alexandrian Jews that the Scripture writers were virtually seized by the Holy Spirit in their writing. The apologist Athenagoras, for example, depicts the prophets as caught up in a state of ecstasy, with the Holy Spirit breathing through them as a musician breathes through a pipe.<sup>3</sup> This is a rather extreme instance of early church belief, however. Most of the Fathers were careful to avoid any suggestion of a purely passive role for the writers. Augustine, for example, emphasized that the authors used their own recollections of the events which had occurred. The Holy Spirit's role was to stimulate those recollections and preserve them from error.<sup>4</sup>

1. James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952 reprint), pp. 22-30. Orr suggests that the historical order in which the major doctrines have been elaborated reflects their dogmatic order, that is, the doctrine of God was the first to be elaborated and the doctrine of last things the last. On that basis, however, we would expect to find already in the fourth and fifth centuries a full treatment of the Holy Spirit, but it was not until the twentieth century that the doctrine was given extensive attention.

2. Origen *Against Celsus* 5.60; cf. Basil *Homily on Psalm 1*.

3. Athenagoras *A Plea for the Christians* 7, 9.

4. Augustine *Harmony of the Gospels* 2.30; 3.7.

By the late second century there was a growing emphasis upon the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Clement of Rome coordinated the three members of the Trinity in an oath—"as God lives, and the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit lives."<sup>5</sup> In like manner he asked, "Have we not one God, and one Christ, and one Spirit of grace poured upon us?"<sup>6</sup> Tertullian called the Holy Spirit God, stressing that there is one substance which the Son and the Spirit hold jointly, as it were, with the Father.<sup>7</sup> In Paul of Samosata, however, we encounter the teaching that the Spirit was merely a name for the grace which God poured out upon the apostles.<sup>8</sup> Irenaeus, in the second century, regarded the Spirit as virtually an attribute of God, identifying him as the divine Wisdom.<sup>9</sup> He was the one through whom the prophets prophesied and through whom men were made righteous.<sup>10</sup> Origen moved even further away from the conception that the Holy Spirit is part of an ontological Trinity. He affirmed that the Holy Spirit is "the most honorable of all the beings brought into existence through the Word, the chief in rank of all the beings originated by the Father through Christ."<sup>11</sup> This belief that the Spirit is the highest and first of the creations is not unlike the view which the Arians were later to hold regarding the Son. While insisting upon a Trinity, and emphasizing that there are three distinct hypostases, Origen distinguished them so sharply that some thought his view approximated tri-theism.<sup>12</sup> In addition, he spoke of a subordination of both the Son and the Spirit to the Father, who transcends them as much as, if not more than, they transcend the realm of inferior beings.<sup>13</sup>

In a sense, the working out of a full doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit, especially in relationship to the Father and the Son, was an accompaniment and a by-product of the christological work done in the fourth and fifth centuries. This was natural, since the question of the deity of the Spirit is in a sense contained within that of the deity of the Son. For if there can be a second person who is divine, there can as easily be a third who is a member of the ontological Godhead and to whom the worship and obedience due only to God should be given.

Since the time of Origen, theological reflection upon the nature of the Holy Spirit had lagged behind devotional practice. The Spirit was re-

5. Clement of Rome *The Epistle to the Corinthians* 58.2.

6. Ibid., 46. 6.

7. Tertullian *Adversus Praxeum* 2, 3, 8.

8. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 118.

9. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2. 30. 9; *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 5.

10. Irenaeus *Demonstration* 6.

11. Origen *Commentary on John* 2.10.75.

12. Ibid.

13. Origen *Commentary on Matthew* 15. 10.

vered, but his exact status remained unclear. Arius had spoken of the Holy Spirit as a hypostasis, but considered his essence to be as utterly unlike that of the Son as the Son's is utterly unlike that of the Father.<sup>14</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea spoke of the Spirit as "in the third rank," "a third power," and "third from the Supreme Cause."<sup>15</sup> He followed Origen's exegesis of John 1:3, arguing that the Spirit is "one of the things which have come into existence through the Son."<sup>16</sup> It remained, therefore, for Athanasius, in this as in other matters, to formulate what was to become the orthodox view.

Athanasius was inspired to expound his ideas particularly because of the writings of some whom he called "Tropici," the name deriving from the Greek word *τρόπος*, which means "figure."<sup>17</sup> These persons were engaged in figurative exegesis of the Scripture, which was not an unusual practice at that time. They maintained that the Spirit is a creature brought into existence out of nothingness. Specifically, they regarded him as an angel, the highest in rank of the angels to be sure, but nonetheless one of the "ministering spirits" referred to in Hebrews 1:14. He was to be thought of as "different [other] in substance" (*έτεροούσιος*) from the Father and the Son. Like most heretics the Tropici cited proof texts to support their views-Amos 4:13 ("Lo, I who establish thunder and create Spirit"); Zechariah 1:9 ("These things says the angel that speaks within me"); and 1 Timothy 5:21 ("I adjure you in the sight of God and Jesus Christ and the elect angels").<sup>18</sup>

Athanasius responded vigorously to the view of the Tropici. He insisted that the Spirit is fully divine, consubstantial with the Father and the Son. His argument contained several elements. First was a refutation of the incorrect exegesis of the Tropici. He then proceeded to show that Scripture clearly teaches that the Spirit "belongs to and is one with the Godhead which is in the Triad." He argued that since the Triad is eternal, homogeneous, and indivisible, the Spirit, as a member of it, must be consubstantial with the Father and the Son. Further, because of the close relationship between the Spirit and the Son, the Spirit must belong in essence to the Son, just as does the Son to the Father. Finally, the Spirit must be divine because it is he who makes us all "partakers of God" (1 Cor. 3: 16-17—the Spirit's indwelling us makes us God's temple). In light of such considerations, the Spirit is to be recognized as of the same

14. See Athanasius *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.6.

15. Eusebius of Caesarea *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.20.

16. Eusebius of Caesarea *On the Theology of the Church: A Refutation of Marcellus* 3. 6. 3.

17. Athanasius *Letters to Bishop Serapion Concerning the Holy Spirit* 1. 21, 30.

18. Ibid., 1.3, 11, 10. The translations reflect the interpretations of the Tropici.

nature as the Father and the Son, and given the same honor and worship as they.<sup>19</sup>

There was still a diversity of views, however. As late as 380, Gregory of Nazianzus reported in a sermon that a variety of beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit existed. Some, he said, consider the Holy Spirit to be a force; others perceive him as a creature; still others think of him as God. And because of the vagueness of Scripture on the subject, some decline to commit themselves. Even among those who consider the Spirit to be God, some hold it as a private opinion, others declare it openly, while still others maintain that the three persons of the Trinity possess deity in varying degrees.<sup>20</sup>

Among the more radical Christian groups on this subject were the Macedonians or Pneumatomachians ("Spirit-fighters"). These people opposed the doctrine of the full deity of the Holy Spirit. Basil, however, in *De Spiritu Sancto* in 375 insisted that the same glory, honor, and worship given to the Father and the Son must also be given to the Spirit. He must be "reckoned with" them, Basil insisted, not "reckoned below" them. He did not call the Spirit God in so many words, but he did say that "we glorify the Spirit with the Father and the Son because we believe that he is not alien to the divine nature." In Basil's view, the greatness of the Spirit's action and the closeness of his relationship and working with the Father and the Son are major keys to understanding his status.<sup>21</sup>

Also to be noted is the existence of charismatic groups during this early period of church history. The most prominent of these groups was the Montanists, who flourished in the latter half of the second century. At his baptism Montanus spoke in tongues and began prophesying. He declared that the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus, was giving utterance through him. Montanus and two of his female disciples as well were believed to be spokespersons of the Holy Spirit. Among their numerous prophecies were warnings that the second coming of Christ was at hand. The Montanists believed and taught that their prophecies clarified the Scriptures and that Spirit-inspired prophets would continue to arise within the Christian community.<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be transmitting a command of the Paraclete, they declared second marriages to be a sin. At a time when the practices of the church were beginning to become lax, there was within the Montanist movement an emphasis upon a high standard of Christian living. They secured their most famous convert when Tertullian became a Montanist. A later movement of a somewhat

19. Ibid., 1. 2, 20-27; 3. 1-6.

20. Gregory of Nazianzus *Theological Oration 5: On the Holy Spirit* 5.

21. Basil *Letters* 159. 2.

22. Tertullian *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 63.

similar character was Novatianism; it flourished in the middle of the third century and onward. This group shared with Montanism a deep concern for moral living. It did not have the same emphasis upon prophecy, however. Neither of these groups enjoyed much lasting effect upon the church.

During the medieval period there was little emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. In part this was due to relative disinterest in the experiential aspect of the Christian life, which is, of course, the special domain of the Holy Spirit. The one major issue that did arise within this period concerned the insertion of the word *filioque* into the creeds. This addition had originally been seen as a way of taking a stand against Arianism—the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and from the Son*. Gradually it was made official, the process becoming virtually complete in the West by the ninth century. The Eastern churches, however, found this word objectionable. They noted that John 15:26 speaks of the Spirit as proceeding from only the Father, not from the Son also. The original form of the Nicene Creed had not contained the words “and the Son,” which were a Western addition. Furthermore, the Eastern churches based their rejection of the word *filioque* upon the concept of the *μοναρχία* (“sole rule”) of the Father—he is the sole fountain, root, and cause of deity. They could subscribe to a statement that the Spirit proceeds “from the Father through the Son,” but not to a statement that he proceeds “from the Son.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently, they eventually separated themselves from the Western churches. Although the *filioque* controversy was the one doctrinal point cited, in all likelihood it was not the really significant issue dividing the East from the West.

The Reformation did not produce any major changes in the orthodox doctrine of the Holy Spirit. What we do find are elaborations and expansions upon the previous formulation. In Luther’s thought, for example, we find the idea of the Holy Spirit’s “infusion of love” into the heart of the believer. In its early formulations, Luther’s idea was quite similar to that of Augustine. This is not surprising, for Luther had been an Augustinian monk. The Spirit’s infusion of love pointed, on one hand, to God’s presence in the life of the individual, the result being a conformity between the will of God and the will of man. Luther’s concept also pointed to the Holy Spirit’s struggle against the old sinful nature which is still within the individual.<sup>24</sup>

23. “Filioque Controversy,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), vol. 4, pp. 312–13.

24. Bernard Holm, “The Work of the Spirit: The Reformation to the Present,” in *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church: From Biblical Times to the Present*, ed. Paul D. Opsahl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), pp. 102–03.

John Calvin’s unique contribution to the discussion of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit lay in the area of the authority of the Scriptures. How do we know that they are really divinely inspired, and thus a message from God? The answer of the Catholic church is that the church certifies the divinity of Scripture. While Calvin’s reply took a number of forms, the testimony of the Spirit was his central point. Neither the testimony of the church, nor the force of other external evidences, but the inward witness of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate basis for our confidence in the divine nature of the Bible.

Calvin insisted that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is superior to reason. It is an inward work which captures the minds of those who hear or read Scripture, producing conviction or certainty that it is the Word of God with which they are dealing. This is a second work of the Holy Spirit with respect to the Scriptures. He who had originally inspired the prophets and apostles to write the Scriptures now penetrates into our hearts, convincing us that these Scriptures are indeed the Word of God and thus the truth. He creates certainty, removing any doubt that we might have.<sup>25</sup>

Calvin was very careful to stress the union of the Word and the Spirit. Some expected the Holy Spirit to function independently of Scripture. They were anticipating new revelations from the Spirit. But Calvin reminded his readers of Jesus’ words in John 14:26—the Spirit would not instill some new truth into the disciples, but would illuminate and impress Jesus’ words upon them.<sup>26</sup>

John Wesley’s major emphasis regarding the Holy Spirit was with respect to the matter of sanctification. He spoke of a special work of sanctification, the whole of which takes place in a moment.<sup>27</sup> This instantaneous work of sanctification, which is something totally different from the conversion/regeneration occurrence at the beginning of the Christian life, is to be expected and sought for. While Wesley did not use the terminology ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit,’ he did see this event as a special act of the Holy Spirit quite similar to what Pentecostalists were later to term “the baptism.” Unlike Luther and Calvin, Wesley spoke of what believers themselves can do to help bring about the working of the Spirit.

The church’s interest in the Holy Spirit underwent a long period of decline during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was due to a variety of movements, each of which in its own way regarded the Spirit and his work as either superfluous or incredible. One of those move-

25. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 1, chapter 7, section 5.

26. Ibid., book 1, chapter 9, section 1.

27. John Wesley, letter of 21 June 1784, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), vol. 7, p. 222.

ments was Protestant scholasticism. It was found in Lutheranism, and particularly the branch which derived its inspiration from the writings of Philipp Melanchthon. As a series of doctrinal disputes took place, it became necessary to define and refine beliefs more specifically. Consequently, faith came increasingly to be thought of as *rechte Lehre* (correct doctrine). A more mechanical view of the role of the Scriptures was developed, and as a result the witness of the Spirit tended to be bypassed. It was now the Word alone, without the Spirit, that was regarded as the basis of authority. Since belief rather than experience came to be viewed as the essence of the Christian religion, the Holy Spirit was increasingly neglected. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was seldom treated as a distinct topic. His work was frequently dealt with in a few brief remarks appended to discussions of Christ's person and work.<sup>28</sup>

A second major force in this period was rationalism. Human reason was set up as the supreme standard. Initially, it was felt that reason could justify all of the beliefs of Christianity. Gradually, however, that idea was modified to the principle that if a belief is to be accepted, it must be justifiable by reason. Only those things which can be established by rational proof are credible. This new emphasis on reason meant that the conception of God, for example, became considerably more general than was previously the case. What can be known about God from natural religion (i.e., without special revelation) is quite devoid of detail. That God is triune, that there is a divine Holy Spirit, cannot be proved from an examination of nature. A further aspect here is that God came to be viewed as very far removed from man's life. As this deism grew, it directly contradicted or at least deemphasized the biblical picture of God as very much involved with man. Accordingly, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who is the particular channel of God's relating to humans, was rather neglected.<sup>29</sup>

The third movement of this period which tended to stifle inquiry regarding the Holy Spirit was romanticism. This may seem like a somewhat contradictory statement, since romanticism gives much attention to the realm of the spirit as over against the realm of the strictly intellectual. It was the *doctrine* of the Holy Spirit which suffered from the rise of romanticism, however. For romanticism in religion, particularly as espoused by Friedrich Schleiermacher, insisted that religion is not a matter either of beliefs (doctrines) or of behavior (ethics). It is not a

28. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 4th ed. rev. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899), pp. 407-99.

29. See, e.g., Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1967 reprint of the 1730 London edition).

matter of receiving and examining doctrines delivered by an external authority. Rather, feeling constitutes the essence of religion, and specifically, the feeling of absolute dependence. With this shift of the locus of religion from belief to feeling, doctrines as such tended to become lost or redefined. For example, Schleiermacher defined the Holy Spirit as "the vital unity of the Christian fellowship as a moral personality."<sup>30</sup>

In spite of these movements which resulted in deemphasis of the Holy Spirit, there were segments of Christianity which gave great attention to him. In particular, the revivalism of the American western frontier maintained a unique type of Christianity. Here great stress was placed upon conversion and an immediacy of experience. The necessity of making a definite decision to accept Christ was kept foremost in the minds of those who heard the revivalists. Repentance and conversion were key words in this approach to the Christian faith. And since the Holy Spirit is the one who brings about repentance and the new birth, he could not be overlooked in this form of personal religion. In these revival meetings, however, one ordinarily did not find special works of the Holy Spirit such as are reported in the Book of Acts. Nevertheless, a rather strong emotional coloration did mark these evangelistic meetings.

At the close of the nineteenth century, however, there came a development which was to give the Holy Spirit, in some circles at least, virtually the preeminent role in theology. There were some outbursts of speaking in tongues or glossolalia in North Carolina as early as 1896. In Topeka, Kansas, Charles Par-ham, the head of a small Bible school, found it necessary to be gone for a period of time, during which the students focused on the topic of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When Par-ham returned, their unanimous conclusion was that the Bible teaches that there is to be a baptism of the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion and new birth, and that speaking in tongues is the sign that **one** has received this gift. On January 1, 1901, a student, Agnes Ozman, requested that Par-ham lay his hands on her in the biblical fashion. When he did this and prayed, according to her own testimony, the Holy Spirit fell upon her, and she prayed successively in several tongues unknown to her.<sup>31</sup> Others in the group received the gift as well. This, in the judgment of some church historians, was the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement.

30. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), vol. 2, p. 537.

31. Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel, 1961), pp. 48-49, 52-53; Agnes N. (Ozman) LaBerge, *What God Hath Wrought* (Chicago: Herald, n.d.), p. 29.

The real outbreak of Pentecostalism, however, occurred in meetings organized by a black holiness preacher, William J. Seymour. These meetings were held in a former Methodist church at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, and have consequently come to be referred to as the Azusa Street meetings.<sup>32</sup> From this beginning, the Pentecostal phenomenon spread throughout the United States and to other countries, most notably Scandinavia. In recent years, Pentecostalism of this type has become a powerful force in Latin America and other Third World countries.

For many years the Pentecostal movement was a relatively isolated factor within Christianity, however. It was found mostly in denominations composed heavily of persons from the lower social and economic classes. Sometimes their practices were quite spectacular, including not only speaking in tongues by a large number of persons within a given group, but also faith healing and exorcism of demons. Such practices were in rather sharp contrast to the worship services of the major denominations. When visiting a service of a Pentecostal group, members of the major denominations would experience quite a cultural shock, for they were accustomed to a much more formal and liturgical type of service.

In the early 1950s, however, this began to change. In some hitherto unlikely places, glossolalia began to be practiced. In Episcopal, Lutheran, and even Catholic churches, there was an emphasis on special manifestations of the Holy Spirit's work. There were significant differences between this movement, which could be called neo-Pentecostal or charismatic, and the old-line Pentecostalism which had sprung up at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues to this day. Whereas the latter had formed definite denominational groups whose members were largely from the lower socioeconomic classes, neo-Pentecostalism was more of a transdenominational movement, drawing many of its participants from the middle and upper-middle classes.<sup>33</sup> In terms of H. Richard Niebuhr's classifications, Pentecostalism would probably be designated a "sect" and neo-Pentecostalism a "church."<sup>34</sup> The two groups also differ in the way in which they practice their charismatic gifts. In the old-line Pentecostal groups, a number of members might speak or pray aloud at once. Such is not the case with charismatic Christians, some of whom use the gift only in their own private prayer time. Public manifestations of the gift are usually in special groups rather than in the plenary worship service of the congregation.

32. Kendrick, *Promise Fulfilled*, pp. 64-68.

33. Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics: The Origins, Development, and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 4-11.

34. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), pp. 17-21.

### The Nature of the Holy Spirit

#### *The Deity of the Holy Spirit*

We now need to examine closely the nature of the Holy Spirit. We begin with his deity. The deity of the Holy Spirit is not as easily established as is that of the Father and the Son. It might well be said that the deity of the Father is simply assumed in Scripture, that of the Son is affirmed and argued, while that of the Holy Spirit must be inferred from various indirect statements found in Scripture. There are, however, several bases on which one may conclude that the Holy Spirit is God in the same fashion and to the same degree as are the Father and the Son.

First, we should note that various references to the Holy Spirit are interchangeable with references to God. In effect, then, these passages speak of him as God. A prominent instance is found in Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira had sold a piece of property. Bringing a portion of the proceeds to the apostles, they represented it as the whole of what they had received. Peter spoke harsh words of condemnation to each of them, and both were struck dead. In rebuking Ananias, Peter asked, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?" (v. 3). In the next verse he asserts, "You have not lied to men but to God." It seems that in Peter's mind 'lying to the Holy Spirit' and 'lying to God' were interchangeable expressions. It could, of course, be argued that two different referents were in view, so that Peter was actually saying, "You have lied both to the Holy Spirit and to God." The statement in verse 4, however, was apparently intended to make it clear that the lie was told not to humans, to someone less than God, but to God himself. Thus, we are led to the conclusion that the second statement is an elaboration of the first, emphasizing that the Spirit to whom Ananias had lied was God.

Another passage where "Holy Spirit" and "God" are used interchangeably is Paul's discussion of the Christians body. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 he writes, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." In 6: 19-20 he uses almost identical language: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." It is clear that, to Paul, to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit is to be inhabited by God. By equating the phrase "God's temple" with the phrase "a temple of the Holy Spirit," Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God.

Further, the Holy Spirit possesses the attributes or qualities of God.

One of these is omniscience. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2: 1 O-1 1: "For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." That the Spirit is omniscient is also clear from Jesus' statement in John 16: 13: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

The power of the Holy Spirit is also spoken of prominently in the New Testament. In Luke 1:35 the phrases "the Holy Spirit" and "the power of the Most High" are in parallel or synonymous construction. This is, of course, a reference to the virgin conception, which must certainly be considered a miracle of the first magnitude. Paul acknowledged that the accomplishments of his ministry were achieved "by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15: 19). Moreover, Jesus attributed to the Holy Spirit the ability to change human hearts and personalities: it is the Spirit who works conviction (John 16:8–11) and regeneration (John 3:5–8) within us. It should be borne in mind that Jesus had elsewhere said with respect to this ability to change human hearts: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26; see vv. 16-25). While these texts do not specifically affirm that the Spirit is omnipotent, they certainly indicate that he has power which presumably only God has.

Yet another attribute of the Spirit which brackets him with the Father and the Son is his eternity. In Hebrews 9:14 he is spoken of as "the eternal Spirit" through whom Jesus offered himself up. Only God, however, is eternal (Heb. 1: 10–12), all creatures being temporal. So the Holy Spirit must be God.

In addition to having divine attributes, the Holy Spirit performs certain works which are commonly ascribed to God. He was and continues to be involved with the creation, both in the origination of it and in the providential keeping and directing of it. In Genesis 1:2 we read that the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters. Job 26:13 notes that the heavens were made fair by the Spirit of God. The psalmist says, "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they [all the parts of the creation previously enumerated] are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground" (Ps. 104:30).

The most abundant biblical testimony regarding the role of the Holy Spirit concerns his spiritual working upon or within humans. We have already noted Jesus' attribution of regeneration to the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8). This is confirmed by Paul's statement in Titus 3:5: "[God our Savior] saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal

in the Holy Spirit." In addition, the Spirit raised Christ from the dead and will also raise us, that is, God will raise us through the Spirit: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11).

Giving the Scriptures is another divine work of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 3: 16 Paul writes, "All scripture is inspired by God [literally, 'God-breathed' or 'God-spirited'] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Peter also speaks of the Spirit's role in giving us the Scriptures, but emphasizes the influence upon the writer rather than the end product: "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). Thus the Holy Spirit inspired the writers and through them the writings.

Our final consideration arguing for the deity of the Holy Spirit is his association with the Father and the Son on a basis of apparent equality. One of the best-known evidences is the baptismal formula prescribed in the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). The Pauline benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is another evidence: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." And in 1 Corinthians 12, as Paul discusses spiritual gifts, he coordinates the three members of the Godhead: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them in every one" (vv. 4-6). Peter likewise, in the salutation of his first epistle, links the three together, noting their respective roles in the process of salvation: "[To the exiles of the dispersion] chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1 Peter 1:2).

#### *The Personality of the Holy Spirit*

In addition to the deity of the Holy Spirit it is important that we also note his personality. We are not dealing here with an impersonal force. This point is especially important at a time in which pantheistic tendencies are entering our culture through the influence of Eastern religions. The Bible makes clear in several ways that the Holy Spirit is a person and possesses all the qualities which that implies.

The first evidence of the Spirit's personality is the use of the masculine pronoun in representing him. Since the word *πνεῦμα* is neuter, and since pronouns are to agree with their antecedents in person, number, and

gender, we would expect the neuter pronoun to be used to represent the Holy Spirit. Yet in John 16: 13-14 we find an unusual phenomenon. As Jesus describes the Holy Spirit's ministry, he uses a masculine noun (*ἐκεῖνος*) where we would expect a neuter pronoun. The only possible antecedent in the immediate context is "Spirit of truth" (v. 13).<sup>35</sup> Either John in reporting Jesus' discourse made a grammatical error at this point (this is unlikely since we do not find any similar error elsewhere in the Gospel), or he deliberately chose to use the masculine to convey to us the fact that Jesus is referring to a person, not a thing. A similar reference is Ephesians 1: 14, where, in a relative clause modifying "Holy Spirit," the preferred textual reading is δοῦλος—"[who] is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

A second line of evidence of the Holy Spirit's personality is a number of passages where he and his work are, in one way or another, closely identified with various persons and their work. The term *παράκλητος* is applied to the Holy Spirit in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7. In each of these contexts it is obvious that it is not some sort of abstract influence which is in view. Jesus is also expressly spoken of as a *παράκλητος* (1 John 2:1). Most significant are his words in John 14: 16, where he says that he will pray to the Father, who will give the disciples another *παράκλητος*. The word for "another" here is ἄλλος, which means "another of the same kind."<sup>36</sup> In view of Jesus' statements linking the Spirit's coming with his own going away (e.g., 16:7), it is clear that the Spirit is a replacement for Jesus and will carry on the same role. The similarity in their function is an indication that the Holy Spirit, like Jesus, must be a person.

Another function which both Jesus and the Holy Spirit perform, and which, accordingly, serves as an indication of the Spirit's personality, is that of glorifying another member of the Trinity. In John 16: 14 Jesus says that the Spirit "will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." A parallel is found in John 17:4, where in his high-priestly prayer Jesus states that during his ministry on earth he glorified the Father.

The most interesting groupings of the Holy Spirit with personal agents are those in which he is linked with both the Father and the Son. Among the best known of these are the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 and the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14. There are other instances, however. Jude enjoins, "But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God;

<sup>35</sup> It has been suggested that a possible antecedent is the masculine noun *παράκλητος* in verse 7. Its distance from the pronoun makes this a rather unlikely possibility, however.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 357-61.

wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (vv. 20-21). Peter addresses his readers as those who are "chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1 Peter 1:2). Earlier, in his message at Pentecost, he had proclaimed, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, [Jesus] has poured out this which you see and hear... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:33, 38). Paul also coordinates the working of the three, for example, in Galatians 4:6: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" A similar reference is 2 Corinthians 1:21-22: "But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." Other examples are Romans 15: 16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Ephesians 3: 14-17; and 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

The Holy Spirit is also linked with the Father and the Son in various events of Jesus' ministry. One such occurrence is the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16-17), where all three persons of the Trinity were present. As the Son was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven in commendation of the Son, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in visible form. Another such occurrence is Jesus' casting out of demons, which he stated was related to the Father and the Spirit: "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). The conjunction of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son in these events is an indication that he is personal, just as are they.

The Holy Spirit's personality can also be seen in passages which group him with humans. We will cite but one example. The letter from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to the church at Antioch contained a very unusual expression: "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (Acts 15:28). It would be hard to dispute that this coordinated working of the Spirit and Christian leaders is an indication that the Spirit possesses some of the very qualities found in human personality.

And, as a matter of fact, the Spirit's possession of certain personal characteristics is our third indication of his personality. Among the most notable of these characteristics are intelligence, will, and emotions, traditionally regarded as the three fundamental elements of personhood. Of various references to the Spirit's intelligence and knowledge we cite here John 14:26, where Jesus promises that the Spirit "will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." The will of the Spirit is attested in 1 Corinthians 12:11, which states that the

recipients of the various spiritual gifts are “inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” That the Spirit has emotions is evident in Ephesians 4:30, where Paul warns against grieving the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit can also be affected as is a person, thus displaying personality passively. It is possible to lie to the Holy Spirit, as Ananias and Sapphira did (Acts 5:3–4). Paul speaks of the sins of grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). Stephen accuses his adversaries of always resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). While it is possible to resist a mere force, one cannot lie to or grieve something which is impersonal. And then, most notably, there is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:29). This sin, which Jesus suggests is more serious than blasphemy against the Son, surely cannot be committed against what is impersonal.

In addition, the Holy Spirit engages in moral actions and ministries which can be performed only by a person. Among these activities are teaching, regenerating, searching, speaking, interceding, commanding, testifying, guiding, illuminating, revealing. One interesting and unusual passage is Romans 8:26, where Paul says, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” Surely, Paul has a person in view. And so does Jesus whenever he speaks of the Holy Spirit, as, for example, in John 16:8: “And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.”

All of the foregoing considerations lead to one conclusion. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force, and that person is God, just as fully and in the same way as are the Father and the Son.

### **Implications of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**

A correct understanding of who and what the Holy Spirit is carries certain implications:

1. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a vague force. Thus, he is someone with whom we can have a personal relationship, someone to whom we can and should pray.

2. The Holy Spirit, being fully divine, is to be accorded the same honor and respect that we give to the Father and the Son. It is appropriate to worship him as we do them. He should not be thought of as in any sense inferior in essence to them, although his role may sometimes be subordinated to theirs.

3. The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son. His work is the

expression and execution of what the three of them have planned together. There is no tension among their persons and activities.

4. God is not far off. In the Holy Spirit, the Triune God comes close, so close as to actually enter into each believer. He is even more intimate with us now than in the incarnation. Through the operation of the Spirit he has truly become Immanuel, “God with us.”

Praise ye the Spirit! Comforter of Israel,  
Sent of the Father and the Son to bless us;  
Praise ye the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Praise ye the Triune God.

## The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian

    The Beginning of the Christian Life

    The Continuation of the Christian Life

The Miraculous Gifts Today

Implications of the Work of the Spirit

**T**he work of the Holy Spirit is of special interest to Christians, for it is particularly through this work that God is personally involved and active in the life of the believer. Moreover, in the recent past this facet of the doctrine has been the subject of the greatest controversy regarding the Holy Spirit. This controversy centers on certain of his more spectacular special gifts. In actuality, however, the topic of these special gifts is too narrow a basis on which to construct our basic discussion here. For the work of the Spirit is a broad matter covering a variety of areas. The controversial issues must be seen against the backdrop of the Spirit's more general activity.

### The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

We begin our study of the general activity of the Holy Spirit with an examination of his ministry within the Old Testament. It is often difficult to identify the Holy Spirit within the Old Testament, for it reflects the earliest stages of progressive revelation. In fact, the term "Holy Spirit" is rarely employed here. Rather, the usual expression is "the Spirit of God." It should be borne in mind that Hebrew is a concrete language with a relative scarcity of adjectives. Where in English we might use a noun and an adjective, Hebrew tends to use two nouns, one of them functioning as a genitive.<sup>1</sup> For example, where in English we might speak of "a righteous man," what we typically find in Hebrew is "a man of righteousness." Similarly, most Old Testament references to the Third Person of the Trinity consist of the two nouns *Spirit* and *God*. It is not apparent from this construction that a separate person is involved. The expression "Spirit of God" could well be understood as being simply a reference to the will, mind, or activity of God.<sup>2</sup> There are, however, some cases where the New Testament makes it clear that an Old Testament reference to the "Spirit of God" is a reference to the Holy Spirit. One of the most prominent of these New Testament passages is Acts 2:16–21, where Peter explains that what is occurring at Pentecost is the fulfilment of the prophet Joel's statement, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (2:28). Surely the events of Pentecost were the realization of Jesus' promise, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). In short, the Old Testament "Spirit of God" is synonymous with the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

There are several major areas of the Holy Spirit's working in Old Testament times. First is the creation. We find in the creation account a reference to the presence and activity of the Spirit of God: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). God's continued working with the creation is attributed to the Spirit. Job

1. A. B. Davidson says, "The genius of the language is not favourable to the formation of adjectives and the gn. [genitive] is used in various ways as explicative of the preceding noun, indicating its material, qualities, or relations"-Hebrew *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902), p. 32.

2. J. H. Raven claims that the Old Testament references to the "Spirit of God" do not pertain specifically to the Holy Spirit: "There is here no distinction of persons in the Godhead. The Spirit of God in the Old Testament is God himself exercising active influence"- *The History of the Religion of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 164.

3. For the view that passages like Psalm 104:30 are personal references to the Holy Spirit, see Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 19–20.

writes, "By his wind [or spirit] the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent" (26:13). Isaiah looks to a future outpouring of the Spirit as a time of productivity within the creation: there will be desolation "until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest" (Isa. 32: 15).

Another general area of the Spirit's work is the giving of prophecy and Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament prophets testified that their speaking and writing were a result of the Spirit's coming upon them. Ezekiel offers the clearest example: "And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me" (2:2; cf. 8:3; 11:1, 24). The Spirit even entered such unlikely persons as Balaam (Num. 24:2). As a sign that Saul was God's anointed, the Spirit came mightily upon him and he prophesied (1 Sam. 10:6, 10). Peter confirmed the testimony of the prophets regarding their experience: "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). In addition, the Book of Acts gives witness that the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of David (Acts 1: 16; 4:25). Since the Holy Spirit produced the Scriptures, they can be referred to as "God-breathed" (*θεόπνευστος*—2 Tim. 3: 16).

Yet another work of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament was in conveying certain necessary skills for various tasks.<sup>5</sup> For example, we read that in appointing Bezalel to construct and furnish the tabernacle, God said, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every craft" (Exod. 31:3–5). It is not clear whether Bezalel had previously possessed this set of abilities or whether they were suddenly bestowed upon him for this particular task. Nor is it clear whether he continued to possess them afterward. When the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel after the Babylonian captivity, there was a similar endowment: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

Administration also seems to have been a gift of the Spirit. Even Pharaoh recognized the Spirit's presence in Joseph: "And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?'" (Gen. 41:38). When Moses needed assistance in leading the people of Israel, part of the spirit was taken from him and given to others: "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of

4. Eduard Schweizer, *The Holy Spirit*, trans. Reginald H. and Ilse Fuller (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. IO- 19.

5. Wood, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 42-43.

the spirit that was upon him, and put it upon the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did so no more" (Num. 11:25). Here the gift of administration was accompanied by or involved the gift of prophesying. While it is not clear whether Joshua's capacity for leadership was especially related to the working of the Spirit of God, there does seem to be an allusion to that effect: "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; so the people of Israel obeyed him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9).

In the time of the judges, administration by the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit was especially dramatic.<sup>6</sup> This was a time when there was very little national leadership. Much of what was done was accomplished by what we would today call "charismatic leadership." Of Othniel it is said, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim" (Judg. 3: 10). There is a similar description of the call of Gideon: "But the Spirit of the LORD took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him" (Judg. 6:34). It is noteworthy that the Spirit's working at the time of the judges consisted largely of granting skill in waging war. The Spirit came upon Othniel, and he went out to war. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he, having been assured that Israel would be delivered by his hand, went out to war. His soldiers proved unusually effective, out of all proportion to their numbers. Similarly, Samson was filled with extraordinary strength when the Spirit came upon him, and he was able to perform supernatural feats: "And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty men of the town, and took their spoil and gave the festal garments to those who had told the riddle" (Judg. 14: 19).

The Spirit also endowed the early kings of Israel with special capabilities. We have already noted that Saul prophesied when the Spirit came upon him (1 Sam. 10: 10). David's anointing was likewise accompanied by the coming of the Spirit of God: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah" (1 Sam. 16: 13).

The Spirit is seen not only in dramatic incidents, however. In addition to the qualities of national leadership and the heroics of war, he was present in Israel's spiritual life. In this connection he is referred to as a "good Spirit." Addressing God, Ezra reminded the people of Israel of the

**6.** Ibid., p. 41.

provision made for their ancestors in the wilderness: "Thou gavest thy good Spirit to instruct them, and didst not withhold thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst" (Neh. 9:20). The psalmist beseeches God: "Let thy good spirit lead me on a level path!" (Ps. 143: 10). The goodness of the Spirit is seen also in two references to him as a "holy Spirit." In each of these instances there is a contrast between the sinful actions of humans and the holiness of God. Asking that his sins be blotted out, David prays, "Take not thy holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 5 1:11). And Isaiah refers to the people who have "rebelled and grieved [the Lord's] holy Spirit" (Isa. 63: 10).

The good and holy quality of the Spirit becomes clearer yet in light of the work which he does and its results. He is described as producing the fear of the Lord and various qualities of righteousness and judgment in the promised Messiah (Isa. 11:2–5). When the Spirit is poured out (Isa. 32:15), the result is justice, righteousness, and peace (vv. 16-20). Devotion to the Lord results from outpouring of the Spirit (Isa. 44:3–5). Ezekiel 36:26–28, a passage that adumbrates the New Testament doctrine of regeneration, speaks of a careful obedience and a new heart as accompaniments of God's giving his Spirit.

The foregoing considerations from the Old Testament depict the Holy Spirit as producing the moral and spiritual qualities of holiness and goodness in the person upon whom he comes or in whom he dwells. We should note, however, that while in some cases this internal working of the Holy Spirit seems to be permanent, in other cases, such as in the Book of Judges, his presence seems to be intermittent and related to a particular activity or ministry which is to be carried out.

There is within the Old Testament witness to the Spirit an anticipation of a coming time when the ministry of the Spirit is to be more complete.<sup>7</sup> Part of this relates to the coming Messiah, upon whom the Spirit is to rest in an unusual degree and fashion. We have already noted Isaiah 1:1-5. Similar passages include Isaiah 42:1–4 and 61:1–3 ("The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ..."). Jesus quotes the opening verses of Isaiah 6:1 and indicates that they are now being fulfilled in him (Luke 4: 18-21). There is a more generalized promise, however, one which is not restricted to the Messiah. This is found in Joel 2:28–29: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your

**7.** George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), pp. 33-3s.

young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maid-servants in those days, I will pour out my spirit." At Pentecost Peter quoted this prophecy, indicating that it had now been fulfilled.

### The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus

When we examine Jesus' life, we find a pervasive and powerful presence and activity of the Spirit throughout. Even the very beginning of his incarnate existence was a work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Both the prediction and the record of the birth of Jesus point to a special working of the Spirit. After informing Mary that she was to have a child, the angel explained, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). After the conception had taken place, the angel appeared to Joseph, who was understandably troubled, and explained, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). The opening words of the paragraph in which this incident is recorded read: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18).<sup>9</sup>

The announcement of Jesus' ministry by John the Baptist also highlights the place of the Holy Spirit. The Baptist had himself been filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). His message emphasized that, unlike his own baptism, which was merely with water, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). Matthew (3:11) and Luke (3:16) add "and with fire." John does not himself claim to have the Spirit; and in particular, he makes no claim to give the Spirit. He attributes to the coming Messiah the giving of the Spirit.

The Spirit is present in dramatic form from the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry, if identified with his baptism, for there was a perceivable coming of the Holy Spirit upon him at that time (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). Matthew and Mark note that Jesus saw the descending dove; they do not tell us whether anyone else did. Luke does not record who saw the dove. Only John makes clear that John the Baptist also saw the Spirit and bore witness to the fact. None of the accounts mention any particular immediate manifestations, that is, visible effects or something similar. We do know, however, that immediately

<sup>8</sup>. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 95.

<sup>9</sup>. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth Of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 124-25.

afterward, Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). The writers in effect leave us to infer from ensuing events just what the works of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus were.

It is clear that the immediate result of Jesus' being filled with the Spirit was the major temptation, or series of temptations, at the inception of the public ministry.<sup>10</sup> Jesus was directed by the Holy Spirit into the situation where the temptation took place. In Matthew 4:1 and Luke 4:1-2 Jesus is described as being led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark's statement is much more forceful: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (1:12). Jesus is virtually "expelled" by the Spirit. What is noteworthy here is that the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life brings him into direct and immediate conflict with the forces of evil. It seems that the antithesis between the Holy Spirit and the evil in the world had to be brought to light.

The rest of the ministry of Jesus as well was conducted in the power and by the direction of the Holy Spirit. This was obviously true of Jesus' teaching.<sup>11</sup> Luke tells us that following the temptation "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (4:14). He proceeded then to teach in all the synagogues. Coming to his hometown of Nazareth, he went into the synagogue and stood up to read. He found Isaiah 61: 1-2, read the passage, and then claimed that it was now fulfilled in him (Luke 4:18-21). In doing this, Jesus was claiming that the ministry in which he was engaged as he taught in the synagogue was a result of the working of the Holy Spirit in and upon him.

What is true of Jesus' teaching is also true of his miracles, particularly his exorcism of demons. Here the confrontation between the Holy Spirit and the unholy forces at work in the world is manifest. On one occasion when Jesus healed a demoniac, the Pharisees maintained that Jesus cast out demons by the prince of demons. Jesus pointed out the internal contradiction within this statement (Matt. 12:25-27) and then countered, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (v. 28). His condemnation of the Pharisees' words as "blasphemy against the Spirit" (v. 31) and his warning that "whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (v. 32) are evidence that what he had just done was done by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit working through him. Jesus was apparently disavowing personal causation of his miracles, attributing them instead to the Holy Spirit.

Not only his teaching and miracles, but Jesus' whole life at this point was "in the Holy Spirit." When the seventy returned from their mission

<sup>10</sup>. Schweizer, *Holy Spirit*, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>. Dale Moody, *Spirit of the Living God* (Nashville: Broadman, 1976), pp. 40-41.

and reported that even the demons were subject to them in Jesus' name (Luke 10:17), "in that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (v. 21). Even his emotions were "in the Holy Spirit." This is a description of someone completely filled with the Spirit.

It is noteworthy that there is no evidence of growth of the Holy Spirit's presence in Jesus' life. There is no series of experiences of the coming of the Holy Spirit, just the conception and the baptism. What there does seem to be, however, is a growing implementation of the Spirit's presence. Nor does one find any evidence of any type of ecstatic phenomena in Jesus' life. There certainly were times when he was seized by a sense of the urgency of the task which was his (as when he said, "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work" [John 9:4]). But we do not find in Jesus' life the type of charismatic phenomena reported in Acts and discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Not only is there no report of such phenomena in his own experience, but we have no teaching of his on the subject either. In light of the problems encountered by the church in Corinth, and the phenomena of Pentecost and later experiences recorded in Acts, it is surprising, especially for those who hold that the existential *Sitz im Leben* was the prime determinant of what materials were incorporated in the Gospels, that neither the Savior's personal life nor his teaching gives any hint of such charismata.

