

Knowing Our God

Advanced Exegetical Theology

The Knowledge of God Series

Book 4

Biblical Psychology

What does Scripture Say about the Human Heart?

Kurt Jurgensmeier

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife Brenda.

Both the wisdom gained through countless hours of counseling, and the work to write the book, required a great deal of time away from my family. Only by the sacrificial love of Brenda was I able to pursue such ministries. Regardless of how useful this book turns out to be, thank God she will have her very great reward.

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The chapters below are marked with the following categories in order to help you prioritize your reading:

- ◆ **Best:** The most helpful, interesting and/or important chapters.
- ◆ **Essential:** Important chapters to understand the topic of the book.
- ◇ **Specialized:** The finer or more complex points of the topic of the book.

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Preface

Helping the next generation of Bible Teachers

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15)

These words were written to a young Teacher of God's word. They are a reminder of the awesome privilege, responsibility, and accountability that comes with such a divine calling. Being a Teacher is God's gift to a man, but what kind of Teacher he becomes is his gift to God. And God tells all Teachers something of what He is expecting in the verse above.

First, the Teacher is to **"present"** himself **"to God"** when he teaches. When we teach it is not only humans that are listening, but Heaven as well, and God is our most important audience. We can be concerned with what people will think of our teaching, but we need to be much, much more concerned with what God will think.

And God's expectations can significantly differ from those of humans. People often expect eloquence and entertainment, God expects accuracy, **"correctly"** interpreting, teaching, and applying God's word for God's people. There is nothing in all the world more important than this because to do otherwise is to misunderstand, misrepresent, and eventually disobey the Author.

As in all human endeavors, not even God expects perfection, but He certainly demands that we do our **"best."** We need to remember that we do all of this under the watchful eye of the Author Himself, and will one Day be either **"approved"** or **"ashamed"** regarding how careful and diligent we were in working to understand, teach, and apply His word **"correctly."**

This book is offered as a help in obeying the Apostle's command for those who have, or desire to have, the great responsibility of teaching God's word to His people. It is part of a series of books written under the title of *Knowing Our God: Advanced Exegetical Theology*.

These books are *advanced* in that they are an in-depth, scholarly study of very specific and often difficult theological topics.

They are uniquely *exegetical* in that there is a special emphasis on interpreting the Scriptures applicable to the topic. A lot of systematic theologies would not require much of a Scripture index.

Excerpts from *Knowing Our God* make up over 1000 pages of OT and NT commentary from the best Evangelical scholars. This is published in Book 19: Theological Commentary, and available online at www.trainingtimothys.org. Accordingly, about 25% of the current 4000 pages of *Knowing Our God* is commentary on Scripture.

Finally, these books are theology, because it is in such an endeavor that we bring the pieces of God's word into a harmonious whole in order to produce the full truth of Scripture. We believe Advanced Exegetical Theology is a great need in equipping Pastors today.

Ezra the priest, of course, is our example, of whom it is written: **"the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel"** (Ezra 7:9-10). Obeying God's word was obviously important to Ezra, but so was being **"devoted . . . to the study"** of God's word, all so that he could be **"teaching"** it to God's people. It is our hope that this book will help you do just that.

Finally, a few practical points. First, while we are not aware of anything in it that would be contrary to the historical, Evangelical Christian faith, if you encounter something that differs from the beliefs of your Pastor(s), please discuss it with them if it causes serious questions for you. We desire to respect the pastoral authority God has in your life as much as possible.

Secondly, studying God's word is best pursued in community with spiritual peers, and we encourage you to read this with others and discuss the "Gauging Your Grasp" questions usually at the end of a chapter.

Thirdly, we make an effort to make an organized study of God's word not just theological but practical as well. So prayerfully consider the sections entitled **Pastoral Practices** along the way.

Fourth, as you read you will notice several references to other writings. This reflects the fact that this book is an excerpt from a larger production entitled *Knowing Our God*. The entire collection of books on systematic theology that are currently available can be found at www.trainingtimothys.org.

Finally, we would appreciate the reader visiting the site and emailing us any feedback on this book, including concerns, comments, and any proposed corrections. We too wish to study God's word in community, and that community includes you.

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Chapter 4.1

The Human "Heart"

Our Connection to God

Overall Objective

Better understand the complex but critical topic of our "heart" and its God-ordained purposes.

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- B.2) A Definition of the "Heart": *the reasoning functions of our inner life that direct our outer life.*
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Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- God has a "heart" and ours is an image of His.
- More than anything else the human "heart" defines who humans are.
- Without our "heart" we cannot know or experience God, let alone anything else. Which is why we must study the topic of epistemology and not just revelation.
- The human "heart" is referenced over 1000 times in Scripture.
- Not even God does anything in or through us apart from our "heart."
- The human "heart" can be described as *the reasoning functions of our inner life that direct our outer life*.
- The functions of the "heart" can be described as: *decisions* based on *beliefs* and *desires*, which result in *emotions*. (cf. 2 Cor 9:7)
- The most foundational product of the "heart" is decisions.
- Emotions are based on our desires which are based on our beliefs, all of which are decisions of the reason of our "heart."
- If we diminish any part of the human "heart" (beliefs, desires, or emotion) we obscure the image of God in us, and despise a part of God Himself.
- Everything that is commonly described as a function of a "will" as distinguished from our reason, is actually a function of the latter (including decisions and desires), therefore making the concept of a "will" inaccurate and misleading.
- Reason is ultimately at the bottom of all desires and emotions.
- The God-given goal of the human "heart" is happiness.
- God's greatest glory from our lives comes from Him making us happy.

A) The Importance of the "Heart"

A.1) God's "Heart"

Any attempt to understand and write about the importance and nature of the human "heart" is akin to attempting the same concerning the importance and nature of God Himself. This is because our "heart" is modeled after the "heart" of God. Accordingly, John Calvin (1509-1564) wrote: "The mind of a man is [God's] true image."¹ When Scripture says we are made in His "image" (cf. Gen 1:26) and that we have a "heart," then we can be sure God has a "heart," and in fact the Bible says so.

God can be **"grieved in His heart"** (Gen 6:6), make **"plans"** in **"His heart"** (Ps 23:11), **"shepherd . . . according to the integrity of His heart"** (Ps 78:72), **"carry out the purposes of His heart"** (Jer 23:20), and **"accomplish the intent of His heart"** (Jer 20:34). He told Eli **"I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and My mind"** (1 Sam 2:35), and Samuel told Saul, **"The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart"** (1 Sam 13:14).

He said of Solomon's temple, **"My heart will be there perpetually"** (1 Kgs 9:3). He told Jehu, **"you have . . . done . . . all that was in My heart"** (1 Kgs 10:30). He told the Israelites a **"day of vengeance was in My heart"** (Isa 63:4). He told Jeremiah, **"My heart would not be with"** the Israelites (Jer 15:1), and yet, **"My heart yearns for"** them (Jer 31:20) and **"I . . . will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and soul"** (Jer 31:41). Finally, in a rather powerful statement God says, **"My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled"** (Hos 11:8).

A.2) The Human "Heart"

If God then has a "heart" from which all of His decisions, desires, and deeds come from, and our "heart" is made in His image, then a study of this "heart" is of utmost importance to understanding God, ourselves, and our relationship to Him. What in all the Universe is more important and awe-inspiring than the "heart" of God? Likewise, on this Earth, concerning the whole of

¹ Calvin's Bible Commentaries, Act 17:22; online at www.ccel.org.

human existence, what is more critical and complex than the human "heart?"

A human can be a human without legs, arms, eyes, ears, or even with a mechanical heart pumping blood through their body. But you cannot be human without a "heart." It is, in fact, the thing that sets us apart from the beasts. Animals have hearts, but not "hearts."² Virtually everything uniquely human comes from their "heart" including all of their beliefs, desires, decisions, actions, and emotions. Remove these from a human and you no longer have one.

Considering the fact that Scripture is a divine revelation to humans, it should not surprise us that the human "heart" (Heb. *lēb*, Gr. *kardia*) is mentioned over 1000 times.³ This does not include the hundreds of rather synonymous references to the human mind, spirit, soul, and conscience (e.g. *rûah*, *nous*, *pneuma*, *psuchē*). The fact that the human "heart" is addressed this often tells us something about its importance in our relationship to God.

It is, in fact, because God designed us with a "heart" that human epistemology is such a critical area of theology, and not just divine revelation. Revelation is the divine side of the relationship, while epistemology is the human side, all of which occurs in our "heart." It is our link, connection, with God and without it we cannot know or experience Him, let alone anything else.

As the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) puts it, our "heart" is, "the place where God deals with man" and that part of a man "where, in the first instance, the

² Many today are attempting to decrease the gap between humans and animals, often to either support evolutionary theories or encourage us to be more compassionate to animals. The latter is biblical (cf. Prov 12:10), the former is a farce. Nonetheless, the gap between humans and animals remains wide, as wide as the fact that we are made in God's image and they are not. More specifically, it is the higher functions of the human "heart" such as self-awareness, abstract reflection, and moral judgment that puts us in an entirely different species of Creation from animals. It is not merely that we have the capacity for these things to a greater degree, but that even the most intelligent animals know nothing of them.

³ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE) counts 850 times that *lēb* and *lēbab* are used in the OT (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., 4 vols., [Eerdmans, 1988]). This fact makes it inexcusable that *The Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Desmond T. Alexander and David W. Baker, eds. [Intervarsity, 2003]) does not even have an entry for "heart." According to the *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, *kardia* is used in the NT 157 times and translated "heart" 152 times (Robert L. Thomas, ed. [Foundation Publications, 1998]).

question for or against God is decided.”⁴ Accordingly, our “heart” is where we get saved, as the Apostle explains that if you, **“believe in your heart [kardia: “heart”] that God raised Him [Christ] from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart [kardia] that you believe and are justified”** (Rom 10:9-10). It is in our “hearts” that a relationship with God takes place, therefore Christ said, **“the first and greatest commandment”** is to **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart [kardia] and with all your soul [psuchē] and with all your mind [dianoia]”** (Matt 22:37-8). As we will see below, all of these terms are rather synonymous with the biblical use of “heart.”⁵

Following the fact that the human “heart” is the place in which a relationship with our Creator occurs, it is also, for believer and unbeliever alike, the “god” within them, directing and controlling every aspect of our life. Not even God does anything in or through us apart from our “heart.” This is because God doesn’t do anything apart from His “heart” either. All of this led Solomon to write, **“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life”** (Prov 4:23). This is because the “heart” dictates who I am and who I will be.⁶ Or as the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT) puts it: “[T]he heart is regarded as the center or focus of man’s personal life, the spring of all his desires, motives, and moral choices--indeed, of all his behavioral trends.”⁷ All of which, again, makes its importance virtually impossible to exaggerate.⁸

⁴ T. Sorg, “Heart,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), II:183.

⁵ For a defense of the unity of the “heart” see the next chapter 4.2.

⁶ A. W. Tozer wrote along these lines:

Anyone who wishes to check on his true spiritual condition may do so by noting what his voluntary thoughts have been over the last hours or days. What has he thought about when free to think of what he pleased? Toward what has his inner heart turned when it was free to turn where it would? When the bird of thought was let go, did it fly out like the raven to settle upon floating carcasses or did it like the dove circle and return again to the ark of God? Such a test is easy to run, and if we are honest with ourselves we can discover not only what we are but what we are going to become. We’ll soon be the sum of our voluntary thoughts. (*The Best of A. W. Tozer*, comp. by Warren Wiersbe [Baker, 1978], 45).

⁷ O. R. Brandon “Heart” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT), Walter Elwell, ed. (Baker, 1984), 499.

⁸ Along these lines, Karl Barth (1886–1968), in a section of his *Dogmatics* entitled “Man as Soul and Body,” wrote regarding the “heart” in both Old and New Testaments:

B) The Nature of the "Heart"

B.1) The Complexity of the "Heart"

Fully understanding the functions of the metaphorical human "heart" is beyond human ability. What Solomon said about his own heart, is true of all human "hearts": **"As the Heavens are high and the Earth is deep, so the hearts of kings are unsearchable"** (Prov 25:3). Only God truly knows the full truth about His Creation, including **"the Heavens . . . and the Earth"** that Solomon mentions, and the inner workings of a human "heart."

The complexity of the "heart" is revealed in any attempt to understand how it makes the decisions that guide our life. The inner workings of humans involve the interaction of different strands of mental, moral, spiritual, physiological, and emotional elements all interwoven so intricately that it is humanly impossible to clearly separate or distinguish them (cf. Heb. 4:12). The fact that all of these elements (e.g. heart, spirit, soul, mind) are used rather synonymously in Scripture makes our study even more difficult. As the *New Dictionary of Theology* remarks: "[T]he Heb. and Gk. words used to express physical, emotional and psychological being are an interpreter's minefield."⁹

If we are true to the biblical texts we must say of the heart that it is the whole man himself, and therefore not only the locus of his activity but its essence. . . . Thus the heart is not merely *a* but the reality of man, both wholly of soul and wholly of body. (quoted in Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* [Eerdmans, 1986] 215).

Barth is reminding us here that not only does the "heart" reflect all of what we are non-physically, but that it controls all the physical movements made to obey the "heart." Accordingly, it can be said that everything of a human can be put in two categories, their "heart" and their body.

God Himself seems to reflect this view when we read:

[T]he LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, [body] but the LORD looks at the heart. (1 Sam 16:7)

⁹ J. E. Colwell, "Heart," *New Dictionary of Theology*, J. I. Packer, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, eds. (Intervarsity, 1988), 29.

Any discussion, even a detailed one, will probably only scratch the surface of such a topic, and will, therefore, entail shortcomings. Therefore, a discussion of this nature is to be approached with a great deal of humility. Nonetheless, in an effort to understand how God interacts with humanity, it is helpful to offer some broad descriptions of the workings of the human "heart." Such a discussion may seem merely theoretical or too psychological to the practical Christian. However, the human "heart" or our "**inmost being**," (Ps 139:13) ¹⁰ is a creation of God that can be studied and marveled at much like a scientist might be awed by any other aspect of God's Creation. More than anything else it defines who humans are. In addition, the "heart" is a central topic of Scripture, and is therefore worth the following study.

B.2) A Definition of the "Heart": *the reasoning functions of our inner life that direct our outer life.*

So what is the "heart?" While the word is used in Scripture to refer to a human's physical heart, ¹¹ it is most often used in a metaphorical sense. If we were to offer a succinct description of the metaphorical human "heart" we would say it is *the reasoning functions of our inner life that direct our outer life.* ¹² Accordingly, the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)* relates:

In the English versions several Hebrew expressions are translated "heart," the main words being *lēb* and *lēbāb*. [L]ike other anthropological terms in the OT, heart is also used very frequently in a psychological sense, as the center or focus of man's inner personal life. The heart is the source, or spring, of motives; the seat of the passions; the center of the thought

¹⁰ The Hebrew for "inmost being" in Ps 139:13 is *kilyah*. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)* relates:

Occurs thirty-one times in [ancient literature]. In all of these languages, the term refers to the [kidneys]. . . . When used figuratively, the term refers to the innermost aspects of personality. . . . This is probably so since in dismembering an animal [for sacrifice] the kidneys are the last organ to be reached. In this usage it is frequently paralleled with heart. (Gleason Archer, R. Laird Harris, Bruce K. Waltke eds. [Moody, 1980], 440-1).

¹¹ For biblical references to the human physical heart see 1 Sam 25:37; 2 Kings 9:24; Exod 28:9; Ps 38:9; Lk 21:34; Acts 14:17; Jas 5:5.

¹² Accordingly, the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, defines the human "heart" as "an inner reflection of the outer man." (466)

processes; the spring of conscience. Heart, in fact, is associated with what is now meant by the cognitive [mental], affective [emotional], and volitional [willing] elements of personal life.

The book of Proverbs is illuminating here: The heart is the seat of wisdom (2:10; etc.); of trust (or confidence) (3:5); diligence (4:23); perverseness (6:14); wicked imaginations (6:18); lust (6:25); subtlety (7:10); understanding (8:5); deceit (12:20); folly (12:23); heaviness (12:25); bitterness (14:10); sorrow (14:13); backsliding (14:14); cheerfulness (15:13); knowledge (15:14); joy (15:30); pride (16:5); haughtiness (18:12); prudence (18:15); fretfulness (19:3); envy (23:17).

The NT word is *kardia*. It, too, has a wide psychological and spiritual connotation. Our Lord emphasized the importance of right states of heart. It is the pure in heart who see God (Matt. 5:8); sin is first committed in the heart (Matt. 5:28); out of the heart proceed evil thoughts and acts (Matt. 15:19); forgiveness must come from the heart (Matt. 18:35); men must love God with all their heart (Matt. 22:37); the word of God is sown, and must come to fruition, in the heart (Luke 8:11-15).

Paul's use of *kardia* is on similar lines. According to H. W. Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, in fifteen cases heart denotes personality, or the inner life, in general (e.g., I Cor. 14:25); in thirteen cases, it is the seat of emotional states of consciousness (e.g., Rom. 9:2); in eleven cases, it is the seat of intellectual activities (e.g. Rom. 1:21); in thirteen cases, it is the seat of the volition (e.g., Rom. 2:5). Paul uses other expressions, such as mind, soul, and spirit, to augment the conception of man; but, on the whole, it may be said that the NT word *kardia* reproduces and expands the ideas included in the OT words *lēb* and *lēbāb*.¹³

B.3) Functions of the "Heart": *Decisions & desires based on beliefs resulting in emotions*

In order to understand the human "heart," it is best to begin with *what* comes from it, rather than *how* these things occur. The most foundational product of the "heart" is decisions. These are what the "heart" was designed to continually work toward, and how it controls our life. The most fundamental decision made by the

¹³ Brandon, 499.

heart is what to believe. As Proverbs says, "**For as he thinks** [*shāar*: "reckon, calculate"] **within himself, so he is**" (23:7 NASB), ¹⁴ and "**As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man**" (27:19). This is because our "heart" ultimately decides what we will believe, which then ultimately determines virtually everything else about our life.

Accordingly, based on what our "heart" believes is true, it decides what we desire. All of our desires are simply decisions made based on what we believe. And our emotions, then, are based on our desires because they result from the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of our desires. Emotions, then, are based on our desires which are based on our beliefs, all of which are decisions of the "heart." This trinity of the "heart" (beliefs, desires, and emotions) encompasses all of what the "heart" produces, all in the context of reasoning to decisions.

This would seem to be illustrated when the Apostle writes: "**Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly** [but with desire] **or under compulsion** [but according to what he really believes], **for God loves a cheerful** [appropriately emotional] **giver**" (2 Cor 9:7). Here, it would seem that all of the functions of the "**heart**" are involved in a God-pleasing decision, including the beliefs and desires that lead to the decision and the resulting emotion. ¹⁵

¹⁴ Admittedly, the NASB is unique in translating the Hebrew in this way. However, Keil and Delitzsch make a case for this rendering saying, "Most moderns (Bertheau, Zöckler, Dächsel, etc.) [translate it]: as he reckons in his soul, so is he." (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.com, 2000]).

¹⁵ Accordingly, the *NIDNTT* notes that the biblical words for "heart" (Heb: *lēb*; Grk: *kardia*) refer to these very three things.

In the metaphorical sense *lēb* is the seat of man's spiritual and intellectual life, the inner nature of man. Here the close connection between spiritual and intellectual processes and the functional reactions of the heart's activity is particularly clearly seen. . . . In the OT *lēb* is also the seat of man's feeling, thinking and willing:

(a) The heart is the seat of the emotions, whether of joy (Deut. 28:47) or pain (Jer. 4:19), of tranquillity (Prov. 14:30) or excitement (Deut., 19:6), etc.

(b) The heart is the seat of the understanding and of knowledge, of rational forces and powers (I Ki. 3:12; 4:29). But folly (Prov. 10:20 f.) and evil thoughts also operate in the heart.

(c) The will originates in the heart, also the carefully weighed intention (I Ki. 8:17) and the decision which is ready to be put into effect (Exod. 36:2).

Accordingly, the Apostle says in Romans, "**it is with your heart that you believe**" (10:10), that his "**heart's desire . . . for the Israelites is that they may be saved**" (10:1), and he said, "**I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish [emotions] in my heart**" (9:2). So then, the functions of the "heart" can be described as the making of decisions based on beliefs and desires which result in emotions. Accordingly, if we diminish any part of the human "heart" (beliefs, desires, or emotion) we obscure the image of God in us, and at least indirectly, despise a part of God Himself. And it is because we are essentially our decisions, based on our beliefs and desires, resulting in emotion, that our "heart" is virtually synonymous with us.

How all of these functions of the "heart" work in making decisions and directing our life is one purpose of the discussion below. Let it be simply said here that all of the functions of the "heart" ultimately depend on its beliefs, again reflecting the foundational purpose of human reason.

Pastoral Practices

- We must ensure that the ministries of our church reflect and minister to all the aspects of the human "heart." For example, it can be suggested that in a general way the *teaching* of the church builds and corrects our beliefs, the *mission* of the church engages our desires, and its *worship* gives us the opportunity to emotionally celebrate. If any of these ministries are neglected, a part of the "heart" of the church and the Christian will be deprived.

Unfortunately, this is the case in many churches. A teaching church can devalue *doing* something for God and putting all that teaching into practice. A worshipping church can simply focus on an emotional singing service, and not grow spiritually in its doctrinal convictions at all. Nonetheless, no church should

lēb, however, means less an isolated function than the man with al his urges, in short, the person in its totality (Ps. 22:26; 73:26; 84:2).

.. The NT use of *kardia* coincides with the OT understanding of the term. . . . Thus it is the person, the thinking [cf. Rom. 1:21], feeling [cf. Rom. 9:2], willing [cf. Rom. 2:5] ego of man . . . that the NT denotes by the use of *kardia*. (II:181. See also *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Ryken, Leland *et. al.* eds. [InterVarsity, 1998], 369).

neglect the importance of emotion in our experience of God. For further discussion of this last point see chapter 4.8.

Evaluate your church on the aspects and needs of the human "heart."

B.4) The Essence of the "Heart": *Reason, not emotion*

The relationship between beliefs, desires, and emotions is a hierarchical one, with beliefs being at the bottom, supporting all else. Desires are the result of beliefs, and emotions stem from desires. In other words, our beliefs are the beginning point for everything we do as human beings. What are desires other than decisions based on what we believe? And what are emotions except

our response to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of our desires? ¹⁶ Therefore, we suggest that the processing and production of our beliefs is the dominant function of the "heart" that directs and determines all else. ¹⁷

¹⁶ Pastor Dave Bovenmyer in his article "Emotions and the Heart" notes:

During the first half of the last century, psychology was dominated by the view that emotions are primarily spontaneous biological and physical reactions to various stimuli—laughing, crying, elevated heartbeat, etc. This "non-cognitive" theory of emotion followed the teaching of Descartes, Darwin, William James, and others in the belief that emotions consist of these physical reactions and grow out of the most basic instincts for survival.

In this view, emotional impulses are primitive reactions and come spontaneously upon a person—they happen to us rather than being produced by our thinking. Thus, according to the "non-cognitive" theory, emotions and passions are fundamentally different from reason, inferior to it, and not to be trusted.

In contrast to the non-cognitive theory of emotion, recent psychological theory has moved toward a "cognitive" theory of emotion. This theory defines emotion as a person's evaluation of an object, situation, or event in relation to himself and according to his values. Thus emotions reveal whether he sees the person or situation as threatening or safe, pleasant or painful, distressing or comforting.

In this view, emotion is tightly bound to reason, interacting with it according to what is valued. Emotions have objects, and an object must be perceived to have value to produce an emotion. We don't get angry when we bend a paper clip, because this object has little value to us. Emotions may be irrational, but this is only because the thinking and values that produce them are irrational.

According to this theory, emotions can show us the truth about our own beliefs and values and give us insight into the beliefs and values of others. . . . Thus emotions are tightly bound to thinking, reason, and belief and can be changed by altering the thinking behind them.

Clearly, a Christian view of emotions will more closely resemble the cognitive theory than the non-cognitive. The Bible teaches that we do have some control over our emotions and sometimes commands that we change them.

(online at: <http://davebovenmyer.wordpress.com/2010/02/20/emotions-and-the-heart>)

¹⁷ Along these lines, Jonathan Edwards wrote in his rather dense treatise: *Freedom of the Will* that "the will is that by which the mind chooses anything" (I.1; online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/will.html>). He went on to describe his understanding of what dictates the will, and seemed to have concluded with us that it is our reason:

The will is said to be 'determined' when some event or influence causes its choice to be directed to and fixed upon a particular end. . .

Many writers today, as noted below, attempt to limit human reason to the task of collecting data. In reality, however, human reason is the source of desires and ultimately emotions, and is superior and prior to both. It is our reason which not only seeks, researches, and receives data, but also evaluates and makes judgments upon it in order to produce what we believe, which is the foundation of what we desire and will feel—all occurring in our reason. Therefore, everything that is commonly described as a function of a "will" as distinguished from our reason, is actually a function of the latter (including decisions and desires), therefore making the concept of a "will" inaccurate and misleading.¹⁸

This then points to the foundational function of human reason. Everything human comes from it. It is the reason of the "heart" that processes and produces beliefs, which in turn dictate our desires and decisions, all of which determine our emotions based on our circumstances. Our reasoning is at the bottom and in first place of it all, and therefore the essence of our "heart." Accordingly, we have defined the human "heart" above as *the reasoning functions of our inner life that direct our outer life*. Not surprisingly, then, we devote a whole chapter (4.3) to the practical importance of reason in the Christian life.¹⁹

Our view of the "heart" is not popular today as it is common to confine the concept of the "heart" to desires and emotions, and distinguish it from the reasoning that occurs in our "head" or mind. This fallacy of "faculty psychology" is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter (4.2). Here, we only want to make it clear that, in Scripture, reasoning is by far the most common function described for the "heart." This is especially clear when we recognize that desires are decisions of reason.

. All I need to say for my purposes is this: What determines the will is the motive that the mind [reason] views as the strongest. . . .

When someone is considering whether to choose to pursue some state of affairs S, how agreeable S appears to him [his reason] to be will depend on various properties that S has and various relations that it enters into. Here are examples: (a) Features that S appears to have just in itself, making it beautiful and pleasant or ugly and unpleasant to the mind. (b) The amount of pleasure or unpleasure that appears to come with S or to result from it. (1.2, II)

We note here as well Edwards' belief that the end desire of our reasoning is happiness, which we discuss further in section C below.

¹⁸ For further discussion of problems regarding the idea of a human "will" see the next chapter 4.2.

¹⁹ For further discussion of the practical importance of reason in the Christian life see chapters 4.3-4.

For example, we read in Matthew 13:15 and 19:

For this people's heart [*kardia*] has become calloused. . . . Otherwise they might . . . understand [*sunieimi*] with their hearts [*kardia*]. . . . When anyone hears the message about the Kingdom and does not understand [*sunieimi*] it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart [*kardia*].

Contrary to popular Christian psychology then, biblically speaking, the "heart" is the place of understanding and reasoning, not just desiring or feeling.

Along these lines the Christian philosopher Gordon Clark (1902-1985) commented in an extensive study on this popular misunderstanding of the "heart":

The Scriptures make no distinction between the head and the heart, as if mathematics came from the head and faith from the heart. . . . [T]he term heart, at least seventy-five percent of the time in the Old Testament, means the mind or intellect. . . .

The aim of citing the following Biblical data--an unusually extended list for such studies as this, but only a small fraction of the textual instances--is to show as clearly as possible what the term heart means. Were the misunderstanding less pervasive, were the pastors less Freudian and more Biblical, were the congregations less confused and misled, a much briefer list would have sufficed. Present ignorance, however, would justify even a more extensive documentation than that which follows.²⁰

After the extended list of passages that describe the "heart" as the place of reasoning and understanding as the passage quoted above, Dr. Clark concluded:

Could it be any more clearly expressed that understanding is the function of the heart? . . . The term heart occurs about 160 times in the New Testament. The instances now given, both from Old and New, conclusively show that the basic meaning of the word is mind or intellect. Volition [desires], usually the [rational] assent to intellectually understood propositions, is also a meaning, and emotion is rarely the point of the passage.²¹

²⁰ Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Trinity Foundation, 1990), 66-7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 74, 75.

The essence of the human "heart" then is reasoning, not feeling.

Another mistake has been that many have suggested a reciprocal relationship between such concepts as reason, will, and emotion, with each having a potential and foundational effect on the other. For example, the Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland has written, "Beliefs are the rails upon which our lives run." However, he immediately qualifies this by saying, "We almost always act according to what we really believe."²² This implies that other factors such as desires and emotions may influence our decisions in a more foundational way than our beliefs. However, upon more careful reasoning, this does not seem true. While our desires may influence what knowledge, truth, and beliefs we pursue, those very desires were ultimately decisions based on beliefs produced by our reasoning in the first place. Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) wrote: "The will is simply the mind [reason] choosing what the mind [reason] deems best."²³

Our point may be illustrated by the irrationality of those who smoke cigarettes. Most of them believe the warnings on the package of cigarettes that this habit damages their health and even shortens their life. In fact, they believe these medical facts so strongly that they will not allow their children to smoke and will urge them never to do so. Yet, they will still inhale their poisonous vapors themselves. Why? Is it ultimately because they have some separate faculty or part of the "heart" called the "will" that acts against their reason? Can this be explained by simply saying their desires prevail over their real beliefs and dictate their final decision to shorten their breath *and* life some more? No. All smokers have *reasoned* to the decision to keep smoking. Bad desires and inappropriate emotions are simply a matter of bad reasoning resulting in bad beliefs.