### The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian

#### *The Beginning of the Christian Life*

In Jesus' teaching we find an especially strong emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit in initiating persons into the Christian life. Jesus taught that the Spirit's activity is essential in both conversion, which from man's perspective is the beginning of the Christian life, and regeneration, which from God's perspective is its beginning.

Conversion is man's turning to God. It consists of a negative and a positive element: repentance, that is, abandonment of sin; and faith, that is, acceptance of the promises and the work of Christ. Jesus spoke especially of repentance, and specifically of conviction of sin, which is the prerequisite of repentance. He said, "And when [the Counselor] comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). Without this work of the Holy Spirit, there can be no conversion.

Regeneration is the miraculous transformation of the individual and implantation of spiritual energy. Jesus made very clear to Nicodemus that regeneration is essential to acceptance by the Father: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). He elaborated upon this point: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (vv. 5-6). Jesus here makes clear that regeneration is a supernatural occurrence, and the Holy Spirit is the agent who produces it. The flesh (i.e., human effort) is not capable of effecting this transformation. Nor can this transformation even be comprehended by the human intellect. Jesus in fact likened this work of the Spirit to the blowing of the wind: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (v. 8).<sup>12</sup>

#### *The Continuation of the Christian Life*

The work of the Spirit is not completed when one becomes a believer; on the contrary, it is just beginning. There are a number of other roles which he performs in the ongoing Christian life.

One of the Spirit's other roles is empowering. Jesus probably left his disciples flabbergasted when he said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). The disciples' doing greater works than Jesus had done was apparently dependent upon both his going and the Holy Spirit's coming, for the two events were closely linked. Indeed, when the disciples were evidently grieved at the thought of his leaving, Jesus said: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). It probably seemed incredible to the disciples, who by now were very much aware of their own weaknesses and shortcomings, that they would do greater works than the Master himself had done. Yet Peter preached on Pentecost Sunday and three thousand believed. Jesus himself never had that type of response, as far as we know. Perhaps he did not gather that many genuine converts in his entire ministry! The key to the disciples' success was not in their abilities and strengths, however. Jesus had told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). He explained that this coming of the Spirit would give them the power that he had

**12.** For a discussion of Jesus' words to Nicodemus, see Henry B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 130-35.

promised, the ability to do the things that he had predicted: "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (v. 8). This enablement by the Spirit caused them to succeed in their task at that time, and is a resource still available today to any Christian wishing to serve the Lord.

Another element of Jesus' promise was that the Holy Spirit would indwell and illuminate the believer: "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (John 14: 16-17). Part of the efficacy of the Spirit's work is a result of its internality. Jesus had been a teacher and leader, but his influence was that of external word and example. The Spirit, however, is able to affect one more intensely because, dwelling within, he can get to the very center of one's thinking and emotions. By indwelling believers, the Spirit can lead them into all truth, as Jesus promised. Even the name used for the Spirit in this context suggests this role: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16: 13- 14).

The Spirit evidently has a teaching role. Earlier in the same discourse we read that he would bring to mind and clarify for the disciples the words which Jesus had already given to them: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Jesus also pledged that "when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (John 15:26). Here we have the idea of illumination by the Holy Spirit, a topic developed at greater length in chapter 11. This ministry of the Holy Spirit was not merely for that first generation of disciples, but obviously also includes helping believers today to understand the Scripture. Illuminating us is a role which falls to the Spirit, for Jesus is now permanently at work carrying out other functions mentioned in this same passage (e.g., he is preparing a place for believers [14:2-3]).

Another point of particular interest is the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit. We are familiar with the intercession which Jesus, as the High Priest, makes in our behalf. Paul also speaks of an intercessory prayer in which the Holy Spirit engages in our behalf: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27). Thus believers have the assurance that when they do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit wisely intercedes for them that the Lord's will be done.

The Holy Spirit also works sanctification in the life of the believer. By sanctification is meant the continued transformation of moral and spiritual character so that the life of the believer actually comes to mirror the standing which he or she already has in God's sight. While justification is an instantaneous act giving the individual a righteous standing before God, sanctification is a process making the person holy or good. In the earlier part of Romans 8, Paul dwells on this work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has liberated us from the law (v. 2). Henceforth believers do not walk and live according to the flesh, their old nature, but according to the Spirit (v. 4), having their minds set *on* the Spirit (v. 5). Christians are in the Spirit (v. 9), and the Spirit dwells in them, a thought that is repeated three times (w. 9, 11 twice). As the Spirit indwells believers, he guides and leads them, and the deeds of the flesh are, accordingly, put to death (v. 13). All those who are thus "led by the Spirit are sons of God" (v. 14). The Spirit is now at work giving them life, witnessing that they are sons rather than slaves, and thus supplying indisputable evidence that they are truly in Christ (w. 15-17).

This life in the Spirit is what God intends for the Christian. Paul in Galatians 5 contrasts life in the Spirit with life in the flesh. He instructs his readers to walk by the Spirit instead of gratifying the desires of the flesh (v. 16). If they heed this instruction, the Spirit will produce in them a set of qualities which are collectively referred to as the "fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22). Paul lists nine of these qualities: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law" (w. 22-23). These qualities cannot in their entirety be produced in human lives by unaided self-effort. They are a supernatural work. They are opposed to the works of the flesh—a list of sins in verses 19-21—just as the Spirit himself is in opposition to the flesh. The work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, then, is not merely the negative work of mortification of the flesh (Rom. 8:13), but also the production of a positive likeness to Christ.

The Spirit also bestows certain special gifts upon believers within the body of Christ. In Paul's writings there are three different lists of such gifts; there is also a brief one in 1 Peter (see Figure 5). Certain observations need to be made regarding these lists. First, while all of them have reference to the gifts of the Spirit, their basic orientations differ. Ephesians 4:11 is really a listing of various offices in the church, or of persons who are God's gifts to the church as it were. Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Peter

**Figure 5**  
**The Gifts of the Spirit**

Romans 12:6-8	1 Corinthians 12:4-11	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
prophecy service teaching exhortation liberality giving aid acts of mercy	wisdom knowledge faith healing working of miracles prophecy ability to distinguish spirits various tongues interpretation of tongues	apostles prophets evangelists pastors and teachers	speaking service

4:11 actually catalogue several basic functions which are performed in the church. The list in 1 Corinthians is more a matter of special abilities. It is likely that when these passages speak of the "gifts of the Spirit," they have different meanings in view. Hence no attempt should be made to reduce this expression to a unitary concept or definition. Second, it is not clear whether these gifts are endowments from birth, special enablements received at some later point, or a combination of the two. Third, some gifts, such as faith and service, are qualities or activities expected of every Christian; in such cases it is likely that the writer has in mind an unusual capability in that area. Fourth, since none of the four lists includes all of the gifts found in the other lists, it is quite conceivable that collectively they do not exhaust all possible gifts of the Spirit. These lists, then, individually and collectively, are illustrative of the various gifts with which God has endowed the church.

It is also important at this point to note several observations which Paul made regarding both the nature of the gifts and the way in which they are to be exercised. These observations appear in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

1. The gifts are bestowed on the body (the church). They are for the edification of the whole body, not merely for the enjoyment or enrichment of the individual members possessing them (12:7; 14:5, 12).
2. No one person has all the gifts (12: 14-2 1), nor is any one of the gifts bestowed on all persons (12:28-30). Consequently, the individual members of the church need each other.

3. Although not equally conspicuous, all gifts are important (12:22-26).
4. The Holy Spirit apportions the various gifts to whom and as he wills (12:11).

### The Miraculous Gifts Today

Certain of the more spectacular gifts have attracted particular attention and stirred considerable controversy in recent years. These are sometimes referred to as remarkable gifts, miraculous gifts, special gifts, sign gifts, or charismatic gifts, the last being a somewhat redundant expression, since *χαρισματα* basically means gifts. Most frequently mentioned are faith healing, exorcism of demons, and especially glossolalia or speaking in tongues. The question that has occasioned the most controversy is whether the Holy Spirit is still dispensing these gifts in the church today, and if so, whether they are normative (i.e., whether every Christian can and should receive and exercise them). Because glossolalia is the most prominent of these gifts, we will concentrate on it. Our conclusions will serve to evaluate the other gifts as well.

We need to examine both sides of this controversial issue if it is to be correctly understood and dealt with. The case for glossolalia has been argued throughout the twentieth century by Pentecostal groups, and in more recent years by neo-Pentecostals or, as they are now more generally termed, charismatics. Their position, relying heavily upon the narrative passages in the Book of Acts, is a rather straightforward one. The argument usually begins with the observation that subsequent to the episodes of conversion and regeneration recorded in Acts, there customarily came a special filling or baptism with the Holy Spirit, and that its usual manifestation was speaking in an unknown tongue. There is no indication that the Holy Spirit would cease to bestow this gift on the church.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, there are evidences that the gift continued throughout the history of the church to the present. Although it often occurred only in small, relatively isolated groups, it fueled those groups with a special spiritual vitality.

Often an experiential argument also is employed in support of glossolalia. People who have experienced the gift themselves or have observed others practicing it have a subjective certainty about the experience.

13. Donald Gee, *The Pentecostal Movement, Including the Story of the War Years (1940-47)*, rev. ed. (London: Elkin, 1949), p. 10.

They emphasize the benefits which it produces in the Christian's spiritual life, especially its value as a means of vitalizing one's prayer life.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the advocates of glossolalia argue that the practice is nowhere forbidden in Scripture. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul does not censure proper use of the gift, but only perversions of it. In fact, he said, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all" (1 Cor. 14: 18). Further, he urged that his readers "earnestly desire the higher gifts" (1 Cor. 12:3 1) and "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts" (1 Cor. 14:1). Identifying "higher gifts" and "spiritual gifts" with tongues, the advocate of glossolalia concludes that the gift of speaking in tongues is both possible and desirable for the Christian.

On the other side of the argument are those who reject the idea that the Holy Spirit is still dispensing the charismatic gifts. They argue that historically the miraculous gifts ceased; they were virtually unknown throughout most of the history of the church.<sup>15</sup> When they were present, it was generally in isolated groups characterized by unorthodox beliefs on a number of other major doctrines. A few who reject the possibility of contemporary glossolalia utilize 1 Corinthians 13:8 as evidence: "as for tongues, they will cease." They note the distinction in that verse between the verb used with "tongues" and the verb used with "prophecy" and "knowledge." Not only is a totally different word involved, but the middle voice is used in the former instance and the passive in the latter. On this basis it is argued that tongues, unlike prophecy and knowledge, were not intended to be given until the end time, but have already ceased. Therefore, tongues are not included in the reference to the imperfect gifts which will pass away when the perfect comes (w. 9-10).<sup>16</sup> Some theologians would argue for the passing of the miraculous gifts on the basis of Hebrews 2:3-4: "salvation ... was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will." The thrust of this argument is that the purpose of the miraculous gifts was to attest to and thus authenticate the revelation and the incarnation. When that purpose had been fulfilled, the miracles being unnecessary, they simply faded away.<sup>17</sup>

14. Laurence Christenson, *Speaking in Tongues and Its Significance for the Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1968), pp. 72-79.

15. Anthony Hoekema, *What About Tongue-Speaking?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 16ff.

16. Stanley D. Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (October-December 1963): 3 11-16; Robert Glenn Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), pp. 118-29.

17. Benjamin B. War-field, *Miracles: Yesterday and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953). p. 6.

A second aspect of the negative argument is the existence of parallels to glossolalia which are obviously not to be interpreted as special gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is noted, for example, that similar phenomena are found in other religions. The practices of certain voodoo witch doctors are a case in point. Further, the phenomenon was not unique to Christianity even in biblical times. From the oracle of Delphi, not far from Corinth, there issued ecstatic utterances not unlike the glossolalia found in the Corinthian church.<sup>18</sup> Psychology, too, finds parallels between speaking in tongues and certain cases of heightened suggestibility caused by brainwashing or electroshock therapy.<sup>19</sup>

One particular point of interest in recent years has been the study of glossolalia by linguists. It should be noted that not all advocates of glossolalia claim that the modern-day phenomenon represents existing human languages. Some, to be sure, maintain that the tongues of Corinth were, like those at Pentecost, actual languages. They likewise maintain that tongues today are actual languages, and anyone familiar with the particular language being spoken would be able to understand without the aid of an interpreter. Others, however, say that, unlike the tongues at Pentecost, the tongues of Corinth and those today are utterances of apparently unrelated syllables and therefore do not display the characteristics of any known human language. The latter group are not affected by the research of linguists. However, those who hold that modern-day tongues do represent existing human languages must answer scientific charges that many cases of glossolalia simply do not display a sufficient number of the characteristics of language to be classified as such.<sup>20</sup>

Is there a way to deal responsibly with the considerations raised by both sides of this dispute? Because the issue has a significant effect on the fashion in which one conducts one's Christian life, and even on the very style or tone of the Christian life, the question cannot simply be ignored. While few dogmatic conclusions can be drawn in this area, a number of significant observations can be made.

We begin with the question of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We note first that the Book of Acts speaks of a special work of the Spirit subsequent to new birth. It appears, however, that the Book of Acts covers a transitional period. Since that time the normal pattern has been for

18. P. Feine, "Speaking with Tongues," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), vol. 11, pp. 37-38.

19. William Sargent, "Some Cultural Group Abreactive Techniques and Their Relation to Modern Treatments," in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* (London: Longmans, Green, 1949), pp. 367ff.

20. William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), chapters 4-6.

conversion/regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to coincide. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and all were made to drink of one Spirit." From verse 12 it is very clear that this "one body" is Christ. Thus Paul appears to be saying in verse 13 that we become members of Christ's body by being baptized into it by the Spirit. Baptism by the Spirit appears to be, if not equivalent to conversion and new birth, at least simultaneous with them.

But what of the cases in Acts where there clearly was a separation between conversion/regeneration and the baptism of the Spirit? In keeping with the observation in the preceding paragraph that Acts covers a transitional period, it is my interpretation that these cases did indeed involve people who were regenerated before they received the Holy Spirit. They were the last of the Old Testament believers.<sup>21</sup> They were regenerate because they believed the Old Testament and feared God. They had not received the Spirit, however, for the promise of his coming could not be fulfilled until Jesus had ascended. (Keep in mind that even the disciples of Jesus, who were certainly already regenerate under the New Testament system, were not filled with the Spirit until Pentecost.) But when on Pentecost those who were already regenerate under the Old Testament system received Christ, they were filled with the Spirit. As soon as that happened, there were no longer any regenerate Old Testament believers. After the events of Pentecost we find no other clear cases of such a postconversion experience among Jews. What happened to the Jews as a group (Acts 2) also happened to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Thereafter, regeneration and the baptism of the Spirit were simultaneous. The case of the disciples of Apollos in Acts 19 appears to be a matter of incompletely evangelized believers, for they had been baptized only into the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance, and had not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. In none of these four cases was the baptism of the Holy Spirit sought by the recipients, nor is there any indication that the gift did not fall upon every member of the group. This interpretive scheme seems to fit well with the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13, with the fact that Scripture nowhere commands us to be baptized in or by the Holy Spirit, and with the record in Acts.

In my judgment it is not possible to determine with any certainty whether the contemporary charismatic phenomena are indeed gifts of the Holy Spirit. There simply is no biblical evidence indicating the time of fulfillment of the prediction that tongues will cease. It is questionable

21. For a more complete treatment, see Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 153-218.

at best to conclude on the basis of the differences between the verbs in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that tongues will cease at one time, and prophecy and knowledge at another. Nor is the historical evidence clear and conclusive. The situation here is somewhat like the situation with respect to the doctrine of apostolic succession. There is a great deal of evidence on both sides. Each group is able to cite an impressive amount of data which are to its advantage, bypassing the data presented by the other group. This lack of historical conclusiveness is not a problem, however. For even if history proved that the gift of tongues has ceased, there is nothing to prevent God from reestablishing it. On the other hand, historical proof that the gift has been present through the various eras of the church would not validate the present phenomena.

What we must do, then, is to evaluate each case on its own merits. This does not mean that we are to sit in judgment on the spiritual experience or the spiritual life of other professing Christians. What it does mean is that we cannot assume that everyone who claims to have had a special experience of the Holy Spirit's working has really had one. Scientific studies have discovered enough non-Spirit-caused parallels to warn us against being naively credulous about every claim. Certainly not every exceptional religious experience can be of divine origin, unless God is a very broadly ecumenical and tolerant being indeed, who even grants special manifestations of his Spirit to some who make no claim to Christian faith and may actually be opposed to it. Certainly if demonic forces could produce imitations of divine miracles in biblical times (e.g., the magicians in Egypt were able to imitate the plagues up to a certain point), the same may be true today as well. Conversely, however, no conclusive case can be made for the contention that such gifts are not for today and cannot occur at the present time. Consequently, one cannot rule in an *a priori* and categorical fashion that a claim of glossolalia is spurious. In fact, it may be downright dangerous, in the light of Jesus' warnings regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, to attribute specific phenomena to demonic activity.

In the final analysis, whether the Bible teaches that the Spirit dispenses special gifts today is not an issue of great practical consequence. For even if he does, we are not to set our lives to seeking them. He bestows them sovereignly; he alone determines the recipients (1 Cor. 12: 11). If he chooses to give us a special gift, he will do so regardless of whether we expect it or seek it. What we are commanded to do (Eph. 5:18) is to be filled with the Holy Spirit (a present imperative, suggesting ongoing action). This is not so much a matter of our getting more of the Holy Spirit; presumably all of us possess the Spirit in his entirety. It is, rather, a matter of his possessing more of our lives. Each of us is to aspire to giving the Holy Spirit full control of our lives. When that happens, our lives will

manifest whatever gifts God intends for us to have, along with all the fruit and acts of his empowering that he wishes to display through us. It is to be remembered, as we noted earlier, that no one gift is for every Christian, nor is any gift more significant than the others.

Of more importance, in many ways, than receiving certain gifts is the fruit of the Spirit. These virtues are, in Paul's estimation, the real evidence of the Spirit at work in Christians. Love, joy, and peace in an individual's life are the surest signs of a vital experience with the Spirit. In particular, Paul stresses love as more desirable than any gifts, no matter how spectacular (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

But what is proper procedure with regard to an actual case of modern-day public practice of what is claimed to be the biblical gift of glossolalia? First, no conclusions should be drawn in advance as to whether it is genuine or not. Then, the procedure laid down by Paul so long ago should be followed. Thus, if one speaks in tongues, there should be an interpreter, so that the group as a whole may be edified. Only one should speak at a time and no more than two or three at a session (1 Cor. 14:27). If no one is present to interpret, whether the speaker or some other person, then the would-be speaker should keep silence in the church and restrict the use of tongues to personal devotional practice (v. 28). We must not prohibit speaking in tongues (v. 39); on the other hand, we are nowhere commanded to seek this gift.

Finally, it is to be noted that the emphasis in Scripture is upon the one who bestows the gifts rather than upon those who receive them. God frequently performs miraculous works without involving human agents. We read, for example, in James 5:14-15 that the elders of the church are to pray for the sick. It is the prayer of faith, not a human miracle-worker, that is said to save them. Whatever be the gift, it is the edification of the church and the glorification of God that are of ultimate importance.

#### Implications of the Work of the Spirit

1. The gifts that we have are bestowals upon us by the Holy Spirit. We should recognize that they are not our own accomplishments. They are intended to be used in the fulfilment of his plan.

2. The Holy Spirit empowers believers in their Christian life and service. Personal inadequacies should not deter or discourage us.

3. The Holy Spirit dispenses his gifts to the church wisely and sovereignly. Possession or lack of a particular gift is no cause for pride or regret. His gifts are not rewards to those who seek or qualify for them.

4. No one gift is for everyone, and no one person has every gift. The

fellowship of the body is needed for full spiritual development of the individual believer.

5. We may rely upon the Holy Spirit to give us understanding of the Word of God, and to guide us into his will for us.

6. It is appropriate to direct prayer to the Holy Spirit, just as to the Father and the Son, as well as to the Triune God. In such prayers we will thank him for, and especially ask him to continue, the unique work that he does in us.

Come, gracious Spirit, heavenly Dove,  
With light and comfort from above;  
Be Thou our Guardian, Thou our Guide;  
O'er every thought and step preside.

The light of truth to us display,  
And make us know and choose Thy way;  
Plant holy fear in every heart,  
That we from God may ne'er depart.

Lead us to holiness, the road  
Which we must take to dwell with God;  
Lead us to Christ, the living Way.  
Nor let us from His presence stray.

(Simon Browne)

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## I PART TEN

# Salvation

- 42. Conceptions of Salvation
  - 43. The Antecedent to Salvation: Predestination
  - 44. The Beginning of Salvation: Subjective Aspects
  - 45. The Beginning of Salvation: Objective Aspects
  - 46. The Continuation of Salvation
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  - 48. The Means and Extent of Salvation
- 

# 42

## Conceptions of Salvation

### Details on Which Conceptions of Salvation Differ

- The Time Dimension
- Nature and Locus of the Need
- The Medium of Salvation
- The Direction of Movement in Salvation
- The Extent of Salvation
- The Objects of Salvation

### Current Conceptions of Salvation

- Liberation Theologies
- Existential Theology
- Secular Theology
- Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology
- Evangelical Theology

**S**alvation is the application of the work of Christ to the life of the individual. Accordingly, the doctrine of salvation has particular appeal and relevance, since it pertains to the most crucial need of the human person. Indeed, because of the primacy of this need within the life of the individual, some recent theologies have dealt first with salva-

tion, and then have turned back to the person and work of Christ.' While this approach has a definite apologetic value in preaching, it has limitations as a format for theology, for it assumes that the human is the best judge of his or her own problem, and may even lead to a situation in which the world dictates the terms on which its dialogue with the church is conducted. While it is preferable, then, to study Christ first, the doctrine of salvation is still of special significance, since it deals with the most important questions of human existence. This is particularly apparent to those who understand the biblical teaching regarding sin.

The term *salvation* may seem to persons familiar with it to have a somewhat obvious meaning. Yet there are, even within Christian circles, rather widely differing conceptions of what salvation entails. Before examining the more prominent of these conceptions, it will be helpful to look briefly at various details on which they differ. This will give us categories we can employ as we analyze the several views.

### Details on Which Conceptions of Salvation Differ

#### *The Time Dimension*

There are various opinions as to how salvation is related to time. It is variously thought of as a single occurrence at the beginning of the Christian life, a process continuing throughout the Christian life, or a future event. Some Christians regard salvation as basically complete at the initiation of the Christian life. They tend to say, "We have been saved." Others see salvation as in process- "we are being saved." Yet others think of salvation as something which will be received in the future- "we shall be saved." It is, of course, possible to combine two or all three of these views. In that case, the separate aspects of salvation (e.g., justification, sanctification, glorification) are understood as occurring at different times.

If salvation is thought of as taking place within time, then we must determine the kind of time that is involved. In the Greek language in particular, the verb employed may depict an action as either punctiliar or durative, or it may make no specification whatsoever as to what kind of time is involved. Consequently, salvation and its constituent aspects can be conceived of in several different ways:

1. Walter Lowe, "Christ and Salvation," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), pp. 196-97.

1. A series of points: .....
2. A series of discontinuous processes:

3. A series of overlapping processes:

4. A single continuous process with distinguishable components:

#### *Nature and Locus of the Need*

A second question relates to the nature and locus of the need which must be dealt with. In the traditional view, man's basic deficiency is thought of as being vertical in nature. The primary human problem is separation from God. Sin is violation of the will of God, and the result is enmity toward God. What is needed is to restore the broken relationship between God and the creature. This is the evangelical view of salvation. It is characterized by terms like "conversion," "forgiveness," "reconciliation," and "adoption." A second view is that the primary human problem is horizontal. This may mean that an individual is deficient in his or her adjustment to other persons, or that there is a fundamental lack of harmony within society as a whole. Salvation involves the removal of ruptures within the human race, the healing of personal and social relationships. "Relational theology" is concerned with this process on the level of individual maladjustments and small-group problems. Liberation theologies are concerned with the conflicts between different racial or economic classes, the fact that the whole of society is so structured as to deny certain of its members some of the basic necessities of life. Finally, the primary human problem is also thought to be internal. The individual is plagued with feelings which must be eradicated-guilt, inferiority, insecurity. "Adjustment," "self-understanding," "self-acceptance," and "growth in self-esteem" are catchwords here.

#### *The Medium of Salvation*

The question of how salvation is obtained or transmitted is also highly important. Some views regard the transmission of salvation as virtually a physical process. This is true of certain sacramental systems which believe salvation or grace to be obtained by means of a physical object. For example, in traditional Roman Catholicism, grace is believed to be actually transmitted and received by taking the bread of communion into one's body. While the value of the sacrament depends to some extent

upon the inward attitude or condition of the communicant, grace is received primarily through the external physical act. Others think that salvation is conveyed by moral action. Here salvation is not so much something possessed by some individual or organization and transmitted to others, as it is something created by altering the state of affairs. This idea of salvation is found in the social-gospel movement and in liberation theologies. The approach to change advocated by some of these ideologies can be quite secular in nature, involving, for example, the use of normal political channels. Evangelical theologies represent a third idea: salvation is mediated by faith. Faith appropriates the work accomplished by Christ. The recipient is, in a sense, passive in this process. (These issues will be examined more fully in chapter 48.)

#### *The Direction of Movement in Salvation*

An additional consideration is the direction of movement in salvation. Does God work by saving individuals, effecting a personal transformation which proceeds outward into society and changes the world of which the redeemed are a part? Or does God work by altering the structures of our society and then using these altered structures to change the persons who make it up?

The social-gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was convinced that the basic human problem lies not in a perverted human nature, but in an evil social environment. According to this view, there is no point in trying to change individuals, for they will be thrust back into a corrupt society and be infected again as it were. Humans are not essentially evil. They are whatever their environment makes them to be. So instead of attempting to cure individuals, who are corrupted by society, we must alter the conditions leading to their illness. We might say that the advocates of the social gospel were proposing a sort of spiritual public-health ministry. Their view of human nature was much like that of Jean Jacques Rousseau, though in a very different context of course. In another way it paralleled behaviorism's view that the individual personality is little more than a set of behavior patterns determined by one's environment.

The opposite approach has been advocated by those elements within Christianity that emphasize conversion. They hold that human nature is radically corrupt. The evils of society result from the fact that it is composed of evil individuals. Only as there is transformation of these individuals is there any real hope for changing society. Altered individuals will eventually change society, not simply because the whole is composed of the sum of its parts, but also because supernaturally transformed

individuals have the motivation to work for the change of the societal whole.

#### *The Extent of Salvation*

The extent of salvation is an issue for those who think of salvation as applying to individual persons rather than to society. The question is, Who or how many members of the human race will be saved? The particularist position sees salvation as based upon individual responses to the grace of God. It maintains that not all will respond affirmatively to God; consequently, some will be lost and some saved. The universalist position, on the other hand, holds that God will restore all humans to the relationship with him for which they were originally intended. No one will be lost. There are two varieties of the universalist position. One might be a universalist by being an optimistic particularist. That is to say, one might hold both that it is necessary to accept Jesus Christ personally in order to be saved, and that every individual will do so. Unfortunately, however, it does not appear that everyone in the past has accepted Christ; indeed, countless numbers did not even have the opportunity to do so. It consequently is not feasible to think of all as being saved in this fashion, unless there is some sort of unconscious means by which the conditions for salvation can be fulfilled. The more common universalist position is to assume that in the end God will on some basis simply accept all persons into eternal fellowship with himself.

#### *The Objects of Salvation*

In some circles there is the idea that only human beings, individually and collectively, are to be saved. This view considers the rest of the creation as merely a stage on which the human drama is worked out: it is therefore only incidental to the whole occurrence of salvation. An alternative view, however, holds that there are cosmic dimensions to salvation. Human beings are not alone in having been affected by the presence of sin in the creation. Usually taking its cue from Paul's statements in Romans 8:18–25, the alternative view argues that salvation, in its final form, will include the restoration of the entire fallen cosmos, which is now under the bondage of sin, to the pure and glorious condition in which it was created and for which it was destined by its Maker.

#### **Current Conceptions of Salvation**

##### *Liberation Theologies*

One of the vital movements currently propounding its unique view of salvation is the cluster of theologies which may collectively be referred

to as 'liberation theologies.' We might subdivide this movement into black, feminist, and Third World theologies. It is especially the last of these three that is referred to as liberation theology. While there are some significant differences which have occasionally produced conflict among these groups, there is a sufficient commonality among them to enable us to trace some basic features of their view of the nature of salvation.

One of the common emphases here is that the basic problem of society is the oppression and exploitation of the powerless classes by the powerful. Salvation consists in deliverance (or liberation) from such oppression. The method of liberation will be appropriate to the nature of the specific situation.

The liberation theologies' analysis of humanity's predicament stems from two sources. On the one hand, there is a consensus that the capitalist or "developmentalist" approach to economic and political matters is inherently both wrong and inept. Capitalists hold that there is one process through which all societies ought ideally to pass. The problem with the undeveloped nations is simply that they are not as far along in the process as are the more industrial nations. As the undeveloped nations advance, their problems will be solved.<sup>2</sup> To the liberation theologians it is increasingly apparent, however, that the economic development of the advanced nations, as well as the prosperity of the elite social classes, is achieved at the expense of the less fortunate. One sees in Latin American countries the sharp contrast of luxury high-rise apartments adjacent to slums. International corporations succeed because they exploit the cheap labor in banana republics and similar places. Rich nations use military power to keep poor countries subservient to them. For the poorer nations to emulate the practices of the richer nations will not result in prosperity for all. The underlying reason here is that the prosperous nations are prosperous specifically because they keep other nations impoverished. The gap between poor and rich continues to increase. Not only are there large numbers (even in the United States) living under poverty conditions, there are people who literally are unable to live! In addition, millions work under degrading and unfair conditions.<sup>3</sup>

The other source of this push to see salvation as liberation from exploitation is a sense that the Bible identifies with the oppressed. The charge that liberation theology is biased in its approach to the Bible is acknowledged to be true, but it is pointed out by way of response that

2. See, e.g., Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University, 1971).

3. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973), p. 26.

the biblical writers shared this bias. The history of God's redemptive working is a history of groups of oppressed people. Certainly the people of Israel were oppressed in Egypt. Indeed, the Book of Exodus is one of liberation theology's favorite portions of God's Word. In later history as well, Israel was constantly under the yoke of more powerful nations. Consider the raids of the Philistines and captivity at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The church, particularly as it expanded into Gentile territory, was made up of powerless, poor, and unimportant persons rather than the elite of society. Justo and Catherine Gonzalez summarize: "First of all, is it true that most of the Bible is written from the perspective of the powerless? Surely this is the case."<sup>4</sup>

Liberation theology concludes from the fact of God's proclivity for speaking the word through the powerless that his message of salvation concerns them in particular Jesus confirmed this in Luke 10:21: "I thank thee, Father, ... that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes." Either the wise and powerful must hear God's word through powerless persons such as Nathan, Amos, Peter, and Jesus, or they will not hear it at all.

But what is the specific nature of salvation as viewed by liberation theologies? We should note first that these theologies do not claim to be universal theories, but are closely tied in with concrete political realities. Universal theories usually turn out to be the theological conceptions of white middle-class males. Black theology, by contrast, claims to be a way of breaking out of the corrupting influence of white thought to formulate a theology built upon norms and drawn from sources appropriate to the black community.<sup>5</sup>

Correlatively, liberation theologies do not view the Bible as universal in nature. When examined closely, it is seen to be a book not of eternal truths and rules, but of specific history. Truth here is not something that *is* but rather something that happens. And the specific history in the Bible is not merely narration of past events. It is also a plan for the redemption of God's creation; it is a political task to be carried out.<sup>6</sup>

Although liberation theology relates particularly to concrete historical and political matters, it does not understand itself to be merely a fragmentary theology. It is concerned with and deals with the whole of Christian theology. It is not merely about liberation. It is designed to be a

4. Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 16.

5. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), p. 53.

6. Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching*, pp. 20-21.

treatment of all the doctrines or topics of traditional theology, but from the perspective of liberation.<sup>7</sup>

Liberation theology does not understand God to be the impassive, immutable, unknowable being traditionally believed in by most Christians. Rather, God is active. He is involved with the poor in their struggle. An evidence of this is the incarnation, by which God, far from remaining aloof and secure, came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ and entered the human struggle. In the understanding of liberation theology, the unchanging and unchangeable God of traditional theism is actually an idol, an idol developed by those who had the most to lose from change. But on the contrary, God is active, and actively involved in change. This means that he is not neutral. He is in favor of equality. And for equality to prevail, God cannot and must not work equally for all persons. If his justice is to be an equalizing justice, it must necessarily work in an unequal or compensating manner in an unequal world. Perhaps the most emphatic statement of this view was made by James Cone: "Black theology cannot accept a view of God which does not represent him as being for blacks and thus against whites. Living in a world of white oppressors, black people have no time for a neutral God."<sup>8</sup>

Liberation theology's view of salvation assumes a particular view of humanity and of sin. Traditional theology has often emphasized humility and self-abasement as the primary virtues of humankind as designed by God. Pride, correspondingly, is viewed as the cardinal sin. Sin is often considered a matter of inner attitudes or private misdeeds. According to liberationists, however, the Bible does not emphasize humility, an attribute which often leads to acceptance of oppression. Rather, in passages like Psalm 8, the Bible exalts the human creature. Moreover, the Bible does not look upon internal pride as the principal sin. Serving the interests of the powerful in this respect as in so many others, theology and Christian preaching have tended to ignore the sort of sin most often condemned in the Bible: "Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land" (Isa. 5:8).<sup>9</sup>

Salvation is not to be thought of primarily as individual life after death, maintain the liberation theologians. The Bible concerns itself much more with the kingdom of God. Even eternal life is usually placed in the context of a new social order, and is regarded as consisting not so much in being plucked out of history as in being a participant in its culmination. This understanding that the goal of history is the realization of justice has

7. Ibid., p. 21.

8. Cone, *Black Theology*, pp. 131-32.

9. Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching*, p. 24.

never been popular with the powerful. If, as the traditional formulation has it, history and eternity are two parallel (i.e., nonintersecting) realms, our goal within history is to gain access to eternity. This can best be achieved by being meek and accepting. Since the chief concern of the human individual is for his or her soul to go to heaven, those who exploit the body may actually be rendering a service. But as Gonzalez and Gonzalez put it, if history and eternity intersect, "if salvation is moving into a new order, which includes the entire human being, then we must strive against everything which at present denies that order."<sup>10</sup> The salvation of all persons from oppression is the goal of God's work in history and must therefore be the task of those who believe in him. They will seek to bring about salvation in this sense by every means possible, including political effort and even revolution if necessary.

#### *Existential Theology*

A variety of twentieth-century theologies have been existential in the sense of being based upon or constructed from existential philosophy. Indeed, to varying degrees probably the majority of twentieth-century theologies have incorporated some measure of existentialism into their formulations of doctrine. We have in mind here, however, those which are overtly and avowedly existential in orientation, theologies in which existential philosophy plays a major and significant role. Perhaps the outstanding representative of existential theology in this sense is Rudolf Bultmann and his demythologization program. Bultmann sought to interpret the New Testament and indeed to construct a theology on the basis of the thought of Martin Heidegger, who was teaching philosophy at the University of Marburg when Bultmann was teaching New Testament there. To understand Bultmann's concept of salvation, it will be necessary to summarize some of Heidegger's major philosophical tenets.

A first major tenet is Heidegger's distinction between objective and subjective knowledge. Objective knowledge consists of ideas which correctly reflect or correspond with the object signified. Here the attitude of the subject or knower has no bearing at all. In fact, it is potentially deleterious, for it tends to prejudice the data. Objective knowledge is what is sought by the various natural sciences, where the aim is to identify, describe, and analyze as accurately as possible the data under consideration. Subjective knowledge is quite different, however. Here the central concern is not accuracy, whether an idea correctly depicts the object signified, but the subjective involvement or inward passion of the knower, how he or she feels about the topic of discussion or object of

10. Ibid.

knowledge. It is impossible to gain scientific-type knowledge when dealing with subjects rather than objects. For subjects, that is, other persons, human or divine, simply cannot be subsumed under hard categories of logic. Our subjective knowledge of another person is not our fund of objective ideas about that person; it is a matter of our feelings toward that person. The same is true of our subjective knowledge of ourselves. The truth about ourselves, then, involves far more than objective information. For while we may have all sorts of scientific knowledge about our body, we may know very little about the real self, who we actually are.<sup>11</sup>

What has just been said Bultmann applies to the Bible. It is not in essence a source of objective information about God, about the human person and condition. It gives us *Geschichte* rather than *Historie*. It is not in essence an objective account of factual occurrences. Instead, it conveys to us the impact which various occurrences had upon the disciples. Its aim is not to inform us, but to transform us; not to add to our store of information, but to affect our existence.

In Heidegger's thought there is also an important distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence. The aim of philosophy is to produce authentic existence in the individual. Authentic existence, as the term implies, is to be what we are meant to be, to live life in such a way as to fulfil the potential which is ours as humans. An example of inauthenticity is failure to exercise one's ability to make choices and act freely. To do something simply because everyone else does it, going along with and conforming to the crowd, is to fail to be one's own person.<sup>12</sup> Another example of inauthenticity is unwillingness to accept the fact that one has acted freely and is therefore responsible. Excusing or explaining one's actions on the basis of any type of determinism, whether genetic, psychological, sociological, theological, or some other form, is inauthenticity. Authenticity, on the other hand, involves accepting responsibility for one's acts. It is acknowledging that whatever may have contributed to my being what I am, I am now able to choose freely and will accept responsibility for my choices. This acceptance of responsibility for oneself Heidegger terms "guilt."

Bultmann borrows the concept of authentic and inauthentic existence. He mentions two tendencies in modern man. There is, on the one hand, a tendency to be guided in life by a self-orientation. Man's aim is to fulfil his desires for happiness and security, usefulness and profit. He is

11. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 85; cf. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1941), pp. 169-75.

12. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 163-68.

selfish and presumptuous. Love for others and desire to know, tell, and honor the truth are subservient to the drive for self-aggrandizement. Not only is man disrespectful of the concerns and needs of others; he is also disobedient to the commands and claims of God upon his life. He either denies that God exists or, if he does believe, denies that God has legitimate right to his obedience and devotion.<sup>13</sup>

The other tendency mentioned by Bultmann is that modern man believes that he can gain real security by his own efforts. He thinks of himself as autonomous. The accumulation of wealth, the proliferation of technology, and the quest to wield influence are either individual or collective attempts of humans to guarantee their future. This is, unfortunately, an unattainable hope, for there are some obstacles which man cannot master. Death inevitably comes, no matter what the human may do. Natural disasters which destroy property as well as lives cannot be anticipated or prevented. Thus, in this world of uncertainty, man's attempts to build security are doomed to failure. Still man keeps on trying. And as he continues to act selfishly and to seek security through his own efforts, he rejects or denies all that he is intended to be. This is Bultmann's theological equivalent of inauthentic existence.<sup>14</sup>

What man is called to by God and by the gospel is his true self, his true destiny. This is, as it were, authentic existence or salvation. The word of God "calls man away from his selfishness and from the illusory security which he has built up for himself. It calls him to God, who is beyond the world and beyond scientific thinking. At the same time, it calls man to his true self."<sup>15</sup>

As the word of God comes to man personally, it calls him to go beyond himself and his anxieties. It calls upon him to abandon his attempt to build security through his own efforts or those of the human race. It offers him the true security which comes from placing one's trust in God. Only through the exercise of faith can man put an end to his inauthentic existence: "to believe in the Word of God means to abandon all merely human security and thus to overcome the despair which arises from the attempt to find security, an attempt which is always vain."<sup>16</sup>

In exercising faith, which comes as a response to the message of Christian preaching, we abandon the attempt to build security through our own efforts; we place our trust in God instead. But this involves placing our trust in something which is unseen in this world, and for

13. Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958), pp. 39-40.

14. Ibid., p. 45.

15. Ibid., p. 40.

16. Ibid.

which there is no earthly proof. This we are reluctant to do. Bultmann points out, however, that the tendency to restrict trust to what we can see is just another form of the inauthenticity which naturally characterizes human beings.<sup>17</sup> Faith means abandoning the quest for tangible realities and transitory objects. The pursuit of such things is sin, for by it we exclude the invisible reality from our lives and refuse God's future, which is offered us as a gift. Faith is an opening of our hearts to the grace of God, allowing him to release us from the past and bring us into his future. It also involves obedience—"turning our backs on self and abandoning all security."

Akin to the view that salvation is merely a stepping into authentic existence by abandoning our selfish strivings for security and putting our confidence in God instead is Bultmann's program of demythologization.<sup>18</sup> The assertions of the Bible are not to be taken as affirmations of objective truth external to ourselves. Rather, they tell us something about ourselves. The cross, for example, is to be understood in light of Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The message of the cross is not that Jesus was put to death as some sort of substitutionary payment made to the Father in a celestial transaction. That is myth. The demythologized meaning of the cross is that each of us must put to death his or her strivings for self-gratification and for security obtained apart from God.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the resurrection is to be understood in terms of texts like Romans 6:11: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." This verse is not speaking of some event which occurred to Jesus. It is, rather, expressing the truth that if we place our faith in God and are open to the future, we will be alive in a way we were not before. Salvation, then, is not an alteration in the substance of the soul, as some have tended to understand regeneration, nor is it a forensic declaration that we are righteous in the sight of God, the traditional understanding of justification. Rather, it is a fundamental alteration of our *Existenz*, our whole outlook on and conduct of life.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Secular Theology*

The whole cultural milieu within which theology is developed has been changing. The human race's view of reality is undergoing alteration.

17. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Bartsch (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 18-19, 30.

18. Ibid., pp. 9-16.

19. Ibid., pp. 35-38.

20. Ibid., pp. 19-22.

In earlier periods most people believed in God. His activity was thought to be the explanation of the existence of the world and of what goes on within it, and he was the solver of the problems which humans faced. Today, however, people put their trust in the visible, in the here and now, and in explanations which do not assume any transcendent or super-sensible entities.