More specifically, while the smoker believes that smoking is hazardous to their health, they have a more important belief (not merely desire) that leads them to smoke anyway. This more important belief is that the temporary pleasure or perceived benefit of smoking will result in more overall happiness for their life than the beneficial health effects of not smoking. In the end, and at bottom, all decisions (and desires) result from a cost/benefit analysis by our reason, based on our beliefs, as to what will make us the happiest. This is because happiness is the God-given goal of the human "heart."

²² J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (NavPress, 1997), 74

²³ Jonathan Edwards, quoted by James M. Boice, *Ephesians* (Baker, 1998), 47.

Pastoral Practices

- The fact that everything human depends on our beliefs highlights the importance of teaching in our ministry. People will desire and act upon what they believe and it is our responsibility to do all we can to ensure they believe according to the Scriptures. And contrary to current popular thinking in the Church, it is because teaching especially affects beliefs, that it is the most foundational ministry in the Church. Everything else will flow from this.

C) The Goal of the "Heart": *Happiness*

In understanding the nature of the human "heart," it is important to understand what it seeks. In a word, it is *happiness*. *Webster's* defines it as "a state of well-being and contentment; Joy; a pleasurable or satisfying experience."²⁴ These are the God-ordained purposes of our "heart's" every action. By experience our reason produces *beliefs* regarding what will make us happy, therefore creating *desires* for those things. Our *emotions* then result from the obtaining or obstruction of those desires, or what we believe will make us happy. **"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when dreams come true, there is life and joy"** (Prov 13:12 NLT).

Human beings, whether Christian or not, ultimately seek happiness on this Earth, and therefore, their desires are constantly conforming to this God given "law of delight." The reason we do what we do is to be happy. This includes obeying God. If we do not believe that obeying God will actually bring us the most happiness, we will struggle to do so, because happiness is the God-given goal of our "heart." Of course, God knows that obeying Him even sacrificially will bring us the greatest happiness in this life.

Accordingly, the King said:

If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:10-11; cf. Matt 6:32-33; 16:25)

²⁴ *Webster's*, online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/happiness>.

Even God's goal for us to that our **"joy may be complete."** However, if our whole "heart" does not believe that obeying God no matter the circumstance will bring us the greatest happiness, then our obedience (and our happiness) will be inconsistent. This is because whether a person is a Christian or not, they possess the built-in all-encompassing desire to be happy.

Along these lines, Augustine (354-430) said in a sermon:

Every man, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy. There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things; whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end alone.²⁵

Likewise, he wrote in his *Confessions*:

Without exception we all long for happiness. . . . All agree that they want to be happy. . . . They may all search for it in different ways, but all try their hardest to reach the same goal, that is, joy.²⁶

The Christian philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. . . . The will [i.e. "heart"] never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.²⁷

More recently, C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) wrote:

The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it as a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith.

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the

²⁵ Augustine, *Sermon 306*, quoted in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Crossway, 1998), 87.

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, X:21, (online at www.ccel.org).

²⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, 113, (online at www.ccel.org).

Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.²⁸

As Solomon put it: **"I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy"** (Eccl 3:12), and this is why it is our ultimate, God-given desire.

This "law of delight" which resides in us is clearly demonstrated by what people will do in order to be happy, including killing others or even themselves if they think it will accomplish their goal. Accordingly, the Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) made happiness a "law of the will" determining our desires, much like logic determines our beliefs, when he wrote: "For as the intellect of necessity adheres to the first principles [logic], the will [i.e. desires] must of necessity adhere to the last end, which is happiness."²⁹

While we do not adhere to the "faculty psychology" of Aquinas that implies an "intellect" being distinguished from a "will," he illustrates the foundational nature of the human desire for happiness. All of the reasoning of our "heart" ultimately seeks happiness. Accordingly, we abide by moral reason (conscience) to avoid the pain of guilt. We seek proper logical reasoning to avoid the inevitable pain of deception or the cost of making a foolish mistake.

We will argue in the next chapter that the laws of logic in our "heart" by which we reason are innate, not acquired, and a God-given part of our being created in His image. We would likewise suggest that the "law of delight" in our "heart" is likewise a part of our being made in His image, as God's own ultimate goal is happiness as well, as argued below. Therefore, God created us not only with the goal of reason implanted (happiness), but the means to attain it (logic- i.e. making the right decisions or having the right beliefs).

However, while *what* we seek may be created in us by God, *how* to find it would seem to be a process of human experience, and

²⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Harper Collins, 2001), 25-26.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.82.1; online at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>.

discovering what truly does make us happy. Thus, the Psalmist says, **"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him"** (Ps 34:8).

The foundational part of beliefs in obtaining our ultimate desire is illustrated by the fact that they are more instrumental in our experiencing happiness than even our circumstances. Beliefs, not circumstances, dictate joy. Accordingly, the King said:

Blessed [*makarios*: happy because of divine approval ³⁰] **are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because [you believe that] great is your reward in Heaven.** (Matt 5:11-12)

The King expects us to experience happiness even when we are being persecuted because we reason according to the divine revelation that we will be greatly rewarded for it. Therefore, the logic of our "heart" can work to accomplish the goal of our "heart," even if we cannot immediately obtain it from our circumstances.

This is why we read in James:

Consider [an act of reason] **it pure joy** [a state of happiness], **my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know** [through the beliefs of reason] **that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything** [which must be a desire of reason]. (Jas 1:2-4)

³⁰ D. A. Carson writes concerning the use of *makrios* ("blessed"):

The word used in [Matt 5:] 3-11 is *makarios*, which usually corresponds in the LXX to *asre*, a Hebrew term used almost as an interjection: "Oh the blessednesses [pl.] of." Usually *makarios* describes the man who is singularly favored by God and therefore in some sense "happy"; but the word can apply to God (1 Tim 1:11; 6:15). (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (EBC) Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.], *in loc.*)

However, Dr. Carson goes on to conclude that "happy" is not the primary meaning intended in the Beatitudes for *makarios*:

As for "happy" (TEV [NCV]), it will not do for the Beatitudes, having been devalued in modern usage. The Greek "describes a state not of inner feeling on the part of those to whom it is applied, but of blessedness from an ideal point of view in the judgment of others" (Allen).

While we are persuaded by Dr. Carson that *makarios* primarily means to be approved, or in "blessed" circumstances, surely the proper recognition of this would lead to happiness. This would be the case of all the "blessedness" described in the Beatitudes, and as clearly described in the last one as we point out.

Here, we see that by proper reasoning we can have happiness even in difficult circumstances. It is because the proper beliefs of our reason have resulted in the proper and over-riding desire for spiritual maturity, that our reason can decide that a difficulty is actually accomplishing what we want, and therefore experience the emotion of joy.

However, our happiness will only be found if we properly reason with our logic to find our happiness in God. Idolatry, and its resulting emptiness and despair, is ultimately the result of false reasoning because we have applied our logical abilities to the false information provided by the world about what will truly make us happy.

Regarding our God-given makeup to pursue happiness, Jonathan Edwards wrote in his classic treatise, *The End for Which God Created the World*:³¹

It is not a thing contrary to Christianity that a man should love himself; or what is the same thing, that he should love his own happiness. Christianity does not tend to destroy a man's love to his own happiness; it would therein tend to destroy the humanity. . . . That a man should love his own happiness, is necessary to his nature, as a faculty of the will [heart] is; and it is impossible that it should be destroyed in any other way than by destroying his being.³²

Again, however, while God created us to reason toward happiness, we will only find that happiness in believing in Him. Accordingly, the popular Reformed teacher John Piper comments on Edwards' insight above:

[T]he sheer faculty of desiring and liking and approving and being pleased, or not, is neither virtuous nor evil. . . . This means that God's Word assumes the legitimacy of the principle of self-love in the simple meaning of desiring and being pleased by what we think is good for us. . . . Self-love is to the soul what hunger is to the stomach. It is simply there with our creaturehood; it's the inescapable desire to be happy. . . .

So self-love is a natural trait that man has before and after the Fall, and it becomes evil only because of its narrowness and confinement. We are evil because we seek our

³¹ An edition of Edwards' *The End For Which God Created the World* can be found in Piper, 117-251.

³² Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, ed. Paul Ramsey (Yale, 1989), 254.

satisfaction in our own private pleasures but do not seek it in the good of others. We cherish our health and our food and our homes and families and jobs and hobbies and leisure. And we do not seek to expand that joy by drawing others into it. Our self-love, our desire for happiness, is narrow and confined and limited.³³

God created our "hearts" to desire happiness, and created us to find that happiness in our relationship with Him, making sin a deceived and destructive pursuit of pseudo-happiness. Accordingly, Augustine wrote concerning the unconverted "heart:" "Seek what you seek, but it is not where you seek it."³⁴ Likewise, Aquinas said, "Those who sin turn from that in which their last end [happiness] really consists; but they do not turn away from the intention of the last end, which intention they mistakenly seek in other things."³⁵

The Psalmist put it this way: **"The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods,"** (Ps 16:4) however **"Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart"** (Ps 37:4). God personally invites us to a happy life in serving Him, rather than false gods. Along these lines, A. W. Pink (1886-1952) wrote:

The central thing which we wish to make clear, and to impress upon the reader is that God has established an inseparable connection between holiness happiness; between our pleasing of Him and our enjoyment of His richest blessing; that since we are always the losers by sinning--so we are always the gainers by walking in the paths of righteousness; and that there will be an exact ratio between the measure in which we walk therein and our enjoyment of "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).³⁶

Not only this, but He promises that happiness is His ultimate goal for us when we read: **"You [God] will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand"** (Ps 16:4, 11). The human desire for happiness is constant, controlling, and comprehensive, but the knowledge of how it can truly be obtained is confined to those who know the One Who created them to be happy, and will make them happy forever with Him.

³³ Piper, 106-07.

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 12, par. i.

³⁵ Aquinas, I-II.1.7.

³⁶ A. W. Pink, ref. unavailable.

As noted above, our human "heart" is a reflection of our Creator's "heart," and so is our desire for happiness. There is nothing more human *or divine* than happiness. God Himself seeks happiness³⁷ and does so in the true happiness of His creatures. As the writer of Hebrews states, it was **"for the joy set before Him"** that the King **"endured the cross"** (12:2). Regardless of how painful the cross was for God, its purpose was to fulfill God's own goal for Himself and us to never experience pain again, but rather, eternal happiness. Because the ultimate goal of God is eternal, unwavering, effortless happiness, He will one day bring Heaven to a New Earth on which, **"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"** (Rev 21:4).

Finally, we can suggest why God created our "hearts" with the goal of happiness. Not only is it because God's "heart" seeks happiness and our "heart" is made in His image, but because happiness glorifies God. So again, Edwards states in his typically dense but illuminating fashion in the treatise noted above:

God in seeking his glory seeks the good of his creatures, because the emanation of his glory . . . implies the . . . happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself, because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory. God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself, and in seeking himself, i.e. himself diffused . . . he seeks their glory and happiness. . . .

Thus it is easy to conceive how God should seek the good of the creature . . . even his happiness, from a supreme regard

³⁷ Some may be offended by our suggestion that God is not always perfectly happy or satisfied. This was particularly taught by John Calvin who felt such concepts, including human emotions, would make God less divine and perfect. Accordingly, it is claimed by such a perspective that when Scripture says something like **"The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the Earth, and His heart was filled with pain"** (Gen 6:6), that this is mere "accommodation of language" and not to be taken literally as an experience or attribute of God.

On the contrary, we are made in God's image, and by retrospect we can then say that He is in our image. Our experience of emotions like happiness and grief are a reflection of God's own emotions. Accordingly, there is nothing intrinsically evil about sadness, and it is in fact a virtue when felt in the appropriate circumstances (cf. Rom 12:15). However, God's own goal for Himself and us is to never experience grief again, but rather, eternal happiness (cf. Rev 21:4).

to himself; as his happiness arises from . . . the creature's exercising a supreme regard to God . . . in beholding God's glory, in esteeming and loving it, and rejoicing in it. . . .

God's respect to the creature's good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself.³⁸

Dr. Piper has rather famously summarized Edwards' insight by saying that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied (happy) in Him.³⁹ In other words, God's greatest glory from our lives comes from Him making us happy. Accordingly, the Westminster Confession famously states: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Dr. Piper has insightfully modified this somewhat by saying in effect: Man's chief end is to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.⁴⁰ Our glorification of God is dependent on our happiness, and this is why He has created humans with the desire for happiness in their "heart."

And so God Himself intends that the goal of our "heart" which He created in us will be satisfied. This explains much of what He has done and will do. Such seems implied when the King says, **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"**

³⁸ Edwards, *The End For Which God Created the World*, sections 114, 277, 278. Dr. Piper comments on this treatise of Edwards:

[T]he depth and wonder and power of this book is the demonstration that these two ends [God's glory and our happiness] are one. The rejoicing of all peoples in God, and the magnifying of God's glory are one end, not two. Why this is so, how it can be, and what difference it makes is what this book, and my life and Jonathan Edwards's theology, are about. The first biographer of Edwards describes *The End for Which God Created the World* like this: "From the purest principles of reason, as well as from the fountain of revealed truth, he demonstrates that the chief and ultimate end of the Supreme Being, in the works of creation and providence, was the manifestation of his own glory in the highest happiness of his creatures. (31)

³⁹ Reference not available.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

(John 10:10).⁴¹ All of which is why the King summed up the ultimate goal of God's "heart" and our "heart" when, at the end of time, He says to one of His own: **"Come and share your Master's happiness!"** (Matt 25:21).

Pastoral Practices

- Have you ever taught on the biblical fact that God's goal for our life is to be happy? Perhaps this strikes you as unbiblical, but we believe a further study of this in the Scriptures will prove our point. God wants to give humans what they really want!

Perhaps no one in our day has articulated this biblical doctrine better than the popular Christian teacher John Piper. His book, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Multnomah, 2003), is well worth your study.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

⁴¹ Dr. Carson comments on John 10:10:

Within the metaphorical world, life . . . to the full suggests fat, contented, flourishing sheep, not terrorized by brigands; outside the narrative world, it means that the life Jesus' true disciples enjoy is not to be construed as more time to fill (merely 'everlasting' life), but life at its scarcely imagined best, life to be lived. (*The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans, 1991], 385).

William Barclay writes:

Jesus claims that he came that men might have life and might have it more abundantly. The Greek phrase used for having it more abundantly means to have a superabundance of a thing. To be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is and what he means, is to have a superabundance of life.

A Roman soldier came to Julius Caesar with a request for permission to commit suicide. He was a wretched dispirited creature with no vitality. Caesar looked at him. "Man," he said, "were you ever really alive?" When we try to live our own lives, life is a dull, dispirited thing.

When we walk with Jesus, there comes a new vitality, a superabundance of life. It is only when we live with Christ that life becomes really worth living and we begin to live in the real sense of the word. (*Daily Study Bible*, CD-ROM [Liguori, 1996])

*Our Father, we thank you that you have created us in Your image, and that even our reason, desires and emotions reflect this. Help us to commit all the fruits of our "heart" to your purposes and glory and to love You **"with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind"** (Matt 22:37). And help us to pursue this so that we may have the desire of our "heart" which is happiness. Amen.*

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why is a biblical study of the human "heart" important?
- 2) How have we defined the human "heart"?
- 3) What are the "fruits" of the human "heart"? Give examples of these in Scripture.
- 4) Where do all the functions of the "heart" occur?
- 5) Why do we suggest the notion of a "will" separate from reason is inaccurate? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What do we claim is the God-given goal of the human "heart"? What applications does this have for understanding humans, including regenerated ones?

Recommended Reading

- The rest of Book 4: *Biblical Psychology*
- *Your Mind Matters* by John Stott (InterVarsity, 1973). Short and very well done.
- *With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy*, Yandall Woodfin, (Abingdon, 1980). Maybe the best book of all on Christian epistemology.
- *Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* by J. P. Moreland, (NavPress, 1997). Corrects many myths about current ideas concerning the place of the mind in Christian spirituality. Moreland's critiques and instruction are excellent, however, the value of his emphasis on influencing the secular world in the latter half of the book is debatable.

- *Faith Beyond Reason*, C. S. Evans, (Edinburgh University Press, 1998). While we would not agree with the author's conclusions, this book is well written and informative, in contrast to the vast majority of others on the topic.
- *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*, R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey (Academie Books, 1984). Good introduction to epistemology in section 1. The debate with presuppositionalism in section III will not probably be of interest to many. There is more than a few things to disagree with the authors on, but it is certainly well worth reading.
- *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Multnomah, 2003), John Piper. A good theological and practical study on the place of happiness in the Christian life.

Publications & Particulars



Chapter 4.2

Misconceptions of the "Heart"

The Error of "Faculty Psychology"

Overall Objective

This section may only be of interest to the more philosophically minded and can be skipped without great harm. However, it does point out the inaccurate and misleading ways that the functions of the "heart" are commonly spoken of in much Christian literature, including how the important concept of faith is understood.

Table of Topics

- A) There is Not a "Will" Apart From or Against Our Reason**
- B) The "Heart" is the "Head"**
- C) There is No "Biblical Psychology"**
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- E) Different Functions, not Faculties of the Heart are to be Distinguished**
- F) Faith is Not Dependent on a "Will" but Reason**

Publications & Particulars

Primary Points

- Many theologians throughout history have distinguished between different faculties of the "heart"; i.e. reason & will.
- Many describe the human "will" and reason working separately and even against each other in a kind of competition. Such a view can lead to the claim that this "will" dominates our reason, something that can lead to the deceptive and harmful philosophy of *voluntarism*.
- From a biblical perspective our head is our "heart." Nonetheless, some will suggest that beliefs in our "heart" are stronger and more important than the beliefs in our "head."
- The majority of Christian theologians have concluded that God has not been interested in revealing detailed "biblical psychology," preferring to view man as a whole related to God.
- While it is common to ascribe our *desires* to a human "will," this is misleading because all desires actually arise from decisions made with our reason. Accordingly, there is really no reason to even speak of a human faculty of the "will."
- When Scripture appears to distinguish between "mind," "heart," "spirit," etc. it would seem the best explanation is that the Bible is not distinguishing different human *faculties*, but rather different *functions* of the human "heart."
- It is wrong to imply, as many do, that the desires of our "will" can conflict with the decisions of our reason.

A) There is Not a "Will" Apart From or Against our Reason

Most theologians throughout the history of the Church have described the workings of the "heart" as the function of distinguishable and exclusive parts or faculties within it. This is most clearly illustrated in comparisons made between our reason (intellect) and will (volition), or our "head" and our "heart."

For example, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) wrote under the heading: "Whether the Will Moves the Intellect":

The intellect moves the will, because the good understood is the object of the will, and moves it as an end. [On the other hand] The will moves the intellect, and all the powers of the soul [because] the object of the will is . . . the end [goal] in general, and each power [including reason] is directed to some suitable [goal] proper to it [the will]. . . . Therefore, the will as an agent [faculty, part of the "heart"] moves all the powers of the soul to their respective acts [including the reason].⁴²

Aquinas is clearly describing two parts of the "heart" (reason and will), not only distinguished from each other, but influencing each other.

Likewise, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) viewed the "heart" or "soul" as he called it, as consisting of two faculties or parts, the "understanding" (i.e. reason) and the "will." Accordingly he wrote:

God has endued the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns, and views, and judges of things; which is called the understanding [reason].

The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined to

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.82.4; online at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>. However, Aquinas concluded his discussion of the relationship between reason and a "will" by saying:

There is no need to go on indefinitely, but we must stop at the intellect [reason] as preceding all the rest. For every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension, whereas every apprehension is not preceded by an act of the will.

While we can appreciate his conclusion of the primacy of reason, he finds it only in reason's ability to understand, and neglects its ultimate power to make decisions, which evidently he ascribes to a "will" which is a result of the "faculty psychology" reflected here.

them, or is disinclined and averse *from* them; or is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things, as an indifferent unaffected spectator [like the understanding], but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the *inclination* and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the *will*.⁴³

More recently, the Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland can be quoted as saying: "By reason, I simply mean the faculties, in isolation or in combination, I use to gain knowledge and justify my beliefs."⁴⁴ Finally, we will quote the Reformed theologian John Frame who writes:

God gives us multiple faculties to serve as a sort of internal system of checks and balances. Sometimes reason saves us from emotional craziness, but [the faculty of] emotions can also check the extravagant pretenses of reason.⁴⁵

Many, many more examples could be found throughout the whole history of Christian theology and philosophy, making one very reluctant to disagree with their approach. However, for reasons given below, we are led to do so.

Such "faculty psychology" as it has been called, leads to several other ways of describing how the human "heart" works. For example, many describe these workings as the human "will" and human reason working separately and even against each other in a kind of competition. Such a view can lead to the claim that this "will" dominates our reason, something that can lead to the deceptive and harmful philosophy of *voluntarism*.⁴⁶

⁴³ Jonathan Edwards *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (I.1.) (online at ccel.org). In addition, Edwards reflects the same "faculty psychology" in his treatise *A Divine and Supernatural Light*. See *Growing in God's Spirit*, T. M. Moore, ed. (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 26, 45-6.

⁴⁴ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (NavPress, 1997), 43.

⁴⁵ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 336.

⁴⁶ In the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT) we read:

Stemming from the Latin word *voluntas*, meaning will, *voluntarism* is a general name for a variety of philosophical positions united in their emphasis on will. In contrast to the dominant rationalistic, intellectualist stream of Western thought reaching back to Plato and

A more familiar effect of "faculty psychology" is the common distinction made between our metaphorical "heart" and "head" (mind) as if desires, emotions, and our "true beliefs" come from the former, and merely our understanding or reasoning processes occur in the latter. This can even lead to referring to the human "heart" as something rather distinguishable and superior to the human mind, therefore disparaging the God-given place of the mind and reason.

For example, while the popular Christian author John Eldredge has some eloquent and at times helpful things to say about the human "heart" in his book, *Waking the Dead*, he also seems guilty of many of the misunderstandings we wish to point out here. Accordingly, he writes:

Your mind tells you that it is now 2:00 A.M. and your daughter has not returned, for the car is not in the driveway. Your heart wrestles with whether or not it is cause for worry.⁴⁷

The mind is a faculty, and a magnificent one at that. But the heart is the dwelling place of our true beliefs.⁴⁸

[R]emember again that the heart is central. Not the mind, not the will. The heart.⁴⁹

Such distinctions normally serve an author's intention to devalue human reason and exalt desires and emotions, as Mr. Eldredge

beyond, *voluntarism* boldly asserts the superiority or importance of the exercise of will to the deliberations of reason. . . .

In theology and religious philosophy *voluntarism* is significant in several contexts. Some have claimed that logic and the laws of reason hold only because God wills them so; God could assert his will and change them were he so to choose. This position, held by the medieval Peter Damien and others, was discussed by Descartes, and has been soundly opposed by contemporary evangelical Gordon Clark in his *Reason, Religion, and Revelation*.

Other *voluntarists* hold that we need not have rational grounds for religious belief, but may justifiably assert our wills to make a religious commitment, a view titled *fideism*. Such a doctrine in various forms has a long history in Christian thought, and finds expression in Pascal, Kierkegaard, William James, and many contemporary evangelicals of a pietistic leaning. (D. B. Fletcher "Voluntarism," *EDT*, Walter Elwell, ed. [Baker, 1984], 1147-9).

⁴⁷ John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead* (Nelson, 2003), 42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

attempts to do throughout his book. In reality, however, as we demonstrate throughout this book, human reason is the source of desires and ultimately emotions, and is superior and prior to both. It would seem these authors attempt to limit human reason to the task of collecting data. On the contrary, as we wrote in the previous chapter:

It is our reason which not only seeks, researches, and receives data, but also evaluates and makes judgments upon it in order to produce what we believe, which is the foundation of what we desire and will feel—all occurring in our reason. Everything that is commonly described as a function of a "will" as distinguished from our reason, is actually a function of the latter (including decisions and desires), therefore making the concept of a "will" inaccurate and misleading.⁵⁰

B) The "Heart" is the "Head"

Several misunderstandings can arise if we do not keep in mind the unity of the "heart" in the faculty of human reason. For example, when we differentiate our will, reason, and emotions, it can suggest that we are speaking of distinct physical parts of our human makeup. This again results in the common, but inaccurate metaphor mentioned above that we reason with our "head" (reason) and desire and feel with our "heart" (will). On the contrary, the reason is the place where all of these functions are decided and produced. We think with our reason, we desire with our reason, and our reason ultimately determines our feelings based on its beliefs and desires in relation to its evaluation of our circumstances. Therefore, our feelings and desires come from our head, not our chest. Thus our definition of the "heart" is *the reasoning functions of our inner life that direct our outer life*. From a biblical perspective our head is our "heart."

Let us take for example Christ's statement that, "**the first and greatest commandment**" is to "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart** [*kardia*] **and with all your soul** [*psuchē*] **and with all your mind** [*dianoia*]" (Matt 22:37-8). While it is admittedly difficult (if not impossible) to clearly distinguish between the elements He lists, the King is not differentiating between three different faculties in the human body. All of the functions of the "**heart**" and "**soul**" occur in our mind/reason. More to our current point, the human "heart" is nothing more or less than our human

⁵⁰ Quoted from section 4.1.B.4.

mind/reason.

However, it is also true that in biblical language the human mind/reason is often synonymous with the human "heart."⁵¹ In other words, all biblical words used to refer to the human mind/reason can include the idea of it being a source of desires, as well as understanding.⁵² Therefore, whenever the Scriptures use the terms "heart" or "mind" the context must determine what mental function (not faculty) is being referred to, whether it be thinking, desiring, or feeling. And because there is no distinction between the head and "heart" in reality or Scripture, we can refer to all mental functions as occurring in the "heart."

Nonetheless, some will suggest that beliefs in our "heart" are stronger and more important than the beliefs in our "head." However, this may be confusing the difference between the opinions we understand and the ones we accept as true and therefore believe. Or, our reason simply evaluates different beliefs based on their importance to us. Accordingly, the competition popularly

⁵¹ Accordingly, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (*NIDNTT*) notes that the biblical concept of heart is often synonymous with the mind (*nous*) or understanding (*dianoia*):

[A] striking feature of the NT is the essential closeness of *kardia* [heart] to the concept *nous*, mind . . . Heart and mind (*noēmata*, lit. thoughts) can be used in parallel (2 Cor. 3:14f) or synonymously (Phil. 4:7). (T. Sorg, "Heart," Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], II:182).

Also, J. P. Moreland comments that in Scripture:

The term heart often actually refers to the mind itself (Romans 1:21; 10:10; 2 Corinthians 4:6, 9:7; Ephesians 1:18; 4:17-18). Therefore, it is safe to say that when the term heart is used in a verse, it most likely includes or explicitly refers to our mental faculty unless the context shows otherwise. (*Mind*, 61).

⁵² The *NIDNTT* points out that both Hebrew and Greek words referring to the mind can refer to a function of desires. In other words, from a biblical perspective, the mind is not only used to think, but to desire and feel as well. Regarding the OT view of the mind we read, "the understanding belongs with the will [sic]" (II.124), and that the use of *nous* in the Greek translation of the OT (LXX) to refer to the human "heart," "shows that *nous* is to be understood in a sense more associated with the will [sic]" (II.125).

Regarding the Greek word groups *nous* (mind) and *dianoia* (understanding) we read: "All in all, it may be said that the NT gives to this group of words its own interpretation. . . . The whole group of words is associated more firmly with the will [sic]" (Ibid.).

While we disagree with the "faculty psychology" reflected here, it is clear that the mind is not just the place of the intellect, but of volition as well. (II:182)

described as occurring between our "head" and "heart" would best be understood as merely the conflict between various beliefs in our reason.

Contrary to Mr. Eldredge then, it is our mind/reason that "wrestles with whether or not" something "is cause for worry," and such a decision does not occur in any way apart from our reason. Neither is the "heart . . . the dwelling place of our true beliefs" as opposed to our mind/reason. Nor then is the "heart . . . central" and more important than "the mind" or "the will" as he claims. Such language is not only inaccurate but unhelpful. It would seem better to claim, as we do, that at the bottom of all of these elements is the beliefs produced by our reason.

C) There is No "Biblical Psychology"

In an effort to better understand humans from a biblical perspective, many have sought to find a "biblical psychology" of the human "heart." It is perhaps the rich variety of words that the Bible uses to describe the inner workings of the "heart" (e.g. spirit, soul, mind, "heart," inner man, etc) that have enhanced a desire to over-distinguish them. However, the majority of Christian theologians who have studied this topic have concluded that God has not been all that interested in revealing such intricate distinctions.

Accordingly, in the entry for "heart" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT) we read: "There is no systematized or scientific psychology in the Bible."⁵³ Under the same heading in the *New Bible Dictionary* we note: "

The Hebrews thought in terms of subjective experience rather than objective, scientific observation, and thereby avoided the modern error of over-departmentalization [of the "heart"].⁵⁴

Along these lines, Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema in his very good book, *Created in God's Image*, remarks:

From the standpoint of analytic psychology and physiology the usage of [Scripture] is chaotic: it is the nightmare of the anatomist when any part can stand at any moment for the whole. . . . It is therefore not possible to construct an exact, scientific, biblical psychology.

⁵³ O. R. Brandon "Heart" EDT, 498

⁵⁴ O. Banwell, "Heart" in *New Bible Dictionary*, J. I. Packer, et al. eds., 3rd ed., (Intervarsity, 1996), 456.

Some have attempted to do so; most notable among them is [the highly respected OT scholar] Franz Delitzsch, whose *System of Biblical Psychology* was originally published in 1855. But even Delitzsch had to admit that "the Scripture is no scholastic book of science" and that "it is true that on psychological subjects, just as little as on dogmatical or ethical, does Scripture comprehend any system propounded in the language of the schools." . . .

[Biblical] terms . . . describe man in his unity and wholeness, though looking at him from slightly different aspects. H. Wheeler Robinson comments: "It is not possible to give any exact differentiation of the provinces covered by 'heart,' . . . for the simple reason that such exact differentiation was never made."

What we ought to observe . . . is that the Bible does not describe man scientifically; in fact, the general judgment [of theologians] is that the Bible gives us no scientific teaching about man, no "anthropology" that would or could be in competition with a scientific investigation of man in the various aspects of his existence or with philosophical anthropology.⁵⁵

Likewise, the renowned Dutch Reformed scholar G. C. Berkouwer writes:

There have been constant attempts . . . to search through the Biblical conceptual material bearing on man in order to introduce system, and to deduce a clear-cut anthropology or psychology.

But these attempts have only made clear that because of the great variety of concepts used in the Bible, it is not possible to synthesize them into a systematic Biblical anthropology in which the structure and composition of man would be made clear. Robinson even speaks of a "chaotic" use of terms, and though such an expression perhaps too much implies a scientific context of fixed usage, his meaning is clear enough: the Biblical concepts cannot be systematized to yield a clear insight into the different parts of man.

It is obviously not the intention of the divine revelation to give us exact information about man in himself and thus to anticipate what later scientific research on man offers. The Scriptural anthropological concepts which vary so extremely never occur in a context which is concerned with the composition of man as such, in himself. God's revelation

⁵⁵ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Eerdmans, 1986), 203-204, 215.

directs our glance towards man in his totality, in his relation to God.⁵⁶

A point which leads to our next topic.

D) The "Heart" is the Whole Person in Relation to God

Dr. Berkouwer goes on to suggest that "faculty psychology" is not only unbiblical, but has man-centered values which suggest humans as existing separately from God:

[W]e can never gain a clear understanding of the mystery of man if, in one way or another, we abstract mere components of the whole man. . . . To gain orientation on this matter, we may perhaps begin best with what is generally called the "Biblical view of man." . . .

The characteristic of the Biblical view lies precisely in this, that man appears as related to God in all his creaturely relationships. . . . This point of view is so central and dominant for the Word of God that it never gives us a neutral independent analysis of man in order to inform us as to the components and structure of humanness in itself. . . and . . . prevent[s] us from ever viewing man in himself, apart from his relation to God. . . .

It is indeed true that various aspects of humanness are spoken of in very concrete and extremely varied ways, but the decisive question is this, whether the intent of the Biblical witness is to reveal to us something of the composition of man, or whether it makes use of this composition as an anthropological given only incidentally, in order to speak of man as a whole.

We can say that in our times, under the influence of Biblical research, a fairly general consensus of opinion has arisen among theologians. They are increasingly conscious of the fact that the Biblical view of man shows him to us in an impressive diversity, but that it never loses sight of the unity of the whole man, but rather brings it out and accentuates it.

No part of man is emphasized as independent of other parts; not because the various parts are not important, but because the Word of God is concerned precisely with the whole man in

⁵⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God (Studies in Dogmatics)* (Eerdmans, 1962), 199.

his relation to God. Thus the various terms and concepts it makes use of give us no exactly expressed or scientifically useful definitions, but rather are related always to the same basic reality of humanness; so that despite the various shifts in terminology, we never receive the impression that we are dealing with an important shift in the portrayal of man. . . .

We come to the conclusion, then, that the great variation of Biblical usage gives us no occasion to read into this variation all sorts of scientific definitions of structure which can serve as the basis for a scientific Biblical anthropology.⁵⁷

E) Different Functions, not Faculties of the Heart are to be Distinguished

While the Scriptures describe different functions of the "heart" emanating from such things as the human mind or spirit, these are not meant to refer to different faculties or parts of us. Therefore, it is simply wrong to speak of a human "will" as distinguishable and/or in competition with human reason. Rather, the "will," if the term is to be used at all, is synonymous with the "heart," depicting the whole person. Accordingly, the renowned Reformed theologian J. I. Packer writes:

It is worth observing that will is an abstraction. My will is not a part of me which I choose to move or not to move, like my hand or my foot; it is precisely me choosing to act and then going into action.⁵⁸

Likewise, the respected NT scholar E. F. Harrison writes in the *EDT* under "will": "The present trend in psychology is away from the notion of will as a faculty and toward the viewpoint that it is an expression of the total self or personality."⁵⁹ Therefore, we should always speak of the desires of a person, not of a "will."

More than this, we would claim again that while it is common to ascribe our *desires* to a human "will," this is misleading because all desires actually arise from decisions made with our reason. Accordingly, there is really no reason to even speak of a human faculty of the "will."

⁵⁷ Ibid., 195-7, 199-200, 207. See also Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 2003), 4:17; Hoekema, 203-4.

⁵⁸ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Tyndale, 1993), 86.

⁵⁹ "Will" *EDT*, 1171.

Even secular authorities avoid referring to a "will" as a faculty. Accordingly, *Webster's* variously defines it as:

Mental powers [not a faculty] manifested as wishing, choosing, desiring, or intending. A disposition to act according to principles or ends . . . the power of control over one's own actions or emotions. ⁶⁰

All of these actions can best be defined as the result of logical decisions processed and produced by our reason.

If the biblical authors had no intention of defining a clear biblical psychology or distinguishing between different faculties such as a human "will" and reason, then how do we explain those Scriptures that seem to make such distinctions?

For example, the King says we are to "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart** [*kardia*] **and with all your soul** [*psuchē*] **and with all your mind** [*dianoia*]" (Matt 22:37). Are we to understand Him to mean these are all exclusive and distinctive parts of humans? In agreement with the consensus of most NT scholars we do not think so. Most think such language is intended to be rather synonymous without making any real distinctions at all. ⁶¹ However, a better explanation would seem to be that while the King is not distinguishing different human faculties, He is distinguishing the different functions of the human "heart."

Therefore, we would interpret His reference to the "**mind**" as describing the beliefs of reason, a conclusion that is supported by Christ's conspicuous use of *dianoia* (understanding, reason) rather

⁶⁰ *Webster's* online at www.webstersdictionary.org

⁶¹ Accordingly, Dr. Carson comments on Jesus' vocabulary in Matthew 22: "From the viewpoint of biblical anthropology, "heart," "soul," and "mind" (v. 37) are not mutually exclusive but overlapping categories, together demanding our love for God to come from our whole person." (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (EBC) Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.], *in loc.*)

Likewise, C. Ryder Smith in his entry to the *NBD* on "heart" writes: "The first great commandment probably means "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, that is with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (e.g. Mk. 12:30, 33). (456)

than the more common and general *nous* for mind.⁶² His references to the "**heart**" and "**soul**" could be seen as pointing to the desires and emotions respectively, both terms being used as the source of these things (cf. Rom 9:2; 10:1; Matt 12:28; 26:38; John 12:27; Heb 10:38; Acts 4:32).

We would suggest the same is true when the Apostle at times distinguishes between different aspects of the "heart." For example, he tells those who would correctly pray that: "**the peace of God, which transcends all understanding** [*noun*: "mind"], **will guard your hearts** [*kardias*] **and your minds** [*noēmata*: "thoughts"] **in Christ Jesus**" (Phil 4:7). There is a lot of psychology in such a statement, but again we do not believe the Apostle is suggesting that the "**hearts**" of people are to be distinguished as a separate part of them from their "**minds**." Rather, by "**hearts**" he is referring to our desires and emotions, and by "**minds**" to our beliefs, all of which are ultimately produced by reason.⁶³ While the suggestion that beliefs are being mentioned here may seem odd, it would seem almost demanded by the foundational place these have in our spiritual health, which is what the Apostle is prescribing here.

Also, there is a rather odd statement by the Apostle in the context of praying in an incoherent tongue:

⁶² There may be some significance to the fact that all three Synoptic Gospels use this rather special word *dianoia* in the context of the greatest commandment. One might expect the more general term *nous* (mind), but as G. Harder notes:

nous [mind] is capable of embracing all the instruments of sensual and conceptual perception . . . *dianoia*, by contrast, belongs more to the narrower, intellectual category of discursive [analytically reasoned] thought. ("Reason, Mind, Understanding," *NIDNTT*, III: 122).

In other words, there seems to be a special emphasis on the fact that we are to love God in how we "mentally reason."

⁶³ Peter O'Brien in his *NIGTC* commentary on Philippians agrees that the "**heart**" mentioned by Paul in Phil 4:7 refers more to our emotion and the "**mind**" to our thinking:

The objects of this activity are . . . lit. "your hearts and your minds", two nouns that often overlap in meaning but that are here emphatically separated (the definite articles and the repeated pronoun ["your"]). . . . *noēma* seems to refer to the mind or the thinking faculty rather than the thoughts that are its product. So it may be better to regard *kardia* as describing the whole person from an emotional and volitional angle while *noēma* focuses on the mental aspects. The combined expression then refers to the whole inner life . . . (*The Epistle to the Philippians* [Eerdmans, 1991], 498).

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit [*pneuma*] prays, but my mind [*nous*] is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? (1 Cor 14:14-16)

While such language would suggest different human faculties operating in distinction from each other (a "**spirit**" vs. a "**mind**,") how would we clearly define, distinguish, and locate them? As we discuss elsewhere, we believe that the Apostle is simply saying that one can pray with a lot of subconscious emotion (i.e. "**with my spirit**") and very little conscious understanding ("**with my mind**").⁶⁴ Therefore, it would seem best to interpret the Apostle as not advocating a "faculty psychology" but simply contrasting different functions of the "heart" (i.e. our beliefs vs. our emotions).

Such "faculty psychology" is especially tempting when it comes to references to the "conscience." Particularly the Apostle Paul's numerous references to it can imply a different mental faculty or part of the mind processing *moral knowledge* (cf. Rom 2:14-15; 9:1; 13:5; 1 Cor 8:7, 10, 12; 10:25, 27, 28, 29 (twice); 2 Cor 1:12; 4:2; 5:11; 1 Tim 1:5, 19; 3:9; 4:2; 2 Tim 1:3; Tit 1:15). The term appears another five times in Hebrews, three times in Peter, and two in Acts. Obviously it is a very important NT concept.

The Greek word used and translated "**conscience**" is *syneidēsis* which comes from *oida* "to know" and *syn* "with" giving a literal meaning of "to know with." Accordingly, the *NIDNTT* relates that in classical Greek:

Originally *syneidēsis* appears to focus on self knowledge: the capacity to relate to oneself, especially when one looks back at one's own past. This looking back did not stop short with ascertaining facts, but led to evaluations and judgments about the criterion of good and evil. Hence, the word gradually acquired the current moral meaning of conscience.⁶⁵

In other words, the Greek concept came to mean "knowing oneself," referring to the unique human ability to evaluate ourselves morally.

Unfortunately, however, many have followed the ancient Greeks

⁶⁴ For further discussion of the emotional aspect of the contemporary phenomena of tongues see section 4.9.D.

⁶⁵ H-C Hahn, "Conscience," *NIDNTT*, I:348.

in understanding or at least implying that the conscience is a separate faculty or part of humans rather than a different function of reason. For example, the highly respected *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature Greek (BDAG)* defines *syneidēsis* as: "the inward faculty of distinguishing right from wrong."⁶⁶ Likewise, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines it as, "that faculty by which we apprehend the will of God."⁶⁷ Also, the *EDT* defines the term as, "that faculty by which one distinguishes between the morally right and wrong."⁶⁸ We believe all of these references would have been more accurate to define *syneidēsis* ("a moral knowing of oneself) as a different *function* of reason, not a different *faculty* of humans.

Accordingly, in the OT, the function of conscience is described as occurring in the "heart" (cf. 2 Sam 24:10; Job 27:6; Ps 32:1-5; 51:1-9). Likewise, Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), the first Professor of Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote:

We have not one faculty by which we discern physical truths, another by which we judge of mathematical theorems, and another for matters of taste; but all these are the one and the same understanding, exercised on different objects. Accordingly, when moral qualities are the objects of our contemplation, it is not a different faculty from the reason or understanding which thinks and judges, but the same, exercised on other subjects; and the only difference is in the object. Our conclusion therefore is, that so far as conscience is an intellectual act or judgment of the mind, so far it belongs to the understanding.⁶⁹

Along the same lines, Gordon Clark (1902-1985) wrote:

Faculty psychology, largely abandoned now, invented parts or faculties of the soul for various acts, while the Scripture, as I understand it, has the unitary soul or mind [i.e. reason] acting on various objects. For example, conscience is not a faculty of the soul for morality and intellect a separate faculty for geometry. Rather the distinction is that in the first case the

⁶⁶ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature Greek (BDAG)* Danker, F. W. ed., 3rd ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001)

⁶⁷ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* , W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, 1996), 122.

⁶⁸ A. M. Rehwinkel, "Conscience, *EDT*, 267.

⁶⁹ Archibald Alexander, *Outlines of Moral Science*, ch. V; online at www.ccel.org.

mind [i.e. reason] studies matters of morality, while in the second the same unitary mind [i.e. reason] studies geometry. This view is consonant with the idea that faith in pickles and faith in God are psychologically identical; the difference lies in the object.⁷⁰

Likewise, C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) wrote:

Besides reasoning about matters of fact, men also make moral judgments-'I ought to do this'-'I ought not to do that'-'This is good'-'That is evil'. Two views have been held about moral judgments. Some people think that when we make them we are not using our Reason, but are employing some different power. Other people think that we make them by our Reason. I myself hold this second view. That is, I believe that the primary moral principles on which all others depend are rationally perceived. . . . Their intrinsic reasonableness shines by its own light. It is because all morality is based on such self-evident principles that we say to a man, when we would recall him to right conduct, 'Be reasonable'.⁷¹

There is an important point being made here. The term "conscience" is especially prone to being thought of as a separate faculty or part of the mind. On the contrary, all reasoning, including moral reasoning, is performed by the same faculty that does any reasoning, the mind.⁷²

⁷⁰ Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Trinity Foundation, 1990), 78.

⁷¹ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, (Macmillan, 1947), 43-4.

⁷² The above perspective also reflects the biblical psychological distinction made between regenerated and unregenerated humans. One might be led to suggest that the radical and immediate changes in desires that occur with regeneration can be explained by merely claiming that the "will" of the person has been changed, while the reasoning faculty has remained relatively unaffected, although having truth now to depend on. This is especially tempting considering the fact that the **"sinful nature [sarx]"** (Rom 7:5 etc.) is rather exclusively described as a source of sinful desires.

However, such a perspective would again ignore the obvious fact that desires are the decisions of reason, and therefore references to a **"sinful nature"** should be viewed in a broader sense as a sinful "heart" or even ego within the person. Accordingly, Scripture uses the broader distinctions of new and old **"heart," "man,"** and **"self"** to distinguish regenerated and unregenerated humans (cf. Ezek 36:26; Eph 4:22-24; 1 Cor 2:16).

Likewise, some may suggest that the suppression of the message of Creation regarding God's existence by some unregenerates (cf. Rom

F) Faith is Not Dependent on a "Will" but Reason

The fact that there is no human faculty or function of "will" apart from reason significantly affects how the concept of "faith" is generally perceived. The traditional understanding of faith is described by R. C. Sproul who writes:

Building upon Augustine's understanding of the multi-faceted character of faith, the Reformers isolated three key elements in authentic faith: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. *Notitia* refers to the data (*notae*) or content of the Christian faith. New Testament faith is not empty of content . . .

The second aspect of faith which follows upon *notitia* is *assensus*. As the Latin suggests, *assensus* refers to the element of faith which involves the assent of the intellect to the truth of the data. . . .

The third aspect of faith is most crucial. . . . *Fiducia* refers to the personal trust dimension of faith. The English derivative is the word fiduciary which places the emphasis on trust. . . . This aspect involves the mind but goes beyond the intellect to the heart, the will, the affections-- to one's personal inclination toward Christ.⁷³

Again, there is an implication that faith is produced somewhere apart from our "intellect" or "mind" (i.e. reason) and actually in our "heart" or "the will." This can again lead to the disparagement of the place of reason in God-pleasing *biblical faith*. The extreme of this is *fideism* in which faith becomes an act against or apart from reason.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, it is common to hear claims that faith is something more than reasoning. Accordingly, theologian Murray Rae writes,

1:18), can be explained by the desires of a sinful human "will" overriding the operation of human reason for which the message would otherwise be clear. While it would seem clear that perhaps certain beliefs and desires are conflicting inside such a person, all of these are, again, the products of reason, not a will.

⁷³ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984), 22.

⁷⁴ For further discussion of *fideism* see chapters 2.10 and 6.12.

"Christian faith cannot be reduced to a work of the intellect." ⁷⁵ Likewise, Geoffrey Bromiley writes in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

[W]hile faith must include an intellectual element, i.e., the reception of the words and works fulfilled in Christ, recorded in Holy Scripture, and proclaimed in genuine preaching, a mere assent to the body of facts and truths herein contained is very much less than faith. ⁷⁶

Likewise, in a discussion of the ingredients of faith, J. P. Moreland has written:

Fiducia . . . involves personal commitment to its object, whether to a truth or a person. *Fiducia* is essentially a matter of the will, because Christianity is a relationship with a Person and not just commitment to a set of truths (though this is, of course, essential). ⁷⁷

On the contrary, faith is simply a *decision*, and all decisions are made by our reason. And the fact that Christian faith involves believing in a Person does not change this, as beliefs in people, God, or things are all processed and decided upon in the same way by reason. Along the same lines, we reject elsewhere the *neo-orthodox* idea that believing in a Person like God is different than believing in things. ⁷⁸

Along these lines, Reformed theologian Robert Reymond writes: Gordon H. Clark in *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, basing his conclusion on the fact that the Bible's "heart" is semantically equivalent not to one's emotions but to one's *deepest self* with a preponderant emphasis even here upon the intellect of the self, argues that even *fiducia* [trust], as well as *notitia* [understanding] and *assensus* [rational conviction], is essentially intellectual. With this I concur, but I would urge

⁷⁵ Murray Rae, "The Status of Doctrine: Kierkegaardian Explorations" in *The Task of Theology Today: Doctrines and Dogmas*, Victor Pfitzner and Hilary Regan eds. (Eerdmans, 1999), 219

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Bromiley, "Faith," in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (*ISBE*), Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), II:271.

⁷⁷ J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, *In Search of a Confident Faith* (Intervarsity, 2008), 22.

⁷⁸ For further discussion of the *neo-orthodox* claim that believing in Christ as a Person, instead of through Scripture is to be different see section 7.7.C.

that this intellectual *fiducia* includes affective and volitional dimensions [not faculties], since the Apostle insists that the saved must not simply know about and believe in but also love the Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 16:22).⁷⁹

And with both Drs. Clark and Reymond we would concur as well.

Therefore, it is wrong to imply, as many do, that the desires of our "will" can conflict with the decisions of our reason. For example, many will explain the choice to smoke dangerous cigarettes in this way. The suggestion is that the desires of the "will" override the beliefs of reason, leading to the decision to smoke. On the contrary, first, beliefs, desires, and decisions are all produced by reason. Secondly, as described above, a decision to smoke in the face of warnings simply reflects conflicting beliefs of reason, not a "will" against our reason.

Publications & Particulars

⁷⁹ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nelson, 1998), 728.

Chapter 4.3

Reason Christian! I

The Importance of Reasoning in the Christian Life

Table of Topics

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D) Reason & Edification

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Reason can be categorized as moral (conscience) and logical (reason).
- Reason operates much like a computer.
- The battle of personal holiness is won or lost *in the mind*, because it is our moral reasoning which dictates our ethics, and therefore our moral attitudes and subsequent actions.
- Our sanctification depends on reasoning because of its central place in repentance, avoiding deception, and transformation.
- Reasoning rightly is at the bottom of the cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love.
- There is no such thing as Christian edification without reasoning.

A) The Nature of Human Reason

A.1) A Computer of Beliefs

While “heart” is a biblical term used to refer to the faculty of reason, other words are used to refer to the process of reasoning as well. This process is often referred to in the Hebrew as *hāšab* and in the Greek as *dokeō* (think), *phronēsis* (thought) or *logizomai* (reason). Concerning the latter, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* says, “The concept implies an activity of the reason which, starting with ascertainable facts, draws a conclusion.”⁸⁰ *Webster’s* defines reasoning as: “the power of comprehending, inferring, or thinking especially in orderly rational ways.”⁸¹ The seventeenth century English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), in his famous and very influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* defined reasoning as:

[T]he discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deduction made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties; viz. by sensation or reflection.⁸²

Along these lines, Yandall Woodfin, former Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote:

All knowing, regardless of its sphere or point of reference, comes as one . . . organizes his sense impressions [or memory] into patterns of meaning and understanding. . . . Though reason is as elusive as the structure of personality itself, it may be described as that mental faculty which possesses a degree of spontaneous, self-evident power of comprehension. It is capable of receiving and projecting various relationships between ideas and thus extending knowledge beyond the conditions of possible experience.⁸³

⁸⁰ J. Eichler, “Think,” *NIDNTT*, III:823.

⁸¹ *Webster’s Dictionary*, online at www.webstersdictionary.org.

⁸² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, A. S. Pringle-Pattison ed. (Clarendon Press, 1967), iv. 18. 2. John Locke was a champion of the use of regenerated reason in the Christian life, whose teachings had a remarkable effect on such theologians as Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield.

⁸³ Yandall Woodfin, *With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy* (Abingdon, 1980), 22, 25.

Reasoning is what you are doing even now as you contemplate what kind of name is Yandall Woodfin. Reasoning is what we have discussed elsewhere as *human research*,⁸⁴ and *private judgment*.⁸⁵ Reasoning is what every human being does every time they make a decision about anything, whether it is to include anchovies on your pizza (which would be *bad* reasoning), or to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. Reason is what you are using right now to understand, interpret, and evaluate the value and accuracy of what you are reading here. While so many dismiss or depreciate it, reasoning is something no human can escape, or at least should not strive to do so.⁸⁶

While we discuss the epistemological importance of reason more specifically elsewhere,⁸⁷ we need only to remember that it is the God-given faculty by which we process information into knowledge which becomes beliefs which in turn are the foundation of everything else we do. As we have discussed elsewhere, knowledge is what we understand and belief is *the knowledge we think is true with various levels of certainty*.⁸⁸ Accordingly, *Webster's* defines belief as: "Conviction of the truth of some statement . . . based on examination of evidence."⁸⁹ Therefore, reasoning is how our mind operates in order to produce our beliefs.

How does this process work? First of all, it needs to be said that the operation of our reasoning is just as mysterious as how the brain itself works.⁹⁰ While our suggested explanation will necessarily be rather simplistic, we think it might be helpful to enlist

⁸⁴ For further discussion on the important epistemological concept of *human research* see section 2.5.D and chapter 2.6.

⁸⁵ For further discussion of the vital concept of *private judgment* see section 3.1.C and chapter 3.3.

⁸⁶ For further discussion on how the God-given place of human reason is disparaged in Christianity see section 2.4.A.2.

⁸⁷ Regarding the epistemological centrality of human reason see chapter 2.4.

⁸⁸ For further discussion of belief see chapter 2.3.

⁸⁹ *Webster's*.

⁹⁰ James Sire even takes the mystery a step further when he comments, "The major mystery of the mind is not how reasoning is conducted by the conscious mind; it is rather how the brain [even] has a mind, how consciousness arises." (*Habits of the Mind*, [Intervarsity, 2000], 234).

computers as an analogy.⁹¹ Along these lines, psychologist David Myers writes:

Since the brain is composed primarily of neurons, and since neurons seem to function primarily as dynamic conveyors of information, it seems to follow that we must understand the activities of the mind primarily in terms of information processing.⁹²

⁹¹ Admittedly, enlisting a computer to describe how the human brain operates has its limitations. For example, while a computer will rather automatically act upon the knowledge it has processed, humans will not. Therefore, it should be noticed that our model of learning relates to how we *gain knowledge*, not how we make *decisions*. This is because we do not always act according to our knowledge because other parts of our "heart" including our desires and feelings can influence our decisions and beliefs in spite of what we know.

Theologian Gregory R. Peterson has a lengthy discussion of the comparison between our reason and computers and comments:

The second problem arose within AI [artificial intelligence] research itself. Known as the "frame problem," it became increasingly apparent that for a computer to perform many of the most basic human actions, such as going to a restaurant and ordering from a menu, requires the writing of programs so complex as to be impossible to put into practice. Too frequently, the computer would come to a situation that the programmer did not (and in many cases could not) anticipate, and it would simply stop running. . . .

But the history of cognitive science has shown that computational models have been enormously fruitful for thinking about the mind and brain and for inspiring research programs and ideas, even though the models themselves are flawed and sometimes misleading. Philosopher Barbara Von Eckardt has argued that, while some have taken and do take computational models literally, such models have been most beneficial as inspirational metaphors.

The brain can be understood as an information processor, and to realize that this is a major function of the brain is an important insight. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to limit our understanding of the brain and mind by the still modest computers of our day. (Gregory R. Peterson, *Minding God (Theology and the Sciences)* [Augsburg Fortress, 2002], 38, 41.

Therefore, while there are limitations to comparing human reason with human-made computers, there are some helpful similarities, partly because computers were designed and invented by human reason itself. Computers are made in our image, although not nearly as well as we are made in God's image.

⁹² David Myers, *Intuition: Its Power and Perils*, (Yale University Press, 2002), 4.

Likewise, theologian Gregory Peterson has written: “[T]he history of cognitive science has shown that computational models have been enormously fruitful for thinking about the mind and brain.”⁹³

Therefore, it can be simply suggested that we receive “data” through various sources including divine revelation, memory, experiences, research, and our senses including sight, hearing, and touch.⁹⁴ This data is processed by the God-given system software imbedded in our reason by the Creator, which contains rules, laws, and constructs of logic and morality.⁹⁵ With these imbedded paradigms humans are enabled to process data into beliefs which result in desires and decisions.⁹⁶

⁹³ Peterson, 41.

⁹⁴ Regarding these different sources of data and knowledge see chapter 2.5.

⁹⁵ Norm Geisler writes a good summary and a potential apologetic for human reasoning when he summarizes the view of Aquinas:

Aquinas makes a significant contribution to epistemology. By a unique synthesis, he unites both the *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements of knowledge. Humans have an innate, natural capacity or form for the truth of first principles [i.e. laws of logic] that is ingrained into their very nature by God. They have first principles in a kind of virtual and natural way as a precondition of all cognitive activity. And when this innate capacity is filled with the content of sense experience, we are able by conscious reflection to come to a knowledge of the very first principles, which as a fundamental part of our nature, enable us to have a consciousness of them.

That is to say, we can only know first principles if we are exercising first principles to know them, otherwise, we would have no means by which they could be known. We have them by way of operation before we know them by way of consciousness. (*Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* [Baker, 1991], 90)

Elsewhere we argue that while *logical* laws are “preprogrammed” by the Creator, enabling us to distinguish true from false, *moral* laws are programmed by our culture and life experience. For further discussion see chapter 2.8.

⁹⁶ Regarding the process by which we gain beliefs see section 2.3.D. We do not claim to be able to accurately specify what data may be “preprogrammed” software and “preprogrammed” data because 1) We cannot know, and 2) It is not important. Still, there has been a great deal of debate in recent years over positions such as *foundationalism*, *empiricism*, and *Reformed epistemology*, all of which concern what beliefs or belief constructing mechanisms God has created us with.

As usual, there is probably some truth to many of these positions. Our analogy of a computer with built in system software reflects our own understanding of the issues and others can label this perspective in

Accordingly, even infants automatically process the data they are exposed to, transforming it into *moral* and *logical* beliefs, and demonstrating a built-in “system software” which enables them to interpret, evaluate, categorize, and synthesize information from the day they are born and even before.⁹⁷

Specifically concerning the logical reasoning of the mind, the imbedded “processing code” used has been described as rules of *logic*.⁹⁸ Dr. Buswell wrote: “Logic is the study of how we *ought* to think if we think correctly.”⁹⁹ The innate rules of logic are demonstrated in what are called syllogisms, which metaphorically speaking, are the binary computer code for our reasoning.¹⁰⁰

An example of this is: 1) All men are mortal, 2) John is a man, therefore, 3) John is mortal. This is the essence of how we think, and the basic process by which we gain all of our knowledge.¹⁰¹

various ways. For a brief discussion of the various philosophical views of how we know what we know see Norm Geisler and Paul Feinberg, *Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (Baker, 1980), 103-118. For a fuller discussion see Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Moody, 1976). For a defense of our view against *Reformed epistemology* see chapter 2.8.

⁹⁷ For further discussion on the process of developing human morals see section 2.5.C.

⁹⁸ For a test of your logic you can visit http://www.begriffslogik.de/logiktest_en.html.

⁹⁹ Buswell, 21.

¹⁰⁰ For more discussion on the particular importance of logic, see especially sections 2.4.B-C. Also, John Frame, Professor of Theology at WTS recommends *Introduction to Logic* by I. M. Copi, (Macmillan, 1961).

¹⁰¹ Not surprisingly, there are much more involved descriptions of the reasoning process. Yandal Woodfin writes:

The path toward reason therefore appears to follow this pattern: Sense impressions provide the initial spatial and temporal occasions or points of contact through which the mystery of thought begins to become tangible and take shape in one's awareness, or apprehension. When this consciousness of some confrontation emerges in greater intensity and becomes increasingly distinguishable from other shades of apprehension, it may be designated as a recognizable perception. Once a perception is clear enough to be imaged or verbalized it can be considered a concept, or idea.

The process of consciously relating ideas coherently and consistently is called reasoning. Rational thinking therefore consists in drawing inferences that correspond appropriately to given data, or premises, and developing purposeful, legitimate conclusions. (26).