This different outlook came about through several channels. One was the growth in scientific explanations. Whereas previously it seemed necessary to believe that some supernatural being or force had brought this great complex universe into existence, alternative explanations now are available. In times past the complexity of the human physical organism seemed to point to some great, wise, and powerful designer. The theory of evolution, however, attributes human complexity to chance variations combined with a competitive struggle for life in which those better able to adapt survive. Complex beings exist, not because someone in his infinite wisdom so decided, but because elements of complexity accidentally arose within the species, and those individuals possessing them survived, while those without them could not.

Another reason for the change in outlook is that man has developed the ability to solve many of the problems faced in life. In biblical times, if a woman was barren, she prayed to God, and he answered by opening her womb so that a child was born (1 Sam. 1:1-20). God was also believed to be the source of weather. In the time of Elijah, a drought of 3½ years and an ensuing downpour were attributed to God (1 Kings 17-18; James 5: 17-18). Now, however, if a woman who desires children is barren, a gynecologist prescribes a fertility pill, and a birth (sometimes multiple) follows! If there is no rain for an extended period, someone seeds the clouds with silver iodide or some similar substance, and it rains. Man can control both birth and weather. God is no longer needed. The human race has come of age. It is capable of dealing with its problems without superhuman aid.

In the face of these developments, many modern persons have become secular. It is not so much that they have consciously adopted a naturalistic world-view, for many of them have no interest in speculative questions. It is rather that they have unconsciously come to follow a lifestyle which in practice has no place for God. Part of this secular outlook is the result of a basic pragmatism. Scientific endeavor has succeeded in meeting human needs; religion is no longer necessary or effective. Man lives in a post-Christian era.<sup>21</sup>

21. Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 1-20; Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), pp. 3-29.

There are two possible responses which the church can make to this situation. One is to see Christianity and secularism as competitors, alternatives to one another. If this approach is adopted, as it has tended to be through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and even to the present day, there will be attempts to resist, avoid, or refute secularism. There will be efforts to show the inadequacy of secularism and its accompanying philosophy, humanism, with its emphasis upon the goodness, value, and sufficiency of man. This is the approach of apologetics. It shows that humanity faces problems with which a secular world-view cannot deal. Only Christian theism can solve them.

In recent years, however, a different response has increasingly been adopted by Christian theologians. That is to regard secularism not as a competitor, but as a mature expression of Christian faith. One of the forerunners of this approach was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In the final years of his life he developed a position which he referred to as "religionless Christianity."<sup>22</sup> He saw the process of the human race's coming of age not as rebellion against God, but as God's educating his highest earthly creature to be independent of him. God, then, has been at work in the process of secularization. Just as wise parents help their children become independent of them, so God has been striving to bring the human race to a point of self-sufficiency. The effort of apologetics to refute secularism is, in Bonhoeffer's view, an attempt to put adults back into adolescence, forcing them to become dependent, exploiting their weaknesses.<sup>23</sup>

Bonhoeffer did not think of God as absent from the secular world. Rather, he is present within the "irreligion." To be Christian is not to be "religious," but to be human. Those secular members of the human race who have come of age are "unconscious Christians."<sup>24</sup> We must celebrate humanity's emancipation from God as a gracious gift of God. We must translate Christianity into language which contemporary secular persons can understand. We must help them see that they need not become Christians; they already are Christians. Traditional evangelism made the mistake of trying to make people religious rather than Christian (i.e., self-sufficient and fully human). Bonhoeffer was particularly opposed to the inward and personal aspect of traditional Christian faith. This he regarded as the final stage of religion, a massive hurdle to be overcome.<sup>25</sup>

Bonhoeffer's writings on this subject are fragmentary. Had he not been executed, he would doubtless have developed them further. It was

<sup>22</sup>. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 278-80.

<sup>23</sup>. Ibid., pp. 326-27.

<sup>24</sup>. Ibid., pp. 280-82, 373.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid., pp. 344-45.

left to others to pick up and elaborate on his ideas. John A. T. Robinson<sup>26</sup> in Great Britain and the Death of God theologians in the United States have been the primary proponents of secular theology. Among the latter, Thomas J. J. Altizer contends that secularism has an ontological basis. The primordial or transcendent God has become fully immanent in the world. This was a long process which culminated in the incarnation of Jesus. God now has no independent status outside of the world and the human race.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, he will not be found in public worship or through personal devotions. He is likelier to be found through involvement in the civil-rights movement and similar causes.<sup>28</sup>

To sum up: secular theology rejects the traditional understanding that salvation consists of removal from the world and reception of supernatural grace from God. Rather, salvation comes in a much more diffuse fashion. Salvation is not so much through religion as from religion. Realizing one's capability and utilizing it, becoming independent of God, coming of age, affirming oneself, and getting involved in the world-this is the true meaning of salvation. Most people, even those who are outside the church, are already experiencing this salvation. In fact, in view of the church's present "religious" orientation, those outside may be more genuinely Christian than those inside the church.

#### *Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology*

When we come to examine contemporary Roman Catholic thinking on any subject, we have a difficult task. It is difficult because, whereas at one time there was a uniform, official position within Roman Catholicism on most issues, now there appears to be only great diversity. Official doctrinal standards still remain, but they are now supplemented, and in some cases are seemingly contradicted, by later statements. Among these later statements are the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council and the published opinions of individual Catholic scholars. It is necessary to see some of these statements against the background of the traditional stance of the church.

The official Catholic position has long been that the church is the only channel of the grace of God. This grace is transmitted through the sacraments of the church. Those outside the official or organized church

<sup>26</sup>. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

<sup>27</sup>. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), pp. 40-54.

<sup>28</sup>. William Hamilton, "The Death of God Theologies Today," in Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 48.

cannot receive it. The church regarded itself as having an exclusive franchise for the distribution of divine grace. Basic also to this traditional view is a clear distinction between nature and grace. Nature in man consists of two parts, a passive capacity for grace and a desire or longing for grace. Man, however, is quite unable to satisfy these aspects of his nature by any accomplishment of his own. That requires the grace of God, which is understood to be divine life imparted to man by God.<sup>29</sup>

This traditional position has been modified at several points. One of these concerns man's nature. Here Karl Rahner has done some of the most impressive work. Describing man as he is apart from the church and its sacraments, Rahner speaks of the "supernatural existential." By this he means not only that man has within him the potential for knowing God, but that this potential is already being actively exercised. There is no such thing as being totally apart from grace. Grace is present even within nature itself. Man experiences grace as part of his own self.<sup>30</sup>

In its discussion of non-Christian religions the Second Vatican Council seemed to allow that grace may be present in nature. It stressed the common origin and destiny of all human persons. In so doing, it observed that the various religions represent diverse perspectives upon the same mystery of life. God's grace is found in all of them, though to differing degrees.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, Catholics are instructed to "acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods" found among adherents of other religions.<sup>32</sup>

Does the presence of grace in nature mean that there is grace apart from or outside of the church? This is the dilemma that faces the church. Does not God's command obliging all humans to know him imply that there is some way by which they can come to know him? The general response of contemporary Catholicism has been both to affirm that all persons can indeed know God and to continue to insist upon the exclusiveness of the church's role in salvation. This response has required a broader conception of the church and its membership.

The traditional Catholic position has been that union with the church is necessary for salvation to take place, because the church possesses the means of salvation. If actual union is not possible, God will accept in its stead a sincere desire for it. While actual union with the church is not

29. Joseph Pohle, *The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, ed. Arthur Preuss (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1942), vol. 1, pp. 66-75.

30. Karl Rahner, *Ecclesiology*, Theological Investigations, vol. 9, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1976), p. 282.

31. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 35.

32. "Declaration of the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 663.

indispensable, complete separation is not acceptable. Yves Congar in effect argues for degrees of membership in the church.<sup>33</sup> While the majority of the human race have no visible and official connection with the church, there is nonetheless such a thing as an invisible membership. Wherever there is salvation, there the church must be also. This reverses the traditional formula, according to which the presence of the church actualizes salvation.

The Vatican Council adopted a position similar to Congar's: the people of God are not limited to the visible, hierarchical church. This is not to say, however, that some of the people of God have no involvement with or do not participate in the visible or Catholic church. As a matter of fact, the people of God are divided into three categories in accordance with their degree of involvement with the church:

1. Catholics, who are "incorporated" into the church.
2. Non-Catholic Christians, who are 'linked' to the church. While their situation is not as secure as that of Roman Catholics, they have genuine churches and are not completely separated from God.
3. Non-Christians, who are "related" to the church.<sup>34</sup>

The third group includes those whom Rahner refers to as "anonymous Christians." The fact that people are outside the visible Catholic church (or any Christian church for that matter) does not mean that all of them are apart from the grace of God. Christ died for them as well, and we should not deny this grace. The concepts of degrees of membership and anonymous Christians have allowed the church both to grant the possibility of grace apart from its sacraments and to maintain its authority at the same time.

There has also been discussion within the church regarding the nature of salvation. There has been a greater openness to the classical Protestant concept of justification. In this regard, Hans King's work on Karl Barth's theology has been particularly significant. In the past, Catholicism merged what Protestants term justification and sanctification into one concept, sanctifying grace. King, however, talks about objective and subjective aspects of justification. The former corresponds to what Protestants usually refer to as justification. In this aspect of salvation man is passive and God is active. The latter corresponds roughly to what Protestants have usually called sanctification; here man is active.<sup>35</sup> King

33. Yves Congar, *The Wide World My Parish: Salvation and Its Problems* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), pp. 101-04.

34. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," pp. 30-35, sections 13-16.

35. Hans Kiing, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1964), pp. 222-35, 264-74.

observes that Barth emphasized the former whereas the Council of Trent emphasized the latter. Nonetheless, there is no real conflict between Barth and Trent.<sup>36</sup> In addition to the Protestant concept of justification, the Catholic church has become more tolerant of Luther's interpretation of grace as well.

To summarize: the Catholic church has in recent years been more open to the possibility that some outside of the visible church, and perhaps some with absolutely no claim of being Christians, may be recipients of grace. As a result, the Catholic understanding of salvation has become somewhat broader than the traditional conception. In particular, the current understanding includes dimensions which have usually been associated with Protestantism.

#### *Evangelical Theology*

The traditional orthodox or evangelical position on salvation is correlated closely with the orthodox understanding of the human predicament. In this understanding, the relationship between the human being and God is the primary one. When that is not right, the other dimensions of life are adversely affected as well.

The Scriptures are understood by the evangelical to indicate that there are two major aspects to the human problem of sin. First, sin is a broken relationship with God. The human has failed to fulfil divine expectations, whether by transgressing limitations which God's law has set or by failing to do what is positively commanded there. Deviation from the law results in a state of guilt or liability to punishment. Second, the very nature of the person is spoiled as a result of deviation from the law. Now there is an inclination toward evil, a propensity for sin. There is a bias, as it were, away from the good, so that the person tends by nature to do evil. Usually termed corruption, this often shows itself in terms of internal disorientation and conflict as well. Beyond that, because we live in the context of a network of interpersonal relationships, the rupture in our relationship with God also results in a disturbance of our relationships with other persons. Sin even takes on collective dimensions: the whole structure of society inflicts hardships and wrongs upon individuals and minority groups.

Certain aspects of the doctrine of salvation relate to the matter of one's standing with God. The individual's legal status must be changed from guilty to not guilty. This is a matter of one's being declared just or righteous in God's sight, of being viewed as fully meeting the divine requirements. The theological term here is *justification*. One is justified

by being brought into a legal union with Christ. More is necessary, however, than merely remission of guilt. Remember that the warm intimacy that should characterize one's relationship with God has been lost. This problem is rectified by *adoption*. In adoption one is restored to favor with God and given the opportunity to claim all the benefits provided by the loving Father.

In addition to the need to reestablish one's relationship with God, there is also a need to alter the condition of one's heart. The basic change in the direction of one's life from an inclination toward sin to a positive desire to live righteously is termed *regeneration* or, literally, new birth. An actual alteration of one's character is involved, an infusion of a positive spiritual energy. This, however, is merely the beginning of the spiritual life. There also is a progressive alteration of the individual's spiritual condition; one actually becomes holier. This progressive subjective change is referred to as *sanctification* ("making holy"). Sanctification finally comes to completion in the life beyond death, when the spiritual nature of the believer will be perfected. This is termed *glorification*. The individual maintaining faith and commitment to the very end through the grace of God is *perseverance*.

As we have done with respect to other issues, we will adopt the evangelical position on salvation. Although God is concerned about every human need, both individual and collective, Jesus made clear that the eternal spiritual welfare of the individual is infinitely more important than the supplying of temporal needs. Note, for example, his advice in Matthew 5:29–30: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." His rhetorical question in Mark 8:36 makes the same point: "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life [or soul]?" God's preoccupation with man's eternal spiritual welfare and the biblical picture of sin are compelling evidence for the evangelical view of salvation. We saw in chapter 27 that sin originates in the individual human through personal voluntary choice in response to temptation. And we observed in chapter 29 the radical and thoroughgoing nature of human sin. This "total depravity," as it is termed, means that a radical and supernatural transformation of human nature is required if forgiveness and restoration to favor with God are to be experienced. Consequently, in the following chapters, we will develop the evangelical view of salvation.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 275–84.

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## The Antecedent to Salvation: Predestination

The Historical Development of the Doctrine

Differing Views of Predestination

Calvinism

Arminianism

Karl Barth

A Suggested Solution

Implications of Predestination

**O**f all the doctrines of the Christian faith, certainly one of the most puzzling and least understood is the doctrine of predestination. It seems to many to be obscure and even bizarre. It appears to others to be an unnecessary inquiry into something that exceeds the human capacity to understand. Such theological hairsplitting is considered to have little if any practical significance. Perhaps more jokes have been made about this doctrine than about all other Christian doctrines combined. Yet because the biblical revelation mentions it, the Christian has no option but to inquire into its meaning. The fact that it is a difficult and obscure

doctrine does not excuse us from the necessity of intensive study and reflection to determine just what the truth is in this matter.

It is necessary to define precisely what is meant by the term *predestination*. Although some use it interchangeably with "foreordination" and "election,"<sup>1</sup> for our purposes here "predestination" is midway in specificity between "foreordination" and "election." "Foreordination" we will regard as the broadest term, denoting God's will with respect to all matters which occur, whether that be the fate of individual human persons or the falling of a rock. "Predestination" refers to God's choice of individuals for eternal life or eternal death. "Election" is the selection of some for eternal life, the positive side of predestination.

### The Historical Development of the Doctrine

Because there has been a considerable amount of controversy over predestination, and because the different formulations of the doctrine are related to other developments within both theology and culture in general, it will be helpful to introduce the doctrine with a survey of its elaboration through the centuries of the church to the point where the classic formulations were enunciated. As so often is the case with theological matters, the doctrine of predestination was held in somewhat undeveloped form until serious disagreement arose regarding it. In the early years of the church, no exact formulation was devised. There was, particularly in the West, a growing conviction of the sinfulness of humans and of the consequent need for divine transforming grace.<sup>2</sup> In general, however, the logical implications of this conviction were not worked out until Augustine. His personal experience of God's grace enabled him to see more clearly than did others the teaching of Scripture on these matters. We must not think that his experience determined what he found in Scripture. Rather, his experience sensitized him, enabling him to identify with what he found there, and thus to understand it better.

Even before encountering the thought of Pelagius, Augustine had to a considerable extent developed his view of the human situation. He stressed that Adam had begun life truly free.<sup>3</sup> The only limitations upon his will and actions were the inherent limitations imposed by the very

1. E.g., Benjamin B. War-field took the position that "'foreordain' and 'predestinate' are exact synonyms, the choice between which can be determined only by taste"—"Predestination," in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University, 1929), p. 4. War-field uses "election" to designate what we are here labeling "predestination."

2. E.g., Tertullian *On the Soul* 39.

3. Augustine *On Rebuke and Grace* 33.

nature of humanity. Thus there was, for example, the possibility of change, which included the possibility of turning away from the good.<sup>4</sup> When Adam sinned, he became tainted in nature. Now inclined toward doing evil, he transmitted this propensity for sin to his descendants. As a result, the freedom to abstain from evil and do good has been lost. This is not to say that freedom of will in general is gone, but rather that we now invariably use that freedom in ways contrary to God's intention for us.<sup>5</sup> Without divine assistance we are unable to choose and do the good.

The views of Pelagius sharpened Augustine's thinking, forcing him to extend it beyond its previous bounds. Pelagius, a British monk, had relocated to Rome and had become a fashionable teacher there.<sup>6</sup> He was primarily a moralist rather than a theologian per se. Concerned that people live as virtuously as possible, he considered Augustine's emphasis upon the extreme corruption of human nature and its corollary, human inability, to be both demoralizing to any genuine effort at righteous living and insulting to God as well.<sup>7</sup> God made humans different from all of the rest of the creation; they are not subject to the laws of nature which control the rest of creation. Man has freedom of choice. This gift of God ought to be used to fulfil God's purposes.<sup>8</sup>

From this basic principle Pelagius developed his system. The first of its tenets is that each person enters the world with a will that has no bias in favor of evil. The fall of Adam has no direct effect upon each human's ability to do the right and the good, for every individual is directly created by God, and therefore does not inherit from Adam either evil or a tendency to evil.<sup>9</sup> Surely the God who forgives each person his or her own sin would not hold any of us responsible for the act of someone else. The only effect of Adam's sin upon his descendants, then, is that of a bad example. We do not inherit his corruption and guilt. There is no inherent spiritual and moral flaw in us from birth.<sup>10</sup>

Further, Pelagius held that God does not exert any special force upon anyone to choose the good. Such influence as he exerts is through external aids. There is no internal work of God upon the soul.<sup>11</sup> In particular, he makes no special choice of certain persons to holiness.

4. Augustine *The City of God* 14.12.

5. Augustine *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness* 9.

6. Although there is some question as to whether Pelagius was actually a monk, he was referred to as a *monachus*. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 357.

7. Pelagius *Letter to Demetrias* 16-17.

8. *Ibid.*, 16.

9. Pelagius *Exposition of Romans* 5: 15.

10. Pelagius *Demetrias* 8, 17.

11. Augustine *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin* 1, 2, 8, 36.

Grace is available equally to all persons. It consists of free will, apprehension of God through reason, and the law of Moses and the example of Christ. Each person has equal opportunity to benefit from these tokens of grace. God is impartial. Progress in holiness is made by merit alone, and God's predestining of persons is based entirely upon his foreseeing the quality of their lives.<sup>12</sup> One might conclude that it is possible to live without sinning. And Pelagius did indeed draw that conclusion. Would God have commanded, "You shall be holy; for I the L ORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2), and "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), if sinlessness were not a possibility for human beings?<sup>13</sup>

In response to this position, Augustine developed his view of predestination. He emphasized the seriousness of Adam's sin and pinned the blame solely on Adam's own act of will. But that sin was not merely Adam's. All of us were one with him and thus participated in his sin. Since the human soul is derived from one's parents through the generative process, we were present in Adam and sinned in and with him.<sup>14</sup> This means that all human beings begin life in a seriously marred condition. Augustine does not hold that the image of God has been completely destroyed, but he does maintain that we have lost the *liberty* not to sin, a liberty which Adam had.<sup>15</sup> Without God's grace, we are unable to avoid sin, and to do the good requires an even greater grace. This is not to say that man is not free. Man has options, but those options are all sinful in nature. He is free to choose, but merely to engage in one sin rather than another.<sup>16</sup> God's grace restores complete freedom; it returns to us the option of not sinning and of doing good. This grace, while irresistible, does not work against, but in concert with our wills. God so works in relationship to our wills that we freely choose the good. God, being omniscient, knows precisely under what conditions we will freely choose what he wills, and works in such a way as to bring about those conditions. Without this special working of God, man cannot choose or do good. While man always has free will, he is free to choose and do good only if and when God grants him that freedom.<sup>17</sup>

This line of argument brings Augustine to predestination. For if we do good only if God chooses to so work in relationship to our will, and if we will infallibly do good if God so wills, our choosing or doing good seems

<sup>12</sup> **Pelagius** *Exposition of Romans* 9–10; see also 8:29–30.

<sup>13</sup> **Pelagius On the Possibility of Not Sinning** 2.

<sup>14</sup> **Augustine On Marriage and Concupiscence** 2.15.

<sup>15</sup> **Augustine City of God** 22.24.2; 13.3, 14.

<sup>16</sup> **Augustine Against Two Letters of the Pelagians** 1.5; 3.24.

<sup>17</sup> **Augustine To Simplician—On Various Questions** 1.2. 13.

to be entirely a consequence of what God has already willed to do. It is a matter, then, of God's choosing to give grace to some and not to others. God has made this choice from all eternity, and has chosen exactly the number needed to replace the fallen angels.<sup>18</sup> This choice of certain people in no way depends upon his advance awareness of what they will do, for any good deeds of theirs depend instead upon his giving his grace to them.<sup>19</sup> There really is no answer to the question of how God decides who will receive his grace and who will be left in their sinful condition. He simply chooses as he pleases. There is, however, no injustice in this, for justice would result in God's condemning all. It is only by an act of great compassion that he saves anyone. The condemned receive just what they deserve. The elect receive more than they deserve.

The outspoken attacks of Augustine led to the condemnation of Pelagianism by the Council of Ephesus in 431, one year after Augustine's death. What prevailed afterwards, however, was not really a pure Augustinianism, but a semi-Pelagianism. Despite the acceptance of many of Augustine's terms, the doctrine of synergism, which holds that God and man together accomplish what must be done in order for man to be saved, tended to predominate. This position was considered and condemned by the Synod of Orange in 529. The synod spoke in strong terms of the inability of man and the necessity of divine grace, but did not insist on absolute predestination (i.e., the doctrine that God by an unalterable eternal decree has determined who is to be saved; being totally of God's grace, salvation in no way depends upon man or what he does) and irresistible grace.<sup>20</sup>

This milder form of Augustinianism prevailed for several centuries. In the ninth century, Gottschalk defended the doctrine of double predestination-predestination applies equally to the elect and the lost. Gottschalk's views were condemned by a synod of bishops at Mainz in 848. Controversy ensued. One of the most interesting positions was that taken by Johannes Scotus Erigena. While charging Gottschalk with heresy, Erigena agreed with him in rejecting the idea that God's predestination is based upon his foreknowledge of what men will do. That had been a rather common way of dealing with the apparent inconsistency between divine predestination and human freedom. It had been advanced particularly by Origen as a solution to the problem. Now, however, Erigena contended that since God is eternal, he sees things as neither past nor

<sup>18</sup> **Augustine City of God** 22. 1.2.

<sup>19</sup> **Augustine On the Gift of Perseverance** 35, 47-48; *On the Predestination of the Saints* 19.

<sup>20</sup> **Harry Buis, Historic Protestantism and Predestination** (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958), p. 15.

future. He sees all of us and sees us all at once.<sup>21</sup> Because God stands outside time, the concept of foreknowledge is alien to him.

In the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, several outstanding theologians advocated the Augustinian position. Anselm reconciled this position with freedom of the will by insisting that the person who can do only right is freer than one who can do wrong.<sup>22</sup> The latter is actually a slave to sin. Peter Lombard held a similar view. Thomas Aquinas followed the Augustinian position on these matters, maintaining that God wills that some men be saved and others not. He drew a distinction between God's general will that all be saved and his special will in electing some and rejecting others: "God wills all men to be saved by His antecedent will, which is to will not simply but relatively; and not by His consequent will, which is to will simply."<sup>23</sup>

From this time until the Reformation, the predominant trend within Catholic theology was a drift toward Pelagianism. There were some notable exceptions, such as John Wycliffe and Thomas Bradwardine, but for the most part Duns Scotus's emphasis upon God's foreknowledge of individual worthiness reflected the position of the church. When Martin Luther made his conspicuous appearance, this was one of the major points against which he contended.

So much emphasis has been given in the popular mind to John Calvin's view of predestination that it is scarcely realized how strongly Luther held and taught a similar view. His "spiritual father," Johann von Staupitz, was an Augustinian monk who promoted Augustine's ideas, so much so that the University of Wittenberg, where Staupitz was dean of the theology faculty, became decidedly Augustinian in orientation. When Luther began wrestling with the subject of predestination, he followed the approach of the Ockhamists: predestination is based upon God's foreknowledge of what man will do. As he studied the Scriptures and also the writings of Augustine, however, his views began to change. His *Commentary on Romans*, which consists of notes for lectures given between November 3, 1515, and September 7, 1516, indicates a firm commitment to the Augustinian position. In connection with Romans 8:28, for example, Luther points to God's absolute sovereignty with respect to humans in the Old Testament, particularly his election of Isaac and rejection of Ishmael, and his election of Jacob and rejection of Esau (see Rom. 9:6–18). Luther insists that all objections to the Augustinian position derive from the wisdom of the flesh, which is human reason. His comments on Romans 9 underscore his firm commitment to Augustinianism.

21. Ibid., p. 17.

22. Anselm On Freedom of Choice 1.

23. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, part 1, question 23, article 4.

Erasmus was urged by the pope to use his rhetorical powers to refute Luther. The result was *The Freedom of the Will*, published in 1524. Luther replied in the following year with *The Bondage Of the Will*, a lengthy treatise on the subject.

It was John Calvin, however, who made the definitive statement on the subject. Indeed, the doctrine of predestination is closely associated with his name to this day. Calvin makes clear that the study of predestination is not merely an academic exercise, but has practical significance as well. He warns against delving too deeply into the subject.<sup>24</sup> While disagreeing with Ulrich Zwingli's contention that sin was necessary in order that the glory of God might be properly set forth, Calvin does insist that God has sovereignly and freely chosen to save some and reject others. God is wholly just and blameless in all of this.<sup>25</sup>

Calvin insists that the doctrine of predestination does not lead to carelessness in morality, to a cavalier attitude that we can continue in sin since our election is sure. Rather, knowledge of our election leads us to pursue a holy life. The way in which a believer can be sure of election is to see the Word of God transforming his or her life.<sup>26</sup>

Calvin established a university in Geneva to which candidates for the ministry came to study. He himself occupied the chair of theology. An especially large number came from the Low Countries; as a result, Calvinism became particularly strong there. His successor, Theodore Beza, not only maintained Calvin's teaching of double predestination, but extended it at some points. Not only did he hold that God has decided to send some to hell, he did not hesitate to say that God *causes* men to sin. Further, he believed that, despite the absence of any specific biblical statements, the logical order of God's decrees can be determined.<sup>27</sup> He believed that the decree to save some and damn others is logically prior to the decision to create. The conclusion is that God creates some persons *in order to* damn them. This belief-supralapsarianism-in time came to be widely regarded as the official position of Calvinism.

There were at various times disagreements with and departures from this interpretation of the decrees. Probably the most serious occurred in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. An educated layman named Theodore Koornhert, objecting to Beza's supralapsarianism, observed that if God causes men to sin, then he is actually the author of sin. The Bible, argued Koornhert, does not teach such a

24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 3, chapter 21, section 1.

25. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 364–66 (Rom. 9:20–21).

26. Calvin, *Institutes*, book 3, chapter 23, section 12.

27. Theodore Beza, *Tractationes*, 1. 171–77.

monstrous thing. Because no one came forward to refute Koornhert's teachings, James Arminius, a popular pastor in Amsterdam and a brilliant expository preacher, was commissioned to do so.

Arminius began his task with zeal, concentrating upon Romans 9. The more he studied the Bible and the history of the church, however, the less certain he became of double predestination and particularly of Beza's supralapsarianism. Installed as a professor of theology at the University of Leyden, he was accused of being a semi-Pelagian and even a Catholic. The dissension at the university became so severe that the government stepped in. Attempts at reconciliation were ended with the death of Arminius in 1609.

The views of Arminius are quite clear and can be readily summarized. God's first absolute decree regarding salvation was not the assignment of certain individuals to eternal life and others to damnation, but the appointment of his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of the human race. Second, God decreed that all who repent and believe shall be saved. In addition, God has granted to all persons sufficient grace to enable them to believe. They freely believe or disbelieve on their own. God does not believe for us or compel us to believe. Finally, God predestines those who he foreknows will believe.<sup>28</sup>

In the eighteenth century, John Wesley popularized Arminianism. In fact, for many years he edited a magazine called *The Arminian*. While holding to the freedom of the will, Wesley went beyond Arminius by emphasizing the idea of prevenient or universal grace. This grace, which God grants to all men, is the basis of any human good which is found in the world. This prevenient grace also makes it possible for any person to accept the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

### Differing Views of Predestination

#### *Calvinism*

What is designated Calvinism has taken many different forms over the years. We shall here examine certain common features found in all of them. A mnemonic aid sometimes used to summarize the complete system is the acronym TULIP: total depravity, unconditional predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance.<sup>30</sup> While

28. James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 reprint), vol. 1, pp. 247-48.

29. John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1979).

30. See, e.g., Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972); Duane Edward Spencer, *TULIP The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

there are somewhat varying interpretations of these expressions, and not all of these concepts are essential to our current considerations, we will utilize them as the framework for our examination of this view of predestination.

Calvinists think of the whole human race as lost in sin. They emphasize the concept of total depravity: every individual is so sinful as to be unable to respond to any offer of grace. This condition, which we fully deserve, involves both moral corruption (and hence moral disability) and liability to punishment (guilt). All persons begin life in this condition. For this reason it is called "original sin." Calvinist theologians disagree as to how Adam's sin produced this effect in us. Some hold that Adam was our representative and that, accordingly, his sin is imputed or charged to us.<sup>31</sup> We are treated as if we had committed the sin ourselves. Others adopt Augustine's view that the entire human race was actually present in Adam germinally or seminally, so that we did in fact sin. Although we were not personally conscious of sinning, it was our sin nonetheless.<sup>32</sup>

Sometimes the phrase "total inability" is used to describe the human condition. This terminology stresses that the sinner has lost the ability to do good and is unable to convert himself.<sup>33</sup> A key passage often cited is Ephesians 2:1-3: "And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Numerous other passages indicate both the universality and the seriousness of this condition (e.g., John 6:44; Rom. 3:1-23; 2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Calvinism's second major concept is the sovereignty of God. He is the Creator and Lord of all things, and consequently he is free to do whatever he wills.<sup>34</sup> He is not subject to or answerable to anyone. Man is in no position to judge God for what he does. One of the passages frequently cited in this connection is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. The master hired some workers early in the morning, some at the third hour, some the sixth, some the ninth, and, finally, some at the eleventh hour. Those who were hired at the eleventh hour were paid the same amount promised to those hired at the beginning of the day. When those hired

31. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 2, pp. 192-205.

32. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1907), pp. 619-37.

33. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), pp. 61-82.

34. Benjamin B. Warfield, "Perfectionism," in *Biblical Doctrines*, pp. 62-64.

earlier complained about this seeming injustice, the master replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" (Matt. 20: 13-1 5). Another significant passage is Paul's metaphor of the potter and the clay. To the individual who complains that God is unjust, Paul responds: "But, who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?" (Rom. 9:20-21). This concept of divine sovereignty, together with human inability, is basic to the Calvinistic doctrine of election. Without these two concepts the remainder of the doctrine makes little sense.

Election, according to Calvinism, is God's choice of certain persons for his special favor. It may refer to the choice of Israel as God's special covenant people or to the choice of individuals to some special office. The sense which primarily concerns us here, however, is the choice of certain persons to be God's spiritual children and thus recipients of eternal life.<sup>35</sup> One biblical evidence that God has selected certain individuals for salvation is found in Ephesians 1:4-5: "even as [the Father] chose us in [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Jesus indicated that the initiative had been his in the selection of his disciples to eternal life: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15: 16). The ability to come to Jesus depends upon the initiative of the Father: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44; see also v. 65). Conversely, all who are given to Jesus by the Father will come to him "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out" (John 6:37). Furthermore, in Acts 13:48 we read that "when the Gentiles heard this [the offer of salvation], they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

The interpretation that God's choice or selection of certain individuals for salvation is absolute or unconditional is in keeping with God's actions in other contexts, such as his choice of the nation Israel, which followed through on the selection of Jacob and rejection of Esau. In Romans 9 Paul argues impressively that all of these choices are totally of God and

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

in no way depend on the people chosen. Having quoted God's statement to Moses in Exodus 33: 19, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion," Paul comments, "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9: 15-1 6).<sup>36</sup>

We have already seen several characteristics of election as viewed by Calvinists. One is that election is an expression of the sovereign will or good pleasure of God. It is not based on any merit in the one elected. Nor is it based upon foreseeing that the individual will believe. It is the cause, not the result, of faith. Second, election is efficacious. Those whom God has chosen will most certainly come to faith in him and, for that matter, will persevere in that faith to the end. All of the elect will certainly be saved. Third, election is from all eternity. It is not a decision made at some point in time when the individual is already existent. It is what God has always purposed to do. Fourth, election is unconditional. It does not depend upon man's performing a specific action or meeting certain conditions or terms of God. It is not that God wills to save people if they do certain things. He simply wills to save them and brings it about. Finally, election is immutable. God does not change his mind. Election is from all eternity and out of God's infinite mercy; he has no reason or occasion to change his mind.<sup>37</sup>

For the most part, Calvinists insist that election is not inconsistent with free will, that is, as they understand the term. They deny, however, that humans have free will in the Arminian sense. What Calvinists emphasize is that sin has removed, if not freedom, at least the ability to exercise freedom properly. Loraine Boettner, for example, compares fallen humanity to a bird with a broken wing. The bird is "free" to fly, but is unable to do so. Likewise, "the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors."<sup>38</sup> It is only when God comes in his special grace to those whom he has chosen that they are able to respond. Then, seeing clearly and vividly the nature of their sins and the greatness, glory, and love of God, they will most assuredly and infallibly turn to him.

There are variations among Calvinists. Some hold to double predestination, the belief that God chooses some to be saved and others to be lost. Calvin called this a "horrible decree," but nevertheless held it because he found it in the Bible.<sup>39</sup> Others say that God actively chooses

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 114-15.

<sup>38</sup> Boettner, *Predestination*, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, book 3, chapter 23, section 7

those who are to receive eternal life, and passes by all the others, leaving them in their self-chosen sins.<sup>40</sup> The effect is the same in both cases, but the latter view assigns the lostness of the nonelect to their own choice of sin rather than to the active decision of God, or to God's choice by omission rather than commission.

The other major variation among Calvinists has to do with the logical order of God's decrees. Here we distinguish the supralapsarian, infralapsarian, and sublapsarian positions. The terminology relates to whether, logically, the decree to save comes before or after the decree to permit the fall. The positions also differ on whether the atonement was for all or only for those chosen to be saved:

#### Supralapsarianism

1. The decree to save some and condemn others.
2. The decree to create both the elect and the reprobate.
3. The decree to permit the fall of both classes.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.

#### Infralapsarianism

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to save some and condemn others.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.<sup>41</sup>

#### Sublapsarianism (unlimited atonement with a limited application)

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to provide salvation sufficient for all.
4. The decree to choose some to receive this salvation.<sup>42</sup>

#### Arminianism

Arminianism is a term which covers a large number of subpositions. It may range all the way from the evangelical views of Arminius himself to left-wing liberalism. Arminius maintained that man is sinful and unable to do good in his own strength.<sup>43</sup> Extreme liberalism, however, discounts the human tendency to sin and, consequently, denies that man needs to be regenerated.<sup>44</sup> Arminianism also includes conventional

**40.** Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 789-90.

**41.** Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), p.31.

**42.** Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 778-79.

**43.** Arminius, *Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 252-53.

**44.** Eugene W. Lyman, *Theology and Human Problems* (New York: Scribner, 1910), pp. 190-98.

Roman Catholicism with its emphasis on the necessity of works in the process of salvation. For the most part, we will be considering the more conservative or evangelical form of Arminianism, but we will construe it in a fashion broad enough to encompass the position of most Arminians.

While statements of the Arminian view vary to some degree, there is a logical starting point: the concept that God desires all persons to be saved.<sup>45</sup> Arminians point to some definite assertions of Scripture. God made clear in the Old Testament that he did not desire the death of anyone, including the wicked: "Say to them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11). That God finds no pleasure in the death of sinners is also clear from Peter's statement, "The Lord is not slow about his promises as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Paul echoes a similar sentiment: "God our Savior ... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). This is also precisely what Paul declared to the Athenians: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men 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 men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). Note particularly the two occurrences of "all" (*πᾶσι*).

It is not only in didactic statements, but in the universal character of many of God's commands and exhortations that his desire for the salvation of the entire human race is seen. The Old Testament contains universal invitations; for instance, "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!" (Isa. 55:1). Jesus' invitation was similarly without restriction: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). These and like passages are so strong and clear that even as staunch a Calvinist as Boettner has to concede, "It is true that some verses taken in themselves do seem to imply the Arminian position."<sup>46</sup> If, contrary to what these verses seem to imply, it is not God's intent that all persons be saved, he must be insincere in his offer.

A second major conception of Arminianism is that all persons are able to believe or to meet the conditions of salvation. If this were not the case, the universal invitations to salvation would make little sense. But is there

**45.** Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1869), pp. 387,392.

**46.** Boettner, *Predestination*, p. 295.

room in theology for the concept that all persons are able to believe? There is, if we modify or eliminate the idea of the total depravity of sinners. Or like Wesley and others, we might adopt the concept of "prevenient grace." It is this latter position that will occupy our attention here.<sup>47</sup>

As generally understood, prevenient grace is grace that is given by God to all men indiscriminately. It is seen in God's sending the sunshine and the rain upon all. It is also the basis of all the goodness found in men everywhere. Beyond that, it is universally given to counteract the effect of sin. Henry Thiessen put it thus: "Since mankind is hopelessly dead in trespasses and sins and can do nothing to obtain salvation, God graciously restores to all men sufficient ability to make a choice in the matter of submission to Him. This is the salvation-bringing grace of God that has appeared to all men."<sup>48</sup> Since God has given this grace to all, everyone is capable of accepting the offer of salvation; consequently, there is no need for any special application of God's grace to particular individuals.

A third basic concept is the role of foreknowledge in the election of persons to salvation. For the most part, Arminians desire to retain the term *election* and the idea that individuals are foreordained to salvation. This means that God must prefer some people to others. In the Arminian view, he chooses some to receive salvation, whereas he merely passes the others by. Those who are predestined by God are those who in his infinite knowledge he is able to foresee will accept the offer of salvation made in Jesus Christ. This view is based upon the close connection in Scripture between foreknowledge and foreordination or predestination. The primary passage appealed to is Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." A supporting text is 1 Peter 1:1-2, where Peter addresses the "elect, ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (NIV). In the former instance, the key word for our consideration is the verb *προγνωσκω*; in the latter, its noun form *πρόγνωσις*. Both references represent foreordination as based upon and resulting from foreknowledge.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, the Arminian raises objections to the Calvinistic understanding of predestination as unconditional or absolute. Some of these are practical rather than theoretical in nature. Many of them reduce down to the

47. Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes; or, A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity* (New York: Lane and Scott, 1850), vol. 2, p. 377.

48. Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 344-45.

49. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1958), vol. 2, p. 351.

idea that Calvinism is fatalistic. If God has determined everything that is to occur, does it really make any difference what humans do? Ethical behavior becomes irrelevant. If we are elect, does it matter how we live? We will be saved regardless of our actions. Mildred Wynkoop sums up Arminianism as "an ethical protest against the antinomian tendencies of Calvinism. If men are in every way determined by predestination, the ethical demands of holiness are not relevant to the Christian life."<sup>50</sup>

A further objection is that Calvinism negates any missionary or evangelistic impulse. If God has already chosen who will be saved, and their number cannot be increased, then what is the point of preaching the gospel? The elect will be saved anyway, and neither more nor less than the appointed number will come to Christ. So why bother to raise funds, send missionaries, preach the gospel, or pray for the lost? Such activities must surely be exercises in futility.<sup>51</sup>

The last objection is that the Calvinistic doctrine of decrees is a contradiction to human freedom. The thoughts that we have, the choices that we make, and the actions that we carry out are not really our doing. God has from all eternity foreordained them. If that is the case, we could not have done anything other than what we in fact did. Our actions are not really free; they are caused by an external force, namely, God. And so we are not really human in the traditional sense of that word. We are automatons, robots, or machines. This, however, contradicts everything that we know about ourselves and the way in which we regard others as well. There is no point in God's commanding us for having done good, or rebuking us for having done evil, for we could not have done otherwise.<sup>52</sup>

#### Karl Barth

Because of the difficulty in understanding the doctrine of predestination, and because of the problems attached to the two classic views, there have been, down through the years of church history, attempts to formulate a less troublesome position. Of the many constructions which have been developed to give a choice other than the two classic views, one of the most interesting was posed in the twentieth century by Karl Barth. As a Reformed theologian, Barth quite naturally desired to treat this puzzling topic, which he regarded as basic and central to all of theology. He felt, however, that his tradition had misunderstood the biblical witness here. Conscious that he was departing from the conven-

50. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1967), p. 65.

51. John Wesley, "Free Grace," in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 7, p. 376.

52. Wakefield, *Complete System*, pp. 326-35; Wesley, "Free Grace," pp. 376-77.

tional Reformed position, he followed in his treatment of predestination the principle which is fundamental to all of his theology, the centrality of Jesus Christ.

Barth's doctrine of election begins with a critique of the traditional Calvinist position that God in eternity determined in a final and absolute fashion who is to be saved and who is to be lost. He regards this position as a misreading of the Bible, a misreading based upon a metaphysical belief that God's relationship to the universe is static-certain individuals have from all eternity been chosen and others rejected, and this cannot be altered. Barth admits that the older theologians went to the Bible, especially Romans 9 and Ephesians 1. They did not read the Bible in the right way, however, nor did they choose the right starting point. What must be done is to read the Bible christologically, making Jesus Christ the starting point for the doctrine.<sup>53</sup>

If we would formulate a doctrine of predestination, says Barth, we must do so in the light of God's work of revelation and atonement.<sup>54</sup> Here we encounter the fact that Jesus Christ came to save men. Barth maintains that there is an intricate connection between the fact that Christ is at the center of God's work within time and the eternal foreordaining of that work in the divine election.<sup>55</sup> If this is the case, God's will was to elect, not reject men. The incarnation is proof that God is for men, not against them. He has chosen them, not rejected them.