Stephen Davis describes the process of reasoning as follows:

When a proposition is suggested and we must determine how much credence to place in it, (1) we first determine what kind of proposition it is and the context in which it is stated. (2) We then take into consideration the criteria of adequacy of evidence conventionally accepted for that sort of proposition in that context, that is, we consider what type, amount, and weight of evidence are required. (3) We then consider the actual evidence at hand for or against the proposition and measure it against the arrived-at standards of adequacy. (4) Finally, on the basis of the first three steps, we assign a degree of belief or unbelief to the proposition. (*Faith, Skepticism, and Evidence: An Essay in Religious Epistemology* [Associated University Press, 1978], 21).

Finally, Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli explain:

The inherent structure of human reason manifests itself in three acts of the mind: (1) understanding, (2) judging and (3) reasoning. These three acts of the mind are expressed in (1) terms, (2) propositions and (3) arguments. Terms are either clear or unclear. Propositions are either true or untrue. Arguments are either logically valid or invalid.

A term is clear if it is intelligible and unambiguous. A proposition is true if it corresponds to reality, if it says what is. An argument is valid if the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises. If all the terms in an argument are clear, and if all the premises are true, and if the argument is free from logical fallacy, then the conclusion must be true. These are the essential rules of reason, in apologetics and in any other field of argument. (17).

In addition, human reasoning has been categorized as either deductive or inductive. Norm Geisler explains:

Simply put, deductive reasoning is arguing from the general to the particular. If all horses are four-legged animals (the general), and Black Beauty is a horse (the particular), then it follows that Black Beauty is also a four-legged animal. This series of propositions is called a syllogism, the standard form of deductive argument. . . . Inductive reasoning is just the reverse, that is, arguing from the particular (for instance, all observable elements of a wall are stone) to the general (the whole wall is stone). (*Introduction to Christian Philosophy* [Baker, 1980], 40-41).

Elsewhere, Dr. Geisler further explains:

Deductive logic starts with the cause and reasons to the effect, while inductive logic starts with the effects and attempts to find the cause. That is why deductive reasoning is called a priori (prior to looking at the facts) and inductive reasoning is called a posteriori (after seeing the evidence). [Deductions] are more philosophical, and inductive arguments are more scientific. The biggest difference, though, is that deductive arguments yield necessary conclusions (that is, the conclusions are necessarily true if the premises are true and the inferences are valid), but inductive reasoning yields only probable conclusions. (*Logical Thinking*, 22-3).

These laws of logic include the laws of identity, contradiction, the excluded middle, and causality.

Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest demonstrate some of these laws in the following comment:

Paul, arguing that Israel's election was by grace, not works, says, "If it were [by works], grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). Here Paul presupposes classical logic's three laws of thought: (1) the principle of identity: A is A, grace is (unmerited) grace; (2) the principle of the excluded middle: A is not non-A, (unmerited) grace is not nongrace (or works with merit); and (3) the principle of noncontradiction: a thing cannot be both A and non-A at the same time, God's choice cannot be according to both grace and nongrace (works).¹⁰²

The beliefs that reason processes are then stored in our memory. In other words, after we have processed something in our reason, we need not do so in the future, but simply extract the previous result from our memory. For example, if we have ever been burned by a hot stove, we no longer need to enter a long process of reasoning in the future of whether or not to do so, but rather, need only to remember the result we had reasoned to before. Remembering is a very important part of our relationship with God, particularly in the areas of Scripture memorization and meditating on the past acts of God in order to bolster our faith in Him.¹⁰³

A.2) *Conscious vs. Subconscious Reasoning*

¹⁰² Demarest and Lewis, I:32.

¹⁰³ For further discussion of the importance of remembering in relation to faith see section 6.12.C.3.

Defining human reason is notoriously difficult.¹⁰⁴ However, understanding it can be enhanced by differentiating some aspects of it. First, any discussion of human reasoning must take into account the differences of both its *conscious* and *subconscious* aspects. Simply put, the thoughts in our *conscious* mind are those we are aware of, while we are unaware of our *subconscious* thoughts, until they are brought into our *conscious* mind. For example, our breathing normally operates in our *subconscious*, but if and when we “think” about it, this rather automatic human process enters the *conscious* part of our mind.

Here again the analogy of a computer is helpful. We are consciously aware of only a very small fraction of the immense amount of data we have stored in our mind. Accordingly, the subconscious mind is much like the hard drive on a computer. In order to use the information there it must be brought into the random access memory (RAM) of the computer, which simulates our conscious mind.

The *conscious* part of our mind is normally what we think of (no pun intended) and will be discussed further below and in subsequent chapters. Here we will take the opportunity to offer a few important thoughts concerning the *subconscious*.

While several theologians throughout Church history have written a considerable amount on our *conscious* reasoning (e.g. Augustine, Aquinas, Edwards, and Clark), few, if any, have written extensively on the *subconscious*. Nonetheless, Pastor Dave Bovenmyer finds several biblical references to it:

¹⁰⁴ Bernard Ramm remarks:

Reason is capable of many definitions as any one familiar with the history of philosophy knows. It is not the simple candle of the Lord burning in the soul, which every man intuitively recognizes, as the deists thought. The reason of Plato is not the same as the reason of Aristotle, and the reason of Locke is far removed from the reason of Hegel. Any writer who claims to follow reason must be prepared to state carefully his definition of reason. (*The Pattern of Authority* [Eerdmans, 1957], 44-5).

Likewise, Ronald Nash notes:

[Reason] has had several meanings in the history of philosophy. Thomas Aquinas used "reason" to mean that which is opposed to revelation; for Hume it meant that which is opposed to sense experience. "Reason" for [Gordon] Clark means simply logic, the forms of thought, the laws of valid inference, or reasoning correctly. (*The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, Ronald Nash, ed. (Presbyterians and Reformed, 1968).

Our own use of the term reason would parallel Clark's.

[A]lthough the word “subconscious” is nowhere found in the Bible, the Scripture alludes to hidden or unnoticed motives, attitudes, and thoughts that would be considered “subconscious.” For example, in Psalm 19:12, David prays, “Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.” Evidently David was not consciously aware of any outright disobedience to God, yet He was concerned that he might have hidden attitudes, motives, and faults that he was ignorant of or refusing to notice and admit.

In Psalm 51:6, a prayer of repentance after committing adultery and murder, David prays to God, “Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.” Evidently David discovered that he had been dishonest (lacked truth), not only with others, but also with himself in his “innermost being.” He realized that he needed God’s wisdom, not only as an outward confession of faith, but also in the “hidden part” of his soul. Evidently God was making him aware of previously unacknowledged pride, selfishness, and errant affections, and he prayed for God’s help to “Create in me a pure heart, O God” (vs. 10).

In Psalm 139: 23-24, David again asks for God’s help concerning his inner heart, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way (vs. 23-24).” He assumes that he does not and cannot fully know the depths of his heart and asks for God’s help to expose hurtful attitudes, desires, and motivations and to bend his heart toward the way of righteousness.

In Hebrews 12:15, the author of Hebrews warns, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.” A root is a structure that is hidden and covered up, yet supports and nourishes the part of the plant that is visible. So, buried anger can seethe under the surface of our hearts, largely hidden from our conscious thinking, yet powerfully shaping and directing the course of our lives in destructive ways.

Proverbs 18:8, 20:27 and 20:30 view the heart as deep, using the Hebrew word *cheder*, “inner chamber” to speak of the hidden places of the heart. For example, Proverbs 20:27 says: “The lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being (*cheder*)” (NIV).

Finally, Romans 1:18-32 shows evidence of the subconscious. Here Paul describes sinful man’s repression of the knowledge of God within his heart as he exchanges the

truth of God for a lie. As mankind didn't approve (*dokimazo*) acknowledging God any longer, God gave them over to an unapproved (*adokimos*) mind (Romans 1:28). Yet sinful man still retains some knowledge of God and His ways, being "God haters" (vs. 30) and knowing full well that God's ordinance demands death for such wicked behavior (vs. 32). Conscious repression of the truth of God causes man to lose much of that truth, yet the knowledge of God cannot be entirely eliminated. Deep within, a shadowy, yet persistent knowledge of God remains, so that mankind remains actively rebellious against a continued inner, partially-repressed knowledge of God's existence and commands.

Indeed the scriptures do speak of an "innermost being" and "hidden parts" of the heart. King David's prayers for God's help to create in him a clean heart, to search his heart, and to lead him in the everlasting way show that our subconscious desires, perspectives, and attitudes *are* important and worthy of our notice, attention and prayer.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps the clearest reference to the subconscious mind in our opinion is when David writes: **"Surely You desire truth in the inner parts [*tūhôt*: "to cover"]; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place**¹⁰⁶ [*sātām*: "hidden"]" (Ps 51:6). While words for mere "mind" were available to the psalmist (e.g. *lēb*), David seems to use wording to suggest an "inner mind." OT scholars C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch write that David is referring to "the hidden part of his mind."¹⁰⁷

From a more scientific view of the subconscious mind, David Myers writes:

[R]ecent cognitive science reveals a fascinating unconscious mind-another mind backstage . . . More than we realized over a decade ago, thinking occurs not on stage, but off stage, out of sight. . . .

[S]tudies of "automatic processing," "subliminal priming," "implicit memory," "heuristics," "spontaneous trait inference,"

¹⁰⁵ Dave Bovenmyer, "The Heart and Emotions"; online at: <http://davebovenmyer.wordpress.com/2010/02/20/emotions-and-the-heart>.

¹⁰⁶ W. E. Vine notes that the idea of "separation" is implied in some instances of *sātām*, making the translation "hidden part" or "place" accurate. (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W.E. Vine, [Thomas Nelson, 1996], 111).

¹⁰⁷ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000), Ps 51:6.

right-brain processing, instant emotions, nonverbal communication, and creativity unveil our intuitive capacities.

Thinking, memory, and attitudes all operate on two levels (conscious and deliberate, and unconscious and automatic)-dual processing, today's researchers call it. We know more than we know we know.¹⁰⁸

More mystical Christians suppose that a strong, insightful thought "out of the blue" is a direct "inspiration" of the Holy Spirit. However, M. Blaine Smith makes the important point that some of our most influential human "inspirations" come from our subconscious mind:

The fact is that our intuition often does a much better job processing information and reaching conclusions than our conscious mind does. Problem solving can occur on a purely conscious level, to be sure. Yet when an answer to a problem or decision is not reached quickly, a subconscious process typically takes over. The subconscious mind mulls the matter over, perhaps for weeks, months or years. Eventually a solution may make its appearance on the conscious level with all the impact of a divine revelation-the "eureka, I've found it!" sensation.

This experience leads many-Christian and non-Christian alike-to conclude that God has spoken directly to them. But usually there is a psychological explanation. The subconscious mind has been working on the problem unnoticed, finally reaching a conclusion which has bubbled to the surface in the form of a conscious inspiration. I'm convinced that this explains many-probably most-of the experiences of intuition and inspiration which we typically have as Christians. . . .

Understanding this, more than any other single factor, helps to put the matter of inward guidance into meaningful perspective. Our bursts of intuition about what we should do often reflect an internal gestation process which has been going on for some time.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Myers, 4.

¹⁰⁹ M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God's Will* (Intervarsity, 1979, 1991), 169. Smith goes on to relate examples of such human "inspiration.":

Creative thinkers from all fields have stressed the importance of this internal gestation process, and I find their testimonies of greatest interest. Consider, for instance, Amy Lowell's reflection on her process of writing poetry:

How carefully and precisely the subconscious mind functions. I have often been a witness to it in my own work. An idea will come into my head for no apparent reason; "The Bronze horses,"

In addition, Christian counselors in growing numbers are discovering the vital importance of addressing the *subconscious* beliefs of their clients in order to truly help them “**be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind**” (Rom 12:2).¹¹⁰ It would seem that an abundance of truth can be processed by the *conscious* mind by way of even memorizing Scripture. But if there are suppressed areas of our *subconscious* mind that have not “accepted” such truth, we will continue to act contradictory to what we “believe” and know in our *conscious* mind. Christians are learning that when the Apostle pointed to the mind as the center for spiritual renewal (Rom 12:2) and the King spoke of loving Him with *all* of our mind (Matt

for instance. I registered the horses as a good subject for a poem; and, having so registered them, I consciously thought no more about the matter. But what I had really done was to drop my subject into the subconscious, much as one drops a letter into the mail-box. Six months later, the words of the poem began to come into my head, the poem-to use my private vocabulary-was “there.”

Or author Jean Cocteau's description of an inspiration in play writing:

The play that I am producing at the Theatre de l'Oeuvre, The Knights of the Round Table, is a visitation. I was sick and tired of writing, when one morning, after having slept poorly, I awoke with a start and witnessed, as from a seat in a theater, three acts which brought to life an epoch and characters about which I had no documentary information and which I regarded moreover as forbidding. Long afterward, I succeeded in writing the play and I [discerned] the circumstances that must have served to incite me.'

Or mathematician Henri Poincard's testimony about how he reached a critical discovery:

For fifteen days I strove to prove that there could not be any functions like those I have since called Fuchsian functions. I was then very ignorant; every day I seated myself at my work table, stayed an hour or two, tried a great number of combinations and reached no results. One evening, contrary to my custom, I drank black coffee and could not sleep. Ideas rose in crowds; I felt them collide until pairs interlocked, so to speak, making a stable combination. By the next morning I had established the existence of a class of Fuchsian functions, those which come from the hypergeometric series; I had only to write out the results, which took but a few hours. (169-70)

¹¹⁰ For further information concerning the *subconscious* in Christian counseling see chapter 4.7.

22:37), that these critical aspects of spirituality include the *subconscious* part of our mind.

Pastoral Practices

- Do you have a way of addressing subconscious beliefs in your counseling of people? Far too much counseling merely addresses the conscious part of the person, and therefore is often too superficial to make a valuable and lasting difference in the person's life. We want to do more than give someone temporary encouragement, but rather, have them "**be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind**" (Rom 12:2). This involves painful, unresolved experiences of people's past which have been suppressed, but which still affect their thinking in major ways. For a basic explanation of this process carefully read chapter 4.7.

A.3) Moral vs. Logical Reasoning

Another helpful way to understand human reason is to distinguish between *moral* and *logical* reasoning. While both occur in the mind, their different objects and results can be distinguished. *Moral reasoning* operates in order to determine ethics and distinguish between right and wrong. This aspect of reasoning has been distinguished to such a degree as to suggest a separate faculty labeled the "conscience." While there is no harm in such a label, it should be remembered that the term does not relate to a different faculty or part of the mind than that which performs any of our reasoning. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the difference is the object and result of the reasoning, but all reasoning is performed by the mind.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, the Apostle uses the word *syneidesis* to refer to moral reasoning when he speaks of the "**consciences**" of the "**Gentiles**" in Romans 2:14-15 (cf. Rom 13:5; 1 Cor 8:7). Accordingly, the NT scholar Gordon Fee defines *syneidesis* as: "a kind of inner moral referee that pronounces on the rightness or

¹¹¹ For a correction to the idea that "conscience" is a separate human faculty instead of function see section 4.2.E.

wrongness of one's actions (as in, "Let your conscience be your guide")."¹¹²

On the other hand, the mind also engages in what may be termed as *logical reasoning* determining facts and distinguishing between true and false. To illustrate both their differences and interaction we could say *logical reasoning* will decide how much tax you owe. *Moral reasoning* will decide whether or not you will pay your taxes. However, even in this example, we can see that the these different types of reasoning may certainly affect one another, as a rather logical "cost/benefit" analysis (what's my chances of getting caught?) in the mind, may enter into the moral decision of whether or not to cheat. Likewise, our morality may affect how accurately we calculate our tax debt.¹¹³

Moral reasoning is a very important concept in Scripture and an integral part of human life. While we devote a whole chapter to it elsewhere,¹¹⁴ we will demonstrate here that the biblical words for "heart" are used to refer to the conscience. For example, we read in 1 Samuel, **"And it came about afterward that David's conscience [*lēb*] bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe"** (1 Sam 24:5 NASB). This is moral reasoning taking place in the human "heart" being referred to as the conscience. Likewise, the Apostle uses *kardia* in the NT as synonymous with the conscience when he writes that the Gentiles: **"show the work of the Law written on their hearts [*kardia*], their consciences [*syneidesis*] bearing witness"** (Rom 2:15 NASB¹¹⁵).

Once again, we would point out that both *moral* and *logical* reasoning occur in our reason, being two different functions, not human faculties. Also, while it may be simpler to refer to *moral reasoning* as a function of the conscience and *logical reasoning* occurring in the mind, we will avoid the inaccuracies noted

¹¹² Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 380.

¹¹³ Particularly those adopting "faculty psychology" would disagree with our claim that the work of the conscience is simply reasoning. For further discussion see section 4.2.E.

¹¹⁴ For further discussion regarding the human conscience see chapter 3.2.

¹¹⁵ The NIV rendering may be misleading as it states: **"the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness"** The addition of **"also,"** which is not in the original Greek text, may imply that the Apostle views the **"heart"** as something separate from the **"conscience."** This is not so.

elsewhere ¹¹⁶ by distinguishing the place of these two functions as the conscience and reason.

B) Reason & Holiness

B.1) A Neglected Relationship

Unfortunately, the vital relationship between our reason and our holiness has been neglected in our own day. Accordingly, NT scholar John Stott writes:

Many secrets of holiness are given us in the pages of the Bible. Indeed, a major purpose of Scripture is to show God's people how to lead a life that is worthy of him and pleasing to him. But one of the most neglected aspects of the quest for holiness is the place of the mind, even though Jesus himself put the matter beyond question when he promised "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." It is by his truth that Christ liberates us from the bondage of sin. ¹¹⁷

One element of historic Christianity that has seemed to miss the importance of reason and sanctification is *Pietism*. Mark Noll in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* defines this movement as:

A recurring tendency within Christian history to emphasize more the practicalities of Christian life and less the formal structures of theology or church order. Its historians discern four general traits in this tendency: (1) its experiential character-pietists are people of the heart for whom Christian living is the fundamental concern; (2) its biblical focus-pietists are, to paraphrase John Wesley, "people of one book" who take standards and goals from the pages of Scripture; (3) its perfectionistic bent-pietists are serious about holy living and expend every effort to follow God's law, spread the gospel, and provide aid for the needy; (4) its reforming

¹¹⁶ For a hopefully clarifying discussion on the terminology used to refer to the functions of the mind see chapter 4.2.

¹¹⁷ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* by John Stott (InterVarsity, 1973), 39.

interest-pietists usually oppose what they regard as coldness and sterility in established church forms and practices.¹¹⁸

Men like Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) spearheaded the movement in Germany in the seventeenth century. Dr. Noll claims that there were distinct pietistic elements in English Puritanism and Methodism as well. While there were obviously many exemplary attributes of the movement, Dr. Noll points out:

At its worst the pietistic tendency can lead to inordinate subjectivism and emotionalism; it can discourage careful scholarship; it can fragment the church through enthusiastic separatism; it can establish new codes of almost legalistic morality; and it can underrate the value of Christian traditions.

¹¹⁹

More specifically concerning our current topic, Gordon Clark (1902-1985) pointed out:

[I]n opposition to Pietism the contrast or even incompatibility between righteousness and rationality must be rejected. Far from conflicting with rationality, righteousness presupposes it. If righteousness requires obedience to God, this obedience depends on understanding God's precepts. Sin is disobedience; and whatever stronger denunciations of sin are appropriate, sin can also be denounced as irrational. Then again, animals, who cannot sin, also cannot be righteous-the reason being that they are non-rational.¹²⁰

In other words, sanctification involves more than just the moral reasoning of our conscience, but the logical reasoning of our mind in order to properly understand God's commandments.

However, far more important than a rational understanding of God's commands is a belief in His doctrines. Nothing will empower our holiness more than believing our God-given identity in Christ. We will act according to who we think we are. If we believe we are a sinner, we will act like a sinner. If we believe we are a child of God, we will act more like one. As we further discuss in chapter

¹¹⁸ Mark A. Noll, "Pietism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, Walter Elwell ed., (Baker, 1984), 855-6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 858.

¹²⁰ Gordon H. Clark in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, Ronald Nash ed. (Presbyterians and Reformed, 1968), 74.

4.7, understanding our identity in Christ is much more foundational to overcoming sin than many believe.

B.2) The Conscience Reasons

Obviously, the human conscience is the means by which we determine our moral beliefs, and like any other beliefs, our moral ones are derived through reasoning. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

What God gives us in our conscience is the capacity to recognize and reason what is morally right from what is morally wrong. . . . The sense of right and wrong is only intrinsic (and perfect) with God. Humans need to be trained (even wrongly) in *moral knowledge*.

Different experiences, including punishment and reward, provide data to our conscience which is then trained regarding what is morally right and wrong. It would not seem that our conscience has built in “data” from birth, but rather, it is simply another aspect of our God-given reason that enables us to process moral convictions, just as our logical reasoning processes logical convictions. The claim that *moral knowledge* is a result of moral reasoning is supported by the fact that only humans possess both, as opposed to animals.¹²¹

It is the moral reasoning of our minds (i.e. conscience) which dictates our moral beliefs, and therefore our moral attitudes and subsequent actions. It is clear then that reasoning is critical to our growing and living in holiness.

However, it is not only moral reasoning that affects our morality, but our logical reasoning as well. Christian philosopher Ronald Nash comments accordingly:

[A] denial of logic has consequences not only for epistemology and metaphysics, but for ethics as well. If all predications [statements] are true, there is no difference between walking to a nearby city and walking over a cliff; there is no difference between drinking milk and imbibing arsenic. But obviously there is a difference.¹²²

John Stott, as well, explains the relationship between our logic and morality when he writes:

¹²¹ Quoted from section 2.5.C.1.

¹²² Nash, *Mind*, 107

The rejection of logic means the end of morality, for morality and ethics depend on understanding. Without understanding, there can be no morality. One must understand the Ten Commandments before one can obey them. If logic is irrelevant or irreligious, moral behavior is impossible, and the "practical" religion of those who belittle logic cannot be practiced at all. . . .

The rejection of logic has become very popular in the 20th century. In matters of morality, one frequently hears that, "There are no blacks and whites, only shades of gray." What this means is that there is no good or evil; all actions and alternatives are mixtures of good and evil. If one abandons logic, as many people in this century have, then one cannot distinguish good from evil-and everything is permitted. The results of this rejection of logic-mass murder, war, government-caused famine, abortion, child abuse, destruction of families, crime of all sorts-are all around us. The rejection of logic has led-and must lead-to the abandonment of morality.¹²³

B.3) Reason & Repentance: *Roman 12:1-3*

One of the foundational elements of sanctification and spiritual growth is the biblical concept of repentance. The meaning of the word is taken directly from its Greek equivalent, *metanoia*, which is literally "change of mind." Because such a concept is behind a foundational and biblical perspective of sanctification such as repentance, it should not surprise us that the Scriptures have much more to say along these lines as well. Repentance is simply a change of belief, resulting in a change of desires and actions, all of which are decisions of reason.

Indeed, Christ's promise that when you simply "**know**" (*ginōskō*; recognize, understand) **the truth . . . the truth will make you free**" (John 8:32), is a powerful promise of life transformation. And how will we "**know the truth**" apart from our reason?

While it is popular to disparage merely cognitive methods for life transformation, the Scriptures emphasize them. This is why the

¹²³ Stott, 22-24.

Apostle repeatedly appealed to Timothy and Titus to preach and teach Scripture. It was such cognitive teaching that the Apostle himself gave his life to and described when he wrote: **"We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor . . ."** (Col 1:28-29).

Likewise, this vital relationship between knowledge and righteousness is precisely what the Apostle is communicating when he introduces himself as, **"Paul, a servant of God and an Apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness"** (Tit 1:1). Along these lines, the great Puritan theologian John Owen (1616–1683) wrote: "[I]n Scripture the deceit of the mind is commonly laid down as the principle of all sin."¹²⁴

Accordingly, it is to the Christian that the writer of Hebrews warns that our "heart" can be, **"hardened by sin's deceitfulness"** (Heb 3:13). This is why selfishness impedes good reasoning and love enhances it. This is precisely what the Apostle is speaking of when he writes: **"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight [*aisthēsei*: perception], so that you may be able to discern [*dokimazein*: "analyze"] what is best"** (Phil 1:9-10). Holy love comes from our reason producing the right beliefs and desires, and this love in turn is critical to reasoning rightly so that we may be holy.

Sanctification and practical holiness is not something that simply descends upon us from on high as some spiritual anointing like some suggest, but rather is, in large part, a process that results from constantly improving our moral and logical reasoning (i. e. conscience and mind). Spiritual maturity is described as a result of consistent spiritual reasoning when we read that, **"the mature"** are those who, **"have their senses [*aistheterion*: the faculty of perception, i.e. reason] trained to discern good and evil"** (Heb 5:14).

The ultimate cause of sin is deception or ignorance. In any temptation we are evaluating, judging, and weighing the alternatives in order to reason to a decision on what to do. Biblically speaking, virtue is a choice and a choice that is decided with reason. Winning the spiritual battle that rages between good and evil in our hearts is a matter of how we think and reason, and sin is simply a matter of bad reasoning. This is why the Apostle says, **"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think [*pronoian*: "give forethought"] about how to gratify**

¹²⁴ Stott, 39.

the desires of the sinful nature” (Rom 13:14). Right reasoning results in a knowledge of the truth, and sin can be understood as simply a matter of distorting, ignoring, or disobeying our reason. Therefore, the battle of personal holiness is often won or lost in our reason. Where else but our reason enables us to obey the Apostle’s command to “**count [logizesthe] yourselves dead to sin,**” so that we may overcome it.

It is to pursuing *reason* that the Apostle appeals to for a holy life when he says:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by [because of] the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable ¹²⁵ [logikēn] service.

¹²⁵ Regarding Rom 12:1, Douglas Moo admits that, “The meaning of *logikēn* is notoriously difficult to pin down.” (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans, 1996], 751). In classical Greek *logikos* meant intellectual, rational, reasonable. Most modern translations (e.g. NIV, NASB, ESV) have chosen to translate it “**spiritual**.” However, the KJV renders it “**reasonable**” and we think this is the best meaning.

First of all, it was the universal meaning of the word in Greek. Schreiner points out that at times *pneumatikos* (“spiritual”) was placed alongside *logikos*, but the meaning of the latter was not to be confused with the former (*Romans* [Baker, 1998], 645). Schreiner notes as well that if the Apostle had meant “spiritual” he certainly would have used *pneumatikos* as he had many times elsewhere.

Schreiner suggests one reason why some have shied away from the Greek usage:

Some scholars hesitate to endorse the meaning “rational” since the term was common in Greek philosophy, fearing (I think) that they would impose foreign categories on Paul. Using the term with the meaning “rational,” however, does not yield the conclusion that Paul was Aristotelian or Stoic. All that needs to be said is that Paul used the term with the meaning “rational” or “reasonable,” as was common in the Greek language. (Ibid.)

This being the case, Philo’s use of this term in his *Special Laws* becomes significant where we read:

That which is precious in the sight of God is not the number of the [sacrificial animal] victims immolated but the true purity of a rational spirit [*pneuma logikon*] in him who makes the sacrifice.” (Moo, 752).

In conclusion, we would suggest that the modern translations miss the fact that the Apostle is intentionally focusing on human reason here as the place where such a decision will be made. Schreiner (in agreement with Barnes, Cranfield, Fitzmyer, MacArthur, Mounce, and Murray; and against Moo and Barclay) puts it well when he comments:

Paul is not merely saying that sacrifices are spiritual in nature. His point is that it is eminently reasonable, given the mercies of God, for believers to dedicate themselves wholly to God. . . . Since God has

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [*nous*], that you may prove [*dokimazein*: analyze, accept] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think [*uperphronein*] of himself more highly than he ought to think [*phronein*: to have understanding, to think], but to think soberly [*sōphronein*: have sound judgment], as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. (Rom 12:1-3 NKJV).

First, the Apostle writes to motivate his readers to serve God. What does he appeal to? Reason and logic. The Apostle wants us to think and reason about what God has done for us (as explained in Romans 1-11), knowing that if we do so properly, we will decide to live for Him. Reasoning here supplies a major motivation for sanctification.

Secondly, when the Apostle commanded, “**be transformed by the renewing of your mind** (*nous*; understanding, reason)” he was not describing some mystical process that bypasses our reason. On the contrary, life transformation is essentially a process of replacing the lies we believe with the truth of God, and our reasoning faculties, the very place God created for us to discern truth from falsehood is where this life transformation occurs. Accordingly, the NLT translates Romans 12:2 as “**let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think,**” and the NCV has it, “**be changed within by a new way of thinking.**” Again, while it is popular to disparage merely cognitive methods for life transformation, the Scriptures emphasize them.

Accordingly, the Apostle describes the process by which one becomes consecrated to God. Simply put, we must exchange the worldly lies we believe with the truth of God to form new beliefs, all of which is the domain of our reason. Our life is “transformed” when the beliefs that are processed, evaluated, accepted, and stored by reason are renewed to conform to Scripture, rather than the world.¹²⁶

been so merciful, failure to dedicate one's life to him is the height of folly and irrationality. (*Romans*, 645).

¹²⁶ Concerning the important place that reason plays in the Apostle's statement in Romans 12:2, NT scholar Douglas Moo writes:

Paul's teaching about the Christian's source for finding the moral will of God in this verse deserves attention. Paul has made clear earlier in the letter that the Christian no longer is to look to the OT law as a complete and authoritative guide for conduct (see Rom. 5:20; 6:14,

Thirdly, the Apostle relates that one result of this renewing of our beliefs will be the improved ability of our reason to analyze, recognize, and accept as true, what God's will is, as revealed in the divine revelation of Scripture.

Finally, the Apostle tells us how such a process of renewal begins: self-evaluation. He encourages us to use our reason to objectively evaluate ourselves based on the "**measure of faith**" God has given them.

Such self-evaluation is an important aspect of sanctification and requires reason. Accordingly, we read, "**A man ought to examine [dokimazetō] himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup**" (1 Cor 11:28). Likewise, the Apostle tells the Corinthians, "**Examine [peirazete] yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test [dokimazetō] yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?**" (2 Cor 13:5). How else would one conduct the test commanded here accept by an objective evaluation of Christian fruit in our lives with our reason?

Commenting on Romans 12:2, Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland writes:

We are so familiar with this verse that some of its oddness or peculiarity is lost on us. But to see how truly peculiar this teaching is, think of what Paul could have said but did not. He could have said, "Be transformed by developing close feelings toward God," or "by exercising your will in obeying biblical commands," or "by intensifying your desire for the right things," or "by fellowship and worship," and so on.

Obviously, all are important parts of the Christian life. Yet Paul chose to mention none of them in his most important precis [summary] of the spiritual life. Why is that? What is it about the mind that justifies Paul's elevation of it to such a position of prominence in religious life? . . .

The mind is the soul's primary vehicle for making contact with God, and it plays a fundamental role in the process of human maturation and change, including spiritual

15; 7:4). What, Paul's first readers and we ourselves today might ask, is to be put in its place? Paul answers: the renewed mind of the believer. Paul's confidence in the mind of the Christian is the result of his understanding of the work of the Spirit, who is actively working to affect the renewal in thinking that Paul here assumes (cf. Rom. 8:4-9). (757)

Unfortunately, neither a growing number of conservative Evangelicals, nor postmoderns share "Paul's confidence in the [*Spirit-liberated*] mind of the Christian."

transformation. In thought, the mind's structure conforms to the order of the object of thought. Since this is so, and since truth dwells in the mind, truth itself is powerful and rationality is valuable as a means of obtaining truth and avoiding error, God desires a life of intellectual growth and study for His children.¹²⁷

Accordingly, the Apostle explains that for the Christian, **"the new self . . . is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator"** (Col 3:10). This was to be in contrast to others who live sinful lives because of **"the futility of their thinking"** (Eph 17), being **"darkened in their understanding"** and having **"ignorance . . . in them"** (v. 18). Commenting on Ephesians 4:17-24, Dr. Stott remarks, "If heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, then Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds."¹²⁸

It is not surprising then that the Apostle describes the starting point of the downward spiral of sin in humans as being a willful suppression of their God-given reasoning faculty. He writes: **"For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking [*dialogismos*: "reasoning"] became futile and their foolish hearts [*kardia*] were darkened"** (Rom 1:21; cf Eph 2:3). The Apostle knows this is true of the believer as well, and therefore exhorts the Corinthians to **"Come back to your senses [*eknephō*: "become sober-minded" NASB] as you ought, and stop sinning"** (1 Cor 15:34; cf. 2 Tim 2:26). When we allow our moral reasoning to become dysfunctional, we are, **"Like a city that is broken into and without walls,"** because **"a man who has no control over his spirit [*ruah*]"** (Prov 25:28 NASB) has no hope of resisting sin.

B.4) Reason & Self-control

Self-control is obviously vital to a holy life and this occurs in our reason. What is self-control other than the beliefs of a biblically taught reason monitoring, evaluating, informing, and controlling our desires and decisions? It is only with our Spirit-controlled reason

¹²⁷ Moreland, 65, 67.

¹²⁸ Quoted by Peter T. O'Brien in *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1999), 331.

that we will be enabled to fulfill the critical command to, **"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life"** (Prov 4:23). Accordingly, *Webster's* defines self-control as: "restraint exercised over one's own impulses, emotions, or desires."¹²⁹ It is reason that enables us to evaluate our desires and feelings in light of the truth, convincing us to act against them if necessary. Our "heart" and all the functions in it must be conformed to the truth in order to please God, and it is our proper reasoning that does this.

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Accordingly, the Apostle Paul writes: **"God did not give us a spirit [Spirit] that makes us afraid but a spirit [Spirit] of power and love and self-control"** (2 Tim 1:7 NCV). As Christians, the indwelling Holy Spirit gives us a *Spirit-liberated reason* by which we have the **"power"** from our holy beliefs and desires to overcome sinful emotions such as fear, and exercise the **"self-control"** necessary to steer our emotions and desires according to God's will. Reasoning while in the **"Spirit of truth"** (John 14:17) is reasoning that keeps us **"in step with"** (Gal 5:25) the Spirit, and therefore, holy.

There are several Greek words used in the NT to describe this very process. The *nēphō* word group literally means "to be free from the influence of intoxicants,"¹³¹ and in a broader sense, "sober in the sense of clear-headed, self-controlled."¹³² The word group *enkrateia* means "self-control, self-restraint."¹³³ The *sōphrōn* word group literally means "of sound mind."¹³⁴ One Greek lexicon notes this particular term denotes "the prudent, thoughtful aspect of self-control."¹³⁵ Another lexicon defines *sōphrōn* and its cognates as:

the exercise of that self-restraint that governs all passions and desires, enabling the believer to be conformed to the mind of Christ. . . . "[S]ound judgment" practically expresses the meaning; it is that habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires, which will hinder

¹²⁹ *Webster's*, 1065.

¹³⁰ For further discussion of reason's affect on desires and emotions see sections 4.1.B-C; 4.4.C; 4.5.C; 4.6.C.2.

¹³¹ *Vine's*, 583.

¹³² George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Eerdmans, 1992), 19.

¹³³ H. Baltensweiler, "Discipline," *NIDNTT*, I.494.

¹³⁴ *Vine's*, 583.

¹³⁵ Knight, 159.

the temptation of these from arising, or at least from arising in such strength as would overbear [its] checks and barriers.¹³⁶

The Scriptures teach clearly that such self control is essential to all Christians. The Apostle Paul writes, **"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled [nēphōmen]. . . . let us be self-controlled [nēphōmen]"** (1 Thess 5:6-8). For the Apostle, the cure for **"ungodliness and worldly passions"** is **"to live self-controlled [sōphronōs]"** (Tit 2:12). The Apostle clearly describes the use of reason to check potentially misleading influences when he writes: **"[I]f a man is sure in his mind that there is no need for marriage, and has his own desires under control, and has decided not to marry the one to whom he is engaged, he is doing the right thing"** (1 Cor 7:37 NCV), implying that if the man's reason had not kept **"his own desires under control"** he might not have done the right thing.

Proverbs reminds us that, **"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control [mitsar]"** (Prov 25:28), because otherwise sinful desires and emotions will destroy Him.

B.5) Reason & Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians 6:10-18

Not only does the self control that reason provides protect us from fleshly desires and emotions, but demonic ones as well. Therefore, the Apostle Peter writes: **"Be self-controlled [nēphate] and alert. [Because] Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"** (1 Pet 5:8; cf. 1 Cor 7:5). Peter has much to say about the need for self control in the Christian life, it being necessary to **"prepare [our] minds for action"** (1 Pet 1:13), and to **"pray"** (4:7).

In general, then, it can be said that it is not the Christian's reason that gets them into trouble with God, but their desires and emotions because, to be sensual is sinful, but to be sensible is to be Christian. Speaking of the relationship between right reasoning and holiness Susannah Wesley (1669-1742) reflected a historical view of Christianity concerning sanctification when she said:

Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience . . . in short, whatever increases the strength

¹³⁶ Vine's, 583.

and authority of your body over your mind--that thing is sin to you.¹³⁷

We will add here that it is not only our spiritual maturity that depends on our reasoning, but our spiritual health depends on our thinking rightly as well. Long before the preachers of positive thinking perverted such teaching into a way to get what we want, the Apostle taught that positive thinking was a way for God to get what *He* wants. He tells the Philippian Christians: **"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think [logizesthe: "reason"] about such things"** (Phil 4:8). Accordingly, Dr. Stott comments:

Self-control is primarily mind-control. What we sow in our minds we reap in our actions. This is not the self-confident optimism of Norman Vincent Peale. Peale's way is to get us to pretend we are other than we are. Paul's way is to remind us what we truly are, because God has made us that way in Christ.¹³⁸

In the end then, we can say that our reason is vital to one of the most important aspects of the Christian life: growing and living in righteousness.

Not only does the sinful beliefs and habits of our flesh operate within our mind, but the deceptions of satan do as well. It is important to recognize that his only weapon against us is a lie, and how else do we recognize and defeat deception except by proper moral and logical reasoning? Accordingly, the Apostle Paul's most detailed description of our spiritual battle against the **"father of lies"** (John 8:44) repeatedly tells us that our greatest defense is the truth, which is the domain of our *Spirit-liberated reason*. The Apostle writes:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be

¹³⁷ Reference unavailable.

¹³⁸ Stott, 29.

able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

¹⁴ **Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.**

¹⁷ **Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.** (Eph 6:10-18)

The importance of knowing, believing, and applying the truth in order to be successful against **"the devil's schemes"** (v. 11), in **"our struggle . . . against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"** (v. 12), and **"the flaming arrows of the evil one"** (v. 16) is clear. Buckling on **"the belt of truth"** (v. 14) no doubt requires the proper use of human reason, or we will process and possess no truth at all. The **"shield of faith"** (v. 16) is simply confronting the lies of the devil with the biblical truths we gained by reasoning upon God's revelation in Scripture. And it is impossible to **"take"** up **"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (v. 17) without our reasoning faculties.

While prayer is also mentioned as a defense against the devil (v. 18), the ignorant or emotional child of God can pray all they want that the devil would be defeated in their life, but unless they are able to defeat the devil's lies with their God-given reason, they will be **"devoured"** (cf. 1 Pet 5:8) and controlled by his lies.

The Apostle Paul describes this process of reasoning in spiritual warfare when he writes:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish [mental, anti-God] strongholds. We demolish [anti-God] arguments [logismos: "reasoning"] and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we [do this when we] take captive every thought [noema: "mental perception"] to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor 10:3-5)

What the Apostle describes, requires careful, diligent reasoning with God's revelation in Scripture.

In a later chapter we will illustrate the importance of reason over our emotions in our battle with the devil's deceptions in the example of Eve:

We sense the influence of feelings on our reasoning when we read the description of the first sin. **"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom** [which she thought would enable her to reach the God-given human goal of happiness], **she took some and ate it"** (Gen 3:6). No doubt if the sight or thought of the fruit would have produced repulsive feelings, Eve would not have desired it. This is why satan works to make his temptations promise good *feelings*. It is *emotion* that can move us so strongly in a certain direction, whether it be for good or evil. Therefore, feelings do not automatically serve the purposes and glory of God but often thwart them.¹³⁹

Indeed, if Eve had been more reasonable, remembering, reflecting, and mentally embracing the truth that God had told her, (i.e. death would result), the temptations of the evil one here would have been thwarted.

Confusion and emotion are the initial weapons satan uses because these suppress our reason allowing him to achieve full deception—and subsequently sin and bondage. This is why the King said, **"If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"** (John 8:31-32). Obviously "holding" to Christ's teaching certainly requires the consistent use of our *Spirit-liberated reason*.

C) Reason, Faith, Hope, Peace & Love

Faith, hope, and love are considered the cardinal virtues of Christianity (cf. 1 Cor 13:13), and each of them is wholly dependent on human reasoning.

As we argue at length in Book 6, *biblical faith* is: *an absolutely certain commitment to a correct understanding of a divine revelation, based on divine evidence, producing divine pleasure*. The commitment involved in faith is decided upon by our reason, based on God-given evidence evaluated by our reason, regarding a divine revelation understood by our reason. *Biblical faith* is simply

¹³⁹ Quoted from section 4.6.C.2.

reasoning properly in response to a divine revelation, and therefore, reason is vital to this most important Christian virtue.

You can have biblical, God-pleasing faith without feeling emotion, but not without understanding and accepting the truth with reason. Contrary to *fideism* which makes faith a feeling, Scripture describes it as a rational decision of reason. So much for the popular but unbiblical idea that faith is absent or opposed to reason!¹⁴⁰

Like faith, hope as well is based on the same processes of human reasoning. Hope is impossible without knowing and understanding what we are hoping in and for. We must correctly understand God's promises with our reason, evaluate the evidence for trusting God and His promises, and make a commitment to trust Him, all with our God-given reasoning faculty. Hope has its reasons! (cf. Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 15:19-20; 2 Cor 1:7; Phil 1:19-20; Col 1:5, 27; 1 Thess 4:13-14; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 4:9-10; 2 Tim 1:12; Tit 1:1-2; Heb 10:23; 1 Pet 1:3, 21; 3:15).¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ For further discussion of faith and its dependence on reason see chapters 6.12-14.

¹⁴¹ The Apostle's reference to "**the peace of God which transcends all understanding**," (Phil 4:7) could be taken as a rebuke of the peace that comes from proper moral and logical reasoning. On the contrary, we believe Dr. O'Brien is correct to understand the Apostle as referring to how wonderful this peace is, not its suprarationality:

Paul describes God's peace by means of a participial expression that is capable of being understood in two ways: (1) his peace accomplishes more than any human forethought or scheming can achieve, and so is far more effective in removing anxiety than any reasoning power (NEBmg); or (2) the peace of God is completely beyond all power of human comprehension (cf. RSV, GNB, JB, NIV, Moffatt, and Phillips [PME]).

The Greek may be interpreted either way, and although both renderings make good sense, it has been argued that (1) is more in harmony with the context. Human reasoning results in continued doubt and anxiety; it cannot find a way out of the dilemma (cf. v. 6). God's peace, by contrast, is effective in removing all disquietude. If, however, in explaining the nature of God's peace Paul is focusing on its uniqueness rather than its relative superiority to human ingenuity [or reasoning], then (2) is the correct interpretation.

The participle [*uperechousa*], with the rendering 'be far beyond, excel', supports this. Further, [*panta noun*], which means 'all understanding' (or possibly 'every thought') rather than 'all planning' or 'all cleverness, inventiveness' leads to the same conclusion. Accordingly, Paul is telling his readers that God's peace or salvation that stands guard over them is more wonderful than they can imagine. (Cf. Eph. 3:20, where God is invoked as the one who can do 'immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'.)

Finally, we argue in a subsequent chapter that love essentially depends on reason because it is essentially a decision, not a feeling. Accordingly, we write:

It may come as some surprise that real love, at least initially, often times has nothing to do with emotion at all, but is rather a rational decision made on the basis of principle, not feeling. When Jesus Christ commands us to “**love your enemies**” (Matt 5:44), He is not expecting us to *feel* like doing so before we obey this command.

No, love is an action, a decision, upon which our feelings may or may not follow. And what guides love is a rational process that recognizes, as the Apostle reminds us in Romans 12:1-2, that such love is the reasonable, moral thing to do, but not necessarily what we feel like doing.¹⁴²

At the very least, the Apostle is saying that reason enhances our love when he writes the Philippians:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge [epignosei] and all discernment [aisthēsei], so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ. (Phil 1:9-10 NASB)

Another translation of the Greek puts it this way: “**This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with your love** (Phil 1:9 NCV). Knowledge, discernment, and understanding come from reasoning, and knowledgeable and discerning love is better than love without such reasoning. More specifically the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes:

Although [*uperechō*] is on occasion used in polemical contexts (2:3; 3:8?), there is no such polemic here—either against Paul's enemies who had an inflated view of their own knowledge or by way of subtle rebuke to those Philippians who are thought to have wanted to surpass their fellow Christians. His point in using [*uperechō*] at v. 7 is quite different as he seeks to encourage his Christian friends about the wonder of God's peace that guards their lives. (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC [Eerdmans, 1991], 496-7)

In addition, any suggestion that peace could come apart from an understanding of truth ignores the biblical concept of faith. For further discussion of faith see chapters 6.12-14. and for further commentary on Philippians 4:7 see section 14.14.E.4.

¹⁴² Excerpt from section 4.6.A.2.

Love must be intelligent and morally discerning . . . if it would be truly *agape*. What is encouraged here is not a heedless sentiment, but love based on knowledge. . . . In this instance it will serve to direct the believers' love into avenues both biblically proper and pure. The discerning atmosphere in which their love should operate will require them continually "to discern what is best." [Which is a function of reason].¹⁴³

Therefore, we believe Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was wrong to say, "the love of God is better than the knowledge of God."¹⁴⁴ On the contrary, they are the same thing. Any lack of love for God is based on a lack of knowledge, understanding, or believing in His attributes. If we truly believed with our reason what God has revealed about Himself, we would truly love Him. We simply will not, and cannot love God more than what we understand, know, or believe about Him, all of which are the province of reason.

Accordingly, Aquinas wrote elsewhere:

Moral virtue [like love for God] [cannot] be without . . . understanding and prudence. Moral virtue cannot be without prudence, because it is a habit of choosing, i.e., making us choose well. Now in order that a choice be good, two things are required. First, that the intention be directed to a due end; and this is done by moral virtue, which inclines the appetitive faculty [desire] to the good. . . .

Secondly, that man take rightly those things which have reference to the end; and this he cannot do unless his reason counsel, judge and command aright, which is the function of prudence and the virtues annexed to it. . . .

[T]he movement of the appetite [desire] cannot tend to anything, either by hoping or loving, unless that thing be apprehended by the sense or by the intellect. Now it is by faith that the intellect apprehends the object of hope and love. Hence in the order of generation, faith [obtained by reason] precedes hope and charity.¹⁴⁵

In the end, faith, hope, and love all depend, and are produced by proper reasoning in response to God's revelation.

¹⁴³ Homer Kent, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (EBC) Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM (Zondervan, n.d.).

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (online at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>), I.82.3.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., I-II.58.4, 62.4.

D) Reason & Edification

In the 18th century Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) stated the biblical and historical belief of the Church regarding the relationship between human reason and spiritual edification:

There is no other way by which any means of grace whatsoever can be of any benefit, but by knowledge. . . . Men . . . receive nothing, when they understand nothing; and are not at all edified, unless some knowledge be conveyed. ¹⁴⁶

This was the universal conviction of the Church until the modern “tongues” phenomenon in *Charismaticism* introduced a new version of the gift that supposedly edifies the self. The now popular belief that spiritual edification can occur apart from understanding is based on the Apostle’s statement that “**anyone who speaks in**” an uninterpreted “**tongue** [*glossa*: language]” cannot be understood by others, and therefore, “**He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself**” (1 Cor 14:2, 4). Obviously, the issue of tongues is a complicated one, which we discuss thoroughly elsewhere. ¹⁴⁷ In addition, in chapter 4.8 we discuss specifically whether or not the practice is actually self-edifying or edifying at all.

God did not create us to be spiritually edified apart from our reason, because all spiritual edification comes from an understanding and belief of the *truth*. Which is why the Apostle is so repetitive and insistent on the need for teaching in the Church throughout the Pastoral Epistles. It is because *truth* edifies Christians, that the King Himself taught the truth, and that the Apostle says the edification of the Church comes through truth-giving gifts (cf. Eph 4:11-15).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., I:223.

¹⁴⁷ For further discussion of the claim that the biblical gift of tongues was meant to edify the self see section 4.9.E.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

*Our Father, we again have the opportunity to thank you for the incredible gift of our minds. When we think of the remarkable complexity and abilities of our physical bodies we are in awe of Your creativity. We think of how the Apostle said, "**Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.**" (Rom 6:13). We offer You our minds, just like our arms, legs, and mouth, to be instruments of righteousness and service to Your glory. Amen.*

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What biblical evidence do we give that God is not only love, but logic? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) Why do we suggest reasoning is such an essential attribute of God?
- 3) What are some significant differences between divine and human reasoning?
- 4) What helpful analogy do we use to describe human reasoning? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What is the difference between moral and logical reasoning?
- 6) What is the difference between conscious and subconscious reasoning?
- 7) What is one Scripture that we use to claim that the battle of personal holiness is dependent on good reasoning?
- 8) Why do we claim that good reasoning is the foundation of the cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love?

- 9) Why do we claim that there is no such thing as Christian edification without reasoning? Do you agree or disagree and why?

Recommended Reading

- The rest of *Knowing Our God* Book 4: *Biblical Psychology*.
- *Knowing Our God* chapter 2.4 on the philosophical (epistemological) importance of human reason.
- John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (InterVarsity, 1973). A succinct, timely, and insightful treatise on the place of reason in the Christian's life.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.4

Reason Christian! II

Christian Decision Making

Overall Objective

Demonstrate the God-ordained place of human reason in decision making & protect against the errors of *mega mysticism*.

Table of Topics

A) Reason & Decision Making

B) Reason & Spiritual Leadership

C) Reasoning Rightly

C.1) The Limits of Reasoning

C.2) Principles of Good Reasoning

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Nothing is more important for humans than decision making and nothing is more important for decision making than reason.
- While we certainly differ from the unregenerated in our sources of data for decision making (i.e. Scripture, New Nature), and different motives (morality), the process that regenerated Christians go through is the God-ordained process of reasoning just like all humans.
- Right reasoning is the most important God-ordained means for making decisions for which Scripture does not give us any specific directions.
- If we do not have an authenticated, certain divine revelation (e.g. Scripture) to act against reason, God's will is to be wise and act in accordance with it. Our dependence on reason is so God-ordained, that it requires nothing less than a miraculous revelation from God for us to righteously and wisely go against reason.
- Biblical wisdom is simply good reasoning.
- Counsel is so valuable because it is the convergence of multiple people reasoning.
- The vast majority of the time the people of the Bible did not depend on divine revelations to make their decisions, but rather, reason, just like us.
- The moral desires of our New Nature applied by our moral reason (conscience), and the divine revelation of Scripture interpreted and applied by our logical reason are very capable of making customized applications of God's will in virtually every circumstance, and are ordained and provided by God to do so.
- Sound reasoning is a critical, biblical requirement for Church leaders.
- We must be careful of sinful attitudes, such as pride, that will hinder us in reasoning rightly.

A) Reason & Decision Making

Nothing is more important for humans than decision making, and nothing is more important for decision making than reason. Contrary to the claims of *mega mysticism*, which emphasizes the need for personal divine “inspiration,” intuition, impulses, and “signs” in order to know God’s will, the Bible teaches that we are to use our God-given reason. In other words, the “peace of God” in decision making is not something mystical or necessarily supernatural, but rather the natural result of following good moral reasoning (i.e. conscience) which resolves guilt, and correct logical reasoning which removes doubt.¹⁴⁸

Along these lines, M. Blaine Smith corrects the popular expectation that the process of Christian decision making is all that different from how wise decisions are made in the world:

We naturally think that as Christians our experience of resolving decisions will be different--perhaps dramatically so--from the process we went through as nonbelievers. Though we may not be certain exactly how it will be different, we expect it to be different nonetheless. The whole idea of receiving [divine] guidance conveys the thought of having a mystical or obviously supernatural experience. It implies the idea of instantaneous direction which removes the need for thinking through a decision.

In reality, Scripture gives little basis for this all-too-understandable assumption. In fact, the differences between Christian and non-Christian decision making are not as great as might first be thought. . . . When we look carefully at examples of decision making in the New Testament, we find pervasive evidence for this perspective. In fact, in the overwhelming majority of personal decisions noted in the New Testament, God's will was discerned simply through a reasoned decision. Human reason was the channel through which God's will was normally known. In most cases discerning his will boiled down to a matter of making a sound, logical choice.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Regarding the Apostle’s reference to “**the peace of God which transcends all understanding**,” (Phil 4:7) see extended discussion in section 14.11.E, esp. section E.4.

¹⁴⁹ M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God’s Will* (Intervarsity, 1979, 1991), 114-15. Considering all the *mega mystical* Christian literature concerning divine guidance, Smith’s book is fairly good. Nonetheless, his error in accepting the idea that God has a specific will for us in amoral issues is significant.

While we certainly differ from the unregenerated in our sources of data for decision making (i.e. Scripture, New Nature), and different motives (morality), the process that regenerated Christians go through is the God-ordained process of reasoning. In other words, the revelation contained in Scripture and the gift of our *Spirit-liberated reason*, controlled by our Spirit-inspired desires, all fully suffice to provide us the divine guidance we need.

The place of reason in decision making is perhaps its greatest demonstration of its God-given importance. Elsewhere we note reason's importance in enabling us to decide what Scripture says.

¹⁵⁰ Here, we will mention that right reasoning is also the most important God-ordained means for making decisions for which Scripture does not give us any specific directions. Accordingly, the OT scholar Bruce Waltke writes:

God guides us first through his Word, then through our heartfelt desires, then the wise counsel of others, and then our circumstances. At that point we must rely on our own sound judgment. . . . God gave each of us a brain, and he expects us to put it to good use. ¹⁵¹

Likewise, Gary Friesen and J. Maxon, in their very good book, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, write:

We must agree with the conclusion of James Jauncy, "Guidance is largely consecrated and sanctified thinking." While God can, if he chooses, lead us contrary to reason, we may trust that in such cases he will make his directions unmistakably clear. Apart from such dramatic guidance, our responsibility is to make as sound a decision as possible, trusting that he in his providence will give us all the information we need to decide within his will. ¹⁵²

One point that is being made here is that if we do not have an authenticated, certain divine revelation (e.g. Scripture, Angel, vision, etc.) to act against reason, God's will is to be wise and act in

For further critiques of Smith's popular book see section 7.15.B.3-4. including important endnotes.

¹⁵⁰ For further discussion regarding reason's importance in interpreting Scripture see sections 2.5.E and 3.1.C and chapter 3.3.

¹⁵¹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Finding the Will of God*, (Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁵² Gary Friesen and J. Maxon, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Multnomah, 1980), 123. The very best book on a biblical view of decision making.

accordance with it. We are to act according to the dictates of reason unless we know we have a divine revelation commanding us otherwise. Joshua's instruction to merely circle Jericho thirteen times over seven days in order to demolish its walls would have been absolutely foolish, except for the fact that God miraculously and undoubtedly gave him a specific divine revelation to act against reason (cf. Josh 5:13-6:21).

Our dependence on reason is so God-ordained, that it requires nothing less than a miraculous revelation from God for us to righteously and wisely go against reason. Of course, many people today claim they have received a divine revelation to act against reason, and accordingly condone all kinds of irrational behavior in the name of God. As discussed thoroughly elsewhere, this is not *biblical faith*, but proud, human foolishness.¹⁵³

God's expectation that we use our reason to make important decisions is reflected in the OT as well when we read:

If you hear it said about one of the towns the LORD your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly [all of which require careful reasoning].

And if it is true and it has been proved [by reason] that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly [make a decision to] put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely . . . (Deut 13:12-15)

Notice that even in such an important decision concerning capital punishment, God did not promise some sort of direct divine revelation of His will, but rather, stated clearly that the careful and diligent use of their reason would lead them correctly (cf. Deut. 17:6; 1 Tim 5:19-20). Likewise, the Apostle Paul expected mature believers to use their reason in deciding court cases among them, with no need of divine revelation implied (cf. 1 Cor 6:1-6).

Along these lines, we should remember the high praise that *wisdom* receives in Scripture. One of the more common Hebrew words for wisdom is *sākal* which the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* defines as:

An intelligent knowledge of the reason. The process of thinking through a complex arrangement of thoughts resulting

¹⁵³ For further discussion of the difference between *biblical faith* and human foolishness see section 6.11.B and chapters 6.12-14.

in a wise dealing and use of good practical sense.¹⁵⁴

It is a reasoned wisdom that God intends, as reflected in the introduction to Proverbs:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom [*hokmâ*] and discipline; for understanding words of insight [*bin*]; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent [*sākal*] life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence [*ormâ*] to the simple, knowledge and discretion [*mezimmah*] to the young. (Prov 1:1-4)

Here we see several Hebrew words that are used throughout, particularly Proverbs, to refer to right thinking. While godly wisdom certainly involves many things including, “**the fear of the Lord**” (Prov 1:7), it hardly needs to be said that it requires the use of our reasoning faculties. The Hebrew word *ormâ* translated above as “**prudence**” contains the idea of thinking, planning, and reasoning in order to come to a decision. It can be used negatively (cf. Exod. 21:14; Josh 9:4), or positively as in the following proverbs where it is translated “**prudent.**” Notice the emphasis on the need to use our reason:

Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly (Prov 13:16).

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception (Prov 14:8).

A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps (Prov 14:15).

A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it (Prov 22:3).

The repeated advice in Proverbs to obtain counsel, is nothing more than a biblical endorsement of reasoning for decision making (cf. Prov 1:5; 11:14; 12:15; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; 24:6). Essentially, counsel is multiplied reasoning, the convergence of the thinking faculties of more than one person, which is why it is so valuable. Along these lines, M. Blaine Smith writes:

The value of counsel, in my opinion, lies not in providing direct insight into God’s will, but in the fact that through

¹⁵⁴ Louis Goldberg, “*sākal*,” *Theological Wordbook of Old Testament (TWOT)*, Gleason Archer, R. Laird Harris, Bruce K. Waltke eds. 2 Vols. (Moody, 1980), 877.

counsel a healthy mental process occurs in which we are inspired to think more creatively, to see new alternatives and to see old alternatives in a new light. The end result is a deeper understanding of the issues at stake in our decisions. .

None of the proverbs listed above say we must accept counsel as unerring divine leading. . . . The proverbs simply are not that specific. They stress that there is an advantage to many advisers and imply that through counseling we're helped to think more deeply, and we're strengthened to make wiser decisions.¹⁵⁵

The NT as well illustrates the importance of reason in decision making. For example, the Apostle Paul writes: **"Be wise [sophia] in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity,"** (Col 4:5) a process which requires careful reasoning.