When Barth comes to ask who has been chosen by God, this christological basis continues. In place of the static, fixed, and absolute decree found in Calvin's thought, Barth substitutes the person of Christ. This is the essential modification which he makes in the traditional view of predestination.<sup>56</sup> The major point in his conception of predestination is that the eternal will of God is the election of Jesus Christ. We are not to look for some will of God beyond or behind the work that he has done within history through Christ. As Barth sees it, the traditional view regarded God's will as an unchangeable decree formed from eternity; he was bound to carry out this will within time. Barth posits a more dynamic view: God, like a king, is free to correct, suspend, or replace his decree.<sup>57</sup> Barth speaks of a 'holy mutability' of God; he is not a prisoner of his own decree in such a fashion as to lead to virtual deism. The unchanging element is not, in Barth's view, an eternal choice of some

53. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957), vol. 2, part 2, pp. 145-48.

54. Ibid., p. 174.

55. Ibid., p. 149.

56. Ibid., p. 161.

57. Ibid., p. 181.

and rejection of others. It is the constancy of God in his triune being as freely chosen love.

The choice of Jesus Christ is not as an isolated individual, however. For in him the entire human race has been chosen.<sup>58</sup> But even this is not the whole of the doctrine of election, for Christ is not merely the elected man; he is also the electing God. He freely obeyed the Father by electing to become man. Barth speaks of Christ as "the concrete and manifest form of the divine decision-the decision of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit-in favour of the covenant to be established between Him and us."<sup>59</sup> Whenever Barth speaks of double predestination, he means that Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected man. There is also a duality of content which approximates the traditional understanding of double predestination. For in choosing to become man Christ chose "reprobation, perdition, and death."<sup>60</sup> He voluntarily experienced rejection by humanity; this is most vividly seen in the cross. He chose reprobation for himself in choosing election and life for mankind.

For Barth, the beginning point in the discussion of election is, as we have seen, the election of Jesus Christ. Orthodox Reformed theology went wrong in part because it began with human individuals rather than the elected man and electing God, Jesus Christ. Between the election of Christ and of the individual, moreover, there is an intermediate election of the community, which exists to proclaim Jesus Christ and to call the world to faith in him.<sup>61</sup> When Barth does turn to consider election of the individual as the third step in his discussion, he does not speak of double predestination. Rather, he speaks of a universal election. All human beings have been elected in Jesus Christ. This is not to say that Barth holds to universal salvation, a subject he deals with very cautiously without ever really committing himself. Although all are elect, not all live as elect. Some live as if they were rejected. This is of one's own choosing and doing, however. The task of the elected community is to proclaim to such a person that "he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and is therefore not rejected, but elected by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision."<sup>62</sup>

There is no absolute difference between the elect and the rejected, the believers and the unbelievers, according to Barth, for all have been

58. Ibid., p. 229.

59. Ibid., p. 105.

60. Ibid., p. 163.

61. Ibid., p. 195.

62. Ibid., p. 306.

elected. The former have realized the fact of their election and are living in the light of it; the latter are still living as if they were not elect.<sup>63</sup> Christians from a traditional background might wish to pry open the question of whether the rejected ones who are actually elect are also saved, but Barth will not open that tangled issue. The church should not take too seriously the unbelief of the rejected ones. In the ultimate sense, there is no rejection of man by God. God has in Christ chosen rejection for himself, but election for man.

### A Suggested Solution

We must now attempt to arrive at some conclusions regarding the nettlesome matter of the decrees of God with respect to salvation. Note that we are not dealing here with the whole matter of the decrees of God in general. In other words, we are not considering whether God renders certain every event that occurs within all of time and within the entire universe. That question has already been raised and dealt with in chapter 16 of this work. Here we are concerned merely with the issue of whether some are singled out by God to be special recipients of his grace. To be sure, the broader question may have to be faced as we proceed, but at present it is a secondary issue.

We begin with an examination of the biblical data. Scripture speaks of election in several different senses. Election sometimes refers to God's choice of Israel as his specially favored people. It occasionally points to the selection of individuals to special positions of privilege and service, and, of course, to selection to salvation. In view of the varied meanings of election, any attempt to limit our discussion to only one of them will inevitably result in a truncation of the topic.

The vocabulary of predestination needs to be closely examined. There are several relevant terms in both Hebrew and Greek. The Hebrew בָּחָר (*bachar*) and the Greek ἐκλέγομαι are roughly equivalent terms. They refer to God's choosing or selecting from the human race certain persons for a special relationship to himself.<sup>64</sup> The Greek verb προορίζω refers to predetermining or fixing beforehand.<sup>65</sup> Not all of its occurrences are in

63. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

64. Francis-Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), pp. 103-04; Lothar Coenen, "Elect, Choose," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 536-43.

65. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), p. 382; Paul Jacobs and Hartmut Krienke, "Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 695-96.

connection with ultimate destiny, however. The verb προτίθημι and noun πρόθεσις refer to planning, purposing, or resolving to do something.<sup>66</sup> All of these terms convey the idea of initiating an action.

Prior to investigating the Bible's teaching that God has specially chosen some to have eternal life, it is important to consider its vivid picture of the lostness, blindness, and inability of humans in their natural state to respond in faith to the opportunity for salvation. In Romans, especially chapter 3, Paul depicts the human race as hopelessly separated from God because of their sin. They are unable to do anything to extricate themselves from this condition, and in fact, being quite blind to their situation, have no desire to do so. Calvinists and conservative Arminians agree on this. It is not merely that humans cannot in their natural state do good works of a type that would justify them in God's sight. Beyond that, they are afflicted with spiritual blindness (Rom. 1: 18-23; 2 Cor. 4:3-4) and insensitivity. Jesus described their plight vividly when he explained that he spoke in parables to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy: "You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them" (Matt. 13:14-15, quoting Isa. 6:9-10). Paul makes clear that spiritual inability is a universal condition true of Jews and Gentiles alike: "All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God'" (Rom. 3:9-11).

If this is the case, it follows that no one would ever respond to the gospel call without some special action by God. It is here that many Arminians, recognizing human inability as taught in the Scripture, introduce the concept of preventient grace, which is believed to have a universal effect nullifying the noetic results of sin, thus making belief possible. The problem is that there is no clear and adequate basis in Scripture for this concept of a universal enablement. The theory, appealing though it is in many ways, simply is not taught explicitly in the Bible.

Brought back to the question of why some believe, we do find an impressive collection of texts suggesting that God has selected some to be saved, and that our response to the offer of salvation depends upon this prior decision and initiative by God. For example, in connection with Jesus' explaining that he spoke in parables so that some would hear but not understand, we observe that he went on to say to the disciples, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (Matt.

66. Abbott-Smith, *Lexicon*, pp. 380, 390; Jacobs and Krienke, "Foreknowledge," pp. 696-97.

13: 16). One might construe this to mean that they were not as spiritually incapacitated as were the other hearers. We can get a better grasp of what is entailed here, however, if we look at Matthew 16. Jesus had asked the disciples who men said that he was, and they had recited the varied opinions—John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (v. 14). Peter, however, confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Jesus’ comment is instructive: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (v. 17). It was a special action of God which made the difference between the disciples and the spiritually blind and deaf. This is in accordance with Jesus’ statements, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44), and “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). Jesus also tells us that this drawing and choosing are efficacious: “All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out” (John 6:37); “Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (v. 45).

The concept that our belief depends on God’s initiative also appears in the Book of Acts, where Luke tells us that when the Gentiles at Antioch of Pisidia heard of salvation, “they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Some have attempted to argue that the verb here (*τεταγμένου*) should be understood as being in the middle voice rather than the passive. Their rendition of the last clause in this verse is “as many as appointed themselves to eternal life believed.” There are several logical difficulties with such an understanding, however. One’s belief is supposedly a result of one’s ordaining himself to eternal life. But how can a person who has not believed take such action? Note also the root meaning of the word *τάσσω*—“to arrange in an orderly fashion.” Can an unregenerate and spiritually impotent person really arrange his life in an orderly fashion?

Nor is the argument that God’s foreordaining is based upon his foreknowledge persuasive. For the word *υπ<sup>τ</sup>(yada')*, which seems to lie behind Paul’s use of *προγνωσκω*, signifies more than an advance knowledge or precognition. It carries the connotation of a very positive and intimate relationship. It suggests looking with favor upon or loving someone, and is even used of sexual relations.<sup>67</sup> What is in view, then, is not a neutral advance knowledge of what someone will do, but an affirmative choice of that person. Against this Hebraic background it appears likely that the references to foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:1-2 are presenting foreknowledge not as the grounds for predestination, but as a confirmation of it.

<sup>67.</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, p. 394; Jacobs and Krienke, “Foreknowledge,” pp. 692-93.

But what of the universal offers of salvation and the general invitations to the hearers to believe? Arminians sometimes argue that on Calvinistic grounds, someone might choose to accept salvation, but not be permitted to be saved. But according to the Calvinistic understanding this scenario never takes place, for no one is able to will to be saved, to come to God, to believe, without special enablements. God sincerely offers salvation to all, but all of us are so settled in our sins that we will not respond unless assisted to do so.

Is there real freedom in such a situation? Here we refer the reader to our general discussion of human freedom in relationship to the plan of God (chapter 16). We must note additionally, however, that we are now dealing specifically with spiritual ability or freedom of choice in regard to the critical issue of salvation. And here the chief consideration is depravity. If, as we have argued in chapter 29 and this chapter, humans in the unregenerate state are totally depraved and unable to respond to God’s grace, there is no question as to whether they are free to accept the offer of salvation—no one is! Rather, the question to be asked is, Is anyone who is specially called free to reject the offer of grace? The position taken herein is not that those who are called *must* respond, but that God makes his offer so appealing that they *will* respond affirmatively.

### Implications of Predestination

Correctly understood, the doctrine of predestination has several significant implications:

1. We can have confidence that what God has decided will come to pass. His plan will be fulfilled, and the elect will come to faith.
2. We need not criticize ourselves when some people reject Christ. Jesus himself did not win everyone in his audience. He understood that all those whom the Father gave to him would come to him (John 6:37) and only they would come (v. 44). When we have done our very best, we can leave the matter with the Lord.
3. Predestination does not nullify incentive for evangelism and missions. We do not know who the elect and the *nonelect* are, so we must continue to spread the Word. Our evangelistic efforts are God’s means to bring the elect to salvation. God’s ordaining of the end includes the ordaining of the means to that end as well. The knowledge that missions are God’s means is a strong motive for the endeavor and gives us confidence that it will prove successful.

4. Grace is absolutely necessary. While Arminianism often gives strong emphasis to grace, in our Calvinistic scheme there is no basis for God's choice of some to eternal life other than his own sovereign will. There is nothing in the individual which persuades God to grant salvation to him or her.

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# 44

## The Beginning of Salvation: Subjective Aspects

### Effectual Calling

The Logical Order: Effectual Calling, Conversion, Regeneration

### Conversion

Repentance

Faith

### Regeneration

Implications of Effectual Calling, Conversion, and Regeneration

The doctrine of salvation encompasses a large and complex area of biblical teaching and of human experience. Consequently, it is necessary to draw some distinctions among its various facets. While we could organize the material in many different ways, we have chosen to utilize a temporal scheme. We will look at salvation in terms of its beginning, continuation, and completion. Chapters 44 and 45 both deal with the inception of the Christian life. They are distinguished, however, by a difference of perspective. Conversion and regeneration (Chapter 44) are subjective aspects of the beginning of the Christian life; they deal

with change in our inward nature, our spiritual condition. Conversion is this change as viewed from the human perspective; regeneration is this change as viewed from God's perspective. Union with Christ, justification, and adoption (Chapter 45), on the other hand, are objective aspects of the beginning of the Christian life; they refer primarily to the relationship between the individual and God.

### **Effectual Calling**

There are certain matters which are preliminary to actual salvation. In the preceding chapter we examined the whole complex of issues involved in predestination, concluding that God chooses some persons to be saved and that their conversion is a result of that decision on God's part. Because all humans are lost in sin, spiritually blind, and unable to believe, however, some action by God must intervene between his eternal decision and the conversion of the individual within time. This activity of God is termed special or effectual calling.

It is apparent from Scripture that there is a general calling to salvation, an invitation extended to all persons. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). There is a universal dimension to Isaiah's "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isa. 45:22). This passage appears to emphasize the exclusiveness of God more than the universality of his offer, but the latter is there, nonetheless. Further, when Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14), he was probably referring to God's universal invitation. But note the distinction here between calling and choosing. Those who are chosen are the objects of God's special or effectual calling.

In several New Testament references to God's calling, it is implied that not everyone is being called. This is implied, for example, in Romans 8:30: "And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." Here the classes of those predestined, called, justified, and glorified seem to be coextensive. If that is the case, the calling must be efficacious—those who are called are actually saved. The efficacy of this calling is also alluded to in 1 Corinthians 1:9: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Other references to God's effectual special calling include Luke 14:23; Romans 1:7; 11:29; 1 Corinthians 1:23–24, 26; Ephesians 1: 18; Philippians 3: 14; 1 Thessalonians 2: 12; 2 Thessalonians 2: 14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3: 1; 2 Peter 1:10.

Special calling means that God works in a particularly effective way

with the elect, enabling them to respond in repentance and faith, and rendering it certain that they will. The circumstances of special calling can vary widely. We see Jesus issuing special invitations to those who became the inner circle of disciples (see, e.g., Matt. 4: 18–22; Mark 1:16–20; John 1:35–51). He singled out Zacchaeus for particular attention (Luke 19:1–10). In these cases, Jesus established a close contact with the individuals called. He no doubt presented his claims in a direct and personal fashion which carried a special persuasiveness not felt by the surrounding crowd. We see another dramatic approach by God in the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–19). In this instance God made a unique entreaty. Sometimes his calling takes a quieter form, as in the case of Lydia: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16: 14).

Special calling is in large measure the Holy Spirit's work of illumination, enabling the recipient to understand the true meaning of the gospel. This working of the Spirit is necessary because the depravity which is characteristic of all humans prevents them from grasping God's revealed truth. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 2:6–16, George Ladd remarks that

the first work of the Spirit is to enable men to understand the divine work of redemption... . This [the cross] was an event whose meaning was folly to Greeks and an offense to Jews. But to those enlightened by the Spirit, it is the wisdom of God. In other words, Paul recognizes a hidden meaning in the historical event of the death of Christ ("God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," II Cor. 5:19) that is not evident to the human eye but which can be accepted only by a supernatural illumination. The Spirit does not reveal heavenly realities but the true meaning of an historical event. He does not impart some kind of "gnostic" esoteric truth but the real meaning of an event in history. Only by the illumination of the Spirit can men understand the meaning of the cross; only by the Spirit can men therefore confess that Jesus who was executed is also the Lord (1 Cor. 12:3).<sup>1</sup>

Special or effectual calling, then, involves an extraordinary presentation of the message of salvation. It is sufficiently powerful to counteract the effects of sin and enable the person to believe. It is also so appealing that the person will believe. Special calling is in many ways similar to the prevenient grace of which Arminians speak. It differs from that concept, however, in two respects. It is bestowed only upon the elect, not upon all humans, and it leads infallibly or efficaciously to a positive response by the recipient.

1. George E. Ladd, *A Theology Of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 490–91.

### The Logical Order: Effectual Calling, Conversion, Regeneration

Special calling is logically prior to conversion and leads to it. Here we must ask whether regeneration also is logically prior to conversion, or whether the converse is true. This is an issue which has traditionally separated Arminians and Calvinists from one another. Arminians have insisted that conversion is prior.<sup>2</sup> It is a prerequisite to new birth. One repents and believes, and therefore God saves and transforms. If this were not the case, a rather mechanical situation would prevail: God would do it all; there would really be no human element of response; and the appeals to the hearers of the gospel to be converted would be insincere. Calvinists, on the other hand, have insisted that if all persons are truly sinners, totally depraved and incapable of responding to God's grace, no one can be converted unless first regenerated. Repentance and faith are not human capabilities.<sup>3</sup>

It should be pointed out that we are not talking here about temporal succession. Conversion and new birth occur simultaneously. Rather, the question is whether one is converted because of God's work of regeneration within, or whether God regenerates the individual because of his or her repentance and belief. It must be acknowledged that, from a logical standpoint, the usual Calvinistic position makes good sense. If we sinful humans are unable to believe and respond to God's gospel without some special working of his within us, how can anyone, even the elect, believe unless first rendered capable of belief through regeneration? To say that conversion is prior to regeneration would seem to be a denial of total depravity.

Nonetheless, the biblical evidence favors the position that conversion is prior to regeneration. Various appeals to respond to the gospel imply that conversion results in regeneration. Among them is Paul's reply to the Philippian jailor (we are here assuming that regeneration is part of the process of being saved): "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Peter makes a similar statement in his Pentecost sermon: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). This appears to be the pattern throughout the New Testament. Even John Murray, who unequivocally regards regeneration as prior, appears to deny his own position when he says, "The faith of which we are now speaking is not

2. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1958), vol. 2, p. 378.

3. John Murray, *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 95-96.

the belief that we have been saved, but trust in Christ in order that we may be saved."<sup>4</sup> Unless Murray does not consider regeneration to be part of the process of being saved, he seems to be saying that faith is instrumental to regeneration and thus logically prior to it.

The conclusion here, then, is that God regenerates those who repent and believe. But this conclusion seems inconsistent with the doctrine of total inability. Are we torn between Scripture and logic on this point? There is a way out. That is to distinguish between God's special and effectual calling on the one hand, and regeneration on the other. Although no one is capable of responding to the general call of the gospel, in the case of the elect God works intensively through a special calling so that they do respond in repentance and faith. As a result of this conversion, God regenerates them. The special calling is simply an intensive and effectual working by the Holy Spirit. It is not the complete transformation which constitutes regeneration, but it does render the conversion of the individual both possible and certain. Thus the logical order of the initial aspects of salvation is special calling—conversion—regeneration.

### Conversion

The Christian life, by its very nature and definition, represents something quite different from the way in which we previously lived. In contrast to being dead in sins and trespasses, it is new life. While it is of lifelong and even eternal duration, it has a finite point of beginning. "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step," said the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu. And so it is with the Christian life. The first step of the Christian life is called conversion. It is the act of turning from one's sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith.

The image of turning from sin is found in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Book of Ezekiel we read the word of the Lord to the people of Israel: "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God; so turn, and live" (Ezek. 18:30-32). The same idea occurs later on when Ezekiel is told to warn the wicked to turn from his way (Ezek. 33:7-11). In Ephesians 5:14 Paul uses different imagery, but the basic thrust is the same: "Awake,

4. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

0 sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." In Acts we find Peter advocating a change in direction of life: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3: 19). While contemporary evangelists frequently plead, "Be converted," it is noteworthy that in the passages we have cited, the command is in the active. What is actually said is, "Convert!"

Conversion is a single entity which has two distinguishable but inseparable aspects: repentance and faith. Repentance is the unbeliever's turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ. They are, respectively, the negative and positive aspect of the same occurrence.<sup>5</sup> In a sense, each is incomplete without the other, and each is motivated by the other. As we become aware of sin and turn from it, we see the necessity of turning to Christ for the provision of his righteousness. Conversely, believing in Christ makes us aware of our sin and thus leads to repentance.

Scripture gives no specifications concerning the amount of time conversion involves. On some occasions, it appears to have been a cataclysmic decision, with the change taking place virtually in a moment's time. This was in all likelihood the case with the great majority of those who were converted at Pentecost, which was no doubt the first time that they had really heard the gospel. On the other hand, for some people conversion was something more of a process. Nicodemus probably came to commitment to Christ in this fashion (John 19:39). Similarly, the emotional accompaniments of conversion can vary greatly. In the case of Saul of Tarsus, the decision was under highly dramatic circumstances. He heard a voice speaking to him from heaven (Acts 9:4-7) and even became blind for three days (w. 9, 17-18). By contrast, as we observed earlier, Lydia's turning to Christ seems to have been very simple and calm in nature: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16: 14). On the other hand again, just a few verses later we read of the Philippian jailor, who, still trembling with fear upon hearing that none of the prisoners had escaped after the earthquake, cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" (v. 30). The conversion experiences of these two people were very different, but the end result was the same.

Sometimes the church has forgotten that there is variety in God's ways of working. On the American frontier a certain type of preaching became stereotypical. Life was uncertain and often difficult, and the circuit-riding evangelist came only on infrequent occasions. The general pattern of preaching included a strong emphasis upon the awfulness of sin, a vivid

5. Charles M. Horne, *Salvation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), p. 55; Fritz Laubach, "Conversion, Penitence, Repentance, Proselyte," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 1, p. 354.

presentation of the death of Christ and its benefits, and then an emotional appeal to accept Christ. The hearers were pressed to make an immediate decision.<sup>6</sup> And so conversion came to be thought of<sup>7</sup> as a crisis decision. Although God frequently does work with individuals in this way, differences in personality type, background, and immediate circumstances may result in a very different type of conversion. It is important not to insist that the incidentals or external factors of conversion be identical for everyone.

It is important also to draw a distinction between conversion and conversions. There is just one major point in life when the individual turns toward Christ in response to the offer of salvation. There may be other points when believers must abandon a particular practice or belief lest they revert to a life of sin. These events, however, are secondary, reaffirmations of the one major step that has been taken. We might say that there may be many conversions in the Christian's life, but only one Conversion.

### Repentance

The negative aspect of conversion is the abandonment or repudiation of sin. This is what we mean by repentance. It is based upon a feeling of godly sorrow for the evil we have done. As we examine repentance and faith, it should be remembered that they cannot really be separated from one another. We will deal with repentance first because where one has been logically precedes where one is going.

There are two Hebrew terms which express the idea of repentance. One is נִחְמָה (*nacham*), an onomatopoetic word signifying "to pant, sigh, or groan." It came to mean "to lament or to grieve." When used in reference to an emotion aroused by consideration of the situation of others, it connotes compassion and sympathy. When used in reference to an emotion aroused by consideration of one's own character and deeds, it means "to rue" or "to repent."<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, when נִחְמָה occurs in the sense of "repent," the subject of the verb is usually "God" rather than "man." A prime example is Genesis 6:6: "And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." Another example is Exodus 32:14. Having considered wiping out the people of Israel because of their sinfulness in worshiping the golden calf, God changed his mind: "the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people." A

6. W. L. Muncy, Jr., *A History of Evangelism in the United States* (Kansas City, Kans.: Central Seminary, 1945), pp. 86-90.

7. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), pp. 636-37.

passage where the verb occurs with a human as its subject is found in Job. At the end of his long trial Job says, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5–6).

The type of genuine repentance that humans are to display is more commonly designated by the word שׁוּב (*shuv*). It is used extensively in the prophets' calls to Israel to return to the Lord. It stresses the importance of a conscious moral separation, the necessity of forsaking sin and entering into fellowship with God.<sup>8</sup> One of the best-known usages is in 2 Chronicles 7: 14: "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." Having noted that God will visit wrath on his enemies, Isaiah adds, "And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord" (Isa. 59:20). Actually, the word can be used of either the negative or positive aspect of conversion.

In the New Testament there are also two major terms for repentance. The word μεταμέλομαι means "to have a feeling of care, concern, or regret."<sup>9</sup> Like שׁוּב, it stresses the emotional aspect of repentance, a feeling of regret or remorse for having done wrong. Jesus used the word in his parable of the two sons. When the first son was asked by his father to go and work in the vineyard, "he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he repented and went" (Matt. 2:1-29). The second son said he would go, but did not. Jesus likened the chief priests and Pharisees (whom he was addressing) to the second son and repentant sinners to the first son: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him" (v. 32). The word μεταμέλομαι is also used of Judas's remorse over his betrayal of Jesus: "When Judas, his betrayer, saw that [Jesus] was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders" (Matt. 27:3), and then went out and hanged himself. It appears that μεταμέλομαι can designate simply regret and remorse over one's actions, as in the case of Judas. Or it can represent true repentance, which involves an actual alteration of behavior, as in the case of the first son. Otto Michel comments that Judas displays "remorse, not repentance. Judas sees that his action was guilty, and he gives way under the burden. The remorse of Judas (Mt. 27:3) and of Esau (Hb. 12: 17) does not have

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid., pp. 996-1000.

<sup>9.</sup> Otto Michel, *μεταμέλομαι*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), vol. 4, p. 626.

the power to overcome the destructive operation of sin."<sup>10</sup> It is instructive to contrast the actions of Judas and Peter in response to their sins. Peter returned to Jesus and was restored to fellowship. In the case of Judas, awareness of sin led only to despair and self-destruction.

The other major New Testament term for repentance is μετανοέω, which literally means "to think differently about something or to have a change of mind." The word was characteristic of John the Baptist's preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). It was also a key term in the preaching of the early church. On Pentecost Peter urged the multitude, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

As we examine this matter of repentance, we cannot avoid being impressed with its importance as a prerequisite for salvation. The large number of verses and the variety of contexts in which repentance is stressed make clear that it is not optional but indispensable. That people in many different cultural settings were urged to repent shows that it is not a message meant only for a few specific local situations. Rather, repentance is an essential part of the Christian gospel. We have already noted the prominence of repentance in the preaching of John the Baptist. Indeed, one might contend that it was virtually the entirety of John's message. Repentance also had a prominent place in the preaching of Jesus. In fact, it was the opening note of his ministry: "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17). And at the close of his ministry he indicated that repentance was to be a paramount topic in the disciples' preaching. Shortly before his ascension he told them: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:46-47). Peter began to fulfil this charge on Pentecost. And Paul declared in his message to the philosophers on Mars' Hill: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). This last statement is especially significant, for it is universal: "all men everywhere." There can be no doubt, then, that repentance is an ineradicable part of the gospel message.

It is important for us to understand the nature of true repentance. Repentance is godly sorrow for one's sin together with a resolution to turn from it. There are other forms of regret over one's wrongdoing which are based upon different motivations. One form of regret may be motivated by little more than selfishness. If we have sinned and the consequences are unpleasant, we may well regret what we have done.

<sup>10.</sup> Ibid., p. 628; cf. Laubach, "Conversion," p. 356.

But that is not true repentance. That is mere penitence. Real repentance is sorrow for one's sin because of the wrong done to God and the hurt inflicted upon him. This sorrow is accompanied by a genuine desire to abandon that sin. In the case of true repentance, there is regret over the sin even if the sinner has not suffered any unfortunate personal effects because of it.

The Bible's repeated emphasis upon the necessity of repentance is an incontrovertible argument against what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace" (or "easy beliefism").<sup>11</sup> It is not enough simply to believe in Jesus and accept the offer of grace; there must be a real alteration of the inner person. If belief in God's grace were all that is necessary, who would not wish to become a Christian? But Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). If there is no conscious repentance, there is no real awareness of having been saved from the power of sin. There may be a corresponding lack of depth and commitment. After Jesus gave assurance that the many sins of the woman who had washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair were forgiven, he made the comment that "he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47). Any attempt to increase the number of disciples by making discipleship as easy as possible ends up diluting the quality of discipleship instead.

#### Faith

As repentance is the negative aspect of conversion, turning from one's sin, so faith is the positive aspect, laying hold upon the promises and the work of Christ. Faith is at the very heart of the gospel, for it is the vehicle by which we are enabled to receive the grace of God. Once again it is important to look first at the biblical terminology.

In a very real sense, Old Testament Hebrew does not have a noun for faith, except perhaps *הַמִּתְּאָנָה* (*'emunah*) in Habakkuk 2:4, but that word is usually rendered "faithfulness."<sup>12</sup> Instead, Hebrew conveys the idea of faith with verb forms. Perhaps that is because the Hebrews regarded faith as something that one does rather than as something one has. It is an activity rather than a possession. The most common of the verbs used to designate faith is *רָאַם* (*'aman*). In the Qal stem it means "to nourish"; in the Niphal stem it means "to be firm, established, or steadfast"; in the Hiphil stem, which is the most significant for our purposes, it means "to consider as established, regard as true, or believe." This verb may be used with the prepositions *בְּ* and *אֶלְ*. With the former it basically conveys

11. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 45-47.

12. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, p. 53.

the idea of confident resting upon someone or something; with the latter it may designate giving assent to a testimony.<sup>13</sup> "Positively, [the word signifies] a fastening or leaning; for this is the proper meaning of *הַמִּתְּאָנָה*, namely a fastening (staying [Gesenius]) of the hem-t upon the Divine word of promise, a leaning upon the power und faithfulness of God, by reason of which He can and will effect what He chooses in spite of all earthly obstacles, and therefore a resting upon the *צֹוָּר לְבָב*, Ps. lxxiii.26."<sup>14</sup> A second Hebrew verb is *תַּעֲשֵׂה* (*batach*). Often appearing with the preposition *לְ*, it means "to lean upon, to confide in." It does not connote intellectual belief as much as it suggests trust and a committing of oneself.<sup>15</sup>

When we turn to the New Testament, there is one primary word which represents the idea of faith. It is the verb *πιστεύω* together with its cognate noun *πίστις*. The verb has two basic meanings. First, it means "to believe what someone says, to accept a statement (particularly of a religious nature) as true."<sup>16</sup> An example is found in 1 John 4: 1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God." A dramatic instance of the verb is Jesus' statement to the centurion, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed" (Matt. 8: 13). Greatly impressed, Jesus rewarded the centurion's belief that his servant could be healed. Jesus bade Jairus believe that his daughter would be well (Mark 5:36; Luke 8:50), and asked the blind men who followed him from Jairus's house, "Do you believe that I am able to [heal you]?" (Matt. 9:28). These and numerous other instances establish that faith involves believing that something is true. Indeed, the author of Hebrews declares that faith in the sense of acknowledging certain truths is indispensable to salvation: "And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

At least equally important are the instances in which *πιστεύω* and *πίστις* signify "personal trust as distinct from mere credence or belief."<sup>17</sup>

13. Ibid., pp. 52-53; Jack B. Scott, *תַּחַת*, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 51-52.

14. Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), p. 459.

15. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), vol. 2, p. 286; Alfred Jepsen, *תַּחַת*, in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), vol. 2, p. 89.

16. Rudolf Bultmann, *πιστεύω*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, p. 203.

17. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), pp. 361-62.

This sense is usually identifiable through the use of a preposition. In Mark 1: 15 the preposition *ἐν* is used: after the Baptist's arrest Jesus preached in Galilee, saying, "Repent, and believe in the gospel." The preposition *εἰς* is used in Acts 10:43: "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." The same construction is found in Matthew 18:6; John 2: 11; Acts 19:4; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 1:8; and 1 John 5:10. The apostle John speaks of believing in the name of Jesus (*εἰς τὸ ὄνομα*): "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1: 12; see also 2:23; 3: 18; and 1 John 5: 13). This construction had special significance to the Hebrews, who regarded one's name as virtually equivalent to the individual. Thus, to believe on or in the name of Jesus was to place one's personal trust in him.<sup>18</sup> The preposition *ἐπί* is used with the accusative in Matthew 27:42: "He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (see also Acts 9:42; 11: 17; 16:31; 22:19; Rom. 4:5). It is used with the dative case in Romans 9:33 and 10:11, and 1 Peter 2:6, all of which are quotations from the Septuagint, as well as in 1 Timothy 1:16.

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, we conclude that the type of faith necessary for salvation involves both believing that and believing in, or assenting to facts and trusting in a person.<sup>19</sup> It is vital to keep these two together. Sometimes in the history of Christian thought one of the aspects of faith has been so strongly emphasized as to make the other seem rather insignificant. There is frequently a correlation between one's view of faith and one's understanding of the nature of revelation. When revelation is thought of as the communication of information, faith is regarded as intellectual assent to doctrine. Such was the case in Protestant scholasticism.<sup>20</sup> When revelation is conceived of as the self-presentation of God in a personal encounter, as in neoorthodoxy, faith is regarded as personal trust in the God one encounters.<sup>21</sup> The position we took earlier in this work, however, is that revelation is not an either/or matter. God reveals himself, but he does so, at least in part, through communicating information (or propositions) about himself, telling us who he is.<sup>22</sup> Our view of revelation leads us to stress the twofold nature of faith: giving credence to affirmations and trusting in God.

18. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 271-72.

19. The distinction is often drawn between *assensus* or *credentia* on the one hand and *fiducia* on the other—William Horder-n, *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pp. 34-35. Edward Carnell used the terms "general faith" and "vital faith"—*The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pp. 28-30.

20. A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought Before Kant* (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 142.

21. Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), p. 36.

22. See pp. 191-96.

Sometimes faith is pictured as being antithetical to reason and unconfirmable. It is true that faith is not something established on an antecedent basis by indisputable evidence. But it is also the case that faith, once engaged in, enables us to reason and to recognize various evidences supporting it.<sup>23</sup> This means that faith is a form of knowledge; it works in concert with, not against, reason. Pertinent here is Jesus' response to the two disciples whom John the Baptist sent to ask, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Luke 7: 19). Jesus responded by telling them to report to John the miracles which they had seen and the message which they had heard. Jesus in effect said to John, "Here is the evidence you need in order to be able to believe."

A close inspection reveals that the cases cited in arguing that faith does not rest on any kind of evidence do not really support that conclusion. One is the case of Thomas, who, not having been with the other disciples when the resurrected Jesus appeared, did not believe. Thomas stated that unless he could see the nailprints in Jesus' hands, put his finger in the mark of the nails, and place his hand in Jesus' side, he would not believe (John 20:25). When Jesus appeared, he invited Thomas to satisfy his doubts. And when Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28), Jesus responded, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (v. 29). Had Jesus expected Thomas to believe blindly, without any evidential basis? Remember that Thomas had lived with Jesus for three years, had heard his teaching, and had seen his miracles; he knew of Jesus' promise and claim that he would rise from the dead. He already had sufficient basis for believing the testimony of his fellow disciples, whose integrity he had long experienced. He should not have required some additional evidence. Similarly, when Abraham was called upon to offer Isaac, he was not being asked to act blindly. True, there was no sacrificial animal in sight; he simply had to trust God. But although there was no visible evidence at the moment, Abraham had known Jehovah for a long time. He had found in the past that God was faithful in providing the land and the son that he had promised. The faith which Abraham exercised in being willing to sacrifice his son was an extrapolation into the unknown future of his experience of God in the past.

We should note that although we have depicted conversion as a human response to divine initiative, even repentance and faith are gifts from God. Jesus made very clear that conviction, which is presupposed by repentance, is the work of the Holy Spirit: "And when [the Spirit] comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness,

23. Augustine *Letter* 137. 15; cf. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 276-77.

because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). Jesus also said, "No one can come to me [i.e., exercise faith] unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). This work of the Father is effective: "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out... Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me" (John 6:37, 45). Thus, both repentance and faith are gracious works of God in the life of the believer.

### Regeneration

Conversion refers to the response of the human being to God's offer of salvation and approach to man. Regeneration is the other side of conversion. It is God's doing. It is God's transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ.

Underlying the doctrine of regeneration is an assumption regarding human nature. Human nature is in need of transformation. The human being is spiritually dead and therefore needs new birth or spiritual birth.<sup>24</sup> We noted earlier that natural man is unaware of and unresponsive to spiritual stimuli.<sup>25</sup> The biblical pictures of unregenerate man as blind, deaf, and dead indicate a lack of spiritual sensitivity. And not only are unbelievers unable to perceive spiritual truths; they are incapable of doing anything to alter their condition of blindness and their natural tendency toward sin. When one reads the description of the sinful human in Romans 3:9-20, it is apparent that some radical change or metamorphosis is needed, rather than a mere modification or adjustment in the person. To some, this appears a very pessimistic view of human nature, and indeed it is, in terms of natural potential, but our view does not limit its expectations to natural possibilities.

The biblical descriptions of the new birth are numerous, vivid, and varied. Even in the Old Testament, we find a striking reference to God's renewing work. He promises, "And I will give them a new heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19-20). Although the terminology and imagery differ

<sup>24</sup> Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 290.

<sup>25</sup> See pp. 614,925.

from the New Testament, we have here the basic idea of transformation of life and spirit.

In the New Testament, the term which most literally conveys the idea of regeneration is *παλιγγένεσία*. It appears just twice in the New Testament. One of these instances is Matthew 19:28, where it refers to the "new world" which will be part of the eschaton. The other is Titus 3:5, which refers to salvation: God our Savior "saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." Here we have the biblical idea of rebirth. Although the literal term *παλιγγένεσία* is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, the idea is most certainly prominent.

The best-known and most extensive exposition of the concept of the new birth is found in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3). At a later point in the discussion he made the comment, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew'" (v. 7). The Greek word used here, *ἀνωθεν*, can also be rendered "from above." That "again" or "anew" is the correct rendering here, however, is seen from Nicodemus's response, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (v. 4). Nicodemus understood Jesus to be saying that one must be born again.

Although the terminology varies, the idea is found elsewhere in the New Testament. In the same conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of being "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8). He had in mind a supernatural work transforming the life of the individual. This work, which is indispensable if one is to enter the kingdom of God, is not something that can be achieved by human effort or planning. It is also spoken of as being "born of God" or "born through the word of God" (John 1: 12-13; James 1: 18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 5:1, 4). Whoever undergoes this experience is a new creation: "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul speaks of the renewing in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), of being made alive (Eph. 2:1, 5), and of resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:6). The same idea is implicit in Jesus' statements that he had come to give life (John 6:63; 10:10, 28).

While it is fairly easy to list instances where the idea of new birth occurs, it is not so easy to ascertain its meaning. We ought not to be surprised that the new birth is difficult to understand, however.<sup>26</sup> Jesus indicated to Nicodemus, who was having great difficulty grasping what

<sup>26</sup> Millard J. Erickson, "The New Birth Today," *Christianity Today*, 16 August 1974, pp. d-10.

Jesus was talking about, that the concept is difficult. It is like the wind: although one does not know where it comes from or where it goes, one hears its sound (John 3:8). Because the new birth deals with matters that are not perceived by the senses, it cannot be studied in the fashion in which most subjects are studied. There is also a natural resistance to the idea of new birth, a resistance which makes it difficult for us to examine the concept objectively. The necessity of the new birth is an indictment of all of us, for it points out that none of us is good enough in his or her natural state; we all need to undergo metamorphosis if we are to please God.

Despite the problems in understanding the concept, several assertions can be made about regeneration. First, it involves something new, a whole reversal of the person's natural tendencies. It is not merely an amplification of present traits. For one side of regeneration involves putting to death or crucifying existent qualities. Contrasting the life in the Spirit with that in the flesh, Paul says: "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:24–25). Other references to the death of the individual or of certain aspects of the individual include Romans 6: 1–11 and Galatians 2:20; 6: 14. The idea of one's being made dead to the flesh (the natural way of acting and living) and alive in the Spirit is evidence that regeneration is the production of a totally new creation (as Paul correctly labeled it), and not merely a heightening of what is already the basic direction of one's life.

As a putting to death of the flesh, the new birth involves a counteracting of the effects of sin. This is perhaps most clearly seen in Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:1-10. The deadness that requires a transformation is a result of the sin in which we live, being led by the prince of the power of the air. Although regeneration involves something totally new to us, it does not result in anything foreign to human nature. Rather, the new birth is the restoration of human nature to what it originally was intended to be and what it in fact was before sin entered the human race at the time of the fall. It is simultaneously the beginning of a new life and a return of the old life and activity.

Further, it appears that the new birth is itself instantaneous. There is nothing in the descriptions of the new birth to suggest that it is a process rather than a single action. It is nowhere characterized as incomplete. Scripture speaks of believers as "born again" or 'having been born again' rather than as "being born again" (John 1:12-13; 2Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1, 5-6; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 5:1, 4—the relevant Greek verbs in these references are either in the aorist tense, which points to punctiliar rather than durative action, or in the perfect tense, which points to a state of completion). While it may not be possible to determine

the precise time of the new birth, and there may be a whole series of antecedents, it appears that the new birth itself is completed in an instant.<sup>27</sup>

Although regeneration is instantaneously complete, it is not an end in itself. As a change of spiritual impulses, regeneration is the beginning of a process of growth which continues throughout one's lifetime. This process of spiritual maturation is sanctification. Having noted that his readers were formerly dead but are now alive, Paul adds, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2: 10). He speaks in Philippians 1:6 of continuing and completing what has been begun: "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Regeneration is a beginning, but there is much more yet to come. The manifestations of this spiritual ripening are called "fruit of the Spirit." They are the direct opposite of the fruit of the old nature, (Gal. 5:19–23).

New birth is also a supernatural occurrence. It is not something which can be accomplished by human effort. Jesus made this clear in John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He was responding to Nicodemus's question whether new birth comes by reentering the womb. It is also important to bear in mind that regeneration is especially the work of the Holy Spirit. Although salvation was planned and originated by the Father, and actually accomplished by the Son, it is the Holy Spirit who applies it to the life of the believer, thus bringing to fulfilment the divine intention for humans.

At times in the past, regeneration was thought of as an alteration of the substance of the soul.<sup>28</sup> That idea is not very meaningful to us, in part because the meaning of "substance" is not very clear. It would be better simply to think in terms of a change in the individual's inclinations and impulses and not to speculate as to the exact nature of the change which takes place.

The doctrine of regeneration places the Christian faith in an unusual position. On the one hand, Christians reject the current secular belief in the goodness of the human and the optimistic expectations arising therefrom. The very insistence upon regeneration is a declaration that without external help and complete transformation there is no possibility that genuine good on a large scale will emerge from mankind. On the other hand, despite the pessimistic assessment of the natural powers of the

27. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), pp. 826-27.