Likewise, we read:

Be very careful [blepete: "discern mentally, perceive, cf. 7:23 ¹⁵⁶], then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise [sophoi], making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand [suniete] what the Lord's will is. (Eph 5:15-17)

To **"be very careful"** of anything obviously requires reasoning. NT scholar Peter O'Brien remarks that, "The adverb rendered 'carefully' signifies something done accurately, precisely, or after close attention has been given."¹⁵⁷ Likewise, **"making the most of every opportunity"** for God's purposes, foremost requires both moral and logical reasoning. So does understanding **"what the Lord's will is."** Accordingly, NT scholar F. F. Bruce (1910–1990) commented, "The doing of his will is not a matter of irrational impulse but of intelligent reflection and action."¹⁵⁸ Accordingly, the Apostle says the way in which we will **"understand what the Lord's will is"** is to **"not be foolish,"** suggesting the need for wise, rational thinking, not mystical impulses as some claim. We like the NLT rendering of verse 17 which reads, **"Don't act thoughtlessly."**

¹⁵⁵ Smith, 206-7.

¹⁵⁶ William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Zondervan, 2006), 1108.

¹⁵⁷ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1999), 380.

¹⁵⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1984), 379.

The Apostle Paul recognizes that moral and logical reasoning is the process by which we make many important decisions, as he implies when he says, **"One man considers [*krino*] one day more sacred than another; another man considers [*krinei*: judges] every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind [*nous*]"** (Rom 14:5).

Likewise, the significant decision of how much to give to the needy is portrayed as something we determine through reason. The Apostle writes, **"Each man should give what he has decided [*proērētai*: "intend considerably" ¹⁵⁹] in his heart to give"** (2 Cor 9:7). Likewise we read in Acts, **"The disciples, each according to his ability, decided [*ōrisan*] to provide help for the brothers living in Judea"** (Acts 11:29). All of the Greek words used in the NT to refer to decision making simply mean to determine with reason. ¹⁶⁰

The place of reason in decision making even applies to the important decision of marriage. Along these lines, Dr. Stott explains:

[T]ruths about God's general will regarding marriage Scripture will tell you. But Scripture will not tell you whether your wife is to be Jane or June or Joan or Janet! How then are you to decide this major question? There is only one possible answer, namely by using the mind and the common sense which God has given you. ¹⁶¹

Dr. Stott reflects the teaching of the Apostle Paul who encouraged someone considering marriage to simply settle, **"the matter in his own mind [*kardia*]"** and to make up **"his mind [*kardia*]"** (1 Cor. 7:37). Accordingly, Friesen and Maxon relate:

In a variety of ways Paul explains that the choice of celibacy or marriage is based upon spiritual expediency. He does not use the word "expediency," but his expressions are well summed up in that term. His procedure is to enumerate some of the advantages and disadvantages that characterize both states.

Paul's stress is upon the values of singleness. His reasons for this preference are as follows:

1. To avoid unnecessary worry (7:20-21)
2. To avoid needless troubles (7:28)
3. To make better use of limited time (7:29-31)

¹⁵⁹ Mounce, 1253.

¹⁶⁰ See Vine's, "Purpose" 499; "Judge, 336-7; "Think," 627.

¹⁶¹ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* by John Stott (InterVarsity, 1973), 46.

4. To be free from concern (7:32)
5. To be able to give undistracted attention to "the things of the Lord" (7:32)
6. To promote personal happiness (7:40)

Paul sums up the reasons for his recommendation of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7:35: "And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord." That is spiritual expediency!¹⁶²

And it illustrates the use of our reason to make one of the most important decisions of our lives.

Another important decision in the Christian life is the choosing of Church leaders. Is this accomplished through a mystical direct revelation of who is called? Not in Scripture. Accordingly, we read in Acts:

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them. (Acts 6:2-3)

It was not a direct divine revelation that told "**the Twelve**" that it "**would not be right**" to "**neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.**" Rather, they no doubt used their reason to recognize the problem and decide on a solution. They in turn encouraged the "**brothers**" to use their reason, based on certain criteria, to "**choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.**" And it should be noticed that the good reasoning abilities that are necessary for wisdom was a requirement for the men chosen for the task at hand.

On this issue, M. Blaine Smith writes:

There is another area where we're given some helpful insight into Paul's practical approach to guidance, and that is his appointment of leaders in the early church. We find a wealth of evidence that his selection of leaders was normally based not on supernatural calls but upon rational considerations. Although Paul himself received a dramatic call to the ministry, there is no indication that he ever required this same experience of others. When, for instance, he gives instructions about how to choose church leaders in I Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9, there is absolutely no mention of need

¹⁶² Friesen and Maxon, 125.

for a special call. Judgment is to be based purely on one's ability and the quality of one's Christian example. Likewise, where we see Paul choosing leaders himself, there is no indication he required a specific call.

Kenneth Pike observes two interesting examples of Paul's using reason in leadership selection. The first is Paul's choice of Silas and Timothy to be his missionary companions, in Acts 15:22 and Acts 16:1-3. From Paul's point of view, why did he choose the two? By divine orders? . . . One finds no evidence of such, but rather sees consecrated judgment in confident action on the basis of the proved character of the two men. Silas had first been chosen by a council as trustworthy, and as one of the "leading men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22); Timothy was "well spoken of by the brethren" (Acts 16:2). These two missionary calls were based on sound judgment, not on feelings.

Regarding Paul's disagreement with Barnabas over the selection of Mark to travel with them (Acts 16:36-41), Pike observes [that] . . . the first split of a "mission board" came on the basis of judgment over the fitness of a candidate. Neither Paul nor Barnabas argued that God had directly revealed to him that Mark should or should not go again to the field. The "sharp contention" was on the basis of judgment, since "Paul thought it not good to take with them him who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). Judgment, not feeling, as to God's guidance seems to be implied by the words "thought not good."

It appears, then, that Paul regarded rational judgment of a person's qualities as the prime factor constituting a call to Christian leadership. The need for a dramatic supernatural call, such as Paul himself received, was not emphasized. Likewise, our popular notion that a call may come through an inner sense of leading, without outward evidence of ability, finds no support in Paul's teaching.¹⁶³

It is instructive to study particularly through Acts and see how God guided His people. Of course there were several instances of miraculous, obvious, direct divine revelation, particularly for those designated as messengers of such revelation. Many today in *charismaticism* and *mega mysticism* insist such miraculous, divine leading is normative and necessary for all Christians today. Nonetheless, most of the personal guidance of the Apostles was accomplished through reasoning, not revelation.

¹⁶³ Smith, 122-3.

Accordingly, Friesen and Maxon note:

The [*mega mystical*] view [regarding decision making] has some weaknesses at this point. The first weakness is that the number of recorded cases [in Scripture of miraculous guidance] is not sufficient to constitute normative experience. In the first thirty years of the church's history covered by the book of Acts, there were at most fifteen to twenty instances of direct, personal [miraculous] guidance.

Many of these directions were given to the Apostle Paul. Yet within the framework of his total ministry, relatively few of his decisions were determined on the basis of such leading. Most of the time he had to weigh the apparent merits of various options before settling on a course of action. In other words, when he had a decision to make, he had to decide (cf. Acts. 15:36; Acts 20:16; Romans 1:10-13; 1 Corinthians 16:4-9; 2 Corinthians 1:15-2:4). The cases of direct [miraculous] guidance are clearly the exception to the rule, even in Paul's case. ¹⁶⁴

For example, against those who would suggest that the Apostles were primarily guided by supernatural visions and impulses, Luke records, **"Then the Apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided [*edoxe*: "to think"] to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas"** (Acts 15:22). The Greek here literally means it simply "seemed good" to them. ¹⁶⁵

The Apostle implies decision making based on reasoning, not a divine revelation when he says, **"So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens"** (1 Thess 3:1), **"I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus"** (Phil 2:25), and **"If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me"** (1 Cor 16:4).

While many in the Church today believe we need some sort of mystical peace, strong intuition, or divine sign in order to decide where to go, the Apostle's own travel planning reveals simply careful reasoning. The Apostle's use of human reason, not divine revelation is clearly implied in such remarks as:

Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided [*gnōmes*] to go back through Macedonia. . . . Paul had decided [*kekrikei*:

¹⁶⁴ Friesen and Maxon, 90.

¹⁶⁵ Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English (MLT)* (Zondervan, 1993), 391.

"to judge"] **to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost**" (Acts 20:3, 16).

Along the same lines, the Apostle tells the Corinthians:

Because I was confident of this, I planned [*eboulomēn*: "to determine with oneself"] **to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. When I planned** [*boulomenos*] **this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans** [*bouleuomai*] **in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?** (2 Cor 1:15-17)

Even the Apostle Paul made missionary plans simply with his reason, and the plans he speaks of here had changed.

In the Apostle's decision to visit Rome, he never communicated that there was a direct divine revelation to do so, but rather mentioned personal desires and practical reasons:

So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ. ²⁰**It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. . . .** ²²**This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.** ²³**But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you,** ²⁴**I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.** (Rom 15:19-20, 22, 24)

Accordingly, after a careful study of the Apostle's decision making methods, several have noted the centrality of using his reasoning. M. Blaine Smith writes:

For Paul, discerning God's will was mainly a matter of making sound, logical judgments, in light of what course appeared most glorifying to God. We must conclude that this process of rational discernment should also be our normal approach to discovering God's will. ¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Smith, 123.

Likewise, Friesen and Maxon conclude:

The question to which we are seeking a biblical answer is: In nonmoral areas, on what basis is the believer to make his decision? Observation of apostolic decision making has revealed that they did not attempt to discover God's [specific, amoral] will for such decisions. Their explanations for their plans are couched in phrases such as: "We thought it best," "I thought it necessary," "If it is fitting," "It is not desirable," "It seemed good," and simply "I have decided" (Titus 3:12). (Luke explained a decision Paul made with respect to an itinerary with the words, "for he was hurrying" [Acts 20:16].) Clearly these men were exercising their freedom of choice within God's moral will.¹⁶⁷

Along the same lines, Bruce Waltke remarks:

When Paul was in the city of Ephesus he saw God do a mighty work. . . . As Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, he told them that he wanted to visit them, but he added, "After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you - for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me" (1 Corinthians 16:5-9). Notice how Paul was flexible, knowing that he was close to God and doing the work the Lord had called him to, so that he had the ability to change his schedule according to the circumstances.

We can see clearly how the decisions made in the New Testament differ from the [miraculous] means used in the Old Testament. How should Paul escape Jerusalem? Should he circumcise Timothy? Where should he go next year? Rather than cast a lot and expect God to answer miraculously, he based his decisions on sound judgment in light of the circumstances.¹⁶⁸

Finally, in a very thorough article on this very subject, Robert Banks makes the following observations:

As for the extent of charismatic [direct, revelatory] guidance of Paul's movements, this appears to have taken place only a

¹⁶⁷ Friesen and Maxon, 187.

¹⁶⁸ Waltke, 157.

few times in the many visits Paul and his colleagues made during his various journeys: (1) a divine vision or word (Acts 16:9; 18:9), confirmed by group endorsement (Acts 16a); (2) the Spirit's largely general - or negative -guidance (Acts 13:2, 4; 16:6-7; 20:22; 21:4, 11 [through a miraculously authenticated Prophet ¹⁶⁹]), though these tend to occur at critical points such as at the beginning of the journeys, before a crucial new direction and at its culmination.

Other, seemingly noncharismatic, reasons mentioned by Luke for Paul's taking or not taking a particular route include: (1) his personal resolution (Acts 15:36; 19:21; 20:3, 13); (2) the presence of a synagogue (Acts 13:4, 13; 14:1; 15:17; 17:1, 10; 18:4, 19), especially during the initial and follow-up journeys; (3) the city's status and significance from a Roman or Hellenistic vantage point (Acts 16:12; 19:21); (4) a colleague's connection (Acts 13:4; Cf. 4:36); (5) local believers' decision (Acts 17:14-15); (6) fulfilling a promise to return (Acts 18:21 and Cf. 21:14). . . .

At other times, only with hindsight can we see how Paul's movements were determined by the main land routes or regular sea lanes that appeared before him. Looking back, we can also take note of the fact that he always seems to work within territory governed by Rome, only passing through other regions not under its protection. ¹⁷⁰

All of this should make us wary of those who suggest we constantly need direct divine guidance from God apart from using our reason. There are, no doubt, many times that people have unnecessarily supernaturalized a decision they have made by claiming that they were prompted by the Holy Spirit when actually their thoughts were simply produced by reason. ¹⁷¹ The Holy Spirit's primary function is controlling our reason rather than providing more *revelation* as the mystics claim.

The moral desires of our New Nature applied by our moral reason (conscience), and the divine revelation of Scripture

¹⁶⁹ Regarding our claim that all of these revelations of the Holy Spirit came through miraculously authenticated NT Prophets, a mode of revelation that no longer operates today, see section 14.13.F and chapters 9.1-9.2.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Banks, "The Role of Charismatic and Noncharismatic Factors in Determining Paul's Movements in Acts" in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins*, eds. Graham Stanton et. al. (Eerdmans, 2004), 129-30.

¹⁷¹ For further discussion on the exaggeration of the need and occurrence of *personal divine inspiration* for our decision making see Book 14.

interpreted and applied by our logical reason are very capable of making customized applications of God's will in virtually every circumstance, and are ordained and provided by God to do so.

Pastoral Practices

- Much of what has been discussed here could merely be boiled down to wisdom. Good reasoning is good wisdom. Therefore, consider intentionally endeavoring to grow in wisdom. Maybe read a chapter of Proverbs every day. Maybe study through Proverbs and categorize them topically. A study of OT characters, and particularly the mistakes they made, is one certain way God would have us grow in wisdom.

B) Reason & Spiritual Leadership

There are few things that church leaders do that are more important than making wise decisions. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul writes: **The elders who direct the affairs** [*proestētes*: to rule, manage, lead] **of the church well are worthy of double honor** (1 Tim 5:17). Leading any group of people, even God's people, requires wise decisions, and the most important aspect of this responsibility is reason. No one wants to follow a fool who makes foolish decisions because of faulty reasoning. Of course, their reason needs to foremost be applied to the revelation of Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16), but contrary to *prophetism*¹⁷² and *mega mysticism*, God is not providing extra-biblical revelation for the decisions that must be made.

Likewise, Moses' qualifications for leaders were expressed when he instructed the Israelites: **"Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you"** (Deut 1:13), all qualities that certainly require the use of reason. We see the same leadership qualities emphasized when the Apostles tell the early Church, **"choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom"** (Acts 6:3). While wisdom in the Scriptures is primarily a moral concept, requiring moral reasoning, it certainly is not absent

¹⁷² *Prophetism* is the belief that God is still providing biblical Prophets today who possess new, divinely authoritative revelation. For further discussion see Book 9.

of logical, prudent reasoning as well.¹⁷³ All of which is why Job was describing a curse when he said God: “**deprives the leaders of the Earth of their reason; He sends them wandering through a trackless waste**” (12:24).

In the previous chapter we discussed the importance of self-control in the Christian life and the place that reason plays in such a virtue. This aspect of right reasoning is especially applied to spiritual leaders in Scripture. The Apostle writes: “**[T]he overseer must be . . . temperate [nephalion], self-controlled [sōphrona]**” (1 Tim 3:2). Likewise, to Titus he writes that “**An elder must be . . . one . . . who is self-controlled [sōphrona] . . . and disciplined [egkratē]**” (Tit 1:6-8). “**In the same way**” leading women “**are to be . . . temperate [nēphalious]**,” because this is the only way they can control their desires and emotions so that they are “**trustworthy in everything**” (1 Tim 3:11).

The Apostle is saying the same thing when he warns of people who will abandon reason and, “**Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths,**” (2 Tim 4:3-4), but then exhorts Timothy, “**But you, keep your head [nēphe] in all situations**” (2 Tim 4:5). In other words, the Apostle says that some people are going to give into foolish thinking, and the Apostle wants Timothy to be wise, reasonable, prudent, and smart. Such characteristics are an important part of being a mature Christian in general. The Apostle says, “**the older men [are] to be temperate [nēphalious] . . . self controlled [sōphronas]**” (Tit 2:2), and “**older women**” are to “**train the younger women to . . . be self controlled [sōphronas]**” (Tit 2:3-5), all of which require logical and moral reason.

C) Reasoning Rightly

C.1) The Limits of Reasoning

While our God-given reason is certainly at the center of our personal understanding and knowledge, its powers are not unlimited. First of all, in general it could be said that all the limitations and weaknesses of our reason are simply reflections of

¹⁷³ For further discussion on the nature of biblical wisdom see chapters 14.17-14.18.

the limitations and weaknesses of being human. Emotions, motives, physical stress, and a myriad of other circumstances can severely hamper even the potential capacities of reason. Still, as Arthur Holmes has said: "The way to avoid error is not to avoid reasoning (if that were even possible) but to improve reasoning."¹⁷⁴ While God has certainly made our reason powerful, He has not made it all-sufficient. This is why we must trust Him, the only all-sufficient, all-knowing One, for the most important needs in our life.

Secondly, it is obvious that our reason's capacity for understanding is limited. We are not God. We cannot fully comprehend all the ways and works of God, including such doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation. But as have pointed out elsewhere, we need not fully understand these things in order to accept them as true.¹⁷⁵

Thirdly, as discussed further elsewhere, the spiritually repressed *devil-darkened reason* of the non-Christian is severely limited by the affects of its rebellion against the God of truth.¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, mere reasoning by unregenerated humans can never lead a person to a saving relationship with God.¹⁷⁷ Here, however, we would point out as we discussed elsewhere, that the affects of sin on human reason are often exaggerated, and there is seldom a recognition of the significant change that occurs when our reason is liberated by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, one of the things that hampers the proper function of our moral and logical reasoning is sin, both in believers and unbelievers.

C.2) Principles of Good Reasoning

Possessing *Spirit-liberated reason* does not ensure that we will always reason correctly, it simply gives us an opportunity that unregenerated humans do not have. If we are living in the flesh instead of the Spirit our moral and even logical reasoning will be

¹⁷⁴ Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* (Intervarsity, 1983), 89.

¹⁷⁵ Regarding the claim that we need not fully understand something to accept it as true see section 2.9.C.

¹⁷⁶ For further discussion of the affects of the *devil-darkened reason* of the unregenerate see chapters 4.12-14.

¹⁷⁷ For further discussion of the biblical fact that mere reasoning apart from regeneration can never produce salvation see section 2.12.B and 7.4.C.6.

¹⁷⁸ The important difference between the reasoning abilities of the regenerate vs. the unregenerate are discussed in chapters 4.12-14.

faulty. It is to the Christian that the writer of Hebrews warns that our **"heart"** [i.e. reason] can be, **"hardened by sin's deceitfulness"** (Heb 3:13). Accordingly, there are many sinful attitudes that can hinder correctly reasoning to the truth, understanding and believing it, and obeying it. While in a subsequent chapter we cover this issue more in depth, particularly as it concerns the unregenerate,¹⁷⁹ here we will make some practical points that apply to the believer as well.

First, we can note the affect of pride on properly reasoning. The vital relationship between humility and good reasoning is stated clearly in Scripture when we read: **"When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom"** (Prov 11:2). Specifically concerning a humility toward God, Scripture says, **"The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom"** (Prov 15:33). Such a lifestyle of humility and God-glorifying reasoning is demonstrated by Daniel when the angel tells him: **"Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard"** (Dan 10:12). Daniel knew that humbling ourselves and understanding properly with our reason go together.

Accordingly, we read in Proverbs: **"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight"** (Prov 3:5-6). This is not a warning against using reason, but rather a warning against reasoning merely from our own whimsical thoughts without the revelation that God provides. Contrary to arrogant *rationalism*,¹⁸⁰ our **"own understanding"** apart from God's revelation is inadequate, but acknowledging, using, and applying such revelation is crucial to good reasoning, and a person believing in God will do so.

Along these lines, the eighteenth century Christian philosopher Thomas Reid (1710-1796) wrote in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* something that seems to relate to the affects that pride can have on reasoning:

When a man has, with labour and ingenuity, wrought up a hypothesis into a system, he contracts a fondness for it, which is apt to warp the best judgment. . . . When a man has laid out all his ingenuity in fabricating a system, he views it with

¹⁷⁹ For further discussion of the affects of the *devil-darkened reason* of the unregenerate see chapters 4.12-14.

¹⁸⁰ *Rationalism* is the exclusive dependence on human reason while denying the authority of divine revelation. For further discussion see chapter 2.9.

the eye of a parent; he strains phenomena to make them tally with it, and makes it look like the work of nature.¹⁸¹

The way in which pride can hinder proper reasoning illustrates how love can enhance it. Accordingly, the Apostle warned that mere, **“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”** (1 Cor 8:1). An intellect not controlled by love will result in empty and blinding pride, thwarting the purpose of our God-given reason. Accordingly, the Apostle wrote as well, **“If I . . . can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge [with my reason] . . . but have not love, I am nothing”** (1 Cor 13:2). If our reason is not yielded to God’s purposes, then all the other right reasoning in the world will be vain.

Therefore, if we are prone to please the world, instead of the King, our reasoning will be distorted. One sinful desire that corrupts reasoning rightly is the desire to please people instead of God. Allowing such “peer-pressure” to control us will lead to some very bad decisions. Along these lines, one unfortunate illustration of allowing human-centered desires to pervert God-honoring reason is found in the following from the nineteenth century liberal OT scholar C. A. Briggs (1841-1913), co-author of the well known *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*:

[T]he conscience and religious feeling of modern evangelical Christians [rightly in Brigg’s opinion] revolt against the . . . assertion of traditional dogma that the whole heathen world is lost forever in eternal punishment. No doctrine can ever maintain its ground when it is condemned by conscience, or the religious feeling, or any of the forms of the human Reason.¹⁸²

Unfortunately, this very intelligent man allowed incorrect beliefs, which resulted in human-centered rather than God-centered desires (i.e. “religious feeling”) to hinder his reason’s ability to properly interpret the clear teaching of Scripture that without Christ people are indeed, “lost forever in eternal punishment.”

We must be careful of the bad beliefs, desires, and feelings that would keep us from reasoning rightly to correctly interpret and teach Scripture and consistently and whole-heartedly obey God. Along these lines, one Bible teacher has written:

¹⁸¹ Thomas Reid in *Works*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, 2 vols., (James Thin, 1895), i. 250.

¹⁸² Charles Augustus Briggs, *The Bible, the Church and the Reason: The Three Great Fountains of Divine Authority* (T. & T. Clark, 1892), 68.

We sometimes speak of people being "conveniently deaf" to human communications, but there is such a thing also as being conveniently deaf towards God; and it is a malady that afflicts us all. There are certain things we just do not want to be told. They would be too inconvenient, too upsetting, too exacting. The readjustment they would involve would be too painful. They would commit us to tasks more difficult and troublesome than we desire to undertake, or they would interfere with certain indulgences we have been allowing ourselves.

The rich young man in the Gospels was so eager to get guidance from Jesus that he came to Him running (who says he was not eager?), asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. He had his guidance, but it was something he did not want to listen to: "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." But he could never again complain of the lack of revelation.

[T]here is no end to the cleverness of our self-sophistication in this matter. We are never such skilled logicians as when we are trying to find reasons for doing the things we want to do. We are never such eloquent orators as when we are telling ourselves why we should not do the things we do not want to do.

How Sigmund Freud humiliated (and offended) us when he first began telling us that our subconscious rationalization of our prejudices far surpasses in elaboration the conscious use of our reason in the discovery of truth! We do find it quite surprisingly easy to explain out of existence any voice we do not want to hear, any call or any conviction that is unwelcome to us.¹⁸³

Again, we must be very careful how we reason to the decisions we make for or against God. And it is proper reasoning, leading to belief of the truth and right desires that will protect us from the distorted and eventually sinful reasoning described above.

Pastoral Practices

- One of the ways in which God wants His family living in humble and God-glorifying interdependence is the practice of obtaining counsel from one another when making decisions. This is one of

¹⁸³ Reference unavailable.

the most neglected biblical disciplines in the Christian Church today, particularly in America where independence is thought to be a virtue. It's not, and it actually displeases God a great deal.

The exhortations in Proverbs regarding the value of wisdom can be understood to apply to counsel. Accordingly, we can read "**Wisdom [wise counsel] is supreme; therefore get wisdom [wise counsel]. Though it cost all you have, get understanding [wise counsel]**" (Prov 4:7).

Find wise people and spend time with them, learning how they think. As Solomon said, "**He who walks with the wise grows wise**" (Prov 13:20). Determine to obtain counsel more faithfully in the future. Study the area of counsel in the Scriptures, especially Proverbs, and gain some convictions on it if you are lacking them. Determine now who are Christians that you respect enough that you would also respect their opinion on a matter. And the next time you have a decision to make, whether big or small, get counsel.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our heavenly Father, we seek you today to help us be controlled by the Spirit so that we can use the reason you gave us to make the kinds of decisions that bless others and glorify You.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why is reason so important in decision making?
- 2) What are some passages of Scripture that demonstrate the use of reason instead of extra-biblical revelation to make important decisions?
- 3) What are some verses that support our claim that good reasoning is a requirement for Christian maturity and Church leadership? Why is this so?
- 4) What are some attitudes that hinder reasoning rightly?

Recommended Reading

- The rest of *Knowing Our God* Book 4: *Biblical Psychology*.
- *Knowing Our God* chapter 2.4 on the philosophical (epistemological) importance of human reason.
- *Knowing Our God* chapter 7.15 on divine guidance and decision making.
- *Knowing Our God* book 14 on the issue of claims to extra-biblical guidance in decision making.
- John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (InterVarsity, 1973). A succinct, timely, and insightful treatise on the place of reason in the Christian's life.
- Gary Friesen and J. Maxon, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Multnomah, 1980). The very best book on a biblical view of decision making.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.5

Desires of the "Heart"

The Drive of the Heart

Primary Points

- The desires that God has created us to experience are merely a reflection of the perfect desires of God Himself.
 - More specifically, we would suggest that human desires are a reflection of God the Father.
 - Desires are essentially decisions made by our reason, based on beliefs produced by reason, all guided towards what will bring us happiness.
 - Not all beliefs result in desires, and therefore have very little effect on us.
 - We are much more aware of the desires that control our life, than we are the beliefs that produced those desires and ultimately control us.
 - Scripture does not tell us so much what God believes, but what He desires.
 - Likewise, the Scriptures speak much more of human desires than beliefs.
 - It is not conflicting desires of a "will" that describes our struggle for holiness. It is the conflicting beliefs of two belief systems within us.
 - Our desires can be categorized into moral and amoral. By *amoral* desires we do not mean *immoral*. *Amoral* issues are *extra-biblical* in the sense that God does not speak of them in Scripture, and therefore leaves to our own reasoning and preferences. And because sinning against God involves morality, you cannot sin in an *amoral* desire. This is contrary to many "Christian" legalists and *mega mystics*.
 - Logical reasoning and personal preferences play a large part in forming our desires and thus control our life.
 - The Spirit's primary function is controlling our *desires*, rather than providing more *revelation* as the mystics claim.
-
- In the end, sinful desires and sin is a result of faulty reasoning.

A) The Sources of Human Desires

A.1) God's image

The desires that God has created us to experience are merely a reflection of the perfect desires of God Himself. When we think about what is meant by a human "will" and "volition" we certainly recognize a divine, not just a human, attribute. For example, the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines the human will as the "ability to desire an outcome and to purpose to bring it about."¹⁸⁴ We immediately think of the first chapter of Ephesians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will . . . And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ . . . In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him Who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, (Eph 1:3-5, 9-11)

While the desires of people are often thwarted, sometimes by God Himself (cf. Ps 33:10), God's "**perfect will**" (Rom 12:2) never is (cf. Eph 3:11; Isa 14:27).¹⁸⁵ And God's will is always perfect, while ours is not. Nonetheless, the desires of our "heart" are a reflection of the desires in God's "heart."

More specifically, we would suggest that human desires are a reflection of God the Father. Where is the will of the Godhead primarily placed in Scripture? God the Father. This is explicit in the

¹⁸⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Simon Blackburn, ed. 2nd ed. (Oxford Press, 2005), 388.

¹⁸⁵ When we claim that God's will is never thwarted we need to recognize different aspects, or a hierarchy, of His will. For example, while human sin and the death of His Son could be said to violate God's *moral* will (i.e. He has established laws against evil and murder), they perfectly fulfill His *ultimate* will (cf. Rom 9:17-18; Acts 4:27-28). God has the power to work "**out everything in conformity with the purpose of His [ultimate, perfect] will**" (Eph 1:11), and "**in all things God works for the [ultimate] good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose**" (Rom 8:28).

passage from Ephesians above which describes the decisions regarding the plan of salvation as originating from the Father. Thus, Christian theologians have routinely observed that the plan of our salvation was generated by the *will* of God the Father, obtained by the *works* of God the Son, and applied by the *indwelling* of God the Spirit.

Christ Himself points to the Father as the source of the divine will in the Godhead when He taught us to pray, **"Our Father in Heaven . . . Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven"** (Matt 6:9-10). Likewise, the King said, **"For I have come down from Heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me"** (John 6:38). The desires of our heart are especially a reflection of God the Father.

A.2) Human Reason Variouslly Influenced

Ultimately it is because God created us with the ability to reason like He does, that we have desires. As described elsewhere, our desires are not produced by some separate faculty called the "will" apart from and against our reason.¹⁸⁶ Desires are essentially decisions made by our reason, based on beliefs produced by reason, all guided towards what will bring us happiness. While reasoning is what produces desires, there are many things that influence that reasoning such as our New Nature, sinful nature, conscience, personal experiences, personality, and spiritual gifts, many of which are discussed elsewhere.¹⁸⁷

Here we wish to illustrate some of our suggestions concerning the sources of *moral* desires in the "heart" of a Christian. First, of course, is Scripture, which is the revelational foundation of all other uniquely Christian influences on our desires.