28. James Strahan, "Flacius," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1955), vol. 6, p. 49.

human, Christianity is very optimistic: with supernatural aid humans can be transformed and restored to their original goodness. It was in regard to God's ability to change human hearts, enabling us to enter his kingdom, that Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

### **Implications of Effectual Calling, Conversion, and Regeneration**

1. Human nature cannot be altered by social reforms or education. It must be transformed by a supernatural work of the Triune God.
2. No one can predict or control who will experience new birth. It is ultimately God's doing; even conversion depends upon his effectual calling.
3. The beginning of the Christian life requires a recognition of one's own sinfulness and a determination to abandon the self-centered way of life.
4. Saving faith requires correct belief regarding the nature of God and what he has done. Correct belief is insufficient, however. There must also be active commitment of oneself to God.
5. One person's conversion may be radically different from that of another. What is important is that there be genuine repentance and faith.
6. The new birth is not felt when it occurs. It will, rather, establish its presence by producing a new sensitivity to spiritual things, a new direction of life, and an increasing ability to obey God.

## **The Beginning of Salvation: Objective Aspects**

Union with Christ  
 The Scriptural Teaching  
 Inadequate Models  
 Characteristics of the Union  
 Implications of Union with Christ

Justification  
 Justification and Forensic Righteousness  
 Objections to the Doctrine of Forensic Justification  
 Faith and Works  
 The Lingering Consequences of Sin

Adoption  
 The Nature of Adoption  
 The Benefits of Adoption

**T**hus far we have examined those aspects of the beginning of the Christian life which involve the actual spiritual condition of the person, that is, the subjective aspects of the beginning of salvation. In this chapter we will be considering the change in the individuals status

or standing in relationship to God, that is, the objective dimensions of the beginning of salvation.

### Union with Christ

#### *The Scriptural Teaching*

In one sense, union with Christ is an inclusive term for the whole of salvation; the various other doctrines are simply subparts.<sup>1</sup> While this term and concept are often neglected in favor of concentrating on other concepts such as regeneration, justification, and sanctification, it is instructive to note the large number of references to the oneness between Christ and the believer. The most basic references in this connection depict the believer and Christ as being “in” one another. On the one hand, we have many specific references to the believer’s being in Christ; for example, 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” There are two such phrases in Ephesians 1:3–4: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” Two verses later we read of the “glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us” (v. 6–8). Paul tells us that we have been created anew in Christ: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The grace of God is given to us in Christ: “I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge” (1 Cor. 1:4–5). Deceased believers are called “the dead in Christ” (1 Thess. 4:16), and our resurrection will take place in Christ: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

The other side of this relationship is that Christ is said to be in the believer. Paul says, “To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Christ’s presence in the believer is also expressed, in a somewhat different way, in Galatians 2:20:

1. John Murray, **Redemption-Accomplished and Applied** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 161.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” There is also Jesus’ analogy of the vine and branches, which emphasizes the mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5). It is apparent that all that the believer has spiritually is based upon Christ’s being within. Our hope of glory is Christ in us. Our spiritual vitality is drawn from his indwelling presence. Other passages we might mention include Jesus’ promises to be present with the believer (Matt. 28:20; John 14:23). Finally, there is also a whole host of experiences which the believer is said to share “with Christ”: suffering (Rom. 8:17); crucifixion (Gal. 2:20); death (Col. 2:20); burial (Rom. 6:4); quickening (Eph. 2:5); resurrection (Col. 3:1); glorification and inheritance (Rom. 8:17).

#### *Inadequate Models*

Although there are numerous references to our union with Christ, we must nevertheless ask what precisely is entailed, for the language is less than lucid. In what sense can Christ be said to be in us, and we in him? Are these expressions completely metaphorical, or is there some literal referent?

Several explanations which have been offered do not accurately convey what this doctrine involves. Among them is the view that our union with Christ is metaphysical. The underlying idea here is the pantheistic concept that we are one in essence with God. There is no existence apart from his. We are part of the divine essence. Christ is one with us and is in us by virtue of creation rather than redemption.<sup>2</sup> This means that he is one with all members of the human race, not merely with believers. This explanation, however, goes beyond the teaching of Scripture; all of the biblical statements about union with Christ pertain exclusively to believers. Various passages make it clear that not everyone is included among those in whom Christ dwells and who are in Christ (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:17).

A second model which has been proposed is that our union with

2. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, **The Phenomenon of Man** (New York: Harper, 1959), pp. 296–97.

Christ is mystical.<sup>3</sup> The relationship between the believer and Jesus is so deep and absorbing that the believer virtually loses his or her own individuality. Jesus so controls the relationship that the human personality is almost obliterated. The Christian experience is compared to the sports enthusiast or concertgoer whose attention is so fully given to what is transpiring on the field or on the stage that he loses all consciousness of time, place, and self. The relationship is not so much a matter of the believer's living the way Jesus would have him to live as it is a matter of Jesus' taking over and actually living the persons life for him. The believer is so suggestible to the commands of the Lord as to seem almost hypnotized. This view, obviously, attempts to do away with all forms of individualism.

Those who hold this view feel that full obedience to the will of the Lord is achievable in this life. That goal is, of course, highly commendable. It must be noted, too, that there are passages which seem to support their position, for example, Galatians 2:20, where Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Yet a closer examination reveals that this text does not teach that the individual personality is obliterated, for Paul goes on to say, "and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Here it is Paul who lives—he lives by faith in Christ. This text in no way suggests that the believer does not live his own life. Other pertinent references include Jesus' statement in John 14:12: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father." Similarly, he said at the time of his departure from the earth, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Note that in these passages Jesus does not suggest that he will do the work while the disciples remain totally passive. They will do it, although in and with the strength which he supplies, to be sure. These and other passages make clear that strong as is the influence of Christ upon the believer, they remain two. They do not merge into one, nor is one of them submerged into the personality of the other.

A third model sees our union with Christ as being like the union between two friends or between a teacher and student. A psychological oneness results from sharing the same interests and being committed to the same ideals. This could be called a sympathetic oneness.<sup>4</sup> It is an

3. Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, 2nd ed. (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), pp. 142-57. In its more extreme forms, which Deissmann terms "unio-mysticism," this view verges on pantheism.

4. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960), pp. 96-97.

external bond. One influences the other primarily through speech; for example, the teacher influences the student primarily through the instruction imparted.

If the second model errs by making the connection between Christ and the believer too strong, this third model makes it too weak. For it views the relationship between the Christian and Jesus as no different in kind from the relationship which one might have had with the apostle Paul or which John the Baptist's disciples had with him. Surely, however, when Jesus promised that he would abide with his followers, he had in mind something more than his teachings. Indeed, in his last great discourse to his disciples before his death, he distinguished between his teachings and his personal presence: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). He was obviously promising a relationship which far exceeds that of Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud with their disciples.

A fourth inadequate model is the sacramental view—the believer obtains the grace of Jesus Christ by receiving the sacraments.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, one actually takes Christ into himself by participating in the Lord's Supper, eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood. This model is based upon a literal interpretation of Jesus' words in instituting the Lord's Supper, "This is my body... this is my blood" (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20). It is also based upon a literal interpretation of Jesus' statement in John 6:53: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." To a large extent, the sacramental view of our union with Christ hinges upon a literal interpretation of these verses. We will scrutinize and evaluate sacramentalism when we discuss the means of salvation (pp. 1007-11). At this point, however, we note simply that taking these passages in the most literal sense seems unwarranted and leads to some virtually ludicrous conclusions (e.g., that Jesus' flesh and blood are simultaneously part of his body and the elements of the Eucharist, as the Lord's Supper is often termed by sacramentalists). A further difficulty with the sacramental view of the union of the believer and Christ is that a human intermediary administers the sacraments. This conception contradicts the statements in Hebrews 9:23-10:25 that Jesus has eliminated the need for mediators and that we may now come directly to him.

#### *Characteristics of the Union*

It is not sufficient, however, to point out the deficiencies of the models we have just examined. We must ask just what the concept of union with

5. Eric Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science: Some Questions on Their Relations* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1956), pp. 314ff.

Christ does mean. To gain a grasp of the concept, we will note several characteristics of the union. We must not expect that we will be able to comprehend this matter completely, for Paul spoke of it as a mystery. Comparing the union between Christ and members of his church to the union between a husband and wife, Paul said, "This is a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32). He was referring to the fact that knowledge of this union is inaccessible to humans except through special revelation from God. It is "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to [the] saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27).

The first characteristic of our union with Christ is that it is judicial in nature. When the Father evaluates or judges us before the law, he does not look upon us alone. We are in his sight one with Christ. God always sees the believer in union with Christ and he measures the two of them together. Thus, he does not say, "Jesus is righteous but that human is unrighteous." He sees the two as one and says in effect, "They are righteous." That the believer is righteous is not a fiction or a misrepresentation. It is the correct evaluation of a new legal entity, a corporation that has been formed as it were. The believer has been incorporated into Christ and Christ into the believer (although not exclusively so). All of the assets of each are now mutually possessed. From a legal perspective, the two are now one.

Second, the union of the believer with Christ is spiritual. This has two meanings. On the one hand, the union is effected by the Holy Spirit. There is a close relationship between Christ and the Spirit, closer than is often realized. This is apparent in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and all were made to drink of one Spirit." Note also the interchangeability of Christ and the Spirit in Romans 8:9-11: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." John Murray says, "Christ dwells in us if his Spirit dwells in us, and he dwells in us by the Spirit." The Spirit is "the bond of this union."<sup>6</sup>

Not only is our union with Christ brought about by the Holy Spirit; it is a union of spirits. It is not a union of persons in one essence, as in the Trinity. It is not a union of natures in one person, as is the case with the

6. Murray, *Redemption*, p. 166.

incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is not a physical bonding, as in the welding of two pieces of metal. It is in some way a union of two spirits which does not extinguish either of them. It does not make the believer physically stronger or more intelligent. Rather, what the union produces is a new spiritual vitality within the human.

Finally, our union with Christ is vital. His life actually flows into ours, renewing our inner nature (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16) and imparting spiritual strength. There is a literal truth in Jesus' metaphor of the vine and the branches. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit if it does not receive life from the vine, so we cannot bear spiritual fruit if Christ's life does not flow into us (John 15:4).

Various analogies have been used to illuminate the idea of union with Christ. Several of them are drawn from the physical realm. In mouth-to-mouth resuscitation one person actually breathes for another. An artificial heart performs the vital function of supplying the body cells with blood (and hence with oxygen and various essential nutrients) during heart surgery. And drawing on the realm of psychology, or parapsychology, we find a considerable amount of evidence that thoughts can somehow be transmitted from certain individuals to others. Now since Christ has designed and created our entire nature, including our psyches, it is not surprising that, dwelling within us in some way that we do not fully understand, he is able to affect our very thoughts and feelings. A final illustration, and one with biblical warrant, is that of husband and wife. Not only do the two become one physically, but ideally they also become so close in mind and heart that they have great empathy for and understanding of one another. While none of these analogies in itself can give us an adequate understanding, all of them collectively may enlarge our grasp of our union with Christ.

#### *Implications of Union with Christ*

Our union with Christ has certain implications for our lives. First, we are accounted righteous. Paul wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Because of our judicial union with Christ, we have a right standing in the face of the law and in the sight of God. We are as righteous as is God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

Second, we now live in Christ's strength.<sup>7</sup> Paul affirmed, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). He also claimed, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and

7. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 492-93.

gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). When Paul struggled with his "thorn in the flesh," probably a physical ailment, he found that although it was not removed, God gave him the grace to bear it: "[The Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). This power of Christ is found not merely in his teaching and the inspiration of his example. He also gives us concrete help that we might fulfil what he expects of us.

Being one with Christ also means that we will suffer. The disciples were told that they would drink the cup that Jesus drank, and be baptized with the same baptism as he (Mark 10:39). If tradition serves us correctly, most of them suffered a martyr's death. Jesus had told them not to be surprised if they encountered persecution: "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (John 15:20). Paul did not shrink from this prospect; indeed, one of his goals was to share Christ's sufferings: "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:8–10). Peter urged his readers, "But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4: 13).

Finally, we also have the prospect of reigning with Christ. The two disciples who asked for positions of authority and prestige were instead promised suffering (Mark 10:35–39); but Jesus also told the entire group that because they had continued with him in his trials, they would eat and drink at his table in his kingdom, "and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30). Paul made a similar statement: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). Although we often have trials and even suffering here, we are given resources to bear them. And for those who suffer with Christ, a glorious future lies ahead.

### Justification

Mankind has a twofold problem as a result of sin and the fall. On the one hand, there is a basic corruption of human nature; our moral character has been polluted through sin. This aspect of the curse is nullified by regeneration, which reverses the direction and general tendencies of human nature. The other problem remains, however: our guilt or liability to punishment for having failed to fulfil God's expectations. It is to this problem that justification relates. Justification is God's action pronouncing sinners righteous in his sight. It is a matter of our being forgiven and declared to have fulfilled all that God's law requires of us.

Historically, this particular doctrine has played a very significant role in Christianity. It was this issue which preoccupied Martin Luther during his spiritual struggle in the monastery, and it was his espousal of justification by faith that led to his break from the Roman Catholic Church. It is an issue of considerable practical significance today as well, for it deals with the question, How can I be right with God? How can I, a sinner, be accepted by a holy and righteous judge?

### *Justification and Forensic Righteousness*

In order to understand justification, it is necessary first to understand the biblical concept of righteousness, for justification is a restoration of the individual to a state of righteousness. In the Old Testament, the verb *תִּשְׁאַدָּק* (*tsadaq*) and its derivatives connote conformity to a norm. Since the character of the individual is not so much in view as is his or her relationship to God's law, the term is more religious than ethical in nature. The verb means "to conform to a given norm"; in the Hiphil stem it means "to declare righteous or to justify."<sup>8</sup> The particular norm in view varies with the situation. Sometimes the context is family relationships. Tamar was more righteous than Judah, because he had not fulfilled his obligations as her father-in-law (Gen. 38:26). And David, in refusing to slay Saul, was said to be righteous (1 Sam. 24:17; 26:23), for he was abiding by the standards of the monarch-subject relationship. Clearly righteousness is understood to be a matter of living up to the standards set for a relationship. Those who fulfil the requirements of the relationships in which they stand are righteous. Ultimately, God's own person and nature are the measure or standard of righteousness. God is the ruler of all and the source of all criteria of rightness. As Abraham confessed, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25).

In the Old Testament, the concept of righteousness frequently appears in a forensic or juridical context. A righteous man is one who has been declared by a judge to be free from guilt. The task of the judge is to condemn the guilty and acquit the innocent.<sup>9</sup> "If there is a dispute between men, and they come into court, and the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. .." (Deut. 25: 1). God is the Judge of men (Ps. 9:4; Jer. 11:20). Those who have been acquitted have been judged to stand in right relationship to God, that is, to have fulfilled what was expected of them in that relationship. In the

8. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), pp. 842-43; J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972), p. 18.

9. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 440.

Old Testament sense, then, justification involves ascertaining that a person is innocent and then declaring what is indeed true: that he or she is righteous, that is, has fulfilled the law.

The New Testament advances upon this Old Testament view of justification. Without some addition to the understanding of the concept, it would have been shocking and scandalous for Paul to say, as he did, that God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). Justice demands that they be condemned; a judge who justifies or acquits the unrighteous is acting unrighteously himself. And so, when we read that, on the contrary, God in justifying the ungodly has shown himself to be righteous (Rom. 3:26), we must also understand that such justification is apart from the works of the law. In the New Testament, justification is the declarative act of God by which, *on the basis of the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death*, he pronounces believers to have fulfilled all of the requirements of the law which pertain to them. Justification is a forensic act imputing the righteousness of Christ to the believer; it is not an actual infusing of holiness into the individual. It is a matter of declaring the person righteous, as a judge does in acquitting the accused.<sup>10</sup> It is not a matter of making the person righteous or altering his or her actual spiritual condition.

There are several factors which support the argument that justification is forensic or declarative in nature:

1. The concept of righteousness as a matter of formal standing before the law or covenant, and of a judge as someone who determines and declares our status in that respect.
2. The juxtaposition of "justify" (*δικαιόω*) and "condemn" in passages like Romans 8:33–34: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?" "Justifies" and "condemn" are parallel here. If the latter is a declarative or forensic act, then presumably the former is also. Certainly the act of condemning is not a matter of changing someone's spiritual condition, of somehow infusing sin or evil. It is simply a matter of charging a person with wrong and establishing guilt. Correspondingly, the act of justifying is not a matter of infusing holiness into believers but of declaring them righteous. A similar passage is Matthew 12:37, where Jesus, speaking of the day of judgment when everyone will give account for every careless word uttered, says, "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." In the Old Testament we should note Deuteronomy 25:1, already

10. Ziesler, *Righteousness*, p. 168.

cited, and Proverbs 17:15: "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD." If "justify" meant "to make righteous or holy or good," those who justify the wicked would not be denounced along with those who condemn the righteous. If condemning is a declarative act, justifying must be also.

3. Passages where *δικαιόω* means "to defend, vindicate, or acknowledge (or prove) to be right." In some cases it is used of man's action in relation to God. Luke reports that upon hearing Jesus' preaching, "all the people and the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John" (Luke 7:29). Jesus used the term in the same way when he responded to the attempts of the Pharisees and lawyers to justify their rejection of him: "Yet wisdom [i.e., the Baptist's teaching and mine] is justified by all her children" (v. 35).
4. Linguistic evidence that justification is forensic or declarative in character. The verbal ending *-όω*, as in *δικαιόω*, does not carry the meaning "to make something a particular way." That, rather, is the signification of *-άζω*, as in *άγιάζω* ("to make holy"). The ending *-όω*, by contrast, signifies "to declare something to be a particular way," as in *άξιόω* ("to deem worthy"). Thus, *δικαιόω* means "to declare to be just."<sup>11</sup>

We conclude from the preceding data that justification is a forensic or declarative action of God, like that of a judge in acquitting the accused. Gottlob Schrenk observes, "In the NT it is seldom that one cannot detect the legal connexion. ... The LXX, with its legal emphasis, has obviously had the greatest influence on NT usage."<sup>12</sup> And D. E. H. Whiteley summarizes, "It is almost universally agreed that the word *justify* (*dikaioo*) does not mean 'make righteous.'"<sup>13</sup>

#### *Objections to the Doctrine of Forensic Justification*

Objections have been raised to the view that justification is forensic in nature. As we deal with them, we will gain a clearer picture of the

11. James Hope Moulton and Wilbert Francis Howard, *New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1960), vol. 2, p. 397; William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), pp. 30-3 1.

12. Gottlob Schrenk, *δικαιόω*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1964-1 976), vol. 2, p. 2 14.

13. Denys Edward Hugh Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 159.

meaning of justification. William Sanday and Arthur Headlam raised the question of how God could justify the ungodly (i.e., declare them righteous). Is this not something of a fiction in which God treats sinners as if they had not sinned or, in other words, pretends that sinners are something other than what they really are? This interpretation of justification seems to make God guilty of deception, even if it is only self-deception.<sup>14</sup> Vincent Taylor picked up on this idea and contended that righteousness cannot be imputed to a sinner: "If through faith a man is accounted righteous, it must be because, in a reputable sense of the term, he is righteous, and not because another is righteous in his stead."<sup>15</sup>

We respond that the act of justification is not a matter of God's announcing that sinners are something which they are not. There is a constitutive aspect to justification as well. For what God does is actually to constitute us righteous by imputing (not imparting) the righteousness of Christ to us. Here we must distinguish between two senses of the word *righteous*. One could be righteous by virtue of never having violated the law. Such a person would be innocent, having totally fulfilled the law. But even if we have violated the law, we can be deemed righteous once the prescribed penalty has been paid. There is a difference between these two situations, which points up the insufficiency of defining justification simply as God's regarding me "just-as-if-I had never sinned." Man is not righteous in the former sense but in the latter. For the penalty for sin has been paid, and thus the requirements of the law have been fulfilled. It is not a fiction, then, that believers are righteous, for the righteousness of Christ has been credited to them. This situation is somewhat analogous to what takes place when people marry or two corporations merge. Their separate assets are brought into the union and are thereafter treated as mutual possessions.<sup>16</sup>

One of the objections sometimes raised to the doctrines of substitutionary atonement and forensic justification is that virtue simply cannot be transferred from one person to another. What should be borne in mind, however, is that this is not so external a matter as it is sometimes regarded. For Christ and the believer do not stand at arm's length from one another, so that when God looks squarely at the believer, he cannot also see Christ with his righteousness but only pretends to. Rather, Christ and the believer have been brought into such a unity that Christ's spiritual assets, as it were, and the spiritual liabilities and assets of the believer are merged. Thus, when looking at the believer, God the Father does not see him or her alone. He sees the believer together with Christ, and in the

14. Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 36.

15. Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 57.

16. Ziesler, *Righteousness*, p. 169.

act of justification justifies both of them together. It is as if God says, "They are righteous!" He declares what is actually true of the believer, which has come to pass through God's constituting the believer one with Christ. This union is like that of a couple who, when they marry, merge their assets and liabilities. With their property held in joint tenancy, the assets of the one can wipe out the liabilities of the other, leaving a positive net balance.

Justification, then, is a three-party, not a two-party matter. And it is voluntary on the part of all three. Jesus is not an unwilling victim conscripted to the task. He willingly volunteered to give himself and unite with the sinner. There is also a conscious decision on the part of the sinner to enter into this relationship. And the Father willingly accepts it. That no one is constrained means that the whole matter is completely ethical and legal.

Numerous passages of Scripture indicate that justification is the gift of God. One of the best-known is Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Another is Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-not because of works, lest any man should boast." Justification is something completely undeserved. It is not an achievement. It is an obtainment, not an attainment. Even faith is not some good work which God must reward with salvation. It is God's gift. It is not the cause of our salvation, but the means by which we receive it. And, contrary to the thinking of some, it has always been the means of salvation. In his discussion of Abraham, the father of the Jews, Paul points out to his readers that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. He makes this point both positively and negatively. He affirms that "Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'" (Gal. 3:6). Then he rejects the idea that we can be justified by works: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse... Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law" (w. 10-11). So God has not introduced a new means of salvation. He has always worked in the same way.

The principle of salvation by grace alone is something that is difficult for humans to accept. The problem which the Galatian church encountered with legalism is not uncommon. Somehow it does not seem right that we should receive salvation without having to do anything for it or to suffer somewhat for our sins. Or if that does not seem to be the case with respect to ourselves, it certainly does seem to be the case with respect to others, especially those of an unusually evil character. Another difficulty is that when humans do accept the principle that they do not have to work to receive salvation, there frequently is a tendency to overreact, all the way to antinomianism (Rom. 6: 1-2; Gal. 5: 13- 15).

*Faith and Works*

The principle of salvation by grace brings us to the question of the relationship of faith to works. It is apparent from what has been said that works do not produce salvation. Yet the biblical witness also indicates that while it is faith that leads to justification, justification must and will invariably produce works appropriate to the nature of the new creature that has come into being. It is well when we quote the classic text on salvation by grace, Ephesians 2:8-9, not to stop short of verse 10, which points to the outcome of this grace: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." James puts it even more forcefully in his discussion of the relationship between faith and works, which is summed up in his statement, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17; see also v. 26). Despite the fairly common opinion that there is a tension between Paul and James, both make essentially the same point: that the genuineness of the faith that leads to justification becomes apparent in the results which issue from it. If there are no good works, there has been no real faith nor justification. We find support for this contention in the fact that justification is intimately linked with union with Christ. If we have become one with Christ, then we will not live according to the flesh, but rather by the Spirit (Rom. 8: 1-17). The union with Christ which brings justification also brings the new life. As J. A. Ziesler says, "The believer enters not just into a private relationship with Jesus, but a new humanity, in which he becomes a new kind of man."<sup>17</sup>

*The Lingering Consequences of Sin*

One issue remains: the consequences of sin seem to linger on, even after sin has been forgiven and the sinner justified. An example is David. He was told that his sin in committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah had been put away so that he would not die; nevertheless, the child born to Bathsheba would die because of David's sin (2 Sam. 12: 13-14). Is such forgiveness real and complete? Is it not as if God in such instances holds back a bit on his forgiveness so that a bit of punishment remains? And if this is the case, is there real grace?

We need to make a distinction here between the temporal and eternal consequences of sin. When one is justified, all of the eternal consequences of sin are canceled. This includes eternal death. But the temporal consequences of sin, both those which fall on the individual and

17. Ibid., p. 168.

those which fall on the human race collectively, are not necessarily removed. Thus we still experience physical death and the other elements of the curse of Genesis 3. A number of these consequences follow from our sins in a cause-and-effect relationship which may be either- physical or social in nature. God ordinarily does not intervene miraculously to prevent the carrying through of these laws. So if, for example, a person in a fit of rage, perhaps a drunken state, kills his family but later repents and is forgiven, God does not bring the family members back to life. The sin has led to a lifetime loss.

While we do not know the exact nature of the cause of the death of David and Bathsheba's son, it is not difficult to see a connection between David's sin and the rape, murder, and rebellion which occurred among his other children. All too aware of his own shortcomings, David may have been overly indulgent with his sons, or they may have viewed his enjoining them to good behavior as hypocritical. We see the results in the tragedies which later transpired. There is a warning here-although God's forgiveness is boundless and accessible, we ought not to presume upon it. Sin is not something to be treated lightly.

*Adoption*

The effect of justification is primarily negative: the cancellation of the judgment against us. Unfortunately, it is possible to be pardoned without simultaneously acquiring positive standing. Such is not the case with justification, however. For not only are we released from liability to punishment, but we are restored to a position of favor with God. This transfer from a status of alienation and hostility to one of acceptance and favor is termed adoption.<sup>18</sup> It is referred to in several passages in the New Testament. Perhaps the best-known is John 1:12: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." Paul notes that our adoption is a fulfilment of part of the plan of God: "He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:5). And in Galatians 4:4-5 Paul links adoption with justification: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

*The Nature of Adoption*

It is important to note several characteristics of our adoption. First, it occurs at the same time as do conversion, regeneration, justification, and

18. Murray, *Redemption*, pp. 132-34.

union with Christ. It is, additionally, the condition in which the Christian lives and operates from that time onward. Although adoption is logically distinguishable from regeneration and justification, the event is not really separable from them. Only those who are justified and regenerated are adopted, and vice versa.<sup>19</sup> This is made clear in the words which follow John 1: 12, which, as we have already noted, is a key reference to the adopted children of God: "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Adoption involves a change of both status and condition. In the formal sense, adoption is a declarative matter, an alteration of our legal status. We become God's children. This is an objective fact. In addition, however, there is the actual experience of being favored of God. We enjoy what is designated the spirit of sonship. The Christian looks affectionately and trustingly upon God as Father rather than as a fearsome slavedriver and taskmaster (John 15: 14-15). It is also significant that through adoption we are restored to the relationship with God which man once had but lost. The debate that sometimes goes on between conservatives and liberals as to whether all humans are children of God is, then, in reality a false issue, for both are correct. We are by nature and creation children of God, but we are rebellious and estranged children. We have voted ourselves out of God's family as it were. But God in adopting us restores us to the relationship with him for which we were originally intended. This condition is not something totally new, for it is not foreign to our original nature.

That we are by creation God's children is strongly implied in Paul's statement in Acts 17:24-29, culminating in verse 29: "Being then God's offspring... ." It is also implied in Hebrews 12:5-9, where God is pictured as a Father disciplining his sons. James 1:17 similarly views God as the Father of all humans: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." Probably the clearest and most straightforward of the texts in this regard is Malachi 2:10: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" Malachi is here referring only to the people of Israel and Judah. He is berating them because, despite the fact that they have one Father, having all been created by one God, they have been faithless to one another and the covenant. But the underlying principle here is of far wider application. All who have been created by this one God have one Father. God's fatherhood, then, is not of merely local significance or application. It is a universal truth because it is tied in with his creation of the human race.

Having said this, however, we must also observe that the adoption of

19. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), p. 857.

which we have been speaking introduces a type of relationship with God quite different from that which humans in general have with him. John clearly pointed out this distinction: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 John 3: 1). The unbeliever simply does not have, and cannot experience, the type of sonship which the believer experiences.<sup>20</sup>

#### *The Benefits of Adoption*

The meaning or significance of adoption becomes most apparent when we examine its results, the effects which it has in and upon the believer's life. One of these is, of course, forgiveness. In light of the fact that God has forgiven us, Paul urges us to forgive others: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). We are to be kind and tenderhearted, since God our Father has not been grudging in forgiving us. He delights in forgiving; he is merciful, tenderhearted, and kind (Deut. 5: 10; Ps. 103:8-14). He is not a stern, harsh, or severe Father. He is not to be feared, but trusted. Our adoption means that there is continued forgiveness. Were God only our Judge, our past sins would all be forgiven, but we would have no assurance of forgiveness of future wrongs. In law, one cannot be convicted or acquitted before the act in question takes place; one cannot pay a fine or serve a sentence anticipatively.<sup>21</sup> Only after the act itself can the penalty be paid and justification made. In stark contrast, we need not fear that God's grace will cease and that we will be treated severely if we slip once. God truly is our Father, not a policeman. We have peace with God, as Paul pointed out in Romans 5:1. Our adoption and God's forgiveness are eternal.

Our adoption also involves reconciliation. Not only has God forgiven us, but we also have been reconciled to him. We no longer carry enmity toward him. God has shown his love for us by taking the initiative in restoring the fellowship which was damaged by our sin. As Paul puts it, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. . . . If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:8, 10). In adoption both sides are reconciled to one another.

There also is liberty for the children of God. The child of God is not a

20. Charles M. Horne, *Salvation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), pp. 76-77.

21. It should be noted that courts hear only actual, not hypothetical, cases. No one can be found guilty or not guilty in advance of the alleged act.

slave who obeys out of a sense of bondage or compulsion. Slaves live in fear of the consequences should they fail to carry out their obligations. But Paul points out that as God's children we need not fear the consequences of failing to live up to the law: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8: 14-16). A similar thought is expressed in Galatians 3:10-11. We are free persons. We are not obligated to the law in quite the way in which a slave or servant is.

This liberty is not license, however. There are always some who pervert their freedom. Paul gave warning to such people: "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:13-16). Believers serve God not out of fear and pressure, but out of a higher motivation-their friendship with him. Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15: 14-15). Earlier in the same address he had made similar statements: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments... He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:15, 21). The believer keeps the commandments, not out of fear of a cruel and harsh master, but out of love for a kindly and loving Father.\*\*

Adoption means that the Christian is the recipient of God's fatherly care. Paul noted that "we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16-17). As heirs we have available to us the unlimited resources of the Father. Paul pointed this out to the Philippians: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4: 19). The believer can pray confidently, knowing that there is no limitation upon what God is able to do. According to Jesus, the Father who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the fields cares even more for his human children (Matt. 6:25-34). His provision is always wise and kind (Luke 11:11-13).

It should not be thought that God is indulgent or permissive, however.

22. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 493-94.

He is our heavenly Father, not our heavenly Grandfather. Thus, discipline is one of the features of our adoption. In the letter to the Hebrews there is a rather extended discussion of this subject (Heb. 12:5-11). Quoting Proverbs 3:11-12, the writer comments: "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" (Heb. 12:7). Discipline may not be pleasant at the moment of application, but it is beneficial in the long term. It is to be remembered that love is concern and action for the ultimate welfare of another. Therefore, discipline should be thought of as evidence of love rather than as evidence of lack of love. It may not always be thought of as a benefit of adoption, but it is a benefit nonetheless. God several times referred to Israel as his son (Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11: 1). As unruly and rebellious as this son was, God did not cast him away. We need not be worried, then, that God will discard us when we stray. If he clung to Israel through all of their iniquity as recorded in the Old Testament, he will be patient with us as well, showing persistent, faithful loving-kindness.

Finally, adoption involves the Father's goodwill. It is one thing for us to be pardoned, for the penalty incurred by our wrongdoing to have been paid. That, however, may simply mean we will not be punished in the future. It does not necessarily guarantee goodwill. If a criminal's debt to society has been paid, society will not thereafter look favorably or charitably upon him. There will instead be suspicion, distrust, even animosity. With the Father, however, there are the love and goodwill that we so much need and desire. He is ours and we are his, and he through adoption extends to us all the benefits his measureless love can bestow.

# 46

## The Continuation of Salvation

### Sanctification

The Nature of Sanctification

Sanctification: Complete or incomplete?

### The Christian Life

Union with Christ

A Relationship of Friendship

The Role of the Law

Separation

The Salvation of Old Testament Believers

**T**he beginnings of salvation as we examined them in the preceding two chapters are both complex and profound. Yet they are not the end of God's special working to restore his children to the likeness to him for which they are destined. Having begun this work of transformation, he continues and completes it.

### Sanctification

#### *The Nature of Sanctification*

Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her actually holy. By "holy" here is meant 'bearing an

actual likeness to God." Sanctification is a process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration, when a newness of life was conferred upon and instilled within the believer. In particular, sanctification is the Holy Spirit's applying to the life of the believer the work done by Jesus Christ.

There are two basic senses of the word *sanctification*, which are related to two basic concepts of holiness. On the one hand, there is holiness as a formal characteristic of particular objects, persons, and places. In this sense holiness refers to a state of being separate, set apart from the ordinary or mundane and dedicated to a particular purpose or use. The Hebrew adjective for "holy" (*קדש—qadosh*) literally means "separate," since it derives from a verb meaning "to cut off" or "to separate."<sup>1</sup> Together with its cognates it is used to designate particular places (especially the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies), objects (e.g., Aaron's garments and the Sabbath day), and persons (e.g., the priests and Levites) as specially set apart or sanctified to the Lord. An example is found in Exodus 13:2: "Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." Similarly, the holiness of God signifies his separateness from anything impure.

This sense of sanctification is found in the New Testament as well. Peter refers to his readers as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9). Here, being sanctified means "to belong to the Lord." Sanctification in this sense is something that occurs at the very beginning of the Christian life, at the point of conversion, along with regeneration and justification. It is in this sense that the New Testament so frequently refers to Christians as "saints" (*ἅγιοι*), even when they are far from perfect.<sup>2</sup> Paul, for example, addresses the persons in the church at Corinth in this way, even though it was probably the most imperfect of the churches to which he ministered: "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

The other sense of sanctification is moral goodness or spiritual worth. This sense gradually came to predominate. It designates not merely the fact that believers are formally set apart, or belong to Christ, but that

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), p. 871.

2. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1953), p. 5.

they are then to conduct themselves accordingly. They are to live lives of purity and goodness.<sup>3</sup>

The term *sanctification* does not appear in the Synoptic Gospels at all. To convey the idea that our lives are to be pure, Jesus emphasized instead that we are children of God. We belong to God and consequently should show a likeness to him. We should share his spirit of love: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:43–45a). To Jesus, his brother and sister are those who do God's will (Mark 3:35). Paul shares this conception that our status before God is to result in holy living. For example, he urges the Ephesians, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). He then goes on to specify a life of lowliness, meekness, patience, and forbearance. The fact of belonging to God is to issue in moral attributes reflecting such a status.<sup>4</sup>

In order to focus more sharply the nature of sanctification, it will be helpful to contrast it with justification. There are a number of significant differences. One pertains to duration. Justification is an instantaneous occurrence, complete in a moment, whereas sanctification is a process requiring an entire lifetime for completion. There is a quantitative distinction as well. One is either justified or not, whereas one may be more or less sanctified. That is, there are degrees of sanctification but not of justification. Justification is a forensic or declarative matter, as we have seen earlier, while sanctification is an actual transformation of the character and condition of the person. Justification is an objective work affecting our standing before God, our relationship to him, while sanctification is a subjective work affecting our inner person.

We need to look now at the characteristics of sanctification. We must first emphasize that sanctification is a supernatural work; it is something done by God, not something we do ourselves. Thus, it is not reform that we are speaking of. Paul wrote, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). Other references stressing that it is God who works our sanctification include Ephesians 5:26; Titus 2: 14; and Hebrews 13:20–21. When we say that sanctification is supernatural, we mean that it is something which nature cannot produce or account for. It is also supernatural in the sense that it

3. Ibid.

4. Horst Seebass, "Holy, Consecrate, Sanctify, Saints, Devout," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), vol. 2, p. 230.

is a special, volitional work or series of works by the Holy Spirit. It is not just a matter of his general providence as universally manifested.

Further, this divine working within the believer is a progressive matter. This is seen, for example, in Paul's assurance that God will continue to work in the lives of the Philippians: "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Paul also notes that the cross is the power of God "to us who are being saved" (1 Cor. 1: 18). He uses a present participle here, which clearly conveys the idea of ongoing activity. That this activity is the continuation and completion of the newness of life begun in regeneration is evident not only from Philippians 1:6, but also from Colossians 3:9–10: "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

The aim of this divine working is likeness to Christ himself. This was God's intention from all eternity: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). The word translated "to be conformed to" (*συμμόρφως*) indicates a likeness to Christ which is not just an external or superficial resemblance. It signifies the whole set of characteristics or qualities which makes something what it is. Further, it is a compound word, with the prefix indicating vital connection with the object resembled. This is clear evidence that our being made like Christ is not an arm's-length transaction. What we come to have we have *together with him*.

Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> In Galatians 5 Paul speaks of the life in the Spirit: "Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (v. 16); "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (v. 25). He also lists a group of qualities which he designates collectively as "the fruit of the Spirit"-love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (v. 22–23). Similarly, in Romans 8 Paul says much about the Spirit and the Christian. Christians walk according to the Spirit (v. 4), set their minds on the things of the Spirit (v. 5), are in the Spirit (v. 9); the Spirit dwells in them (v. 9); by the Spirit they have put to death the deeds of the body (v. 13); they are led by the Spirit (v. 14); the Spirit bears witness that they are children of God (v. 16); the Spirit intercedes for them (v. 26–27). It is the Spirit who is at work in the believer, bringing about likeness to Christ.

One might conclude from the preceding that sanctification is com-

5. Otto Procksch, ἀγιος, ἀγιάζω, ἀγιασμός, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), vol. 1, p. 113.

pletely a passive matter on the believer's part. This is not so, however. While sanctification is exclusively of God, that is, its power rests entirely on his holiness,<sup>6</sup> the believer is constantly exhorted to work and to grow in the matters pertaining to salvation. For example, Paul writes to the Philippians: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12–13). Paul urges both practice of virtues and avoidance of evils (Rom. 12:9, 16–17). We are to put to death the works of the body (Rom. 8: 13) and present our bodies a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1–2). So while sanctification is God's work, the believer has a role as well, entailing both removal of sinfulness and development of holiness.

#### *Sanctification: Complete or Incomplete?*

One major issue over which there has been disagreement throughout church history is whether the process of sanctification is ever completed within the earthly lifetime of the believer. Do we ever come to the point where we no longer sin? There are sharp differences of opinion upon this matter. While it is dangerous to generalize, those who answer that question in the affirmative (the perfectionists) tend to be Arminians. Major perfectionistic denominations such as the Church of the Nazarene and the Pentecostal groups are Arminian. Not all Arminians are perfectionists, however. Calvinists are usually nonperfectionistic.

Perfectionists hold that it is possible to come to a state where a believer does not sin, and that indeed some Christians do arrive at that point. This does not mean that the person cannot sin, but that indeed he or she does not sin. Nor does this mean that there is no further need for the means of grace or for the Holy Spirit, that there is no longer any temptation or struggle with the innate tendency toward evil, or that there is no room for further spiritual growth.<sup>7</sup> It does mean, however, that it is possible not to sin, and that some believers actually do abstain from all evil. There are ample biblical texts supporting such a view. One of them is Matthew 5:48, where Jesus tells his hearers, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Paul notes that leaders will be provided to equip the saints for building up the body of Christ "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 13). He prays for the Thessalonians, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept

6. Ibid., p. 111.

7. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth, 1952), p. 28.

sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). The writer to the Hebrews similarly prays that "the God of peace ... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:20-21). These verses certainly seem to offer *prima facie* evidence that total sanctification is a possibility for all believers, and a reality for some.<sup>8</sup>

No less earnest about their convictions are those who maintain that perfection is an ideal which will never be attained within this life. They maintain that as much as we should desire and strive after complete deliverance from sin, sinlessness is simply not a realistic goal for this life. They point to certain passages which indicate that we cannot escape sin.<sup>9</sup> One of the more prominent of these passages is 1 John 1:8-10: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." That this passage was written to believers renders the statement that there is sin in all of us the more cogent.

Another passage which is very frequently alluded to by the nonperfectionist is Romans 7, where Paul describes his own experience. On the assumption that Paul has in view his life after conversion (an assumption which not all scholars accept), this passage appears to be a vivid and forceful testimony to the effect that the believer is not free from sin. Paul puts it powerfully: "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (vv. 18-19). This word came from one of the greatest of all Christians; indeed, many would say he was the greatest Christian of all time. If even he confessed having great difficulty with sin, certainly we must conclude that perfection is not to be experienced in this life.

How shall we untangle all of these considerations and arrive at a conclusion on this difficult but important topic? We begin by noting again the nature of sin. It is not merely acts of an external nature. Jesus made it quite clear that even the thoughts and attitudes that we have are sinful if they are less than perfectly in accord with the mind of the almighty and completely holy God (see, e.g., Matt. 5:21-28). Thus, sin is of a considerably more pervasive and subtle character than we might tend to think.

8. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (London: William Tegg, 1851), pp. 604-13.

9. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), p. 879.

We also need to determine the nature of the perfection that is commanded of us. The word *τέλειοι*, which is found in Matthew 5:48, does not mean "flawless" or "spotless." Rather, it means "complete." It is quite possible, then, to be "perfect" without being entirely free from sin.<sup>10</sup> That is, we can possess the fullness of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13) and the full fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) without possessing them completely.

The standard to be aimed for is complete freedom from sin. The commands to strive by the grace of God to attain that goal are too numerous to ignore. And certainly, if it is possible by this enablement to avoid giving in to a particular temptation, then it must be possible to prevail in every case. Paul set it forth thus: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Having said this, however, we must also note the forcefulness of passages like 1 John 1. And even beyond these didactic passages there is the confirming fact that Scripture freely portrays the great men and women of God as sinners. While we must be careful to avoid basing our argument primarily upon the experiential, the phenomena of the Christian life, we must nonetheless note that the narrative and descriptive portions of Scripture confirm and elucidate the didactic passages in this regard. Apparently the perfection which we may presume was possessed by the great heroes and heroines of faith in Hebrews 11 was not incompatible with the fact that they were not entirely free from sin. In addition, the Lord's Prayer implies that until the kingdom of God comes completely on earth, it will be necessary to pray, "Forgive us our sins." Our conclusion is that while complete freedom from and victory over sin are the standard to be aimed at and are theoretically possible, it is doubtful whether any believer will attain this goal within this life.

Certain difficulties attach to assuming such a stance, however. One is that it seems contradictory to repeatedly exhort Christians to a victorious, spotless life unless it is a real possibility.<sup>11</sup> But does this necessarily follow? We may have a standard, an ideal, toward which we press, but which we do not expect to reach within a finite period of time. It has been observed that no one has ever reached the North Star by sailing or flying toward it. That does not change the fact, however, that it is still the mark toward which we press, our measure of "northernness." Similarly, although we may never be perfectly sanctified within this life, we shall be in the

10. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 629.

11. Finney, *Lectures*, pp. 611-13.

eternity beyond and hence should presently aim to arrive as close to complete sanctification as we can.

Another problem is the presence of teachings like 1 John 3:4–6: “Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.” Does this not confirm the perfectionist position? Note, however, that the verb forms, particularly the participles in verse 4 (“who commits sin”) and the latter half of verse 6 (“who sins”), are in the present tense. The meaning here is that everyone who continues in habitual sin is guilty of lawlessness and has never known Christ.

There are important practical implications of our view that though sinlessness is not experienced in this life, it must be our aim. On the one hand, this position means that there need not be great feelings of discouragement, defeat, even despair and guilt when we do sin. But on the other hand, it also means that we will not be overly pleased with ourselves nor indifferent to the presence of sin. For we will faithfully and diligently ask God to overcome completely the tendency toward evil which, like Paul, we find so prevalent within us.

### The Christian Life

The New Testament has a great deal to say about the basis and nature of the ongoing Christian life. This instruction not only helps us understand God’s sanctifying activity in us, but also gives us guidance for living the Christian life.

#### *Union with Christ*

In the preceding chapter we examined at some length the concept of union with Christ as in a sense encompassing the whole of salvation. There we noted that justification is possible because, being united with Christ, we share and possess his righteousness. Beyond that, however, it is clear that our continued walk in the Christian life, our sanctification is dependent on union with him. Jesus made this quite evident in his imagery of the vine and the branches: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5). Jesus viewed union with him which is closely linked to keeping his commandments (v. 10), as the key

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to the believer’s whole Christian life. Fruit-bearing (v. 5), prayer (v. 7), and ultimately joy (v. 11) depend upon it.

Paul expressed a similar idea in his wish to “gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:8b–11). Here, becoming like Christ is closely connected with a willingness to share in his sufferings. A similar expression is found in Romans 8:17: “and if [we are] children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” Apparently Paul regarded union with Christ as a two-way commitment.<sup>12</sup>

#### *A Relationship of Friendship*

Perhaps Christ’s most touching and intimate picture of the relationship between the believer and himself is found in his use of the figure of friendship in John 15. This is more than a metaphor, however, for surely here Christ is saying something literal about this relationship. Believers are not to think of themselves as servants or slaves ( $\delta\sigma\lambda\omega\iota$ ), for Jesus has told them everything he has heard from his Father. In so doing he has acted not as a master, who does not explain to his servants what he is doing, but as a friend (v. 15). As friends of Jesus rather than slaves, believers have a totally different attitude. There are trust and confidence in Jesus rather than fear and secretiveness.

The same type of warmth and trust is also present in the believer’s relationship to the Father. Just as human fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, so also does the heavenly Father. He will not give anything evil or harmful to his child who asks in simple faith (Luke 1:11–13). The heavenly Father knows the child’s needs and any danger that might threaten, and in accordance with that knowledge acts for the child’s welfare (Matt. 6:25–34; 10:28–31).

#### *The Role of the Law*

Now that we have seen that the Christian life is based on our union and friendship with Christ, the question arises: What place does the law have in this scheme? Other than matters directly related to Jesus Christ

12. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 516–17.

himself, few topics have received more extensive treatment by Paul than has the place of the law. In order to understand what the New Testament has to say about the place of the law in the Christian life, we must first determine the role it played under the Old Testament scheme of things.

It is popularly held that whereas salvation in the New Testament era is obtained through faith, Old Testament saints were saved by fulfilling the law. A close examination of significant Old Testament texts belies this assumption, however. In actuality, the important factor was the covenant which God established with his people by grace; the law was simply the standard God set for those people who would adhere to that covenant.<sup>13</sup> So it is said of Abraham that "he believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Paul makes clear that Abraham's salvation was by faith, not by works of the law (Gal. 3:6). In numerous ways the Old Testament itself points out that it is not fulfilment of the law that saves a person. The law itself prescribed complete and unqualified love for God: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). It similarly commanded love for one's neighbor: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19: 18). If personal fulfilment of this law had been required of the Old Testament saints, none of them would have been saved. Clearly, salvation came through faith rather than works. Furthermore, although the covenant between God and man was certified by an external ritual, namely, circumcision, that act alone was insufficient to make a person right with God. There had to be a circumcision of the heart as well (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4).<sup>14</sup> That act of faith was the crucial factor.

During the inter-testamental period the law took on a different status within Judaism. The idea of the law came to overshadow the covenant. Observance of the law came to be regarded as the basis on which God passes judgment upon humanity.<sup>15</sup> It was said to be the grounds of hope (Testament of Judah 26:1), justification (Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 51:3), righteousness (Apoc. Bar. 67:6), salvation (Apoc. Bar. 51:7), resurrection (2 Maccabees 7:9), life (4 Ezra 7:20–21; 9:31). It was maintained that obedience to the law would bring in the kingdom and transform the world (Jubilees 23). George Ladd comments, "Thus the Law attains the position of an intermediary between God and man."<sup>16</sup>

In the New Testament, and particularly the writings of Paul, the law is seen quite differently. As we look into this matter, we must keep in mind

13. *Ibid.*, p. 496.

14. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), p. 94.

15. Hermann Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, *Law*, Bible Key Words, vol. 11 (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 69.

16. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 497.

that the status and significance of the law are never depreciated in the New Testament. Jesus himself says that he did not come "to abolish the law and the prophets ... but to fulfil them" (Matt. 5: 17). Similarly, Paul speaks of the law as "the law of God" (Rom. 7:22, 25). It is not sin (Rom. 7:7); it is holy, just, and good (v. 12); it is spiritual (v. 14).

Judaism at this time considered salvation to be based upon obedience to the law, but realistically recognized that strict obedience was rare. So the teaching that salvation is based upon obedience was supplemented with a doctrine of repentance and forgiveness. In Paul's understanding, however, this new trend in Judaistic thinking mixed two contradictory principles: works and grace.<sup>17</sup> He insisted instead that to be righteous one has to obey the law in all of its particulars (Gal. 5:3). Failure to keep any part of it is violation of all of it (Gal. 3:10). On this point he was in agreement with the teaching of James (James 2:11). There is a problem, of course, in that none of us can obey all of the law.

Inasmuch as we are unable to achieve righteousness by adhering strictly to the law, the role of the law is not to justify, but to show us what sin is (Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20; Gal. 3:19). By revealing man's sinful condition, the law establishes him as a sinner. The law does not actually cause us to sin, but it constitutes our actions sin by giving God's evaluation of them. That we cannot in ourselves fulfil the law and thus be justified by it does not mean, however, that the law is now abolished. For in Christ, God has done what the law could not do: sending his own Son for sin, he has condemned sin in the flesh, so that what the law requires is now fulfilled by those who walk by the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4). As faith in Christ frees us from the law, we are actually being enabled to uphold the law (Rom. 3:31). The law, then, continues to have application.

Just as we do not receive the righteousness to enter the Christian life by doing in our own strength the works which the law requires, so the continuance of the Christian life is by grace, not by works which fulfil the law. And yet, although Christians do not acquire and maintain righteousness by fulfilling the specific requirements of the law, they are nonetheless to regard the biblically revealed law as an expression of God's will for their lives, for, as we have seen, the law has not been abolished. Paul notes that we can fulfil several specific commandments of the law by love (Rom. 13:8-10). He reiterates the importance of the command to love one's father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise (Eph. 6:2). Thus, Ladd observes, "It is clear that the

17. G. F. Moore points out that no rabbi would have seen a contradiction here—*Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1962), vol. 3, pp. 150-51.

Law continues to be the expression of the will of God for conduct, even for those who are no longer under the Law.”<sup>18</sup>

It is important to draw a distinction between attempting to observe the principles embodied in the law and legalism. Scripture does not give us any basis for disregarding God’s revealed commands. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14: 15), and “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). We are not at liberty to reject such commands; to do so would be an abuse of Christian freedom. Therefore, we must seek to guide our lives by these precepts. Such behavior is not legalism. Legalism is a slavish following of the law in the belief that one thereby earns merit; it also entails a refusal to go beyond the formal or literal requirements of the law. It is completely ineffectual in that it ignores the facts that we never outgrow the need for divine grace and that the essence of the law is love.

#### *Separation*

One theme which follows from the biblical insistence upon holiness and purity is separation. The Christian is to be removed from certain aspects of the world. This message is proclaimed by James: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). Similarly, Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6: 17-18). Such appeals to live pure and distinctive lives are based upon the fact that we are God’s own people; our relationships and behavior ought to be different from those of the world.

The application of these principles to the actual conduct of life has meant different things to different people. To some it means a shunning of the wisdom of the world, that is, avoidance of secular learning. To others it means separation from churches or church bodies which are not pure in doctrine or lifestyle. To yet others, it means withdrawing from any profound or prolonged contact with non-Christian persons, lest one’s own faith and life should be corrupted thereby. It has also meant abstaining from certain personal practices such as smoking, drinking, dancing, and theater attendance. Certain groups have adopted several of these understandings of separation.<sup>19</sup>

18. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 5 10.

19. See, e.g., John R. Rice, *The Ruin of a Christian* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord, 1944), pp.13-40.

On the other hand, in recent years there has also been a movement toward secularization in some evangelical circles. This movement has taken several forms. One of them is educational and academic. Among its manifestations are desires to make Christian educational institutions the equal of their secular counterparts, or to obtain one’s education, particularly on the graduate level, at a secular institution, or to involve oneself in the scholarship conducted in broader circles.

There has also been an ecclesiastical form of secularization. Conservatives in the first half of the twentieth century often chose to withdraw from groups that they perceived to be theologically liberal. This was the case with the founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929 by J. Gresham Machen, Oswald T. Allis, Robert Dick Wilson, and others who separated from Princeton Seminary and ultimately were forced out of the parent denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.<sup>20</sup> The formation of the General Association of Regular Baptists and that of the Conservative Baptist Association are instances of the same phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> Some evangelicals, however, have in recent years chosen to remain a part of parent denominations which have drifted to the left theologically; it is the feeling of these evangelicals that they can have a greater influence from within than from outside.<sup>22</sup>

There has, further, been a movement toward a less separatistic social stance. This is true on the individual level; close personal friendships are maintained with non-Christians. It is also true on a broader level; evangelicals are now choosing to live and work within the non-Christian segments of society, to be members of organizations which make either no explicit claim to a Christian commitment or an inconsistent one. And finally, some evangelicals have adopted personal practices which were formerly taboo. For example, some people who identify themselves as evangelicals now indulge in drinking, smoking, and even the use of four-letter words.<sup>23</sup>

There are biblical grounds supporting certain forms of each side of this tension. On the one hand, there certainly is scriptural teaching that since we belong to a pure and holy God, we are to be pure as well. But there is also Jesus’ teaching that we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5: 13-16). We are to make our influence felt in a world that needs the tempering effect of Christianity. To be involved

20. Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 430-68.

21. Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1950), pp. 440-52.

22. Edward J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pp. 132-37.

23. Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 119.

in the structures of society while still maintaining our distinctiveness, our quality as salt and light, requires a delicate balance; each Christian will need to determine prayerfully just how he or she can best achieve it. The ideal laid down by James should be our goal: both to practice acts of compassion and kindness and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

#### *The Salvation of Old Testament Believers*

One issue which may not be of direct practical importance but which has far-reaching implications is the status of the Old Testament believers. Was their salvation on the same basis as that of believers since the time of Pentecost? Was their subjective experience of the Christian life the same as that which we have today? If there were differences, how do they affect the way we interpret and apply the Old Testament?

In our examination of the status of the law, we noted that justification was apparently on the same grounds in Old Testament times as in the New Testament period. It was not by works but by faith. But what of the other aspects of salvation?

Regeneration is a particularly problematic issue with regard to Old Testament believers. Some theologians have quite flatly stated that Old Testament believers were not regenerated, and could not be, since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, and would not be until Pentecost. A representative of this position is Lewis Sperry Chafer:

Of the present ministries of the Holy Spirit in relation to the believer—regeneration, indwelling, baptizing, sealing and filling—nothing indeed is said with respect to these having been experienced by the Old Testament saints... Old Testament saints are invested with these blessings only theoretically... The Old Testament will be searched in vain for record of Jews passing from an unsaved to a saved state, or for any declaration about the terms upon which 'such a change would be secured... The conception of an abiding indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which every believer becomes an unalterable temple of the Holy Spirit belongs only to this age of the church, and has no place in the provisions of Judaism.<sup>24</sup>

Note that this position is an inferential conclusion drawn from the belief that regeneration can take place only in connection with indwelling by the Holy Spirit. Yet there is an absence of real proof that Old Testament believers were not regenerated. On the other hand, there are several

<sup>24</sup>. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948), vol. 6, pp. 73-74.

biblical considerations that do argue for the occurrence of regeneration in the Old Testament (or pre-Pentecost) period.

A major consideration is that the language used to describe the status of Old Testament saints is remarkably similar to that which depicts the regeneration of New Testament believers. Moses distinguished between two groups within Israel. There were those who walked in the stubbornness of their hearts (Deut. 29:19-20). They were referred to as "stubborn" and "stiff-necked" (Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; Ezek. 2:4). A similar concept is expressed by Stephen: "stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:5 1). Now contrast with these descriptions the promise of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:6: "And the **Lord** your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the **Lord** your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." The contrast is between those who are circumcised of heart and those who are not. Paul clarifies this expression: "For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God" (Rom. 2:28-29). Arthur Lewis comments: "Paul therefore taught and believed that within the total number of Jews there had always been a company of **true Jews**, **all** of those who were saved by faith and cleansed from within, having their hearts altered ('circumcised') to conform to the will of God."<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the resemblance in language depicting the condition of Old and New Testament believers, Old Testament descriptions of changes in human hearts strongly resemble the New Testament depiction of the new birth. Samuel told Saul, "The spirit of the **Lord** will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them and be turned into another man" (1 Sam. 10:6). This promise was immediately fulfilled: "When [Saul] turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all these signs came to pass that day" (v. 9). The Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul and he prophesied. In Isaiah 57:15 God declares his intention "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite." The Hebrew verb literally means "to cause to live."<sup>26</sup> Twice in Ezekiel (11:19-20; 36:25-26) God promises to replace the heart of stone with a new heart, a heart of flesh. All of these references appear to be more than mere figurative expressions. What they are describing is a transformation like that which Jesus described to Nicodemus. We should also note that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus well before Pentecost. It is difficult

<sup>25</sup>. Arthur H. Lewis, "The New Birth Under the Old Covenant," *Evangelical Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (January 1984): 37.

<sup>26</sup>. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, p. 3 11.

to believe that he was describing something which would not be available until a few years hence—or that the apostles were not born again until Pentecost.

The issue that concerns us here, however, is whether the Old Testament saints experienced sanctification. It is significant that in the Old Testament we find prominent cases of what the New Testament terms “the fruit of the Spirit.” Note, for example, that Noah and Job were both righteous men, blameless in conduct (Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1, 8). Special attention is given to Abraham’s faith, Joseph’s goodness, Moses’ meekness, Solomon’s wisdom, and Daniel’s self-control. While these men did not experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they were certainly under his influence.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to the similarities we have noted, there are two ways in which the salvation Old Testament believers possessed and experienced differed from the New Testament variety. While based entirely upon the work of Christ, grace in the Old Testament was indirectly received. The Old Testament believers did not know how that grace had been effected. They did not understand that their righteousness was proleptic—it was achieved by the future death of the incarnate Son of God. That grace was also mediated by priests and sacrificial rites; it did not come about through a direct personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The second point of difference lies in the relative externality of Old Testament grace. The Holy Spirit did not dwell within, but exerted an external influence, for example, through the written and spoken word. The presence of God was visibly represented by the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and temple. The law was an external written code rather than the Spirit’s imparting of truth to the heart, as would later be the case (John 14:26). But despite these differences, the Old Testament saint, like the New Testament believer, grew in holiness through faith and obedience to the commands of God. This spiritual progress was the work of God.

If there were radical differences between the salvation of Old Testament believers and that of Christians from Pentecost on, we might be inclined to think that the pattern which we find in the New Testament is also a variable form subject to change. But the fact that the essence of salvation has remained unchanged across widely differing times and cultures, with only minor variations attributable to progressive revelation, indicates that the New Testament pattern of salvation is to be ours as well.

The Christian life, as we have seen, is not a static matter in which one is saved and then merely reposes in that knowledge. It is a process of growth and progress, lived not in the Christian’s own strength, but in the power and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And it is a process of challenge and satisfaction.

27. Lewis, “New Birth,” p. 40.

## The Completion of Salvation

### Perseverance

The Calvinist View

The Arminian View

A Resolution of the Problem

### Glorification

The Meaning of "Glory"

The Glorification of the Believer

**C**hristians know that two experiences lie ahead of them. One of these experiences is physical death or the end of earthly life. The other is the life thereafter, the eternity beyond this life and world. The believer is assured that there will be survival of the former and blessed existence throughout the latter. In this chapter we will discuss two major topics. First, the Christian, kept by the grace of God, will successfully endure all the trials and temptations of this life, and remain true to the Lord until death. This we term "perseverance." Second, the life beyond will not be merely an extension of the current quality of life but the perfecting of it. The limitations which we currently experience will be removed. This we term "glorification."

**Perseverance**

Will the believer who has genuinely been regenerated, justified, adopted by God, and united with Jesus Christ persist in that relationship? In other words, will a person who becomes a Christian always remain such? And if so, on what basis? This issue is of considerable importance from the standpoint of practical Christian living. If, on the one hand, there is no guarantee that salvation is permanent, believers may experience a great deal of anxiety and insecurity that will detract from the major tasks of the Christian life. On the other hand, if our salvation is absolutely secure, if we are preserved quite independently of what we do or what our life is like, then there may well be, as a result, a sort of lassitude or indifference to the moral and spiritual demands of the gospel; the end result may even be libertinism. Therefore, determining the scriptural teaching concerning the security of the believer is worth whatever time and effort may be necessary.

**The Calvinist View**

Two major positions have been taken on the issue of whether the salvation of the believer is absolutely secure—the Calvinist and the Arminian. These two positions hold certain conceptions in common. They agree that God is powerful and faithful, willing and able to keep his promises. They agree, at least in their usual forms, that salvation is neither attained nor retained by works of the human person. They are agreed that the Holy Spirit is at work in all believers (although there may be some disagreement as to whether the Spirit is more fully present and active in some Christians than in others). Both are convinced of the completeness of the salvation provided by God. They both insist that the believer can indeed know that he or she currently possesses salvation. But with all of these beliefs held in common, there are still significant points of difference between the two.

The Calvinist position is both clear and forthright on this matter: “They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”<sup>1</sup> This point is consistent with the remainder of the Calvinist theological system. Since God has elected certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity to receive eternal life, and those so chosen will necessarily come to receive eternal life, it follows that there must be a permanence to their salvation. If the elect could at some point lose their

1. Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1.

salvation, God’s election of them to eternal life would not be truly effectual. Thus, the doctrine of election as understood by the Calvinist requires perseverance as well. As Loraine Boettner puts it:

This doctrine [Perseverance] does not stand alone but is a necessary part of the Calvinistic system of theology. The doctrines of Election and Efficient Grace logically imply the certain salvation of those who receive these blessings. If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved.<sup>2</sup>

It is not logical consistency alone which leads the Calvinist to hold to the doctrine of perseverance, however. There are numerous biblical teachings which serve independently to support the doctrine. Among them is a group of texts emphasizing the indestructible quality of the salvation which God provides.<sup>3</sup> An example is 1 Peter 1:3-5: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” The three adjectives used to describe our inheritance are vivid and powerful. They speak of our salvation as incapable of being destroyed in the fashion in which armies ravage a nation during war. It cannot be corrupted or spoiled by the introduction of something impure. And it never fades, no matter what influences are brought to bear upon it. This salvation has a permanent quality about it; it endures!

Various texts emphasizing the persistence and power of divine love also support the doctrine of perseverance.<sup>4</sup> One such testimony is found in Paul’s statement in Romans 8:31–39, culminating in verses 38 and 39: “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This text clearly points to a continued working of God in the life of the believer. Christ does not simply give us eternal life and then abandon us to our human self-efforts. Rather, the work begun in him is continued until it is completed: “And I am sure that

2. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 182.

3. John Murray, *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 155.

4. Boettner, *Predestination*, p. 185.

he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Moreover, Christ is said to make intercession for us constantly (Heb. 7:25). Since Jesus said that the Father always hears his prayers (John 11:42), it follows that these prayers of intercession for us are effectual. And not only is Christ interceding at the right hand of the Father, but the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26). Thus, even when we do not know how to pray or what to pray for, prayer is being offered for us.

Support for the Calvinist position is also afforded by the biblical assurances that, because of God's provisions, we will be able to deal with and overcome whatever obstacles and temptations come our way. Our Master will enable us his servants to stand in the face of the judgment (Rom. 14:4). He provides a way for coping with temptations: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Calvinist finds the greatest source of encouragement concerning this matter, however, in the direct promises of the Lord's keeping. One of the most straightforward is Jesus' statement to his disciples: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27-30). Accordingly, Paul had complete confidence in the Lord's keeping: "But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me" (2 Tim. 1:12).

In addition, many Calvinists also infer their view of perseverance from other doctrines.<sup>5</sup> Among them is the doctrine of union with Christ. If believers have been made one with Christ and his life flows through them (John 15:1-11), it is inconceivable that anything could nullify that connection. Louis Berkhof says, "It is impossible that they should again be removed from the body, thus frustrating the divine ideal."<sup>6</sup> The doctrine of the new birth, the Holy Spirit's impartation of a new nature to the believer, likewise lends support to the doctrine of perseverance. John states, "No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). If salvation could be lost, there would have to be some reversal of regeneration. But can this be? Can spiritual death actually come to someone in whom the

5. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), p. 882.

6. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 547-48.

Holy Spirit dwells, that is, to someone who has already been given eternal life? This must surely be an impossibility, for eternal life is by definition everlasting. Finally, perseverance is an implication of the biblical teaching that we can be assured of salvation. Relevant passages here include Hebrews 6:11;10:22; and 2 Peter 1:10. Perhaps the clearest of all is found in the Book of 1 John. Having cited several evidences (the testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood) that God has given us eternal life in his Son, the apostle summarizes: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5: 13). How could one have this assurance if it were possible to lose salvation? That we can have such assurance means that our salvation must be secure.

#### *The Arminian View*

A quite different stance is taken by the Arminians. One of the early statements of their view on the issue of perseverance is that of the Remonstrants. While the position detailed in the *Sententia Remonstrantium* presented to the Synod of Dort is in many ways quite moderate, insisting only that falling away is possible,<sup>7</sup> later statements of the Arminian position are more emphatic. These are based upon both scriptural material and experiential phenomena.

The first class of biblical materials cited by Arminians as bearing upon the issue of perseverance consists of warnings against apostasy. Jesus warned his disciples about the danger of being led astray (Matt. 24:3-14). He said specifically, "Take heed that no one leads you astray" (v. 4). And after describing various events which will take place before his second coming, he added, "And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved" (w. 11-13). Would Jesus have issued such a warning to his disciples if it were not possible for them to fall away and thus lose their salvation? There are similar warnings in other portions of Scripture. Paul, whom Calvinists frequently cite in support of their position, suggested that there is a conditional character to salvation: "And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard" (Col. 1:21-23a). Paul also warned the Corinthians, "Let any one who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). The writer to the Hebrews

7. *Sententia Remonstrantium* 5. 3.

was especially vehement, calling his readers' attention on several occasions to the dangers of falling away and the importance of being on guard. One notable example is Hebrews 2:1: "Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." A slightly different injunction is found in 3: 12-14: "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end." It is difficult, says the Arminian, to understand why such warnings were given if the believer cannot fall away.<sup>8</sup>

The Arminian also cites texts which urge believers to continue in the faith. An example of these exhortations to faithfulness, which frequently appear in conjunction with warnings such as we have just noted, is Hebrews 6: 1 I-1 2: "And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Paul testified regarding his own diligence and efforts to remain faithful: "But I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27). The urgency of Paul's efforts to keep from being disqualified suggests that even his salvation could be lost.

Arminians also base their view upon passages which apparently teach that people do apostasize.<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6 is perhaps the most commonly cited and straightforward instance: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt." Another instance is Hebrews 10:26-27: "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries." These are clear statements about people who, having had the experience of salvation, departed from it.

The Bible does not simply remain on this abstract level, however. It also records concrete cases of specific persons who apostasized or fell away.<sup>10</sup> One of the most vivid is the case of King Saul in the Old Testa-

8. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 350-54.

9. I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (London: Epworth, 1969), p. 141.

10. Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1869), pp. 463-65.

ment. He had been chosen and anointed king of Israel, but eventually proved so disobedient that God did not answer him when he prayed (1 Sam. 28:6). Rejected by God, Saul lost his position as king and came to a tragic death. A striking New Testament instance of apostasy is Judas, who was chosen by Jesus as one of the twelve disciples. It seems inconceivable to the Arminian either that Jesus would have intentionally chosen an unbeliever to be one of his most intimate associates and confidants, or that he made a mistake of judgment in his selection. The conclusion is clear: when chosen, Judas was a believer. Yet Judas betrayed Jesus and ended his own life apparently without any return to faith in Christ. Surely this must be a case of apostasy. Others who are mentioned include Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); Hymenaeus and Alexander, who 'by rejecting conscience ... have made shipwreck of their faith' (1 Tim. 1:19-20); Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:16-18); Demas (2 Tim. 4:10); the false teachers and those who follow them (2 Peter 2:1-2). As the Arminian sees it, only a most contrived line of reasoning can explain away the obvious impression that these individuals were actual believers who departed from the faith.

Note that the Arminians make use of two basic methods in formulating their view. First, they focus on didactic passages which apparently teach that it is possible to apostasize. Second, they point to historical phenomena, biblical narratives which tell of specific people who apparently did fall away. When the author directly interprets what occurred (e.g., when Paul asserts that Hymenaeus and Alexander have made shipwreck of their faith), however, these particular passages are actually functioning as didactic material. In addition to biblical examples, Arminians also point to various extrabiblical cases of persons from history or from their current experience who at one time gave every appearance of being regenerate yet subsequently abandoned any semblance of Christian faith. In these cases, of course, the line of argument is clearly based on experiential phenomena rather than biblical teaching.

Finally, Arminians also raise several practical objections to the Calvinistic understanding of perseverance. One of these objections is that the Calvinistic view is in conflict with the scriptural concept of human freedom.<sup>11</sup> If it is certain that those who are in Christ will persevere and not fall away, then it must surely be the case that they are unable to choose apostasy. And if this is the case, they cannot be free. Yet Scripture, the Arminians point out, depicts humans as free beings, for they are repeatedly exhorted to choose God and are clearly portrayed as being held responsible by him for their actions.

11. Ibid., pp. 465-66.

*A Resolution of the Problem*

We have seen two opposed views. How shall we relate them to one another? The advocates of both have cogent arguments which they can appeal to in support of their positions. Is there truth within both, or must we choose one or the other? One way in which we may deal with this dilemma is to examine two key biblical passages which serve, respectively, as the major textual support for each of the two theories. These passages are John 10:27–30 and Hebrews 6:4–6.

Jesus' words in John 10:27–30 constitute a powerful declaration of security. Verse 28 is especially emphatic: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." In the clause "and they shall never perish" John uses the double negative *οὐ μὴν* with the aorist subjunctive, which is a very emphatic way of declaring that something will not happen in the future. Jesus is categorically excluding the slightest chance of an apostasy by his sheep. A literal translation would be something like, "They shall not, repeat, shall not ever perish in the slightest." This assertion is followed by statements that no one can snatch believers out of Jesus' hand or out of the Fathers hand (w. 28–29). All in all, this passage is as definite a rejection of the idea that a true believer can fall away as could be given.

Arminians argue that Hebrews 6 presents an equally emphatic case for their position. The passage seems clear enough: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy" (w. 4–6). The description is apparently of genuinely saved persons who abandon the faith and thus lose their salvation. Because of the complexity of the issue and the material in this passage, however, a number of interpretations have grown up:

1. The writer has in mind genuinely saved persons who lose their salvation.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that once they have lost their salvation, there is no way they can regain it. The one item that is unequivocal in this passage is that it is impossible to renew them to salvation (v. 4a), a point which many Arminians ignore.
2. The persons in view were never regenerate. They merely tasted of the truth and the life, were but exposed to the word of God; they

12. Marshall, *Power of God*, pp. 140–47.

did not fully experience these heavenly gifts. They do in fact apostasize, but from the vicinity of spiritual truth, not from its center.<sup>13</sup>

3. The people in view are genuinely and permanently saved; they are not lost. Their salvation is real, the apostasy hypothetical. That is, the "if"-clause does not really occur. The writer is merely describing what would be the case if the elect were to fall away (an impossibility).<sup>14</sup>

Upon close examination, the second explanation is difficult to accept. The vividness of the description, and particularly the statement "[those who] have become partakers of the Holy Spirit," argues forcefully against denying that the people in view are (at least for a time) regenerate. The choice must therefore be made between the first and third views.

Part of the difficulty in interpretation stems from the ambiguity of the word translated "if they then commit apostasy" or "if they fall away." The word is *παραπτεσόντας*, which is an adverbial participle. As such, it can be rendered in many different ways. H. E. Dana and Julius Mantey list ten possible usages of the adverbial participle; it can, for example, denote cause, time, concession, and, significant for our purposes here, condition.<sup>15</sup> Thus one legitimate translation of *παραπτεσόντας* would be "if they fall away," but it could also be rendered in several other ways, including "when they fall away" and 'because they fall away.' The meaning in cases like this must be determined on the basis of the context. The key element in the present context is found in verse 9: "Though we speak thus, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation." This verse might be understood as implying that the people described in verses 4–6, unlike the people to whom Hebrews is addressed, were not really saved. We have seen, however, that there is a major difficulty with this interpretation. The other possibility is that the referents in verses 4–6 and verse 9 are the same. They are genuinely saved people who could fall away. Verses 4–6 declare what their status would be if they did. Verse 9, however, is a statement that they will not fall away. They could, but they will not! Their persistence to the end is evidence of that truth. The writer to the Hebrews knows that his readers will not fall away; he is

13. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 135–40 (Heb. 6:4–6).

14. Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 110. Hewitt refers to the three views as, respectively, the "saved and lost theory," the "non-Christian theory," and the "hypothetical theory." See also Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 165.

15. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 226–29.

convinced of better things regarding them, the things that accompany salvation.<sup>16</sup> He speaks of their past work and love (v. 10), and exhorts them to continue earnestly in the same pursuits (v. 11). The full data of the passage would seem to indicate, then, that the writer has in view genuine believers who could fall away, but will not.

We are now able to correlate John 10 and Hebrews 6. While Hebrews 6 indicates that genuine believers *can* fall away, John 10 teaches that they *will not*.<sup>17</sup> There is a logical possibility of apostasy, but it will not come to pass in the case of believers. Although they could abandon their faith and consequently come to the fate described in Hebrews 6, the grace of God prevents them from apostasizing. God does this, not by making it impossible for believers to fall away, but by making it certain that they will not. Our emphasis on *can* and *will not* is not inconsequential. It preserves the freedom of the individual. Believers are capable of repudiating their faith, but will freely choose not to.

At this point someone might ask: If salvation is sure and permanent, what is the point of the warnings and commands given to the believer? The answer is that they are the means by which God renders it certain that the saved individual will not fall away.<sup>18</sup> Consider as an analogy the case of parents who fear that their young child may run out into the street and be struck by a car. One way the parents can prevent that from happening is to build a fence around the yard. That would prevent the child from leaving the yard, but would also remove the child's freedom. Try as he or she might, the child could not possibly get out of the yard. That is the idea some persons have of what perseverance is. Another possibility is for the parents to teach and train the child regarding the danger of going into the street and the importance of being careful. This is the nature of the security which we are discussing. It is not that God renders apostasy impossible by removing the very option. Rather, he uses every possible means of grace, including the warnings contained in Scripture, to motivate us to remain committed to him. Because he enables us to persevere in our faith, the term *perseverance* is preferable to *preservation*.

But what of the claims that Scripture records cases of actual apostasy? When closely examined, these instances appear much less impressive than at first glance. Some cases, such as that of Peter, should be

16. Westcott, *Hebrews*, pp. 154, 165.

17. This distinction appears to elude Marshall, who regards the "hypothetical theory" as "a thoroughly sophistical theory which evades the plain meaning of the passage. There is no evidence whatsoever that the writer was describing an imaginary danger which could not possibly threaten his readers" (*Power of God*, p. 140).

18. G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), pp. 83-124.

termed backsliding rather than apostasy. Peter's denial of his Lord was something done in a moment of weakness; it was not a deliberate and willful act of rebellion. There was nothing of permanence in his action. It is a bit difficult, on the other hand, to know how to classify the situation of King Saul, since he lived under the old dispensation. As for Judas, there were early indications that he was not regenerate. Consider particularly the reference to his thievery (John 12:6). In the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had "swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already" (2 Tim. 2: 17-18), there is no indication that they had ever been convinced advocates of the truth, or that it had become an intrinsic part of their lives. As a matter of fact, it is significant that the following verse focuses, by contrast, on sure believers: "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity'" (v. 19). The reference to Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1: 19-20 is very difficult to interpret, since we do not know precisely what is meant by Paul's having "delivered [them] to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." Like 2 Timothy 2: 17- 18, this reference as well needs to be seen in the light of Paul's statements in 1 Timothy 1:6-7 about persons who have wandered away into vain discussions. Paul's remark that they do not understand what they are saying may well imply that they are not true believers. The proximity of 1 Timothy 1:6-7 to the reference to Hymenaeus and Alexander (w. 19-20), and the use of the key word *ἀστραχέω* ("to swerve" from the truth) in both 1 Timothy 1:6 and the reference to Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2: 18), may indicate that the two situations were similar. Hymenaeus and Alexander may have been believers who were chastened and disciplined for wandering from the truth, or they may have been superficially involved individuals who were cast out of the fellowship. As for the other names (e.g., Demas) cited by the Arminians, there is insufficient evidence to warrant the conclusion that they were true believers who fell away.

Even less reliable are the instances cited of contemporary persons who supposedly were at one time true believers but fell away. The difficulty here is pointed up by the fact that we can also cite instances of persons who by their own testimony were never really Christians, but were thought to be so. Further, we must be careful to distinguish cases of temporary backsliding, such as that of Peter, from real abandonment of the faith. It is necessary to ask regarding someone who seems to have lost the faith, "Is he or she spiritually dead yet?" Beyond that, we must note that the Bible does not justify identifying every person who makes an outward profession of faith as genuinely regenerate. Jesus warned of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing, but who are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15). They are to be evaluated by their fruits rather than

by their verbal claims (w. 16–20). In the day of judgment such people will call him “Lord, Lord,” and claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many mighty works in his name (v. 22). All of these claims will presumably be true. It will not, however, be these individuals who enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather those who do the Father’s will (v. 21). Jesus’ final word regarding the sham believers will be, “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers” (v. 23). The parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23) is another indication that what appears to be genuine faith may be something quite different. It may be but a superficial and temporary response: “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (w. 20–22). In light of what Jesus says in Matthew 7:16–20, it appears that the only ones who are truly regenerate believers are those who bear fruit, whether thirty-, sixty-, or a hundredfold (Matt. 13:23). Similarly, in speaking of eschatological matters, Jesus indicated that endurance is the distinguishing mark of the true believer: “And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24:12–13; see also Matt. 10:22; Mark 13:13). Finally, we note that Jesus never regarded Judas as regenerate. For to Peters confession of faith, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68–69), Jesus responded, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (v. 70). Judas, although not a believer, had a vital role to play in the scheme of redemption. From the foregoing considerations it is clear that, in Jesus’ view, not all who appear to be believers are truly that. We conclude that those who appear to have fallen away were never regenerate in the first place.

The practical implication of our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance is that believers can rest secure in the assurance that their salvation is permanent; nothing can separate them from the love of God. Thus they can rejoice in the prospect of eternal life. There need be no anxiety that something or someone will keep them from attaining the final blessedness which they have been promised and have come to expect. On the other hand, however, our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance allows no room for indolence or laxity. It is questionable whether anyone who reasons, “Now that I am a Christian, I can live as I please,” has really been converted and regenerated. Genuine faith issues, instead, in the fruit of the Spirit. Assurance of salvation, the subjective conviction that one is a Christian, results from the Holy Spirit’s giving

evidence that he is at work in the life of the individual. And wherever the Spirit’s work results in conviction that one’s commitment to Christ is genuine, there is also the certainty on biblical grounds that God will enable the Christian to persist in that relationship, that nothing can separate the true believer from Gods love.

### Glorification

The final stage of the process of salvation is termed glorification. In Paul’s words, those whom God “foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. . . . And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 8:29–30). Glorification is the point at which the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the last things overlap, for it looks beyond this life to the world to come. The topic is one which receives little treatment in standard theology textbooks, and even less attention in sermons, yet it is rich in practical significance, for it gives believers encouragement and strengthens their hope.

Glorification is multidimensional. It involves both individual and collective eschatology. It involves the perfecting of the spiritual nature of the individual believer, which takes place at death, when the Christian passes into the presence of the Lord. It also involves the perfecting of the bodies of all believers, which will occur at the time of the resurrection in connection with the second coming of Christ.<sup>19</sup> It even involves transformation of the entire creation (Rom. 8:18–25).

#### *The Meaning of “Glory”*

To understand the doctrine of glorification, we must first know the meaning of the term glory, which translates a number of biblical words. One of them is the Hebrew קָבֹד (*kabod*). It refers to a perceptible attribute, an individual’s display of splendor, wealth, and pomp.<sup>20</sup> When used

19. John Murray restricts glorification to the time of the resurrection; in his view all believers will be glorified together at the return of Christ (Redemption, pp. 174–75). Bernard Ramm, however, looks upon glorification as occurring in connection with face-to-face knowledge of Christ (*Them He Glorified: A Systematic Study of the Doctrine of Glorification* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963], p. 65). The issue here is how to define “glorification.” What is its extent; to what events does it apply? The answer will depend in part on one’s view of the nature of the intermediate state between death and resurrection (see chapter 56).

20. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1955), pp. 458–59.

with respect to God, it does not point to one particular attribute, but to the greatness of his entire nature.<sup>21</sup> Psalm 24:7–10 speaks of God as the King of glory. As King he is attended by his hosts and marked by infinite splendor and beauty.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *δόξα* conveys the meaning of brightness, splendor, magnificence, and fame.<sup>22</sup> Here we find glory attributed to Jesus Christ, just as it was to God in the Old Testament. Jesus prayed that the Father would glorify him as he had glorified the Father (John 17:1–5). It is especially in the resurrection of Christ that we see his glory. Peter proclaimed that in raising Jesus from the dead, God has glorified him whom the Jews had rejected (Acts 3: 13–15). Similarly, Peter wrote in his first letter: “Through [Christ] you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21). Paul asserted that “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4); he also spoke of Christ’s glorious resurrection body (Phil. 3:21). Paul saw Christ’s glorification in the ascension as well—he was “taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). In addition, the apostles preached that Christ is now exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; 5:3 1).

The second coming of Christ is also to be an occasion of his glory. Jesus himself has drawn a vivid picture of the glorious nature of his return: “they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30); “when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne” (Matt. 25:31). One of the petitions of Jesus’ high-priestly prayer was that his disciples might see his coming glory: “May [they] be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Paul spoke of “our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2: 13).

Both the Old and New Testaments present this eschatological manifestation of God’s glory as the believer’s hope and goal. The clearest of the Old Testament references is found in Psalm 73:24: “Thou dost guide me with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory.” This promise of future blessedness is God’s answer to the psalmist’s complaint and despair at the apparent good fortune and prosperity of the wicked. The New Testament likewise pictures the coming glory as incomparably superior to the present suffering of the righteous. Paul writes in Romans 8: 18: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth

<sup>21</sup> Ramm, *Them He Glorified*, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), pp. 202–03.

comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” He makes a similar statement in 2 Corinthians 4:17: “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” Peter also links present suffering with the future revelation of glory. As “a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed,” he exhorts his fellow elders to tend the flock of God so that “when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5: 1, 4).

#### *The Glorification of the Believer*

It is important to realize that not only Christ, but all true believers as well, will be glorified. The New Testament contains several characterizations of this future dimension of the Christians salvation. Paul said, “We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). This, the final stage in the process of salvation, is an inheritance guaranteed by the Holy Spirit: “In [Christ] you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1: 13–14). Peter also spoke of an inheritance: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3–5). Furthermore, the New Testament promises salvation from the wrath of God at the time of judgment: “Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:9–10). In short, the believer can look forward to a much greater experience, an experience variously characterized as adoption by God, redemption of the body, an undefiled inheritance guaranteed by the Spirit, salvation from God’s wrath.

But what precisely will be entailed in the glorification of the believer? One of its aspects will be a full and final vindication of the believer.<sup>23</sup> The justification which took place at the moment of conversion will be manifested or made obvious in the future. This is the meaning of Romans 5:9–10, which we quoted in the preceding paragraph. In chapter 8, Paul

<sup>23</sup> Ramm, *Them He Glorified*, pp. 67–69.

contemplates the future judgment and asks who will bring any charge against the elect; in view of the fact that Christ died for us and now intercedes for us, no one will (w. 33-34). Neither things present, nor things to come, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (w. 38-39). The judgment will be the final declaration of the justified status of the believer (Matt. 25:31-46). Like a student who is thoroughly prepared for an examination, the Christian regards the last judgment, not with apprehensiveness, but with anticipation, knowing that the result will be positive.