Secondly, the New Nature we receive at regeneration is an important source of desires. Accordingly, we read in Ephesians:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude [including desires] of your minds; and to put on the new self [New Nature], created to be like God in [desires for] true righteousness and holiness. (4:22-24)

¹⁸⁶ For further discussion of the error of "faculty psychology" see chapter 4.2.

¹⁸⁷ For further discussion of the desires produced by our spiritual gifts see chapter 7.13.

How else does our New Nature affect us except by producing desires to be acted upon? That is certainly how our old nature affects us (cf. v. 22). The conflict between our “**old self**” and “**new self**” involves desires and is vividly illustrated in Galatians:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Gal 5:16-17 NASB; cf. Rom 7:14-25)

In other words, the desires of the “**flesh**” impede the desires of our New Nature from being the sole influence on us and therefore acting as a Christian desires to with their New Nature. The Apostle goes on to add that we can be “**led by,**” “**live by,**” and “**keep in step with**” the desires of the Spirit (Gal 18, 25) as opposed to the “**passions and desires**” of the “**sinful nature**” (v. 24). Therefore, we see that these two “natures” in us are a significant source of the moral (or immoral) desires that affect our reasoning.¹⁸⁸ In addition, we see why our desires are not perfect like God’s desires. His mind has not been trained to sin as ours has.¹⁸⁹

Another primary source of our moral desires is our conscience. Obviously, for the Christian, Scripture is to be the supreme source of the moral knowledge with which the conscience is to be trained with. However, consciences can also produce different desires (and dislikes) in people according to influences from culture, family and personal experience. Accordingly, in the context of the Christian’s conscience, the Apostle Paul writes: “**One man considers one day**

¹⁸⁸ NT scholar R. N. Longenecker writes regarding Galatians 5:17:

[B]ehind the individual believer Paul sees two ethical forces that seek to control a person’s thought and activity. . . . Here . . . Paul gives a précis of his basic soteriological anthropology, which underlies . . . his whole understanding of humanity. . . . Since “sin entered the world” “the flesh” and “the Spirit” are diametrically opposed to one another, with the result that one cannot do what he or she knows to be right when in the “flesh”. . . .

In effect, Gal 5:17 sets out in rudimentary fashion what is later spoken of more fully in Rom 7:14-25, with both passages expressing the plight of humanity . . . as being torn between direction by “the flesh” or direction by “the Spirit.” (*Galatians*, WBC [Nelson, 1990], 245-6.

¹⁸⁹ For further discussion of the divine purpose for our New Nature see chapter 7.12.

more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (i.e. conscience)" (Rom 14:5). Therefore, we see that the conscience is also an important source of the moral desires that act upon our will.¹⁹⁰

The final uniquely Christian source of moral desires we will suggest is spiritual gifts. Elsewhere we point out that such gifts as evangelism, pastoring, teaching, mercy, giving, and leading (cf. Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6-8) essentially produce unique desires to serve God and people in certain ways.

B) The Nature of Human Desires

B.1) Beliefs vs. Desires In God & Us

Not all beliefs result in desires, and therefore have very little effect on our life. My belief that daffodils are yellow is true, but such a belief has little, if any opportunity to turn into a desire that would affect my life. This is why our beliefs concerning God are especially important, for they are the most fertile ground for the growth of the most valuable and life-changing desires.

Because beliefs are beneath desires and often do not even result in them, desires are a more evident part of our life. We are much more aware of the desires that control our life, than we are the beliefs that produced those desires and ultimately control us. However, while beliefs are more epistemological fundamental to the direction of our life, desires are practically so. This has at least two effects.

One, this may be one reason why we have been so tempted to conceive of a human faculty of the "will." It is rather easy to imagine that particularly those beliefs that do not turn into desires remain in our reason, but that those that result in desires move to a "will." Nonetheless, reason is the only mental faculty we have, or need, as it is fully capable of producing, holding, and acting upon our desires.

The second reflection of the fact that desires are the more evident and practical controlling aspect of a person is that even Scripture speaks much more about their effect than beliefs. For example, Scripture does not tell us so much what God believes, but

¹⁹⁰ For further discussion of the development of the conscience see section 2.5.C. Concerning the practical importance of the conscience see chapter 3.2.

what He desires. While we are told clearly and repeatedly that He wanted to save us, we have to dig some in Scripture to understand *why*? What are the beliefs of God that led to His desires to save us? This can be illustrated in the following passage that speaks clearly and repeatedly of God's desires, but not His underlying beliefs:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For He chose [desired] us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love [a desire] ⁵ He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure [happiness] and will [desire]— ⁶ to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that He lavished on us with all wisdom [sophia] and understanding [phronēsei: thinking, beliefs!]. ⁹ And He made known to us the mystery of His will [desires] according to His good pleasure [happiness], which He purposed [desired] in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In Him we were also chosen [desired], having been predestined according to the plan [desire] of Him Who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will [desires], ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:3-12)

The Bible describes even God being controlled by His desires. But what are the contents (beliefs) of God's "**wisdom and understanding**" that resulted in the many beliefs described here? More specifically, what divine beliefs are behind God's ultimate desire for pleasure and glory (cf. vs. 5-6, 9, 12), an idea discussed elsewhere, ¹⁹¹ and clearly reflected in this passage? Now we are getting to the point where the Apostle said elsewhere:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? (Rom 11:33-34)

¹⁹¹ For further discussion of God's own desires for happiness and glory see section 4.1.C.

In both Ephesians 1 and Romans 9-11 the Apostle is sharing all he knows and understands about why God wanted to save us. In both passages he tells us that God desires to save us because He desires to be glorified (cf. Rom 9:18, 22-23). Yet the Apostle does not tell us why God desires these things, or the beliefs that resulted in these desires.

Elsewhere we have suggested that *by experience* our human reason produces *beliefs* regarding what will make us happy, therefore creating *desires* for those things.¹⁹² But this will not do for how God comes to His desires, for all of His beliefs and subsequent desires have existed perfectly from eternity past. The most we can conjecture is that God's desires to be glorified and happy stem from a belief that these things are the most valuable and virtuous attainments of any being, including God Himself.

Likewise, the Scriptures speak much more of human desires than beliefs. While beliefs are the underlying principle controlling us, Scripture is more interested in practical theology than the philosophical kind. No doubt there is a great emphasis on the fundamental need for truth and right beliefs, but the life of the Christian is more often described as a matter of desires. For example the Apostle writes:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law [desires] at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law [desires] at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law [desires] of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law [desires] of sin at work within my members. (Rom 7:14-23; cf. Gal 5:16-25)

¹⁹² Regarding how desires are developed see section 4.1.B-C.

One gets the impression that we are merely a bundle of desires. However, it is important to remember that we do not change by merely changing our desires. We will only change our desires by changing our beliefs and a change in desires will automatically flow from that.

At bottom, it is not conflicting desires of a “will” that describes our struggle for holiness. Actually, it is the conflicting beliefs of two belief systems within us. The “**sin living in me**” programs us to believe sin will ultimately make us happy, and part of us therefore desires those things. The Spirit (New Nature) is the *Person* (not just a will) in us that knows holiness will ultimately make us happy, and therefore desires those things. Which system of beliefs and desires we choose to abide by will direct our actions.

The Apostle described this process when he wrote:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern [e.g. beliefs and resulting desires] **of this world** [which has trained the sinful nature], **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind** [including its beliefs which will change your desires]. **Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.** (Rom 12:2).

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B.2) Moral & Amoral Desires

Our desires can be categorized into moral and amoral. Webster’s defines *moral* as: “relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior . . . sanctioned by or operative on one’s conscience or ethical judgment.”¹⁹⁴ Here we can distinguish between holy and evil desires. How do we do that? Every desire explicitly supported in Scripture is holy, and every desire explicitly condemned by Scripture is evil.

For example, the Apostle’s description of what love is, and what it is not, in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is a clear list of holy desires (e.g. to be patient, kind, forgiving, truthful, to protect, trust, hope, persevere) and evil desires (to be envious, boastful, proud, rude, self-seeking, angry, evil). *All* of God’s moral desires are communicated in Scripture and reflected by the Holy Spirit that

¹⁹³ The definitions, nature, and relationships of all the components that make up the Christian and operate for their sanctification (e.g. flesh, Spirit, etc.) is quite complicated. A good discussion can be found in George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* rev. ed. (Eerdmans, 1993).

¹⁹⁴ Webster’s Dictionary online at www.webstersdictionary.org.

dwells within us in our New Nature. And it is good that we know them because evil desires are sin, and if we are consumed by them we are not even saved.

However, it is important to recognize that God does not have an opinion on everything. Whether we choose grilled prime rib or boiled lima beans for dinner does not matter to Him, although we may have a fairly strong desire in this regard. Such desires are *amoral* in nature. By *amoral* desires we do not mean *immoral*. Webster's simply defines amoral as, "being neither moral nor immoral; lying outside the sphere to which moral judgments apply."¹⁹⁵

Accordingly, *amoral* issues are *extra-biblical* in the sense that God does not speak of them in Scripture, and therefore leaves to our own reasoning and preferences. And because sinning against God involves morality, you cannot sin in an *amoral* desire.

This is contrary to many "Christian" legalists who add to Scripture with their *extra-biblical* traditions concerning a variety of things. They label too many desires regarding dress, music, etc. as sinful because they've made amoral issues into moral ones. Likewise, *mega mystics* who claim God desires to give us specific direction in all sorts of amoral, extra-biblical issues (who to marry, what job to choose, etc.), have also greatly increased the number of sinful desires we may have because they have unnecessarily made many amoral issues regarding such decisions into moral ones, if indeed God has a specific opinion as they claim.¹⁹⁶

A good example of personal preference and logical reasoning (instead of legalistic traditions and *mega mystical* signs and promptings from the Spirit) working to create desires that effect an important decision is in the area of marriage. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul writes:

If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. (1 Cor 7:36-38)

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ For further discussion of the error of *mega mysticism* in regards to divine guidance see Book 14.

While there are other biblical rules concerning a decision to marry,¹⁹⁷ after these have been followed, it is an amoral decision, ultimately based on the personal desires of the person. These desires may come from logical reasoning regarding the costs and benefits of marriage, which the Apostle mentions in this very passage (cf. v. 2, 28-35). Our wants in such a matter will also be dependent upon desires produced by our marital gift as well (cf. v. 6).¹⁹⁸ Finally, desires regarding marriage may depend a great deal on simply personal preferences, the reason for which may be difficult to discern. Therefore, we see that logical reasoning, and personal preferences play a large part in forming our desires and thus control our life.

C) Divinely Desiring: *Spirit-controlled reasoning*

As our beliefs are transformed by the Word of God, our desires are changed to align with the desires of the Holy Spirit living in us. While He always desires holiness, we do not. Nonetheless, as our beliefs become more conformed to Scripture and our desires more conformed to the Spirit, we find ourselves living more “in the Spirit.”

God knows if He changes our desires, He therefore changes virtually everything else about our life. The essence of being born again is having the Holy Spirit come to live inside of us. Subsequently, His primary function is controlling our *desires*, rather than providing more *revelation* for our beliefs or guidance as the mystics claim. The Spirit’s inspiration of Scripture and liberation of our reason goes a long way to providing the revelation we need, but what we also need is holy desires and this is the main work and “**fruit of the Spirit**” (Gal 5:22).

We need to recognize the importance of our being regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Those without the Spirit have only one nature, the sinful one, which “**is hostile to God. . . . does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so**” (Rom 8:7). But the born again Christian has been indwelt with the Holy Spirit, dethroning the sinful nature, and making His fruits the normal operating principles in their life (cf. Gal 5:22-25).

The affects of spiritual regeneration on the whole “heart” of humans is illustrated by the Apostle Paul when he writes: “**God did**

¹⁹⁷ For further discussion of decision making as reflected in getting married see section 7.15.D.1.

¹⁹⁸ For further discussion on marital gifts see section 7.13.B.4.

not give us a spirit [Spirit] that makes us afraid but a spirit [Spirit] of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7 NCV). As Christians, the indwelling Holy Spirit gives us “**power**” to overcome sinful *emotions* such as fear, empower holy *desires* such as “**love,**” and liberates our *reason* to exercise the “**self-control**” necessary to steer our emotions and desires according to God’s will.

In the end, sinful desires and sin is a result of faulty reasoning. When we have wrong beliefs (e.g. what will make us truly happy) influencing our desires, we will desire sinful things. However, emotions can play a critical part in properly reasoning as well, as we discuss in the next chapter.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we praise You for the Holy Spirit in us Who gives us the opportunity to live the same desires You have. We commit ourselves today to taking full advantage of that blessing.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do we suggest that desire is especially a reflection of God the Father?
- 2) How are our desires formed?
- 3) What is the ultimate goal of our desires?
- 4) Even though beliefs are at the foundation of even God's desires, why does Scripture primarily speak of the latter instead of the former?
- 5) Why do you think Scripture speaks much more of human desires than beliefs?
- 6) How do we describe in psychological terms the struggle for holiness? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 7) What is the difference between moral and amoral desires? Why is it important to distinguish between them?
- 9) Why do we claim that sin is essentially a result of faulty reasoning? Do you agree or disagree?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.6

Emotions of the “Heart”

The Voice of the Heart

Overall Objective

Better understand the God-ordained purpose of our emotions and how they affect our spiritual life.

Table of Topics

A) The Nature of Human Emotion

A.1) The Meaning of Emotion

A.2) The Place of Emotion

A.3) The Power of Emotion

B) The Source of Human Emotion: *God*

C) Feeling Right: *Reason-controlled emotions*

C.1) Helpful Effects of Emotion

C.2) Harmful Effects of Emotion

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Emotion is the voice of the heart reflecting what we believe.
- Emotions were created to be reactionary and follow reason.
- The fact that both biblical love and faith can exist without emotion helps to put it in proper perspective.
- Every human emotion can also be found in God.
- God created women to be more emotional because God is more emotional than most males and He wants His full image reflected in humanity.
- The fact that all human emotions can be found in God demonstrates that no emotion is intrinsically evil, including lust, jealousy, and hate. These emotions are perfectly holy in God and illustrate the fact that, **"There is a [proper] time for everything"** even **"A time to love and a time to hate"** (Eccl 3:1, 8).
- The morality of an emotion depends on its motive and purpose, or the desire behind it.
- A biblically *correct love* can exist toward our enemies that does not involve positive emotions, the *complete love* we are to have for our God must include them.
- Our reason enables us to worship God *correctly* ("in truth"), our "spirit," (emotions) enable us to worship Him *completely*.
- What has aided evil more than emotion? God's primary point of influence with us is our reason. Satan's is our emotions.
- Nothing God-pleasing or God-ordained occurs by our emotions acting independently from our reason.
- It is the "high" that emotion offers that attracts us to it and that addicts us to it. Sin makes us *feel* like nothing else. And if all we want is to *feel*, sin will draw us in.
- Many of the problems in the Church today would be remedied by more and deeper *thinking*, instead of *feeling*.
- C. S. Lewis: "The heart never takes the place of the head; but can and should obey it."
- Relying on emotions is particularly dangerous in decision making. Unfortunately some believe a strong *feeling* = "God's voice." Since when is a mere "feeling" a good indicator of what is true? It is virtues (i.e. love, humility, self-control) that enhance God-pleasing decision making, not feelings. There is not a single verse of Scripture that would suggest that our life should be led more by feelings instead of reason.

A) The Nature of Human Emotion

A.1) The Meaning of Emotion: *The voice of the "heart"*

As with all other topics concerning the human "heart," the place and nature of emotions is a difficult one and we do not profess to offer anything close to a complete treatise here on the matter. We might start with asking, what is more human than emotion? Emotion is an integral part of the "heart" God has created within us. Webster's defines "emotion" as:

the affective aspect of consciousness. a state of feeling. a psychic and physical reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling and physiologically involving changes that prepare the body for immediate vigorous action.

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While this is a rather *unemotional* definition of emotion it reminds us of a few things. First, notice how close our feelings are tied to our desires. Nonetheless, these things can be distinguished. We can recognize discouragement as a feeling and love as a desire/decision. We can also recognize that feelings, like discouragement, can affect our desires/decisions. However, in the end, we know that there is hardly such a thing as desire without feelings and it would be difficult to imagine the presence of one without the other.²⁰⁰

Secondly, notice that emotion is defined as a *reaction*, which may in part distinguish it from desires as well. Desires are more a

¹⁹⁹ Webster's Dictionary; online at www.websterdictionary.org.

²⁰⁰ The difficulty of distinguishing between emotions and desires is especially demonstrated in Jonathan Edwards' famous writing on this subject entitled *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (online at ccel.org). Accordingly, he seems to include both desires and emotions in his "affections." He writes concerning his own definition of "affections": "The affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul" (Ibid.). In other words, for Edwards, "affections" are simply strong desires.

This would seem to expose a minor flaw in N. R. Needham's very helpful modernized and abridged version of the *Treatise* in which he simply refers to the "affections" as "emotion." (*The Experience That Counts!* [Grace Publications Trust, 1997], 10-11). Edwards is not only speaking of emotion, but essentially strong desires.

Nonetheless, while Edwards rather mixes desires and feelings in his "affections," his thoughts generally apply equally well to both

product of a reasoning process, whereas emotions are a reaction to the fulfillment or unfulfillment of our desires. In other words, emotion was created to *follow* our beliefs and desires, not dictate them. We will have more to say about this below.

Finally, we notice that emotions directly affect the body, which would be difficult to say for our beliefs or desires. Truth and desires *in themselves* do not make us cry, shake, laugh, or turn red; but grief, fear, happiness, and anger will.

The definition we find for “feeling” in *Webster’s* more precisely (and emotionally) describes our topic:

FEELING, EMOTION, AFFECTION, SENTIMENT, PASSION mean a subjective response to a person, thing, or situation. FEELING denotes any partly mental, partly physical response marked by pleasure, pain, attraction, or repulsion; it may suggest the mere existence of a response but imply nothing about the nature or intensity of it; EMOTION carries a strong implication of excitement or agitation but, like FEELING, encompasses both positive and negative responses; AFFECTION applies to feelings that are also inclinations or likings; SENTIMENT often implies an emotion inspired by an idea; PASSION suggests a very powerful or controlling emotion.²⁰¹

While such technical definitions of emotion can be helpful, we like the one suggested by John Eldredge:

Emotions are the voice of the heart. . . . Not the heart, but its voice. They express the deeper movements of the heart, as when we weep over the loss of someone we love, or when we cheer at the triumph of a son’s team at the state championships.²⁰²

A.2) The Proper Place of Emotion

We are intrigued with Eldredge’s idea of emotion being “the voice of the heart.” Indeed, how do we most clearly perceive our beliefs, or most powerfully experience our desires, than in our feelings. Mere reflection by our reason may not always be the most accurate indicators of what is really occurring in our “heart,” but our feelings usually are. For sure our feelings are the best indicator of our greatest desires. But our feelings also may be the best

²⁰¹ *Webster’s*.

²⁰² John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead* (Nelson, 2003), 42.

reflection of our true beliefs. For example, you cannot honestly say that you believe there is no reason to fear someone or something while at the same time you experience fear when you encounter these very things.

Another indication of the importance of emotion is the damage that can occur with their continual suppression. Similar to the feelings (senses) of our body that alert us to the pleasure or pain we are “physically” experiencing, so our “psychological” emotions tell us what we are experiencing in our “heart.” Likewise, as ignoring our physical senses can do immeasurable damage to our body, disregarding our emotions can cause and perpetuate harm to our “heart.”

Still, in a feelings oriented culture like ours, it needs to be said that our beliefs have a hierarchical superiority to our emotion. You can have biblical faith without feeling emotion, but not without understanding and accepting the truth. Faith is not ultimately a feeling, and in fact, often its opposite.

The same can be said when it comes to the cardinal virtue of Christianity, love. One of the most unfortunate things that has occurred in our age is the redefinition of love as just a feeling or emotion. It is said and believed that when the feeling is gone in a relationship, that it is a sure indication that the love is gone too. Others mistake love for lust. God forgive us for perverting the most noble of virtues into something that describes the height of selfishness. Along these lines, Gordon H. Clark (1902-1985) wrote:

The love Augustine had in mind, and love as considered in Scripture, is a volition [desire], not an emotion. The Scripture commands love. Commands are addressed to the will [reason]. Emotions are involuntary. One should not interpret, misinterpret, Scriptural love in terms of the secular psychology of the twentieth century.²⁰³

Likewise, J. I. Packer writes:

Love is not essentially a feeling of affection, but a way of behaving, and if it starts as a feeling, it must become more than a feeling if it is truly to be love. Love does something; it gives; that is how it establishes its identity.²⁰⁴

It may come as some surprise that real love, at least initially, often times has nothing to do with emotion at all, but is rather a rational decision made on the basis of principle, not feeling. When

²⁰³ Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Trinity Foundation, 1990), 116.

²⁰⁴ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 114.

Jesus Christ commands us to **"love your enemies"** (Matt 5:44), He is not expecting us to *feel* like doing so before we obey this command. No, love is an action, a decision, upon which our feelings may or may not follow. And what guides love is a rational process that recognizes, as the Apostle reminds us in Romans 12:1-2, that such love is the reasonable, moral thing to do, but not necessarily what we feel like doing.²⁰⁵

Nonetheless, the importance that God places on *joy* illustrates that authentic Christianity is incomplete without emotion. Authentic Christianity is to **"Rejoice in the Lord always"** (Phil 4:4) and a fruit of the Holy Spirit is **"joy"** (Gal 5:22). Accordingly, the Apostle Paul wrote: **"The Kingdom of God is . . . a matter of . . . righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men"** (Rom 14:17-18).

Joy is a supernatural emotion that operates regardless of our circumstances, but is based on what we believe. Therefore, joy is always dependent on reason (i.e. truth) and never separated from it, as all God-pleasing emotions are. The Apostle tied beliefs, desires, and emotion all together when he wrote: **"Love [a desire] . . . rejoices [an emotion] with the truth [a belief]"** (1 Cor 13:6).

In an effort to communicate a biblical balance between an empty *intellectualism* and an equally empty *emotionalism* Reformed theologian John Frame writes:

Redemption doesn't make us more emotional (as some charismatics might suppose) or less so (as many Reformed would prefer), any more than it makes us more or less intellectual. What redemption does to the intellect is to consecrate that intellect to God, whether the I.Q. is high or low. Similarly, the important thing is not whether you are highly emotional or not; the important thing is that whatever emotional capacities you have should be placed in God's hands to be used according to His purposes.²⁰⁶

It is emotion divorced from love and truth that we and God despise, not emotion in itself. Emotion based on proper reasoning (i.e. beliefs and desires) is what pleases God. Therefore, a lack of proper emotion can be a lack of good reasoning as well. There are times we *should* feel more strongly about something, but we don't

²⁰⁵ For further discussion of the relationship between reason and love see section 4.3.C.

²⁰⁶ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 336.

because our beliefs, desires, and values are faulty. An emphasis on reasoning does not necessarily diminish the place of emotion. Rather, it simply better ensures that emotions are appropriate, because inappropriate ones can lead to sin. Right beliefs lead to great and God-pleasing emotions. More will be said concerning the proper place of emotions below.

Pastoral Practices

- Do you diligently monitor your emotions? This is surely included in the wise and biblical advice to **"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life"** (Prov 4:23). Our emotions are often the best indicator of whether we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit or the flesh.

Far too many Christians, including Pastors, become too accustomed to sinful emotions such as anger, anxiety, lust, discouragement, etc. They have lived with such things for so long that they assume this is just how their life is supposed to be.

On the contrary, the **"fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience . . . self-control"** (Gal 5:22-23). *This is the normal Christian life!* Do not lower God's standard in your own life or the lives of others. Continually encourage this kind of life and endeavor to live it yourself.

Habitual, overwhelming negative emotions probably indicate an unresolved issue in your life in which you are in bondage to lies, which hinder your ability to consistently live in the power of the Holy Spirit. Seek freeing truth for yourself and then your people.

A.3) The Power of Emotion

We have said all along in our study of the "heart" of both God and humans that its goal is happiness. That is an emotion. The God given goal of our life is not to just have the proper beliefs, desires, decisions, and circumstances, but the emotion of joy. Epistemologically for the human our beliefs of reason are the foundation, but joy and happiness are the pinnacle of human experience. Which is why both God and we seek them. And it is that seeking for the feeling of happiness that drives our search for understanding what will bring it, and the desire and pursuit of those things, all of which dictates virtually our whole life, just, we believe, as it does for God.

This perspective brings out the importance of another aspect of our "heart" which is the conscience, or the moral aspect of our reason. Its power is in its ability to produce the rather potent emotions of guilt or peace. Accordingly, David writes of the former: **"My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear"** (Ps 38:4). Such **"remorse"** **"seized"** Judas so powerfully that he hung himself (cf. Matt 27:3-5). Why do the **"Gentiles, who do not have the [written] law, do by nature things required by the law"**? Because **"their consciences [are] bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing [causing guilt or], now even defending them [causing peace]"** (Rom 2:14-15). Why did the Apostle say, **I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man"** (Acts 24:16)? Because he sought to avoid the painful emotion of guilt and the pleasing emotion of peace.

This helps to explain why some **"suppress the truth . . . about God"** communicated in Creation. The message is **"plain to them"** and **"clearly seen"** and **"understood"** by their reason such that they **"are without excuse."** However, while there is a part of them that believes in God, as is true of all humans according to this passage,²⁰⁷ there is a belief that is stronger than this. It is the belief that if **"God's . . . eternal power and divine nature"** were allowed to be a controlling belief in their life, the result would be the pain of guilt (and the loss of happiness), because of their **"wickedness"** (Rom 1:18-20), which they do not want to give up because they think sin will make them happy. In other words, to believe God exists is, in the mind of some unregenerate humans, to give up what makes them happy.

Emotions also powerfully affect our reasoning process as we know that the data we receive in the context of emotionally charged events makes a far greater impression on us than otherwise. Often our most powerful beliefs (good or bad) have been imprinted in the atmosphere of experiencing powerful emotions.

We also know the power of emotion by the tremendous affect it has in our life. Expressions such as *anguish*, *passion*, *exuberance*, and *lust* are power words because the emotions they reflect are powerful. The Scriptures describe several pictures of powerful human emotion, often referring to their strength as *overwhelming* the person. We have mentioned this already concerning guilt. The overwhelming nature of the emotional aspect of love is expressed when we read in the Song of Songs:

Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the

²⁰⁷ For further discussion of humanity's response to the divine revelation of Creation see section 4.13.A.

grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. (Song 8:6-7)

It is the *feelings* God created us to experience in sexual intimacy that makes it among the most powerful experiences (and therefore) desires known to humans.

Likewise, we read of the power of anger and jealousy: **"Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?"** (Prov 27:4). Fear can cause paralysis and prostration. Accordingly, we read of the emotional affect that fear had on the Prophet Daniel when he saw God. The Prophet says:

I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless . . . trembling on my hands and knees . . . I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless . . . [saying to the divine messenger] I am overcome with anguish . . . I can hardly breathe" (Dan 10:8, 10, 15-17; cf. Ps 14:5; 55:4-5; Job 15:24;).

Sorrow and anguish can completely debilitate a person as expressed many times in Scripture (cf. Job 9:18; 15:24; Ps 116:3; 2 Cor 1:8-9; 2:7). The most powerful depiction of this in Scripture is Christ Himself the night before He was to endure the torture of the cross. Matthew records regarding that night in a garden: **"He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death"** (Matt 26:37). The intense grief ²⁰⁸ that Christ felt as He pondered His impending punishment is especially illustrated by Luke's account when he writes: **"And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"** (Luke 22:44). It is perhaps the full emotion that the King experienced that best demonstrated His full humanity.

B) The Source of Human Emotion: *God*

And yet, the King's emotion was equally a demonstration of His deity, as human emotion is again merely a reflection of the emotional part of God's own "heart." In fact, we know of no human emotion that cannot also be found in God as well. This includes

²⁰⁸ Some suggest that Christ experienced fear, but none of the texts say this, but rather specify His emotion as sorrow. This may be important as fear/anxiety is described in Scripture as a sin (cf. Phil 4:6; 2 Tim 1:7).

such emotions as lust and jealousy (cf. Exod 20:5; 34:14), which, of course, are only found consistently in their purely righteous sense in God. The psalmist says God “**has desired** [*avah*] **it** [Zion] **for His habitation**” (Ps 132:13 NASB), using a word that means lust.²⁰⁹ Likewise, in Luke 22:15 a righteous lust is applied to Christ when we read “**He said to them, “I have earnestly desired** [*epithumia epethumēsa*: lit. “with desire/lust I desired/lusted”²¹⁰] **to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.**” This is the same word used by Christ concerning the sin of one who “**looks at a woman lustfully**” (Matt 5:28). Nonetheless, if God can “lust,” then we are not surprised to see it in humans in a positive sense as well (cf. Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 2:17). However, lust in its twisted sinful sense is only found in humans (cf. Matt 5:28; Mark 4:19).

Likewise, we find a full range of emotion in God, from deep delight, to severe anger, to intense grief. Deep divine delight is expressed in the Hebrew verb *sûs*, or “exult, rejoice” and is reflected in the Prophet Zephaniah who states, “**He will take great delight in you . . . He will rejoice over you with singing**” (Zeph 3:17). As we have noted above, joy is an essential aspect of not only authentic Christianity, but God as well (cf. Deut 28:63; Neh 8:10; Isa 62:5; John 15:11; Heb 12:2).

Severe divine anger is demonstrated in Revelation several times including 14:10:

If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury [*thumou*: “hot anger”²¹¹], **which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath** [*orgēs*]” (cf. Rom 2:8; Rev 16:19; 19:15).