In glorification there will also be a moral and spiritual perfecting of the individual.<sup>24</sup> Several biblical references point to a future completion of the process begun in regeneration and continued in sanctification. One of the most direct of these statements is Colossians 1:22: "he has now reconciled [you] in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him." The concept of future flawlessness or blamelessness is also found in Ephesians 1:4 and Jude 24. Guiltlessness is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:8. Paul prays that the Philippians' 'love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11). Our moral and spiritual perfection will be attained in part through the removal of temptation, for the source of sin and evil and temptation will have been conclusively overcome (Rev. 20:7-10).

The glorification which is to come will also bring fullness of knowledge. In 1 Corinthians 13: 12 Paul contrasts the imperfect knowledge which we now have with the perfect which is to come: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." The incompleteness of understanding that we now experience will be replaced by a much fuller comprehension. Our knowledge will increase because we will see the Lord; we will no longer have to be content with merely reading accounts written by those who knew him during his earthly ministry. As John says, "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

What we have been describing thus far could perhaps be termed the glorification of the soul (the spiritual aspect of human nature). There is also to be a glorification of the body (the physical aspect). This will take place in connection with the resurrection of the believer. At the second coming of Christ, all who have died in the Lord will be raised; and they,

24. Charles M. Horne, ***Salvation*** (Chicago: Moody, 1971), pp. 102-06.

together with the surviving believers, will be transformed. Three passages in particular emphasize the change which will be produced in the body of the believer. In Philippians 3:20-21 Paul says, "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself." The word *σύμιμοφον* ("like") indicates that our bodies will be "similar in form" to that of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 Paul envisions the body that we will have, a body eternal in nature, not made by human hands but coming from God. It is to be our heavenly dwelling. That which is mortal will be swallowed up by life (v. 4). The third passage is 1 Corinthians 15:38-50. Paul draws a comparison between the body which we are to have and our present body:

1. The present body is perishable, subject to disease and death; the resurrection body is incorruptible, immune to disease and decay.
2. The present body is sown in dishonor; the resurrection body will be glorious.
3. The present body is weak; the resurrection body is powerful.
4. The present body is physical (*ψυχικόν*); the resurrection body will be spiritual.

Paul notes that the great change which will take place at the time of the coming of Christ will be instantaneous: "Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (w. 51-52). Bernard Ramm comments: "In short, the four positive attributes of the resurrection body may be equated with the glorification of that body. This glorification is no process, no matter of growth, but occurs suddenly, dramatically, at the end-time."<sup>25</sup>

Finally, we should note the relationship between the believer's glorification and the renewal of the creation. Because man is part of the creation, his sin and fall brought certain consequences to it as well as to himself (Gen. 3: 14- 19). Creation is presently in subjection to futility (Rom. 8:18-25). Yet Paul tells us that "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (v. 21). The nature of the transformation which is to take place is stated more specifically in Revelation 2 1: 1-2: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming

25. Ramm, ***Them He Glorified***, p. 103.

down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." At that time God will declare, "Behold, I make all things new" (v. 5). Man's original dwelling was in the paradisaical setting of the Garden of Eden; his final dwelling will also be in a perfect setting—the new Jerusalem. Part of the glorification of man will be the provision of a perfect environment in which to dwell. It will be perfect for the glory of God will be present.

In this life believers sometimes groan and suffer because they sense their incompleteness. Yet they have a sure hope. The doctrine of perseverance guarantees that the salvation they possess will never be lost. And the doctrine of glorification promises that something better lies ahead. We will be everything that God has intended us to be. In part our glorification will take place in connection with death and our passage from the limitations of this earthly existence; in part it will occur in connection with the second coming of Christ. That we will thereafter be perfect and complete is sure.

Complete in Thee! no work of mine  
 May take, dear Lord, the place of Thine;  
 Thy blood hath pardon bought for me,  
 And I am now complete in Thee.

Yea, justified! O blessed thought!  
 And sanctified! Salvation wrought!  
 Thy blood hath pardon bought for me,  
 And glorified, I too shall be!

(James M. Gray)



## The Means and Extent of Salvation

### Views of the Means of Salvation

- The View of Liberation Theology
- The View of Sacramentalism
- The Evangelical View

### The Extent of Salvation

- Varieties of Universalism
- Evaluating the Case for Universalism

**T**wo important dimensions of the topic of salvation remain to be discussed. The first concerns the means by which salvation is effected or obtained; the second deals with the extent of salvation—will all be saved?

### Views of the Means of Salvation

One's view of the means by which salvation is obtained depends to a considerable extent upon one's understanding of the nature of salvation. Yet even among people with basically the same understanding of the nature of salvation, there are different views of the means.

### The View of Liberation Theology

To understand liberation theology's conception of the means of salvation, we must first look at its view of the nature of theology. In his *Theology of Liberation*, which, significantly, is subtitled *History, Politics, and Salvation*, Gustavo Gutierrez observes that the basic view of the nature of theology has undergone radical transformation. Originally, theology was simply a meditating on the Bible; its aim was wisdom and spiritual growth.<sup>1</sup> Then theology came to be viewed as rational knowledge, a systematic and critical reflection upon the content of the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> In recent times, however, there has been a considerable modification in the understanding of faith. Faith is no longer regarded as an affirmation of truths, but a total commitment of oneself to others. Love is at the center of the Christian life and of theology. Spirituality is not monastic contemplation, but activity in the world, with emphasis placed upon the profane dimensions of life.

Gutierrez defines salvation as liberation on three different levels. The first level of liberation has to do with "the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes."<sup>3</sup> Gutierrez vehemently disagrees with those who hold that natural developments within a basically capitalistic framework will solve the world's problems. The second level has to do with man's assuming "conscious responsibility for his own destiny."<sup>4</sup> The third level is Christ the Savior's liberating man from sin.

Gutierrez views salvation as eschatological in nature. He does not have in mind, however, some otherworldly deliverance from the conditions of life here. Rather, he has in mind the opening of history to the future.<sup>5</sup> Not an escape from history, but the realization of fundamental ideals within future history is the goal toward which we press. Moreover, although liberation theologians take very seriously the eschatological dimension of the Christian message and of the Bible, we must not assume that their interest in eschatology means that their basic approach is to apply the biblical message to the situations of history. Rather, they move the other way around—from their experience of reality to theology. This is what Juan Luis Segundo has described as the "hermeneutical circle." Their experience of reality leads the liberation theologians to question the

1. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology Of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Or-his, 1973), p. 4.

2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. Ibid., p. 36.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 215.

prevailing ideologies, then the theological assumptions underlying those ideologies, and finally the hermeneutic on which those assumptions are based; the result is a new hermeneutic.<sup>6</sup> Liberation theologians reject the Western orthodox understanding of theology because of its failure to square with their experience of life, not because of new developments in exegesis.

At this point we must introduce into our discussion Jürgen Moltmann's *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*. Two of the essays in this volume, "Religion, Revolution, and the Future" and "God in Revolution," are particularly significant for our purposes here. In the former, Moltmann describes the chief problems which man faces; in the latter, some possibilities for their solution.

In "Religion, Revolution, and the Future," Moltmann observes that man is estranged from his true essence and his future. This estrangement occurs in three basic forms: (1) economic alienation, (2) political alienation, and (3) racial alienation:

1. Economic alienation. Over half of the human race live under conditions of severe deprivation—of minimal existence or even less. These burdens and hardships must cease; humans must live free from hunger and anxiety over their basic needs. While the present industrialized societies are a demonstration of what can be done in this respect, they also have the effect of separating human from human even further. This calls for a uniting of those peoples who have advanced capacities with those who are in need. Moltmann says, "There can be no humanity without solidarity."<sup>7</sup>

2. Political alienation. Authoritarian political systems control the lives and destinies of those under them. While there may not be economic deprivation under some of these systems, there nonetheless is alienation. If human dignity depends upon ending economic want, human happiness requires ending domination. While we customarily think of political domination in terms of repressive governments or imperialistic exploitation, it can also take the form of overbearing paternalism toward nations receiving developmental aid.<sup>8</sup>

3. Racial alienation. Wherever a man is judged by his skin color, whatever it may be, he is not being accorded his human identity. The progress of the white man has been achieved largely at the expense of the nonwhites, who have been made the helpers, servants, and even

6. Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), pp. 7-38.

7. Jürgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (New York: Scribner, 1969), p. 38.

8. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

slaves of white men. Only within very limited areas have nonwhites been permitted to share in the progress of the white man.<sup>9</sup>

Moltmann's essay "God in Revolution" responds to these problems. He argues that history is becoming more and more revolutionary. Revolution is occurring in numerous different areas. By revolution Moltmann means a transformation in the very foundations of a system, whether of politics, economics, morality, or religion.<sup>10</sup> Any other changes are merely evolution or reform. In the present struggles for freedom and justice, the church is not to be a neutral observer or referee. Although some maintain that the church should not become involved in these struggles, since it is to be for all men, Moltmann insists that the church must take sides. It must side with the humiliated and help bring them to a position of equality, since there are to be no barriers dividing the "new people of God." The distinctions between Jew and Greek, master and slave, male and female, must cease. Anything, therefore, which raises barriers of any kind between humans must be opposed and broken down.<sup>11</sup>

The necessity of breaking down barriers raises the question of the propriety of the use of violence. Moltmann notes that, paradoxically, those who advocate nonviolence today are those who control the police power, and those advocating revolutionary violence are usually those who do not have any real power. The use of violence is a necessity, however, if conditions are to be transformed, if balance of power is to be achieved. At the same time Moltmann stipulates that violence is to be used only if humane goals are in view. In addition, before revolution is undertaken, it must be proven that the existing power structures are guilty of "naked violence," that is, are making unjustified use of their power.<sup>12</sup>

From the emphasis on transformation of present systems it is clear that liberation theology views salvation as a liberation for all persons. Salvation involves economic, political, and racial equality for all. God's work in this direction is accomplished by various means, not merely the church and the practice of religion. As a matter of fact, salvation is effected primarily by means of political processes, and even on occasion by revolution and violence.

In evaluating liberation theology's concept of salvation, it must be conceded that, of the three levels of liberation, Gutierrez identifies as the most basic the level of Christ's granting us freedom from sin. In practice, however, the emphasis seems to be placed particularly upon the economic and political aspects. There is no question, of course, that God is

<sup>9.</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>10.</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>11.</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>12.</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

concerned about these aspects of life, as a reading of the Minor Prophets (e.g., Amos) will indicate. It must be seriously questioned, however, whether these aspects are as significant as the liberation theologians have made them. Rather, the crucial issue in Scripture is our bondage in sin, and the separation and estrangement from God which sin has produced. Even the exodus, the deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage to the Egyptians, was not primarily a political event. In fact, if we examine the biblical account closely, we will see that the main purpose of the exodus was God's establishing a special relationship with Israel so that they might enjoy the spiritual blessings reserved for his unique people. Political freedom, economic sufficiency, and physical health, important as they are, are secondary to spiritual destiny. This is an implication of Jesus' statement: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Matt. 5:29-30). If our analysis is correct, the shortcoming of liberation theology is not in what it says, but in what it does not say. Not nearly enough is said about what the New Testament clearly indicates to be the primary dimension of salvation.

We must also comment on liberation theology's advocacy of violence by the deprived and downtrodden. It is notable that this position appears to conflict with some of Jesus' statements, such as his exhortations to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39; Luke 6:29) and love one's enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). While it is possible to make a sound case for the use of force in a good cause (e.g., in a just war), the liberation theologians have not established an adequate argument for using force in the present situation.

#### *The View of Sacramentalism*

A second major view of the means of salvation is that salvation is transmitted and received through the sacraments of the church. Probably the clearest and most complete expression of this view is that of traditional Roman Catholicism, which is succinctly summarized by Joseph Pohle:

The justification of the sinner ... is ordinarily not a purely internal and invisible process or series of acts, but requires the instrumentality of external visible signs instituted by Jesus Christ, which either confer grace or augment it.

Such visible means of grace are called **Sacraments**.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13.</sup>Joseph Pohle, *The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, ed. Arthur Preuss (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1942), vol. 1, p. 1.

Several important characteristics of sacraments are noted in this brief statement. These acts are necessary for the justification of the sinner. Justification is not merely an internal and invisible occurrence (a purely spiritual event), but it depends upon and requires particular external rites. These rites are actual means of grace. They symbolize the changes which take place within the individual, but they are not merely symbols. They actually effect or convey grace. They are, in other words, efficacious signs.<sup>14</sup>

In the Catholic understanding, three elements are necessary to constitute a sacrament: a visible sign, an invisible grace, and divine institution. The visible sign consists of two parts: some form of matter (e.g., water in baptism) and a word of pronouncement.<sup>15</sup> All sacraments convey sanctifying grace; that is, they cause the individual to become both just and holy, combining what Protestants term justification and sanctification.<sup>16</sup>

Of prime importance is the idea that the sacraments are efficacious. In the judgment of the Council of Trent, the Protestant Reformers considered the sacraments merely "exhortations designed to excite faith" (Luther), "tokens of the truthfulness of the divine promises" (Calvin), or "signs of Christian profession by which the faithful testify that they belong to the Church of Jesus Christ" (Zwingli). Condemning the positions of the Reformers, the council set forth its own position that the sacraments are means of grace to all those who do not erect an obstacle to that grace.<sup>17</sup>

Proponents of the position of the Council of Trent argue that Scripture gives evidence of an essential causal connection between sacramental signs and grace. A most prominent example is John 3:5: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." It is contended that the water is the instrumental cause of new birth. Pohle says, 'As truly, therefore, as the spiritual rebirth of a man is caused principally by the Holy Ghost, so is it caused instrumentally by water, and consequently, the water of Baptism exercises a causal effect on justification.'<sup>18</sup> Other texts cited as supporting the contention that the water of baptism cleanses sin include Acts 2:38; 22:16; Ephesians 5:26; and Titus 3:5. Moreover, on the basis of various texts, efficacy is claimed for the other sacraments as well: confirmation (Acts 8:17); the Eucharist (John 6:56–58); penance (John 20:22–23); extreme unction (James 5:14–

14. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 122–23.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

16); holy orders (2 Tim. 1:6).<sup>19</sup> In addition, the testimony of the church fathers is cited as support for the view that the sacraments are means of grace.<sup>20</sup>

In the historic Catholic view, the sacraments are effective *ex opere operato* ("from the work done"). This expression, which was first used in the thirteenth century, was officially adopted by the Council of Trent. It indicates that the conferral of grace depends upon the act itself, not upon the merits of either the priest or the recipient. Certainly there must be a priest to perform the sacrament and the recipient must be morally prepared. In fact, the amount of grace conferred depends on the disposition and cooperation of the recipient.<sup>21</sup> Yet these factors are not what gives effect to the sacrament. The sacrament itself is the efficient cause of the operation of grace.

At times the Catholic position appears contradictory. On the one hand, it is said that the sacraments produce their effects "independently of the merits and disposition of the recipient." On the other hand, moral preparation is deemed necessary if the sacrament is to produce "the full effect required for justification."<sup>22</sup> This moral preparation, however, is simply the removal of "any previous indisposition opposed to the character of the respective sacrament."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the actual efficacy of the sacrament in no way depends on the merit of the recipient. A theological argument in support of this contention is the practice of infant baptism, where there obviously cannot be any merit, or even active faith.<sup>24</sup>

We have already alluded to the fact that there must be a proper administrator of the sacrament. With the exception of certain unusual circumstances, the only people qualified to administer the sacraments are ordained individuals, that is, persons who have received the sacrament of holy orders.<sup>25</sup> As we have seen, the validity of the sacrament does not depend upon either the personal moral worthiness or the orthodoxy of the priest.<sup>26</sup> What is necessary, however, is that he have the intention of performing the sacrament.<sup>27</sup> This need not necessarily be conscious intention. If a priest in the act of performing a sacrament is

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–28.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 129–31.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 171.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

distracted, the administration of the sacrament is valid. This would be considered a case of virtual intention (as contrasted with actual intention). On the other hand, if a priest, while swimming, splashes water on another person playfully, that is not baptism, for it is not done with the aim of baptizing.

What all of this amounts to is that' salvation is dependent upon the church. For, in the first place, it is argued that the sacraments, which were entrusted to the church by Christ, are requisite to salvation. And second, the presence of a qualified administrator, namely, an individual ordained by the church, is required. The essential point in this view is that salvation is actually effected by the sacraments. They are the means by which salvation is brought about. If we desire to receive salvation, we must receive the sacraments.

This clear-cut position of traditional Roman Catholicism is deficient at several points. We will indicate some of the deficiencies in our discussion of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We note here, however, that there is little evidence for some of the interpretations which traditional Catholicism has given to various pertinent texts in the Bible. These interpretations are at best doubtful and at worst highly imaginative. To be sure, classical Roman Catholicism does not subscribe to our view that the Bible is the sole authority of divine truth. Instead, it posits two equal authorities, the Bible and the unwritten tradition of the apostles, preserved, interpreted, and made explicit by the church. Yet there ought not to be any contradiction between these two authorities in their teaching on basic issues such as the sacraments. That we fail to find objective efficacy of the sacraments taught in any clear way in the Bible, then, is apparently highly significant. Further, the idea that the ministry or priesthood has a unique or distinctive role fails to find clear expression in the Bible. Indeed, the teaching of passages such as Hebrews 9 appears to contradict this contention.

Moreover, the concept of the disposition required of the recipient if the sacrament is to convey grace presents difficulties. Sacramental&s, in an attempt to avoid the accusation that they view sacraments as magical, as having an automatic effect in and of themselves, stress that sacraments are objectively efficacious, that they confer the grace that is needed, but that a certain disposition is required of the recipient. The recipient must remove any obstacle to reception of the grace of God. In other words, the sacrament will avail, *ex opere operato*, if it is not resisted or objected to by the recipient. This makes faith, even saving faith, rather passive. At most, it is an intellectual acquiescence. The type of faith that is required in order to receive the grace of God is much more active, however. See, for example, James 2:18-26, where faith that involves only mental assent without accompanying works is termed dead. Further-

more, the faith for which the apostles appeal in the Book of Acts is obviously active. They call for a positive seizing upon God's promises and for total commitment.

#### *The Evangelical View*

What, according to the evangelical construction of theology, are the means of salvation or, more broadly put, the means of grace? To some extent the evangelical view has been expounded in our assessment of the views of liberation theology and **sacramentalism**. More needs to be said, however, in terms of a positive declaration of the evangelical position.

In the evangelical view, the Word of God plays an indispensable part in the whole matter of salvation. In Romans Paul describes the predicament of persons apart from Christ. They have no righteousness; they are totally unworthy of his grace and salvation (3:9-20). How, then, are they to be saved? They are to be saved by calling upon the name of the Lord (10:13). For them to call, however, they must believe, but they cannot believe if they have not heard; therefore someone must tell them or preach to them the good news (w. 14-15). Paul also writes to Timothy regarding the importance of the Word of God. The sacred writings known to Timothy from his youth "are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired 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. 3:15b-17). Peter also speaks of this instrumental role of the Word of God: 'You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. .. That word is the good news which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:23, 25). In Psalm 19 David extols the virtues and values of the law of the Lord: it revives the soul (v. 7a); it informs (w. 7b, 8b); it warns against wrong (v. 11).

There is a rich series of images depicting the nature and function of the Word of God. It is a hammer capable of breaking the hard heart (Jer. 23:29), a mirror reflecting one's true condition (James 1:23-25), a seed which springs up into life (Luke 8:11; 1 Peter 1:23), rain and snow to nourish the seed (Isa. 55:10-11). It is food: milk for babies (1 Cor. 3: 1-2; Heb. 5:12-13), strong meat for the mature (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14), and honey for all (Ps. 19: 10). The Word of God is gold and silver (Ps. 119:72), a lamp (Ps. 119: 105; Prov. 6:23; 2 Peter 1: 19), a sword discerning the heart (Heb. 4:12), a fire impelling the believer to speak (Jer. 20:9). These images graphically convey the idea that the Word of God is powerful and able to accomplish great work in the life of the individual. It is not, however, the

Bible alone, but the Word as applied by the Holy Spirit, that effects spiritual transformation.<sup>28</sup>

The Word of God is the means not merely to the beginning of the Christian life, but also to growth in it. Thus, Jesus told his disciples that they were made clean through the word which he had spoken to them (John 15:3). He also prayed that the Father would sanctify them in the truth, which is the Fathers word (John 17:17). The Lord told Joshua that the book of the law is the means to a life of rectitude: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success" (Josh. 1:8). The Word of God guides our feet (Ps. 119: 105) and provides us protection as we engage in spiritual warfare (Eph. 6: 17).

We have seen that the Word of God, whether read or preached, is God's means of presenting to us the salvation found in Christ; faith is our means of accepting that salvation.<sup>29</sup> Paul put this quite clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-not because of works, lest any man should boast." That the Word of God (the gospel) and faith are the means of salvation is evident in Romans 1: 16-17: "For I am **not ashamed** of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" The necessity of faith is also made clear in Romans 3:25: "God put forward [Christ Jesus] as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith." Paul is definite that there is only one way of salvation for all people, whether Jew or Gentile: "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith" (w. 28-30). Even Abraham was counted righteous because of faith: 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3; see also w. 9, 12).

If what we have just said is correct, salvation is not by works. A person is declared righteous in the sight of God, not because of having done good works, but because of having believed. But what of the passages

<sup>28</sup>X. Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 28-37.

<sup>29</sup>Edward J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), p. 70.

which seem to argue that works are necessary if we are to obtain God's salvation? Among these passages are Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 7:36-50; 18: 18-30; and James 2: 18-26. As we interpret them, we will need to bear in mind the clear teaching of the passages we have just examined.

Perhaps the most problematic of the passages is Matthew 25:31-46, which seems to suggest that our eternal destiny will be based on whether or not we have done works of kindness and charity for others. There is a feature of this account which should be noted, however. The works done to others are not really the basis on which the judgment is rendered. For these works are regarded as having been done (or not having been done) to Jesus himself (w. 40, 45). It is, then, one's relationship to the Lord, not to one's fellows, that is the basis for the judgment. The question arises: If the works done to others are not the basis of judgment, why are they brought into consideration at all? To answer this question, we must see Matthew 25:31-46 in the broader setting of the doctrine of salvation. Note here the surprise of both groups when the evidence is presented (w. 37-39, 44). They had not thought of works done to others as indicative of their relationship with God. Even those who had done works of charity are surprised when their deeds of kindness are introduced into evidence. True, works are not meritorious. However, they are evidence of our relationship with Christ and of his grace already operating in us. Donald Bloesch comments:

The intent of the parable is to show us that we will be judged on the basis of the fruits that our faith brings, though when we relate this passage to its wider context we see that the fruits of faith are at the same time the work of grace within us. They are the evidence and consequence of a grace already poured out on us. We are to be judged according to our works, but we are saved despite our works. Both affirmations must be made if we are to do justice to the mystery of the free gift of salvation. The final judgment is the confirmation of the validity of a justification already accomplished in Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The key to understanding this passage, then, is to keep in mind that it relates to the final judgment, not to our coming to salvation. Good deeds done to others are represented as what follows from salvation, not as what we must do to receive it.

In Luke 7:36-50 we find the account of a sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and then kissed and anointed them. Recounting what the woman had done and declaring that she loved much, Jesus pronounced her sins forgiven (vv. 44-48). This

<sup>30</sup>Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), vol. 2, p. 184.

seems to indicate that she was forgiven on the basis of her actions and love. Jesus' parting words to the woman are very instructive, however: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50).<sup>31</sup>

The story of the rich young ruler, as found in Luke 18: 18-30 (and also in Matt. 19: 16-30; Mark 10:17-31), seems to suggest that salvation is obtained by works. For to the question "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replies, "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). It is significant, however, that immediately before this episode, Jesus had said, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (v. 17). It is childlike trust, then, that is the basis of salvation; willingness to leave all behind is merely a test to determine whether one has such trust.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, a close examination will show that James 2: 18-26 does not look upon works as an alternative to faith, but as a certification of faith. The apostle says, "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith" (v. 18). James in no way denies that we are justified by faith alone. Rather, his point in this passage is that faith without works is not genuine faith; it is barren (v. 20). Genuine faith will necessarily issue in works. Faith and works are inseparable. And so James writes: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'; and he was called the friend of God" (w. 21-23). It is significant that, just like Paul in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6, James here cites the classic proof-text for salvation by faith-Genesis 15:6. In saying that what Abraham did fulfilled this Scripture, James is clearly connecting works with justification by faith; works are the fulfilment or completion of faith.

It is our conclusion that the four passages we have just examined, when seen in their contexts and in relation to the texts which speak of justification by faith, do not teach that works are a means of receiving salvation. Rather, they teach that genuine faith will be evidenced by the works that it produces.<sup>33</sup> Faith that does not produce works is not real faith. Conversely, works that do not stem from faith and a proper relationship to Christ will have no bearing at the time of judgment. Jesus

**31.** Johannes Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 234.

**32.** I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 682-83.

**33.** Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 54-55.

makes this point in Matthew 7:22-23. On that day many will say to him, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" Presumably these claims will be true. Yet Jesus will respond, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers." Because their works were not done out of true faith and commitment, Jesus does not include such people among the number of those who have done the will of his Father in heaven (v. 21).

### The Extent of Salvation

We come now to the issue of who will be saved. And specifically, will all be saved? The church's usual position throughout history has been that while some or even many will be saved, some will not. The church took this position not because it did not want to see everyone saved, but because it believed there are clear statements in Scripture to the effect that some will be lost. From time to time, however, a contrary position has been espoused in the church, namely, that all will be saved. This position, which is known as universalism, gave birth in America to a denomination bearing the name *Universalist* (it subsequently merged with the Unitarians). Not all who hold to universalism are to be found in that denomination, however.

#### Varieties of Universalism

Universalism has had a long history. Origen was probably its first major proponent. He conjectured that the punishment of the wicked of which the Bible speaks will not be some form of eternal external suffering inflicted upon them by God, but a temporary internal anguish occasioned by their sense of separation from him.<sup>34</sup> Its purpose is to be purification. That end can be realized without eternal punishment. So the punishment of the wicked will at some point come to an end, and all things will be restored to their original condition. This is Origen's doctrine of *apokystasis*.

While Origen's form of the teaching of universal salvation has been the most popular, it has not been the only one. Indeed, there are several hypotheses as to how salvation might be available to and achievable by (at least theoretically) the entire human race:

1. The theory of universal conversion holds that all persons will be saved via the route stipulated by the Bible-repentance and faith. Pro-

**34.** Origen *De principiis* 1.6.2.

ponents of this view believe that the world will someday be successfully evangelized; all persons will respond to the gospel and thus be saved. The problem with this theory, however, is that millions have already lived and died without being converted. The universal response envisioned lies in the future. Therefore, there is no guarantee of the salvation of all, but only of those persons who will respond in the future. There is no true universalism here. To be truly universalistic, this theory must be combined with some other theory or portion thereof.<sup>35</sup>

2. The theory of universal atonement holds that Christ died not merely for a certain portion of the human race (the elect), but for all humans. This is not true universalism, although it is sometimes regarded as such by those who hold to particular or limited atonement. Since the Arminians and mild Calvinists who propound the theory of universal atonement do not ordinarily maintain that all those for whom Christ atoned will believe (or that the atonement will be efficacious in every case), they speak only of universal atonement, not universal salvation.<sup>36</sup> Only when this view is interpreted by external assumptions rather than by its own assumptions is it construed as true universalism.

3. The theory of universal opportunity holds that every person within his or her lifetime has an opportunity to respond in a saving fashion to Jesus Christ. The opportunity to be saved is not limited to those who actually hear the gospel proclaimed, who have been afforded some knowledge of the contents of the special revelation. Rather, everyone, by virtue of exposure to the general revelation discussed in Psalm 19, Romans 1 and 2, and elsewhere in Scripture, may exercise implicitly the requisite faith in Jesus Christ. Here again, there is no claim that everyone will respond; the theory of universal opportunity is not, then, real universalism. While everyone could exercise faith, many will not. There may be unacknowledged Christians, but they are few in number. This group does not consist of rabid devotees of other world religions which conflict with the central tenets of Christianity. Rather, those who are saved through general revelation are like the Athenians who worshiped the "unknown god" (Acts 17:23).<sup>37</sup>

4. The theory of universal explicit opportunity holds that everyone will have an opportunity to hear the gospel in an overt or explicit fashion. Those who do not actually hear it during their lifetime here upon earth

35. Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1977), p. 118. Boettner maintains that the Bible promises "the ultimate conversion of the large majority of men in all nations."

36. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1958), vol. 2, p. 295.

37. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), p. 842.

will have an opportunity in the future.<sup>38</sup> There will be a second chance. After death, they will be enabled to hear. Some of the proponents of this theory believe that even those who have heard and have rejected will be confronted with the claims of Christ in the life hereafter. When this belief is coupled with the idea that everyone given such an opportunity will of course accept it, the inevitable conclusion is universal salvation. This view is difficult to reconcile with Jesus' teaching about the afterlife (see Luke 16:19-31, especially v. 26).

5. The theory of universal reconciliation maintains that Christ's death accomplished its purpose of reconciling all mankind to God. The death of Christ made it possible for God to accept man, and he has done so. Consequently, whatever separation exists between man and the benefits of God's grace is subjective in nature; it exists only in man's mind. The message man needs to be told, then, is not that he has an opportunity for salvation. Rather, man needs to be told that he has been saved, so that he may enjoy the blessings that are already his. The advocates of this view lay great stress on 2 Corinthians 5:18: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself." Reconciliation is not something which is to be; it is an accomplished fact.<sup>39</sup>

6. The theory of universal pardon maintains that God, being a loving God, will not hold unswervingly to the conditions that he has laid down. While he has threatened eternal condemnation for all those who do not accept him, he will in the end relent and forgive everyone.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, there is no need for an exercise of faith. God will treat all persons as if they had believed. He will impute not only righteousness to everyone, but faith as well. While this might seem unfair to those who have believed and acted to accept the offer of salvation, they should remember Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Those who came late in the day received the same pay as did those who began to work early in the morning.

7. The theory of universal restoration is the view put forth by Origen. At some point in the future, all things will be restored to their original and intended state; there will be a full salvation. Existing reality will be altered or transformed. It is conceivable that God might instantaneously bring the human race into a state of perfection. In the usual form of this theory, however, which follows the pattern of Origen's thinking, the beginning of the life hereafter has a purgatorial function. When there has been a sufficient period of punishment, mankind will be purified to the

38. Richard Eddy, *A History of Universalism*, in American Church History, vol. 10 (New York: Christian Literature, 1894), pp. 458-60.

39. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960), pp. 60-62.

40. C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (New York: Scribner, 1954), pp. 118-26.

point where God may have fellowship with them throughout the remainder of eternity!

#### *Evaluating the Case for Universalism*

We now need to look closely at the specific arguments for universalism. It will not be possible to examine and evaluate each of the varieties of universalism which we have just sketched. Insofar as they are theories of universal salvation, however, they are built on similar arguments. There are two general types of considerations advanced in support of the belief that salvation is universal. Some are based upon or relate to a particular text of Scripture. Others are more theological in nature. We shall look first at the latter type of argument as embodied in the thought of Nels Ferré.

Born in Sweden, Ferré was the son of a very conservative Baptist preacher. As a youth Nels was troubled by much that he heard from his father's pulpit, and especially the idea that those who have not heard the gospel will be eternally lost in hell. His autobiographical sketch, "The Third Conversion Never Fails," recounts his growing questions about the Bible. When he at length summoned the courage to ask his father about these matters, he was rebuffed by an authoritarian answer—one must not question God.<sup>41</sup> As a teen-ager he came alone to the United States, where he cast off the orthodox view. Later he was influenced by the theologians of the Lundensian school in his native Sweden, who emphasized the love of God. Following their lead, he built his own theology upon the central thought of divine love. In his consideration of eschatology, this concept is powerful and determinative.

Ferré notes that most approaches to eschatology stress the justice of God. While it is true that God is just, the justice of God, says Ferré, is completely in the service of his love.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Fen-6 rests his perception of God on but one divine attribute. Asking why some people insist on teaching and preaching the concept of an eternal hell, he suggests that those who do so have never really understood the love of God.<sup>43</sup> He bases his conclusion on the assumption that love and punishment, heaven and hell, joy and grief, are mutually exclusive:

41. Origen *De principiis* 1. 6.2.

42. Nels Ferré, "The Third Conversion Never Fails," in *These Found the Way*, ed. David Wesley Soper (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), pp. 132-33.

43. Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 228.

44. *Ibid.* pp. 234-37.

Some have never really seen how completely contradictory are heaven and hell as eternal realities. Their eyes have never been opened to this truth. If eternal hell is real, love is eternally frustrated and heaven is a place of mourning and concern for the lost. Such joy and such grief cannot go together. There can be no psychiatric split personality for the real lovers of God and surely not for God himself. That is the reason that heaven can be heaven only when it has emptied hell, as surely as love is love and God is God. God cannot be faithless to Himself no matter how faithless we are; and His is the power, the kingdom and the glory.<sup>45</sup>

In studying the eschatological passages in the New Testament, Ferré found what he regarded as irreconcilable traditions. First there are the passages which teach that there will be an eternal hell.<sup>46</sup> Whether Jesus himself taught such a doctrine, however, is uncertain.<sup>47</sup> Another strand within the New Testament is that the wicked shall perish.<sup>48</sup> They will simply be obliterated or annihilated at death. They will neither be saved eternally in heaven nor punished everlasting in hell. Yet a third tradition is what Ferré terms "the sovereign victory of God in Christ over all, in terms of His own love."<sup>49</sup> He cites certain specific texts as teaching that all human beings will be saved: "we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10); "at the name of Jesus every knee [shall] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11); "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32). It was not any specific verses that led Ferré to his ultimate conclusion on the matter, however:

But all such verses, in any case, however many they be, and however clear, are as nothing in comparison to the total message of the New Testament... . The logic of the New Testament at its highest and deepest point is the logic of God's sovereign love, "according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." ... Those who worship the sovereign Lord dare proclaim nothing less than the total victory of His love. No other position can be consistently Christian. All other positions limit either God's goodness or His power, in which case both fundamentalism and modern liberalism have their own varieties of the finite God.<sup>50</sup>

45. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-45.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-43.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 246-47.

On the basis of such considerations, Ferré arrived at a universalist position. It is significant that his exposition of eschatology appears in a treatise on the doctrine of God, for it is his understanding of God as love that governs his interpretation of the pertinent Scriptures and the issue as a whole. He does not claim to understand how universal salvation will be brought about. We must simply accept the fact. But whatever the means, God's sovereign love will bring the process to complete victory.<sup>51</sup>

In our consideration of Ferré's view, we mentioned a few texts which seem to assert or imply that salvation is universal. Various other verses have been cited in support of universalism: "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom. 5:18); "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22); "For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:19–20); Jesus "for a little while was made lower than the angels ... so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one" (Heb. 2:9).

If we are to do systematic theology, however, we must also consider those texts which suggest an opposite conclusion, and then we must attempt to reconcile the apparently contradictory material. There are many texts which seem to contradict universalism: "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46); "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3: 16); "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28–29); "God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction" (Rom. 9:22). Numerous other passages could be cited, among them Matthew 8: 12; 25:41; 26:24; Mark 3:29; Romans 2:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 2:1:8. Indeed, on the basis simply of numbers, there appear to be considerably more passages teaching that some will be eternally lost than that all will be saved.

Can the apparent contradictions be reconciled? One possibility advanced by universalists is to regard those passages which suggest that the wicked will be lost as descriptions of a hypothetical rather than actual situation. (We are reminded here of our interpretation of Hebrews 6:4–6; see pp. 992–94.) That is to say, they are descriptions of what would happen if we were to reject Christ. But, as a matter of fact, no one does,

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 248–49.

for the passages in question are warnings sufficient to turn us to Christ. On this basis, universalists can explain away texts like John 3:16 and Mark 3:29. However, there remain those verses which declare that some people will actually be lost. Examples include Matthew 8: 12; 25:41, 46; and John 5:29. We cannot simply dismiss these references. Are we then forced, with Ferré, to conclude that there are irreconcilable traditions within the New Testament?

An alternative remains: interpreting the universalistic passages in such a way as to fit with the restrictive ones. Here we find a more fruitful endeavor. Note, first, that Philippians 2:10–11 and Colossians 1:19–20 do not say that all **will** be saved and restored to fellowship with God. They speak only of the setting right of the disrupted order of the universe, the bringing of all things into subjection to God. But this could be achieved by a victory forcing the rebels into reluctant submission; it does not necessarily point to an actual return to fellowship. Note also that 1 Timothy 4:10 and Hebrews 2:9 say merely that Christ died for all or offers salvation to all. These verses argue for universal atonement, but not necessarily for universal salvation. Indeed, Paul in 1 Timothy explicitly distinguishes "those who believe" from the rest of humanity.

More troublesome are the passages where a parallel is drawn between the universal effect of Adam's sin and Christ's saving work, namely, Romans 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:22. In the context of each of these passages, however, there are elements which serve to qualify the universal dimension as it applies to Christ's work. In the case of Romans 5, verse 17 specifies that "**those who receive the** abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (italics added). Furthermore, the term *many* (*πολλοί*) rather than *all* is used in verses 15 and 19. Paul similarly restricts the meaning of "all" in 1 Corinthians 15:22 ("in Christ shall all be made alive"). For in the next verse he adds: "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming **those who belong to Christ**" (italics added). In fact, he had earlier made it clear that he is speaking about believers: "If Christ has not been raised ... those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (vv. 17–18). We conclude that the benefits of Christ's death are received by **all who are in Christ**, just as the penalty for Adam's sin is incurred by all who are in Adam.

One universalistic passage remains. Romans 11:32 seems to suggest that God saves all: "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all." In actuality, however, the mercy which God has shown is his providing his Son as an atonement and extending the offer of salvation to all, for in this context Paul is talking about Israel's rejection of God and the subsequent offer of salvation to the Gentiles. God's mercy has been shown to all humans, but only those who accept

it will experience and profit from it. Indeed, Paul points out (e.g., in w. 7-10, 21-22) that some have rejected God's mercy and, accordingly, have not received his salvation. Thus, although salvation is universally available, it is not universal.

Not everyone will be saved. This is not a conclusion which we state with satisfaction, but it is most faithful to the entirety of the biblical witness. It should be a spur to evangelistic effort:

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" [Rom. 10:14-15]

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**PART ELEVEN**

## The Church

- 49. The Nature of the Church
- 50. The Role of the Church
- 51. The Government of the Church
- 52. The Initiatory Rite of the Church: Baptism
- 53. The Continuing Rite of the Church: The Lord's Supper
- 54. The Unity of the Church

# 49

## The Nature of the Church

### Defining the Church

- Confusion Regarding the Church
- The Empirical-Dynamic Definition of the Church
- The Biblical-Philological Definition of the Church

### Biblical Images of the Church

- The People of God
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- The Church and the Kingdom
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- The Visible Church and the Invisible Church
- The Time of Inception of the Church

### Implications

We have discussed to this point the nature of salvation as it pertains to individual Christians. Yet the Christian life is not a solitary matter. Typically, in the Book of Acts, we find that conversion leads the individual into the fellowship of a group of believers. That collective dimension of the Christian life we call the church.

## Defining the Church

## Confusion Regarding the Church

The church is at once a very familiar and a very misunderstood topic. It is one of the few aspects of Christian theology which can be observed. For many persons, it is the first point, and perhaps the only point, where Christianity is encountered. Karl Barth noted that one of the several ways in which the church witnesses to Jesus Christ is simply by its existence.<sup>1</sup> There are concrete evidences that the church exists, or at least that it has existed. Church structures, even though sometimes very few persons gather within them, are proof of the reality of what we call the church. The church is mentioned in the media, but without much specification as to what is meant. Legislative documents refer to it. In the United States the church is to be kept separate from the state. People belong to a church; they go to church on Sunday. But for all of this familiarity, there are frequently considerable confusion and misunderstanding concerning the church.

Part of this misunderstanding results from the multiple usages of the term *church*. Sometimes it is used with respect to an architectural structure, a building. Frequently it is used to refer to a particular body of believers; we might, for example, speak of the First Methodist Church. At other times, it is used to refer to a denomination, a group set apart by some distinctive; for instance, the Presbyterian church or the Lutheran church. In addition to the confusion generated by the multiple usages of the term *church*, there is evidence of confusion at a more profound level—a lack of understanding of the basic nature of the church.

Among the reasons for this lack of understanding is the fact that at no point in the history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention which other doctrines have received. At the first assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, Father Georges Florovsky claimed that the doctrine of the church had hardly passed its pretheological phase.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity had been given special attention in the fourth and fifth centuries, as had the atoning work of Christ in the Middle Ages, and the doctrine of salvation in the sixteenth century. But such concerted attention has never been turned to the church. Even the Augustinian-Donatist controversy of the early fifth century, and the

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), vol. 1, part 1, p. 1.

2. Colin W. Williams, *The Church, New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), p. 11.

sixteenth-century **dispute over the means of grace, while they dealt with aspects** of the nature of the church, did not really get at the central issue of what the church is. Colin Williams suggests that “little direct theological attention was ever given to the church itself probably because it was taken for granted.”<sup>3</sup>

Dealing with the question of the nature of the church can no longer be delayed, however. The ecumenical movement in the twentieth century has thrust the church into the forefront of discussion. While there is room in ecumenism for disagreement on some areas of theology, or at least on the details of such matters as the relationship between Jesus’ deity and humanity, the forensic character of justification, and the possibility of complete sanctification in this life, the issue of the nature of the church cannot be ignored. For the primary concern of the ecumenical movement is the relationship of churches to one another, and its most visible manifestation is in the form of a “Council of Churches.”

There are other reasons why it is imperative to carefully delineate the essential nature of the church. John Macquarrie has pointed out that the church is the theme of much theological writing today:

**Probably more gets written on the Church nowadays than on any other single theological theme. Most of this writing has a practical orientation. We hear about the Church in relation to rapid social change, the Church in a secular society, the Church and reunion, the Church in missions. But however valuable some of the insights gained in these various fields may be, they need to be guided and correlated by a theological understanding of the Church.**<sup>4</sup>

Note that Macquarrie draws attention to the fact that much of the discussion about the church is in terms of its relationship to other entities, for example, secular society. At the present time the focus of most of this literature is not the church itself, but the other entities. It is time to reverse this trend, for if we do not have a clear understanding of the nature of the church, we cannot have a clear understanding of its relationship to these other areas.

The emphasis on matters such as social change and mission rather than on the church itself is due in part to a general shift to a secular way of thinking. To put it another way: there has been a major modification in the way in which God is viewed; there is far more stress on his immanence than on his transcendence. He is no longer viewed as relating

3. Ibid.

4. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1966), p. 346.

to the world only through the agency of his supernatural institution, the church. In general, the church is no longer looked upon as the sole embodiment of the divine presence and activity, as God's special agent. Rather, there is a widespread conception that God dynamically relates to the world through many avenues or institutions. The emphasis is upon what God is doing, not upon what he is like. Consequently, more attention is given to the mission of the church than to its identity and limits or boundaries.

Traditionally, the church was thought of as distinct from the world, as standing over against and intended to transform it. In the most fully developed form of this view, the church is the repository of grace, and the world can receive this grace and be transformed by it only by being connected to the church and receiving its sacraments. In a more Protestant form, this view holds that the church possesses the gospel, the good news of salvation, and that the world, which is lost and separated from Christ, can be saved or reunited with him only by hearing that gospel, believing, and being justified and regenerated. Now, however, God is seen as working directly in the world, outside of the formal structure of the church, and as accomplishing his purpose even through persons and institutions that are not avowedly Christian. One of the consequences of this shift in thinking is, as we observed in chapter 48, an altered conception of the nature and means of salvation.

#### *The Empirical-Dynamic Definition of the Church*

There is still another factor which has served to stymie modern attempts to develop a doctrine of the church. The twentieth century, with its widespread aversion to philosophy, and particularly to metaphysics and ontology, is far less interested in the theoretical nature of something than in its concrete historical manifestations. Thus, much of modern theology is less interested in the essence of the church, what it "really is" or "ought to be," than in its embodiment, what it concretely is or dynamically is becoming. In a philosophical approach, which is basically deductive and Platonic, one begins by formulating a definition of the ideal church and then moves from this pure, fixed essence to concrete instances, which are but imperfect copies or shadows. In a historical approach, what the church is to be emerges inductively from its engagement with what is—the condition of the world and the problems within it shape what the church is to be. This is, of course, a part of the shift from a preoccupation with the otherworldly, the unseen realm of reality, to the worldly, the observable realm. Changing empirical presence, instead of unchanging pure definitions, is what is determinative.

There is widespread acknowledgment that such a shift in orientation

has taken place within our culture, and many theologians accept it as normative and desirable. Carl Michalson, for example, has written: "The being of God-himself, his nature and attributes, the nature of the church, the nature of man, the preexistent nature of Christ—all these conjectural topics which have drawn theology into a realm of either physical or metaphysical speculation remote from the habitation of living men should be abandoned."<sup>5</sup> Colin Williams agrees, "I have no doubt that this shift has occurred and must be welcomed."<sup>6</sup>

The shift in emphasis from theoretical essence to empirical presence is characteristic of the way in which the whole world is viewed. The whole of reality is regarded as being in flux rather than fixed. Walter Ong calls attention to the fact that we have shifted from being a print-oriented to an oral-aural culture. The former tends to be fixed; the latter tends to be dynamic and changing or growing. He illustrates this trend with *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. The former editions had reflected the view of language which says that there are fixed forms which are to be rigidly followed. The more recent edition reflects the view that language is dynamic: it is alive and ever changing. Its rules are determined by actual usage. (Ong sees the strong popular reaction against this new view of language as simply one form of a general rejection of the shift to the view that reality is dynamic.)<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the church is now viewed as dynamic. It is not thought of in terms of its essence, but of its existence—an openly existentialist interpretation. It is an event, not an already complete, realized entity. The church is not a fixed form, but a project, a continuing task.

As a result of this change in orientation, the church is now studied through disciplines and methodologies other than dogmatics or systematic theology, which attempts to define or isolate essences. Many theologians look to the history of the church to tell them what the church is: the church is what it has been. Some of them look upon the church as strictly a phenomenon of the New Testament; that is, they limit their historical study to the earliest period of the church, regarding it as normative. The church is (or ought to be) what it was at the beginning (or what it first became).

The new emphasis applying nontheological disciplines and methodologies to study of the church poses a danger as the church struggles to

5. Carl Michalson, *Worldly Theology: The Hermeneutical Focus of an Historical Faith* (New York: Scribner, 1967), p. 218.

6. Williams, *Church*, p. 20; see also his *Faith in a Secular Age* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

7. Walter Ong, "The Word in Chains," in *In the Human Grain* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 52-59.

understand itself theologically. Whenever in the past the church was called upon, in the face of an alternative methodology or framework (e.g., biology, anthropology, or psychology), to justify its understanding of particular doctrines (e.g., the doctrine of man or sin), it had to a considerable degree already arrived at its formulation, so that it was relatively sure of itself. In this case, however, the church is not very sure of its own doctrine, and consequently may be tempted simply to adopt a view and categories derived from sociological science. As a social institution, the church has aroused the interest of those who study social institutions of various types. They apply to the church the same sort of analysis which they apply to any social institution, using the same categories. We must be aware that the church is far more than a social institution and therefore must be defined in terms beyond the merely sociological.

The major problem with attempting to define the church in terms of its dynamic activity is that such a definition avoids making any kind of statement regarding the nature of the church. This is an instance of what we described in chapter 5 of this work as the approach of the transformers, who make rather serious alterations in the content of doctrine in order to meet changing situations in the world. But the question arises, If the definition of the church is to undergo frequent change in order to relate it to the modern world, in what sense is there continuity with what has preceded? Or, in other words, why continue to call it the church? What is the common thread identifying the church throughout all the changes? Is it not likely that at some point a different term should be applied? Consider the field of biological evolution. When a new species develops from an existing species, a new name is assigned. Biologists do not apply the old name to the new species. That name is reserved for the members of the old species. For all of the apparent changes in the world, certain morphological or classificatory categories remain fixed. Yet it is being argued that while the church is changing and must change, very radically perhaps, it is to continue to be called the church. But if it is to continue to be called the church, we must know just what it is that distinguishes the church as the church, or qualifies it to be called the church. This question is not being asked. We must also determine if there is a point at which the church ought rather to be termed a club, a social agency, or something similar. These questions cannot be answered without facing up to the issue of the nature of the church. That is an issue which must be addressed, and there is no better place to begin than with the biblical testimony itself.

#### *The Biblical-Philological Definition of the Church*

The word **church** and cognate terms in other languages (e.g., *Kirche*) are derived from the Greek word *κυριακός*, “belonging to the Lord.” They

are, however, to be understood in light of the New Testament Greek term *ἐκκλησία*. While this is a common word, its occurrences are unevenly distributed through the New Testament. The only instances in the Gospels are in Matthew 16:18 and 18: 17, both of which are somewhat disputed. It does not appear in 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 or 2 Peter, 1 or 2 John, or Jude. There is little significance to its absence from 1 and 2 John, since it is found in 3 John; from 2 Timothy and Titus, since it is found in 1 Timothy; and from Jude, since this book is so brief. More surprising, however, is its absence from Peter’s letters. Karl Schmidt comments: “1 Peter deals most emphatically with the nature and significance of the OT community and uses OT expressions, so that we may ask whether the matter [of the church] is not present even though the term is missing. The same question arises in respect of the non-occurrence of the word in the two Synoptists Mk. and Lk, and also in Jn.”<sup>8</sup>

The meaning of the New Testament concept must be seen against two backgrounds, that of classical Greek and that of the Old Testament. In classical Greek the word *ἐκκλησία* is found as early as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, and Euripides (fifth century B.C. onwards).<sup>9</sup> It refers to an assembly of the citizens of a *polis* (city). Such assemblies convened at frequent intervals, as often as thirty to forty times a year in the case of Athens.<sup>10</sup> While the authority of the *ἐκκλησία* was limited to certain matters, all who were full citizens were allowed a vote in those matters. In the secular sense of the word, then, *ἐκκλησία* refers simply to a gathering or assembly of persons, a meaning which is still to be found in Acts 19:32, 39, 41. In only three exceptional cases in classical Greek is it used of a religious fellowship or cultic guild.<sup>11</sup> And in these instances it refers to their business meetings, not to the union itself.

Of more significance to us is the Old Testament background. Here we find two Hebrew terms, *קָהָל* (*qahal*) and *עֵדָה* (*’edah*). The former term, perhaps derived from the word for voice, refers to a summons to an assembly and the act of assembling. It is not so much a specification of the members of the assembly as a designation of the occurrence of assembling. A religious significance sometimes attaches to the word (e.g., Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 23:1-3). The term can also denote a more general assembly of the people (e.g., 1 Kings 12:3). Women (Jer. 44:15) and even children (Ezra 10:1; Neh. 8:2) are included. The term is also used of the gathering

8. Karl L. Schmidt, *ἐκκλησία*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), vol. 3, p. 504.

9. Ibid., p. 513.

10. Lothar Coenen, “Church,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 1, p. 291.

11. Ibid., pp. 29 1-92.

of troops, and in Ezekiel it refers to nations other than Israel (Egypt, 17:17; Tyre, 27:27; Assyria, 32:22).

The other Hebrew term of relevance for us is **תְּנַשֵּׁעַ**. It appears especially in the Pentateuch, more than half of its occurrences being in the Book of Numbers. It refers to the people, particularly as gathered before the tent of meeting. That the term first occurs in Exodus 12:3 suggests that the “congregation” of Israel came into being with the command to celebrate the Passover and leave Egypt.<sup>12</sup> The word **תְּנַשֵּׁעַ** points to the community as centered in the cult or the law. Summarizing the distinction between the two Hebrew terms, Lothar Coenen comments:

If one compares the use of the two Heb. words, it becomes clear, from the passages in which both occur in the same context (e.g. Exod. 12: 1 ff.; 16:1ff.; Num. 14:1ff.; 20:1ff.; 1 Ki. 12:1ff.) that ‘edah is the unambiguous and permanent term for the ceremonial community as a whole. On the other hand, qahal is the ceremonial expression for the assembly that results from the covenant, for the Sinai community and, in the deuteronomistic sense, for the community in its present form. It can also stand for the regular assembly of the people on secular (Num. 10:7; 1 Ki. 12:3) or religious occasions (Ps. 22:26), as well as for a gathering crowd (Num. 14:5; 17:12).<sup>13</sup>

When we look at the Greek words which are used in the Septuagint to translate these Hebrew terms, we find that **ἐκκλησία** is often used to render **תְּנַשֵּׁעַ**, but never **תְּנַשֵּׁעַ**. The latter term is usually rendered by **συναγωγή**, which is also used to translate **תְּנַשֵּׁעַ**. It is **ἐκκλησία** which is our major source of understanding the New Testament concept of the church.

Paul uses the word **ἐκκλησία** more than does any other New Testament writer. Since the majority of his writings were letters addressed to specific local gatherings of believers, it is not surprising that the term usually has reference to a group of believers in a specific city. Thus we find Paul’s letters addressed “to the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), “to the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2), “to the church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thess. 1:1). The same holds true of other New Testament writings as well. The opening portion of Johns Apocalypse (Rev. 1-3) was addressed to seven specific churches. In Acts also, **ἐκκλησία** refers primarily to all the Christians who live and meet in a particular city such as Jerusalem (Acts 5: 11; 8: 1; 11:22; 12: 1, 5) or Antioch (13: 1). Paul visited local churches to appoint elders (14:23) or to instruct and encourage

12. Ibid., p. 294.

13. Ibid., p. 295.

(1541; 165). This local sense of the church is evidently intended in the vast majority of occurrences of the word **ἐκκλησία**.

Beyond the references to churches in specific cities, there are also references to churches meeting in individual homes. In sending greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, Paul also greets “the church in their house” (Rom. 16:5; see also 1 Cor. 16:19). In his letter to the Colossians, he writes, “Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Col. 4: 15). In most cases, however, the word **ἐκκλησία** has a broader designation-all believers in a given city (Acts 8:1; 13:1). In some instances, a larger geographical area is in view. An example is Acts 9:31: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.” Another example is 1 Corinthians 16: 19: “The churches of Asia send greetings.” Note that the former reference is in the singular, while the latter is plural.

We should note that the individual congregation, or group of believers in a specific place, is never regarded as only a part or component of the whole church. The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place. Karl Schmidt says, “We have pointed out that the sum of the individual congregations does not produce the total community or the church. Each community, however small, represents the total community, the church.”<sup>14</sup> Coenen comments in a similar vein “In the Acts too [as in Paul] the *ekklesia* is ultimately one. Admittedly, it appears only as it gathers in particular places (cf. 1427). But it always implies the totality.”<sup>15</sup> First Corinthians 1:2 is of special help to us in understanding this concept. Paul addresses this letter “to the church of God which is at Corinth” (see also 2 Cor. 1:1). Note that he is writing to the church as it is manifested or appears in one place, namely, Corinth. “It is one throughout the whole world and yet is at the same time fully present in every individual assembly?

At this point some people might accuse theologians of adopting a Platonic perspective whereby local churches are regarded as instantiations or concrete particular manifestations of the pure Form, the abstract Idea, of church. Note, however, that theologians are not reading this concept into the Bible. The concept is actually present in the thought of Paul and Luke; it is not introduced by their interpreters. There is on this one point a genuine parallel between biblical thought and that of Plato. This is neither good nor bad, and should not be considered an indication of Platonic influence upon the Bible. It is simply a fact.

14. Schmidt, **ἐκκλησία**, p. 506.

15. Coenen, “Church,” p. 303.

16. Ibid.

The concept that the church is universal in nature enables us to understand certain New Testament passages more clearly. For example, Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church," makes good sense in the light of this concept. In Ephesians, Paul gives particular emphasis to the universal nature of the church. The church is Christ's body, and all things are under him (1:22–23); the church makes known the manifold wisdom of God (3:10) and will glorify him to all generations (3:21). "There is one body" (4:4); "Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior" (5:23). The church is subject to Christ (v. 24) and is to be presented before him (v. 27). He loved the church and gave himself up for her (v. 25). Christ and the church are a great mystery (v. 32). All of these verses point to the universal nature of the church, as do 1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:22; 12:28; and Colossians 1:18, 24. Obviously the church includes all persons anywhere in the world who are savingly related to Christ. It also includes all who have lived and been part of his body, and all who will live and be part of his body. This inclusiveness is strikingly depicted in Hebrews 12:23: "and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven." In view of this inclusiveness we may offer a tentative theological definition of the church as the whole body of those who through Christ's death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth. While it is universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers which display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole.

#### Biblical Images of the Church

We next need to inquire regarding the qualities or characteristics which are present in the true church. Traditionally, this topic has been approached through an examination of the "marks of the church"—the qualities of unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity. We will instead approach it through an examination of certain of the images which Paul used of the church. While there are a large number of such images,<sup>17</sup> we will examine three in particular Arthur Wainwright has argued that in much of Paul's writing there is an implicit trinitarianism which shows itself even in the structure with which he organizes his letters.<sup>18</sup> It is also

17. Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), suggests over one hundred such images.

18. Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), pp. 256–60.

present in the way he understands the church, for he describes it as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

#### The People of God

Paul wrote of God's decision to make believers his people: "God said, 'I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'" (2 Cor. 6:16). The church is constituted of God's people. They belong to him and he belongs to them.

The concept of the church as the people of God emphasizes God's initiative in choosing them. In the Old Testament, he did not adopt as his own an existing nation, but actually *created* a people for himself. He chose Abraham and then, through him, brought into being the people of Israel. In the New Testament, this concept of God's choosing a people is broadened to include both Jews and Gentiles within the church. So Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2: 13–14; see also 1 Thess. 1:4).

Among the Old Testament texts in which Israel is identified as God's people is Exodus 15: 13, 16. Singing to the Lord after the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses notes that God has redeemed Israel and they are his people: "Thou hast led in thy steadfast love the people whom thou hast redeemed, thou hast guided them by thy strength to thy holy abode.... Terror and dread fall upon [Edom, Moab, and the inhabitants of Canaan]: because of the greatness of thy arm, they are as still as a stone, till thy people, O **Lord**, pass by, till the people pass by whom thou hast purchased." Other allusions to Israel as the people of God include Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 32:9–10; Isaiah 62:4; Jeremiah 12:7–10; and Hosea 1:9–10; 2:23. In Romans 9:24–26 Paul applies the statements in Hosea to God's taking in of Gentiles as well as Jews: God "has called [us], not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles[.] As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call "my beloved.'" 'And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," they will be called "sons of the living God."'"

The concept of Israel and the church as the people of God contains several implications. God takes pride in them. He provides care and protection to his people; he keeps them "as the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10). Finally, he expects that they will be his people without reservation and without dividing their loyalty. Jehovah's exclusive claim on his people

is pictured in the story of Hosea's exclusive claim on his unfaithful wife Gomer. All of the people of God are marked with a special brand as it were. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the proof of divine ownership. It was required of all male children of the people of Israel, as well as of all male converts or proselytes. It was an external sign of the covenant which made them God's people. It was also a subjective sign of the covenant in that it was applied individually to each person, whereas the ark of the covenant served as an objective sign for the whole group.

Instead of this external circumcision of the flesh, found in the administration of the old covenant, we find under the new covenant an inward circumcision of the heart. Paul wrote, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal" (Rom. 2:29; see also Phil. 3:3). Whereas in the Old Testament, or under the old covenant, the people of God had been national Israel, inclusion among the people of God was not, in the New Testament, based upon national identity: "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom. 9:6). It is inclusion within the covenant of God that distinguishes the people of God; they are made up of all those "whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles" (v. 24). For Israel the covenant was the Abrahamic covenant; for the church it is the new covenant wrought and established by Christ (2 Cor. 3:3-18).

A particular quality of holiness is expected of the people of God. God had always expected Israel to be pure or sanctified. As Christ's bride the church must also be holy: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25b-27).

#### *The Body of Christ*

Perhaps the most extended image of the church is its representation as the body of Christ. Indeed, some apparently regard this image as virtually a complete definition of the church.<sup>19</sup> While it is a very full and rich statement, it is not the whole of the account.

The image of the church as the body of Christ emphasizes that the church is the locus of Christ's activity now, just as was his physical body during his earthly ministry. The image is used both of the church universal and of individual local congregations. Ephesians 1:22-23 illustrates the former: "He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him

19. E.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 557.

who fills all in all." Paul's statement to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12:27 illustrates the latter: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

The image of the body of Christ also emphasizes the connection of the church, as a group of believers, with Christ. Salvation, in all of its complexity, is in large part a result of union with Christ. We observed in chapter 45 numerous references to the believer's being "with Christ" or "in Christ." Here we find an emphasis upon the converse of this fact. Christ in the believer is the basis of belief and hope. Paul writes, "To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27; see also Gal. 2:20).

Christ is the head of this body (Col. 1: 18) of which believers are individual members or parts. All things were created in him, through him, and for him (Col. 1:16). He is the beginning, the first-born (v. 15). "All things in heaven and on earth [will be brought] together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10, NIV). Believers, united with him, are being nourished through him, the head to which they are connected (Col. 2: 19). This image is virtually parallel to Jesus' image of himself as the vine to which believers, as the branches, are connected (John 15:1-1). As the head of the body (Col. 1:18), he also rules the church: "For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority" (Col. 2:9-10). Christ is the Lord of the church. It is to be guided and controlled by his direction and his activity.

The image of the body of Christ also speaks of the interconnectedness between all the persons who make up the church. Christian faith is not to be defined merely in terms of individual relationship to the Lord. There is no such thing as an isolated, solitary Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul develops the concept of the interconnectedness of the body, especially in terms of the gifts of the Spirit. Here he stresses the dependence of each believer upon every other. He emphasizes that "all the members of the body, though many, are one body" (v. 12). They all, whether Jew or Greek, have been baptized by one Spirit into one body, and have been made to drink of one Spirit (v. 13). All of the various members have been given gifts. These gifts are not for personal satisfaction, but for the edification (building up) of the body as a whole (14:4-5, 12). While there is diversity of gifts, there is not to be division within the body. Some of these gifts are more conspicuous than others, but they are not therefore more important (12: 14-25). No one gift is for everyone (12:27-3 1); this means, conversely, that no one person has all the gifts. Each member needs the others, and each is needed by the others.

There is, in this understanding of the body, a mutuality; each believer

encourages and builds up the others. In Ephesians 4: 11–16 Paul develops this idea of the value of each one's contribution to the others. He concludes: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and **upbuilds** itself in love." There is to be a purity of the whole. Members of the body are to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) and restore those who are found to be in sin (v. 1). In some cases, as here, dealing with sinful members may involve gentle restoration. At times, it may involve barring from the fellowship those who are defiling it. That is to say, it may involve actual exclusion or excommunication. In Matthew 18:8, 17, Jesus spoke of this possibility, as did Paul in Romans 16:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:12–13.

The body is to be characterized by genuine fellowship. This does not mean merely a social inter-relatedness, but an intimate feeling for and understanding of one another. There are to be empathy and encouragement (edification). What is experienced by one is to be experienced by all. Thus Paul writes, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26). The church in the Book of Acts even shared material possessions with one another.

The body is to be a unified body. Members of the church in Corinth were divided as to what religious leader they should follow (1 Cor. 1:10–17; 3:1–9). Social cliques or factions had been formed and were very much in evidence at the gatherings of the church (1 Cor. 11:17–19). This was not to be, however, for all believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:12–13). Paul also wrote on another occasion: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4–6).

The body of Christ is also universal. It is for all who will come into it. There are no longer any special qualifications like nationality. All such barriers have been removed, as Paul indicated: "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11). The same idea, with special reference to eliminating divisions between Jews and Gentiles within the body, is found in Romans 11:25–26, 32; Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 2: 15.

As the body of Christ, the church is the extension of his ministry. We ought not press this idea too far in the direction of viewing the church as a literal incarnation of Christ, for the result would be a virtual pantheism. Rather, we should look to Christ's Great Commission. Having indicated that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him (Matt. 28: 18), he sent his disciples to evangelize, baptize, and teach, prom-

ising them that he would be with them always, even to the end of the age (vv. 19–20). He told them that they were to carry on his work, and would do so to an amazing degree: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14: 12). The work of Christ, then, if it is done at all, will be done by his body, the church.

#### *The Temple of the Holy Spirit*

Filling out Paul's trinitarian concept of the church is the picture of the church as the temple of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who brought the church into being. This dramatic work of the Spirit occurred at Pentecost, where he baptized the disciples and converted three thousand, giving birth to the church. And he has continued to populate the church: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12: 13).

The church is now indwelt by the Spirit, on both an individual and a collective basis. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are God's temple 'and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are'" (1 Cor. 3:16–17). Paul later tells them, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God" (1 Cor. 6: 19). Elsewhere he describes believers as "a holy temple in the Lord ... a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21–22). And in a context where we find the image of Christ as the cornerstone of the temple, Peter speaks of believers as "a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5).

Dwelling within the church, the Holy Spirit imparts his life to it. Those qualities which are his nature and which are spoken of as the "fruit of the Spirit" will be found in the church: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). The presence of such qualities is indicative of the activity of the Holy Spirit and thus, in a sense, of the genuineness of the church.

It is the Holy Spirit who conveys power to the church. Jesus so indicated in Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." Because of the imminent coming of the Spirit with power, Jesus could give his disciples the incredible promise that they would do even greater works than he had done (John 14:12). Thus Jesus told them, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). It is the Spirit who does whatever is necessary to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (v. 8).

The promise was very soon fulfilled. Not only did three thousand persons respond to Peters preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), but the Lord daily added to their number people who were being saved (Acts 2:47). Filled with the Spirit, the disciples testified to Jesus' resurrection with boldness and great power (Acts 4:31, 33). One simply cannot account for the effectiveness of the ministry of those early believers on the basis of their abilities or efforts. They were not unusual persons. The results were a consequence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Students in a homiletics class were required to prepare sermons based upon various sermons recorded in the Bible. When the students came to Acts 2, they discovered that Peter's address at Pentecost is not a marvel of homiletical perfection. All of them were able to prepare sermons which were technically superior to that of Peter, yet none of them expected to surpass his results. One simply cannot account for the results of Peters sermon on the basis of the skill with which it was prepared and delivered. The reason for its success lies in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we observed earlier, the Spirit, being one, also produces a unity within the body. This does not mean uniformity, but a oneness in aim and action. The early church is described as being "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). They even held all their material goods in common (2:44–45; 4:32, 34–35). The Spirit had created in them a stronger consciousness of membership in the group than of individual identity, and so they viewed their possessions not as "mine" and "yours," but as "ours."

The Holy Spirit, dwelling within the church, also creates a sensitivity to the Lord's leading. Jesus had promised to continue to abide with his disciples (Matt. 28:20; John 14:18, 23). Yet he had said as well that he had to go away so that the Holy Spirit could come (John 16:7). We conclude that the indwelling Spirit is the means of Jesus' presence with us. So Paul wrote: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:9–10). Paul uses interchangeably the ideas of Christ's being in us and the Spirit's dwelling in us.

As the Spirit indwelt Jesus' disciples, he brought to their remembrance the Lord's teachings (John 14:26) and guided them into all truth (John 16:13). This work of the Spirit was dramatically illustrated in the case of Peter. In a vision Peter was told to kill and eat certain unclean beasts which had been let down to earth in something like a great sheet (Acts 10:11–13). Peters first response was, "No, Lord" (v. 14), for he was well aware of the prohibition upon eating unclean animals. Tradition told him to abstain. Peter soon realized, however, that the essence of the message of the vision was not that he should eat unclean animals, but that he

should bring the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews (vv. 17–48). The Spirit who dwelt within made Peter aware that the Lord was leading him to the Gentiles and made him willing to obey. The Holy Spirit renders believers who are set in their ways responsive and obedient to the leading of the Lord.

The Spirit is in one sense also the sovereign of the church. For it is he who equips the body by dispensing gifts, which in some cases are persons to fill various offices and in other cases are special abilities. He decides when a gift will be bestowed, and upon whom it is to be conferred. Paul writes, "All these [the several gifts] are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

Finally, the Holy Spirit makes the church holy and pure. For just as the temple was a holy and sacred place under the old covenant because God dwelt in it, so also are believers sanctified under the new covenant because they are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6: 19–20).

### Special Problems

There are four special issues which require particular attention in our introductory chapter on the doctrine of the church: the relationship between the church and the kingdom; the relationship between the church and Israel; the relationship between the visible and invisible church; and the time of the beginning of the church.

#### *The Church and the Kingdom*

There is obviously a close connection between the kingdom and the church. In fact, Jesus, having announced that he would build his church and that the powers of death would not prevail against it, immediately went on to say to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18–19). From this one might infer that the church is a synonym for the kingdom. Indeed, Geerhardus Vos argued that the imagery in this passage is that the church is a house built upon a rock foundation (v. 18) and the keys to the house will be turned over to Peter.<sup>20</sup> George Ladd, however, correctly maintains that this is pressing metaphorical language too far. Rather, he argues, the kingdom is to be thought of as the reign of God.<sup>21</sup> The church, by contrast, is a realm of God, the people who are under his rule. The kingdom is the rule of God, whereas

20. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (New York: American Tract Society, 1903), p. 150.

21. George E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 259–60.

the church is the human community under that rule.<sup>22</sup> Ladd makes five basic points concerning the relationship between the kingdom and the church?

1. The church is not the kingdom.
2. The kingdom creates the church.
3. The church witnesses to the kingdom.
4. The church is the instrument of the kingdom.
5. The church is the custodian of the kingdom.

The church is a manifestation of the kingdom or reign of God. It is the form which that reign takes on earth in our time. It is the concrete manifestation of God's sovereign rule in our hearts. Under the old covenant, the form of expression which the kingdom took was Israel. The kingdom can be found wherever God rules in human hearts. But more than that, it is found wherever his will is done. Thus, the kingdom was present in heaven even before the creation of humans, for the angels were subject to and obeyed God. They are included within his kingdom now, and will be in the future. But they never have been and never will be part of the church. The church is only one manifestation of the kingdom.

#### *The Church and Israel*

A second specialized issue concerns the relationship of Israel to the church. Here we encounter widely and sharply differing opinions, which can in some cases be classified as disputes. On the one hand, some Reformed theologians see literal Israel as virtually swallowed up or displaced by the church or spiritual Israel.<sup>24</sup> There is nothing left to be fulfilled in relationship to literal Israel; consequently, there is no need for a millennium in which Jews will be restored to a prominent place in God's work. On the other hand, dispensationalists regard Israel and the church as two eternally separate entities with which God deals in different ways.<sup>25</sup> As Ladd has noted, the truth here, as in so many matters, lies somewhere between the two poles.<sup>26</sup>

We note first that spiritual Israel has in many respects taken the place

22. Ibid., p. 260.

23. Ibid., pp. 259-73.

24. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 570-71.

25. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948), vol. 4, pp. 29-35.

26. George E. Ladd, "Israel and the Church," *Evangelical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (October-December 1964): 207.

of literal Israel. Paul stressed this point in Romans and Galatians. For example, he wrote, "For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal" (Rom 2:28-29). To the Galatians he wrote, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (3:29). Other pertinent passages include Romans 4:11,16, 18; and 9:7-8.

Further, we should observe that some of the promises directed to literal Israel in the Old Testament are regarded by New Testament writers as having been fulfilled in spiritual Israel, the church. For example, Hosea wrote, "And I will have pity on Not pitied, and I will say to Not my people, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'Thou art my God'" (Hos. 2:23). It is clear from Hosea 1:6-11 that this verse has reference to Israel. Paul, however, applies it to Jew and Gentile alike. For in speaking of "us whom [God] has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles," he quotes this verse: "As indeed [God] says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call "my beloved"' " (Rom. 9:24-25). Ladd also cites Peter's application of Joel's promise, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28; cf. Acts 2:17).<sup>27</sup> It should be noted, however, that Peter was speaking to and about Jews at this point (Acts 2:5, 22). Thus, the assertion that Peter is here applying to the church promises made to Israel is open to question.

There is, however, a future for national Israel. They are still the special people of God. Having declared that Israel's rejection has meant the reconciliation of the world, Paul asks, "What will their [Israel's] acceptance mean but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:15). The future is bright: "and so all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). Yet Israel will be saved by entering the church just as do the Gentiles. There is no statement anywhere in the New Testament that there is any other basis of salvation.

To sum up, then: the church is the new Israel. It occupies the place in the new covenant which Israel occupied in the old. Whereas in the Old Testament the kingdom of God was peopled by national Israel, in the New Testament it is peopled by the church. There is a special future coming for national Israel, however, through large-scale conversion to Christ and entry into the church.

#### *The Visible Church and the Invisible Church*

A further issue is the relationship between the visible church and the invisible church. This distinction, which appeared as early as Augustine,<sup>28</sup>

27. Ibid., p. 209.

28. Augustine On *Christian Doctrine* 3.3 1-34.

was first enunciated clearly by Martin Luther,<sup>29</sup> and then incorporated by John Calvin into his theology as well.<sup>30</sup> It was Luther's way of dealing with the apparent discrepancies between the qualities of the church as we find them laid out in Scripture and the characteristics of the empirical church, the church as it actually exists on earth. He suggested that the true church consists only of the justified, those who are savingly related to God.

We should note in examining the distinction between the visible and invisible church, a distinction which some would disallow, that it is not the same as the distinction between the local and the universal church. Rather, what we are dealing with here is the question of the extent to which the true church is to be identified with the present earthly institution. Is it possible, on the one hand, that there are persons within the visible church who are not true believers, who are not actually part of the body of Christ? And conversely, can there be membership in Christ's body apart from affiliation with some segment of the visible church, some local collection of believers? Or, to put the matter differently, which is the prior factor, the institutional or the personal/spiritual? Does connection with the institutional church make one a Christian? Or is the church constituted by the individual Christian experiences of its members? Which justifies the other, the institutional organization or the individual spiritual experiences? These questions have been answered in several different ways.

On the one hand, we have those groups which maintain that the institutional or visible church is prior. Traditional Roman Catholicism is probably the purest form of this point of view, although it is also characteristic of Anglican and Eastern Orthodox communions. Particular organizations are regarded as part of the true church if they can trace their origin to Christ's act establishing the church (Matt. 16:18).<sup>31</sup> In this view, Jesus' statement, "I will build my church," was not simply a prediction and promise. It was a constitutive declaration. That this was the point at which he initiated the church is confirmed by his subsequent statement: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (v. 19). In the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation, Jesus here conferred upon the apostles a special status enabling them to define doctrine and convey grace, for example, by forgiving sins. It is this grace (sanctifying grace, in the traditional formula-

29. Martin Luther, "Preface to Revelation."

30. John Calvin, *Institutes Of the Christian Religion*, book 4, chapter 1, section 7.

31. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals Of Catholic Dogma*, ed. James Canon Bastible (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1960), pp. 27 1-74.

lation) which gives salvation or makes one a Christian. The authority to dispense this grace was transmitted by the apostles to their successors, a process which has continued to this day.<sup>32</sup>

A major mark, then, of a true church is apostolicity. Jesus gave his apostles an exclusive franchise as it were; accordingly, a true church will display a specific pedigree. A true church is one which can trace itself back to the apostles and thus, of course, to Jesus' act of establishing the church. Without such a pedigree there is no church, there is no salvation, and there are no Christians. A group of persons might gather, organize themselves into a corporation, conduct religious services, erect a structure, and call themselves a church, but they are not thereby constituted a church. Without proper connection to the formal institution established by Christ and the apostles, they are not a church and the individuals are not Christians. What authenticates a group of people as a church is visible connection to a present-day organization which can be traced back historically to the New Testament church. Obviously, those who hold this view set extreme importance on such matters as the order of the church, its leadership and government, and the ordained clergy.

At the opposite extreme is what might be termed the pietistic approach to the church, although that term is somewhat misleading. The emphasis here is upon the individual's direct relationship to God through Jesus Christ. It is that and that alone which makes one a Christian. And it is the presence of such believers, regenerate persons, that properly constitutes a group as a church.<sup>33</sup> Note that in this view those who are savingly related to Christ make up the church, whether or not they are assembled into any visible group. Membership in a visible group is no guarantee whatsoever of justification in God's sight, so the visible organization is relatively unimportant. In fact, some deny the necessity of being part of an organized body. Informal fellowship on a voluntary basis is all that is needed. In the case of groups such as the Plymouth Brethren, there may well be an aversion to anything resembling a formal structure and professional clergy.<sup>34</sup> Church membership, as a permanent commitment to a given group of believers, is minimized in this individualistic approach. Parachurch organizations or house churches may take the place of the organized church. And intercongregational organizations, whether denominations or interdenominational fellowships, are considered rela-

32. Ibid., pp. 274-79.

33. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), pp. 494-97.

34. D. Nauta, "Church, Nature and Government of: Quakers, 'Plymouth' Brethren, Darbyites, etc.," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity* ed. Gary G. Cohen (Marshalltown, Del.: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 487-88.

tively unimportant. While Christians who take this approach may consider themselves interdenominational, they are in reality frequently nondenominational, and sometimes even antidenominational.

In some cases, the deemphasis of the visible church may stem from a dispensational view which regards the church in general as a parenthesis in God's plan, a virtual afterthought. The emphasis here is that God's original intention was in relationship to national Israel. When Israel rejected Jesus' offer of the kingdom to them, God turned to the Gentiles and created the church. Nonetheless, God has never abandoned his interest in Israel. When the time of his dealing with the church is completed, Israel will be reinstated to her position of primacy. The actual Davidic kingdom will be reestablished, as will even the Old Testament sacrifices. Israel and the church are separate and always will be.<sup>35</sup> The future primacy of Israel will not be the result of massive numbers of conversions incorporating Jews into the church. Rather, it will be the result of a reinstitution of Israel's special status as a nation. The church is a temporary phenomenon unforeseen in the Old Testament. Indeed, no Old Testament prophecy pertains to the church or is fulfilled in the church. Since this is the case and even the invisible church is relatively transient, the visible or institutional church certainly need not receive a great deal of attention.

The view of the church being sketched here could in some ways be more accurately referred to as the individualistic rather than the pietistic view. What makes the term *pietistic* appropriate, however, is that there is frequently a strong emphasis upon the quality of individual Christian living. Since the individuals relationship to Christ is determinative of Christianity, individual piety and purity of life are exceedingly important. Thus, whenever individual Christians join together, they will emphasize such ethical qualities within the group as well. These qualities are not to be looked upon as characteristics of the group as a group, but of the individuals who happen to make it up.

Intermediate between the two views we have discussed is what might be termed the "parish" view. It stresses both the visible and invisible church. The visible church or parish includes all who make an outward profession and come together to hear the Word and celebrate the sacraments.<sup>36</sup> The believers within this visible church constitute the true church, the invisible church.

According to this view, there are certain marks by which the presence of the true church can be detected. These are objective marks, not

<sup>35</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, pp. 27-53.

<sup>36</sup> Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology Of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899), p. 591.

merely subjective criteria. That is to say, they are not merely qualities of the individuals making up the group, but of the local assembly quite apart from the spiritual condition of the individuals within it. The two most frequently mentioned are true preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments. The former has reference to purity or correctness of doctrine. The latter means that a duly authorized person administers the sacraments in an appropriate way to people entitled to receive them, and that there is a correct understanding of their efficacy.<sup>37</sup>

Having examined these several views, we conclude that the distinction between the visible and invisible church needs to be maintained, but with qualifications. The parable of the weeds amid the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43) and Jesus' teaching about the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46) support this distinction. But it is to be seen as a recognition of the possibility of hypocrisy and even deceit, not as a demeaning of the importance of church membership. It is a reflection of the truth of 2 Timothy 2:19: "The Lord knows those who are his." Even one of Jesus' twelve disciples turned out to be a traitor.

We should observe that Scripture seems to look upon the individuals spiritual condition as prior. For example, Luke says of the early church, "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). When questioned about salvation, the apostles never suggested that it depends upon connection with a group of believers. When Peter and the others were asked, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), the reply was, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). Peters message was the same in Acts 3:12-26 and 4:7-12. Paul's reply to the Philippian jailor's question, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) was straightforward: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). In none of these instances is there any suggestion that relationship to a group is determinative. Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman indicates that worshiping in a particular place is of less importance than worshiping in spirit and truth (John 4:20-24).

Having assigned to faith the priority, or given precedence to the invisible over the visible, we must nevertheless not minimize the importance of the visible form of the church. It was apparently the standard procedure for the believer to become a part of the fellowship (see, e.g., Acts 2:47). While we do not know exactly what membership in the apostolic church entailed, it was certainly for the purposes of edification, prayer, service, and, as can be seen particularly in Acts 5, discipline. We should therefore emphasize the importance of every believer's becoming an integral part of a group of believers, and making a firm commitment to

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 590-9 1.

it. Christianity is a corporate matter, and the Christian *life can* be fully realized only in relationship to others.

While acknowledging the distinction between the visible or empirical church and the invisible or spiritual fellowship, we should do whatever we can to make the two identical. Just as no true believer should be outside the fellowship, so also there should be diligence to assure that only true believers are within. The handling of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), as well as Paul's instructions to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:1–5) and the Galatians (6:1) regarding the treatment of sinners, argues for a careful monitoring by the group of the spiritual condition and conduct of the members. While perfect purity of the membership is an ideal which cannot be realized within this life (Matt. 13:24–30), open unbelief and sin are not to be tolerated.

#### The Time of *Inception* of the Church

A final question regarding the nature of the church relates to the time of its beginning. Louis Berkhof, among others, speaks of the church in the patriarchal and Mosaic periods.<sup>38</sup> It is notable, however, that Jesus makes only two references to the church (Matt. 16: 18; 18: 17), and that in the former case he is speaking of the future ("I will build my church"). The fact that Luke never uses *ἐκκλησία* in his Gospel but employs it twenty-four times in Acts is also significant. It would seem that he did not regard the church as present until the period covered in Acts. (While Acts 7:38 uses *ἐκκλησία* of the people of Israel in the wilderness, it is likely that the term is here being used in a nontechnical sense.) We conclude that the church originated at Pentecost.

In light of this conclusion, we need to ask regarding the status of Israel. What of the Old Testament believers? We have argued that while the form which the people of God took in the Old Testament was national Israel, in the New Testament it is the church, and that the church began with Pentecost. Does this mean that we who are now part of the church will be forever in a separate grouping from the Old Testament believers? I would suggest, instead, that those who were part of Israel prior to Pentecost have been incorporated into the church. This certainly seems to have been the case with the apostles. They had been part of Israel, but at Pentecost became the nucleus of the church. If the Old Testament believers, those who made up true Israel, were saved, like us, upon the basis of Christ's redemptive life and death, then they may well have been swept by the event of Pentecost into the same body as the New Testament believers. Israel was not, then, simply succeeded by the church; rather,

<sup>38</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 570.

Israel was included within the church. The people of God are truly one people; the body of Christ is truly one body.

#### Implications

1. The church is not to be conceived of primarily as a sociological phenomenon, but as a divinely established institution. Accordingly, its essence is to be determined not from an analysis of its activity, but from Scripture.
2. The church exists because of its relationship to the Triune God. It exists to carry out its Lord's will by the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. The church is the continuation of the Lord's presence and ministry in the world.
4. The church is to be a fellowship of regenerate believers who display the spiritual qualities of their Lord. Purity and devotion are to be emphasized.
5. While the church is a divine creation, it is made up of imperfect human beings. It will not reach perfect sanctification or glorification until its Lord's return.