Intense divine grief confronts us in the memorable statement in

²⁰⁹ For the meaning of the Hebrew *avah* see *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, Gleason Archer, R. Laird Harris, Bruce K. Waltke eds. (Moody, 1980), 18

²¹⁰ See *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols. (Zondervan, 1986), I.456-8.

²¹¹ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nelson, 1996), 688. The entry adds a slight distinction between the words used in Rev 14:10 and elsewhere in the NT for anger:

Thumos, “wrath” is to be distinguished from *orgē*, in this respect, that *thumos* indicates a more agitated condition of the feelings, an outburst of wrath from inward indignation, while *orgē* suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view to taking revenge. *Orgē* is less sudden in its rise than *thumos*, but more lasting in its nature (27).

Genesis 6:6: **"The LORD was grieved [*nāham*: "repent" ²¹²] that He had made man on the Earth, and His heart was filled with pain [*āsab*: to hurt, pain, grieve]."** Thus, we see that the emotions of our "heart" are an image of those in God's heart.

Likewise, we would suggest that each gender uniquely reflects an aspect of the Creator, and each gender uniquely emphasizes an aspect of the human "heart." While we do not wish to press the stereotype too far, males are known for logic, and females for feeling. Even the Bible indicates that females are more emotional than males (cf. 1 Pet 3:7), ²¹³ which was God's design. God created them that way because God is actually more emotional than most males! If He had not created the more emotional woman, God's emotional nature would not be fully reflected in humanity.

Nonetheless, the emotional makeup of humans differ, and that difference depends on how God created them, and therefore to disparage someone's emotional nature is to disparage their Creator. Unfortunately, in our increasingly female oriented society in America, a lack of emotion on the part of males or others can be thought to be subhuman. On the other hand, men are tempted to mock and manipulate women because of the more emotional nature God Himself gave them. All of this is sin.

Finally, we would tentatively suggest that like the unique

²¹² TWOT, 570. The entry for *nāham* relates two interesting facts. First, "The origin of the root seems to reflect the idea of "breathing deeply," hence the physical display of one's feelings, usually sorrow, compassion, or comfort" all of which reflecting deep emotion. Secondly, while the word can mean repent, it is not used concerning sin on God's part, and a different Hebrew word is used of human repentance:

The KJV translates the Niphal of *nhm* "repent" thirty-eight times. The majority of these instances refer to God's repentance, not man's. The word most frequently employed to indicate man's repentance is *shûb* (q.v.), meaning "to turn" (from sin to God). Unlike man, who under the conviction of sin feels genuine remorse and sorrow, God is free from sin (571).

²¹³ The Apostle Peter writes: **"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker [*asthenesterō*] partner"** (1 Pet 3:7). Of course the relative "weakness" in females could be a number of things including being weaker physically, and in authority particularly in marriage (see Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, TNTC [Eerdmans, 1988, 1999], 144). However, greater emotional sensitivity is certainly involved here as well, especially when we notice Peter's admonition to women in the preceding verse, **"do not give way to fear"** (v. 6). Obviously, none of this is to imply that women are created mentally or spiritually deficient as compared to males.

reflections of God the Father and the Son in our desires and beliefs of reason respectively, something of the same may be said in relation to our feelings and God the Holy Spirit. In the Trinity, the Holy Spirit would seem to always fulfill its proper place in responding to the desires of the Father and Son, not dictating to them. While being fully God, the Holy Spirit is depicted in Scripture more as a responder being sent, than a director decreeing things (cf. John 14:26; 15:26; esp. 16:13). This is how God has intended our emotions to work in relation to our beliefs and desires as well.

In addition, a trademark of the Spirit's influence in our life is the emotions of joy and peace (cf. Gal 5:22). Unfortunately, these fruits of the Spirit can be faked, especially in worship services designed to evoke emotion from the flesh, instead of the emotion of the Spirit which is based on truth, a critical topic of discussion we take up elsewhere.²¹⁴ In addition, while the Holy Spirit always helps the work of the Father and Son, the same cannot be said of human emotion

C) Feeling Right: *Reason-controlled emotions*

C.1) Helpful Effects of Emotion

The intense and overwhelming power that emotion exercises over us highlight the importance of ensuring they serve to help us, rather than hurt us. God would have them empower godly and holy desires, while satan would use feelings to entice us with the pleasures of sin. Along these lines, Gary Friesen remarks:

There are two things we must bear in mind about our emotions. The first is that they can be greatly influenced by a host of things: our health, our upbringing, fatigue, medication, the weather, our diet, our hormonal balance, a news report, the feelings of others--in sum, everything that influences our immediate perception of reality.

The second factor is that emotions can affect our lives in one of two ways. They can function either as initiators or as responders. They can be the means whereby one determines

²¹⁴ For further discussion of *emotionalism* particularly as it applies to many American worship services see chapter 4.11

"reality," or they can be the means whereby one responds to truth.²¹⁵

The fact that all human emotions can be found in God demonstrates that no emotion is intrinsically evil, including lust, jealousy, and hate. These emotions are perfectly holy in God and illustrate the fact that, **"There is a [proper] time for everything"** even **"A time to love and a time to hate"** (Eccl 3:1, 8).

The morality of an emotion depends on its motive and purpose, or the desire behind it. This points to the importance of our New Nature which conforms our emotions to God's purposes, instead of the sinful nature that constantly uses feelings to serve sin. This is the background of what the Apostle is saying when he writes: **"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid [*deilia*: "cowardice"- a bad emotion], but gives us power, love and self-discipline"** (2 Tim 1:7). Regeneration does not sanctify our feelings, rather the indwelling Spirit redirects them and even opposes them when they obstruct the Christian life.

First, we will note some of the benefits of Spirit-controlled emotion in four vital areas of our life: 1) Our relationship with God, 2) our worship of God, 3) our thinking, and 4) our sanctification.

Regarding the place of emotion in our relationship with God, few, if any, have written as powerfully as the Puritan (and often thought to be *unemotional*) theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Accordingly, an excerpt from his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* is worth the following rather lengthy quote:

[W]ho will deny that true religion consists in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart? That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be good in earnest, "fervent in spirit," and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: Rom. 12:11, "Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Deut. 10:12, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?" . . .

If we be not in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. . . . It is such a fervent vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion,

²¹⁵ Gary Friesen and J. Maxon, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Multnomah, 1980), 247.

that is the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration, and that has the promises of life. . . .

As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection. As on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding, as well as an affected fervent heart; where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart; so on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Edwards, I.2.1, I.3.1. We will also add the following excerpt:

The Scriptures place religion very much in the affection of *love*, in love to God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to the people of God, and to mankind. The texts in which this is manifest, both in the Old Testament and New, are innumerable. . . . The contrary affection of *hatred* also, as having sin for its object, is spoken of in Scripture as no inconsiderable part of true religion. It is spoken of as that by which true religion may be known and distinguished; Prov. 8:13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." And accordingly the saints are called upon to give evidence of their sincerity by this; Psal. 97:10, "Ye that love the Lord hate evil." . . . Again, Psal. 139:21, "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?" . . .

[Also] holy desire, exercised in longings, hungerings, and thirstings after God and holiness, is often mentioned in Scripture as an important part of true religion; . . . Psal. 42:1, 2, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" . . . The Scriptures speaks of holy joy, as a great part of true religion. . . . Phil. 3:1, "Finally, brethren, rejoice in the Lord." And chap. 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." . . .

Religious sorrow, mourning, and brokenness of heart, are also frequently spoken of as a great part of true religion. These things are often mentioned as distinguishing qualities of the true saints, and a great part of their character; Psal. 34:18, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." . . .

Another affection often mentioned, as that in the exercise of which much of true religion appears, is *gratitude*; especially as exercised in thankfulness and praise to God. This being so much spoken of in the book of Psalms, and other parts of the holy Scriptures, I need not mention particular texts. . . .

Again, the holy Scriptures do frequently speak of compassion or mercy, as a very great and essential thing in true religion, insomuch that good men are in Scripture denominated from hence; and a merciful man and a good man are equivalent terms in Scripture; Isa. 57:1, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and

Human experience and virtue is simply incomplete without feelings, including our relationship with God. No relationship of love is complete without emotion. While we suggested that a biblically *correct love* can exist toward our enemies that does not involve positive emotions, the *complete love* we are to have for our God must include them. In other words, we can have *sufficient love* for our enemies in our actions as Christ commands (cf. Matt 5:44) without liking them.

However, *supreme love* will include all the positive emotions that result from an understanding and appreciation of God's attributes. This is why Christ described this *complete and supreme love* as loving **"the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"** (Matt 22:37). There is no doubt that such love toward people and God involves the emotions, but this is not the level of love God would expect us to have for our enemies.

It is because God-pleasing spirituality and worship demand a "whole-hearted" approach which includes the beliefs of our reason, holy desires, and appropriate emotions, that a suppression of any of these God-given aspects of our human makeup is what we call *half-hearted* worship. Accordingly, in the contemporary Church, *charismaticism* has accused others of *half-hearted* spirituality and worship because of a lack of emotion. On the other hand, *charismaticism* is often guilty of an *emotionalism* that suppresses the other aspects of our "heart," including reason, and therefore also resulting in unbiblical practices. Because of the importance of this topic to contemporary Christianity, and its practical application of the theological truths regarding the human "heart," we further discuss *whole-hearted* spirituality and worship in chapters 4.8-4.11.

Not only do feelings enhance our worship and love for God, but actually can help in our thinking as well. For example, the often difficult and diligent study required to understand Scripture, and ultimately God better, is hard work. If a person does not delight in

merciful men are taken away." And the Scripture chooses out this quality, as that by which, in a peculiar manner, a righteous man is deciphered; Psal. 37:21, "The righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth;" and ver. 26, "He is ever merciful, and lendeth." And Prov. 14:21, "He that honoreth the Lord, hath mercy on the poor." . . .

Zeal is also spoken of, as a very essential part of the religion of true saints. It is spoken of as a great thing Christ had in view, in giving himself for our redemption; Tit. 2:14, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (I.2.4)

it and gain a certain sense of joy and satisfaction in it, they will not have the consistent motivation necessary to do it. Simply put, if thinking is pleasurable for us, we'll do more of it.

Along the same lines, feelings enhance our giving. **"The Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed ["happy"] to give than to receive.'"** (Acts 20:35) No doubt if giving was always ultimately painful, we would not practice it as much. It is the good feelings associated with even sacrificial giving that partly motivates us to do it.

Likewise, obeying God often results in positive emotions, encouraging us to obey more. This is why the King said:

If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:10-11)

Obedience brings joy!

Finally, God can certainly use our feelings even in our sanctification. The reason that divine discipline is effective is that, **"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful"** (Heb 12:11). It is the pain that God either causes or allows in our life that He can use to mold us more in His image. The Bible tells us that even the King, **"learned obedience from what He suffered"** (Heb 5:8), and that the Christian, **"who has suffered in his body is done with sin"** (1 Pet 4:1). Likewise, the Apostle writes that, **"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death"** (2 Cor 7:10). We see here that the source of our emotions are important, those being prompted by God being helpful, and those prompted otherwise being hurtful.

So we see that God certainly has several good purposes for our feelings. Accordingly, a neglect of the God-ordained place of human emotions leads to a mere empty *intellectualism*, or as Edwards said, life with light, but little heat. Particularly our charismatic brothers and sisters have been right to expose this tendency in American Christianity and there is no doubt that they have infused more God-honoring emotion into our churches.

C.2) Harmful Effects of Emotion

On the other hand, one wonders if anything has fueled and aided evil more than human emotion. It should never be forgotten

that the emotional part of us is the *most* susceptible to the manipulations of our three arch-enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. God's primary and initial point of influence with us is in our reason where we receive, process, and believe the truth. Satan's primary point of influence is our emotions. As Eldredge notes, "Many people have made a wreck of their lives by following an emotion without stopping to consider whether it was a good idea to do so. Neither adultery nor murder is a rational act."²¹⁷

This is why it is so critical that our feelings are subjected to desires controlled by the Spirit and a mind controlled by the truth of reason, because both of these protect the emotional part of our "heart" from corrupting the other parts. Nothing God-pleasing or God-ordained occurs by our emotions acting independently from our reason. Such a perspective is to separate what God has joined together which, among other things, are the functions of the "heart." It leads to empty *emotionalism*, a life with heat, but little light, and Evangelicals have been right to expose this tendency particularly in *charismaticism*.

Therefore, while feelings can be an important ingredient in love, worship, thinking, and spiritual growth, they can also hinder all of them. Feelings corrupt love because they are often self-centered, and the sinful nature thrives on these very things. More specifically, what the sinful nature desires often promises to result in good feelings, tempting the person in its favor. This, in spite of the fact that the believer knows in their reason that whatever good feelings come from sin will soon turn sour (cf. Heb 11:25) and are empty counterfeits of the truly fulfilling virtues produced by the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-23).

We sense the influence of feelings on our reasoning when we read the description of the first sin. **"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom** [which she thought would enable her to reach the God-given human goal of happiness], **she took some and ate it"** (Gen 3:6). No doubt if the sight or thought of the fruit would have produced repulsive feelings, Eve would not have desired it. This is why Satan works to make his temptations promise good *feelings*. It is *emotion* that can move us so strongly in a certain direction, whether it be for good or evil. Therefore, feelings do not automatically serve the purposes and glory of God but often thwart them.

It is the intensity of emotion caused by sin, the "high" it offers, that attracts us to it, that we experience in it, and that addicts us to it. Sin makes us *feel* like nothing else. And if all we want is to *feel*,

²¹⁷ Eldredge, 42.

sin will draw us in.

The eminent NT scholar John Stott, in his classic book *Your Mind Matters*, corrects the notion that the Fall should lead us to trust our feelings more, as so many contend today:

[T]he fact that man's mind is fallen is no excuse for a retreat from thought into emotion, for the emotional side of man's nature is equally fallen. Indeed, sin has more dangerous effects on our faculty of feeling than on our faculty of thinking, because our opinions are more easily checked and regulated by revealed truth than our experiences.²¹⁸

It is not thinking that Scripture warns us about, but the wrong kind of thinking. No doubt, a good many of the personal and corporate problems in the Church today would be remedied by more and deeper *thinking*, instead of more and deeper *feeling*.

Regarding worship, as we have noted, the King said the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in their spirit *and in truth* (cf. John 4:23). Worshipping God in truth certainly involves our reason and purely emotional worship is not what God is seeking.²¹⁹

This is certainly true of our sanctification. Many of those who exalt the place of emotions in Christian spirituality are the very ones who devalue the place of suffering, which is a vital part of the Christian life (cf. Matt 16:24-26; Rom 5:3; Phil 1:29; 3:10; 2 Tim 1:8; 1 Pet 2:21). If we allow our faulty theology or feelings of distaste regarding suffering to affect us, we may avoid it at all cost and miss its God-ordained purpose in our life.

Think a moment about the incredibly powerful emotions Christ was experiencing before His crucifixion. Because of His humanity, those emotions would have surely stopped Him from going to the cross, even causing Him to run and hide from it as all humans do to avoid the prospect of intense pain. However, His perfect beliefs and holy desires enabled Him to overcome the power of His human emotions and willingly go where He would be cruelly tortured and murdered. So the Spirit of God operating in us today can give us the same power over the emotions that would keep us from obeying our God.

We have already noted the potential harm our feelings can have on reasoning rightly. This needs to be heard loud and clear in our generation. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) speaks of how such emotions can harmfully mess with our God-given reasoning abilities when he writes: “The heart never takes the place of the head; but can and

²¹⁸ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (Intervarsity, 1973), 16

²¹⁹ We thoroughly discuss the place of reason in worship in chapter 4.8.

should obey it.”²²⁰

Accordingly, the Christian philosopher wrote elsewhere:

In fact, I was assuming [when I was an atheist] that the human mind is completely ruled by reason. But that is not so. For example, my reason is perfectly convinced by good evidence that anesthetics do not smother me and that properly trained surgeons do not start operating until I am unconscious. But that does not alter the fact that when they have me down on the table and clap their horrible mask over my face, a mere childish panic begins inside me. I start thinking I am going to choke, and I am afraid they will start cutting me up before I am properly under.

In other words, I lose my faith in anesthetics. It is not [proper] reason that is taking away my faith: on the contrary, my faith is based on reason. It is my imagination and emotions [which ultimately, however, are based on other controlling beliefs of reason]. The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination [based on other beliefs] on the other.

When you think of it you will see lots of instances of this. A man knows, on perfectly good evidence, that a pretty girl of his acquaintance is a liar and cannot keep a secret and ought not to be trusted; but when he finds himself with her his mind loses its faith in that bit of knowledge and he starts thinking, [because the belief promises more happiness] 'Perhaps she'll be different this time,' and once more makes a fool of himself and tells her something he ought not to have told her. His senses and emotions have destroyed his faith in what he really knows to be true. . . .

Now Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes. I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable; but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable.

This rebellion of your moods against your real self is going to come anyway. That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue: unless you teach your moods 'where they get off', you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really

²²⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Harper Collins, 2001), 30.

dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion. Consequently one must train the habit of Faith.²²¹

An over-emphasis on emotions is particularly dangerous in decision making. While Christianity has traditionally warned that emotions can hinder good reasoning and decision making, it is popular today to claim otherwise. Yet this is essentially what *mega mysticism* encourages when it teaches that we are to expect extra-biblical impulses as an indication of God's will. Accordingly, notice how the *mega mystic* Dallas Willard advises his readers to recognize extra-biblical revelation from God:

The quality of God's voice [apart from Scripture] is more a matter of the weight or impact an impression [feeling] makes on our consciousness. A certain steady and calm force with which communications from God impact our soul, our innermost being, incline us toward assent and even toward active compliance.²²²

Essentially, then, according to *mega mysticism*, a strong *feeling* = "God's voice." Since when is a mere "feeling" a good indicator of what is true? It is virtues (i.e. love, humility, self-control) that enhance our God-pleasing decision making, not feelings, and the two should not be confused. In addition, no *mega mystic* would be able to point to a single verse of Scripture that would suggest that our life should be led more by feelings instead of reason. Along these lines, surely the words of D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) needs to be heeded:

Do not be swayed even by the fact that something . . . makes you feel wonderful. You may say, 'Well now surely anything that makes me feel greater love to God must be right.' Robert Baxter, to whom I have already referred in connection with the Irvingite movement [an early *charismatic* movement in England], used to say that he had never felt so much love, the love of God in his heart, or so much love in himself to God as he did at this period. He was ready to leave his wife and family for God's sake. He was filled with a sense of the love of God, he said, that he had never known before, but he came to see that it had all been misleading him.

So we must not judge even in terms of such feelings. You may say, 'I have never known such love, I have never known

²²¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, 2001), 139-40.

²²² Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Intervarsity, 1999), 175.

such peace, I have never known such joy.' The people who belong to the cults will often tell you exactly the same thing. So we must not rely upon our own subjective feelings. Do not dismiss them or discount them, but do not rely upon them. Do not say, 'I feel this is right, everything in me says this is right, all my Christian spirit.' It is not enough. The devil is as subtle as that. Remember our Lord's word—'If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.'²²³

While there is no hint in the Scriptures that our outward physical senses need to be doubted, there are warnings concerning inward, psychological processes such as emotions, intuitions and speculations. Such things bypass our God-given reason, and are therefore not God-ordained sources for reliable knowledge.

Contrary to popular thinking in modern *mega mysticism*, God says, **"It is not good to have zeal [feelings] without knowledge . . . and miss the way"** (Prov 19:2). We are warned that, **"fools die for lack of judgment,"** not emotion, and that God's **"people are destroyed from lack of knowledge,"** not feelings (Prov 10:21; cf. Hos 4:6). It is because satan has a particular way of deceiving us through our emotions and impulses that God tells us to, **"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"** (1 Pet 5:8 NASB). No doubt our repository of beliefs and truth in our reason is a critical part of having the kind of **"sober spirit"** that will protect us from the devil's emotional manipulations. Emotions may be the best indicator of *what* we believe, but the worst indicator of what we *should* believe.

Surely this is what the Prophet was implying when he said, **"The heart (*lēb*) is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"** (Jer 17:9). Remembering our study of the Bible's use of "heart" in chapter 4.1, we can say confidently that the meaning here is not our God-given reasoning faculties, but actually the things that can come out of the "heart" to distort those faculties. Irrational fears and selfish feelings are certainly among those things that hinder rational, God-pleasing judgments. This is why Solomon said: **"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life"** (Prov 14:23).

²²³ Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning the Gifts* (Harold Shaw, 1985), 68.

In the end then, and in spite of the popularity of *anti-intellectualism*,²²⁴ *emotionalism*,²²⁵ and *mega mysticism*,²²⁶ we insist on what we will emphasize throughout *Knowing Our God*: God does nothing to us or through us except that which He does to or through our reason. It is sound reasoning that Scripture continually exhorts us to and it is the God-ordained gatekeeper of what is real and true, not our feelings, emotions, and experiences.

Pastoral Practices

- We believe all the “isms” mentioned in the preceding paragraph are very dangerous tendencies in American Christianity which severely inhibit it from being Authentic Christianity. We would suggest careful study of the sections referenced in the applicable endnotes, so that even if you would not agree with our view, you will be more sensitive to these potentially dangerous perspectives on human emotion in the Christian life.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You for making us in Your image so that we too can feel. It truly is one of the best things about being human. But we confess it can also be one of the worst things. Help us evaluate those places and circumstances in which we are overwhelmed by negative, sinful emotions, and help us renew those places in our “heart” so that they may be more consistently controlled by Your Spirit.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do we call emotions, “the voice of the heart”?
- 2) What is the helpful place of emotion in the Christian life in terms of its relationship to reason?

²²⁴ For further discussion of *anti-intellectualism* see section 2.4.A.

²²⁵ For further discussion of *emotionalism* see chapter 4.8.

²²⁶ For further discussion of the *mega mystical* idea that we are to be led by impulses see Book 14.

- 3) We claim that there is no human emotion that cannot also be found in God as well. Do you agree or disagree. What are the applications of this?
- 4) What do we claim it means to worship God "**in spirit and in truth**"?
- 5) What are some of the dangers of emotion in the Christian life?
- 6) Why is the emotional part of us the *most* susceptible to the manipulations of our spiritual enemies?

Recommended Reading

For a practical discussion on the place and purpose of emotion in the Christian life see Dave Bovenmyer, "The Heart and Emotions"; online at:
<http://davebovenmyer.wordpress.com/2010/02/20/emotions-and-the-heart>.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.7

Transforming the "Heart"

Healing through Biblical Meditation

A) Fulfilling the Great Commission by Renewing the Mind

- A.1) The Goal of the Church: The Great Commission
- A.2) The "Micro" Great Commission: *Renewing the mind*
- A.3) The Means of Renewing the Mind: *Teaching*

B) Recognizing Wounded Parts of Our Heart

- B.1) Why can't I believe this?
- B.2) Levels of victory
- B.3) How wounds of the heart happen: *Demonic footholds*

C) Renewing Wounded Parts of Our Heart: *Biblical meditation*

- C.1) Recognize persistent negative emotions
- C.2) Reveal the lie
- C.3) Resolve the past
- C.4) Receive freeing truth
- C.5) Take steps of faith

D) Biblical Spiritual Warfare

- D.1) The battle is simply between lies & truth
- D.2) Knowing our identity in Christ: *Free at last*

Primary Points

- For all the talk in Christianity that spiritual growth and sanctification is a work of God and therefore His responsibility, Jesus says otherwise. His plan is to bring about spiritual growth in His people through our teaching. Simply put, Jesus commanded us to "go and change lives."
- The "macro" Great Commission of making mature disciples of all peoples will only be fulfilled to the extent that we fulfill the "micro" Great Commission of renewing each disciple's mind.
- The sub-conscious mind contains beliefs that we are not aware of, but that greatly influence us.
- The contents of the mind can be understood as beliefs that are true or false. Life transformation occurs as the lies are replaced with the truth.
- The reason that there are over 30 references to formal teaching in the Pastoral Epistles is because this is God's primary means in the Church for changing minds and lives and making mature disciples.
- It is important to understand that our "hearts" are in parts in order to understand why it can seem we believe something, but still will not act like it.
- When we experience a particularly traumatic event there is a message in it, that if not handled correctly, will allow a demonic foothold in our life.
- The emotional pain in our memories is not in the event itself, but the lie we believed about ourselves in the event.
- Healing these corrupted parts of our heart is a matter of the biblical practice of meditation, facilitated by vital questions.
- Overwhelming negative emotions are not of the Holy Spirit and should alarm us that we are under attack.
- All negative emotions not of the Holy Spirit are based on a lie we are believing, which can be exposed by simply asking, "Why am I feeling this way?"
- The spiritual battle over our mind is simply between lies and truth. Believing lies puts us in emotional bondage. Replacing those lies with the truth sets us free as Jesus promised.
- Often times the lies affecting us are lodged in suppressed parts of our mind which must be accessed by following our overwhelming negative emotions back to an event where we were imprinted with the painful lie.
- This process is biblical meditation and is described in Psalms.
- Our identity is Christ in the heart to our spiritual journey.

The following chapter is not merely a theological treatise. It is based on over 10 years of study and over 2000 hours of counseling Christians with spiritual "strongholds" in their life. And that counseling has been extremely successful, because it is based on Scripture and a proven method for helping people "**be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind**" (Rom 12:2). What follows is a rather brief synopsis of these principles.²²⁷

A) Fulfilling the Great Commission by Renewing the Mind

A.1) The Goal of the Church: *The Great Commission*

Just before leaving this Earth, the King clearly communicated the goal and purpose for leaving His Church on the Earth:

All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

²²⁷ We wish to express our indebtedness to both Neil Anderson and Ed Smith. The former's materials on gaining an identity in Christ (*Victory Over the Darkness*) have been very helpful to people in our congregation.

Likewise, the *Theophostic* ministry of Dr. Smith has been a great aid in training the counselors in our church, and we greatly wish we could whole-heartedly endorse it. But Dr. Smith's focus on the need for extra-biblical revelation to occur in order for healing to happen is unbiblical and potentially dangerous. Dr. Smith does not recognize that the truth that sets people free comes from their reasonable, conscious mind instead of some supernatural encounter with Jesus.

The mysticism of Dr. Smith's approach is especially evidenced in the crucial step of helping people recognize truth after exposing the lie. At this point, Dr. Smith instructs the counselor to pray, "Jesus, what would you like to communicate to this person?" This obviously creates the expectation of a supernatural extra-biblical revelation. This is not necessary, and Christian psychologists the author has spoken to who are experts in "Theophostic" have agreed. If one would simply change the above step to something like merely *asking* the person (instead of praying for the person), "What would Jesus say about that [lie]," they would see the same results and avoid the unbiblical and potentially dangerous pitfalls of mysticism.

And if this was the only change to Dr. Smith's training and materials that was needed we would probably still recommend them. But he consistently makes such mysticism the key to success throughout his training and also consistently disparages the God-given place of reason, even though it is actually what makes the process successful.

For further discussion of "Theophostic" ministry see Chapter 14.19.

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the Age. (Matt 28:18-20)

Consequently, everything we do for Him must somehow further this "Great Commission" if our works are to please Him.

The "Great Commission" of Christ is to **"make disciples"**²²⁸ in every **"nation,"** **"teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** NT scholar D. A. Carson comments: "Disciples are those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus' teaching (cf. Matt 12:46-50)."²²⁹ A "disciple" then is synonymous with being a convert, as no one who is not learning and following Jesus could claim to be a Christian.²³⁰

²²⁸ The word **"make"** is not in the original Greek but a reflection of the "transitive use of [*mathēteusate*] [which] in the NT means 'make disciples.'" (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. [T & T Clark, 1988-1997], 684).

²²⁹ D. A. Carson, *Matthew* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM (Zondervan, n.d.), *in loc*.

²³⁰ Accordingly, John MacArthur comments at Matthew 28:19-20:

A person who is not Christ's true disciple does not belong to Him and is not saved. When a person genuinely confesses Christ as Lord and Savior, he is immediately saved, immediately made a disciple, and immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. Not to be Christ's disciple is therefore not to be Christ's at all.

Scripture knows nothing of receiving Christ as Savior but not as Lord, as if a person could take God piecemeal as it suits him. Every convert to Christ is a disciple of Christ, and no one who is not a disciple of Christ, no matter what his profession of faith might be, is a convert of Christ.

The Great Commission is a command to bring unbelievers throughout the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the term the Lord uses in this commissioning is **make disciples**. The true convert is a disciple, a person who has accepted and submitted himself to Jesus Christ, whatever that may mean or demand. The truly converted person is filled with the Holy Spirit and given a new nature that yearns to obey and worship the Lord who has saved him. Even when he is disobedient, he knows he is living against the grain of his new nature, which is to honor and please the Lord. He loves righteousness and hates sin, including his own. (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], *in loc*).

But making converts and disciples will not fulfill the "Great Commission."²³¹ While evangelism is a necessary first step in fulfilling God's purpose for the Church, if we only make Christians we will fall far short of Christ's desires. We are to **"make disciples [converts] . . . and teach them to obey everything [Christ] commanded."** And it is this latter task that is the much harder part of the "Great Commission." Even in physical life, it is relatively much easier to have babies, than to raise, nurture, teach, and train them to maturity. Of course, we and Heaven rejoice over the birth of spiritual babies (cf. Luke 15:7, 10), but the "Great Commission" reminds us that just because God gives His Church a Christian "baby," our work is far from over. Jesus does not want **"worldly . . . infants in Christ"** (1 Cor 3:1), but disciples who, **"go on to maturity"** (Heb 6:1). Only this will fully glorify Him and fulfill His purpose and goal for the Church on Earth.

Accordingly, even the great Evangelist Paul wrote:

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ [not just converted to Christ]. **For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power.** (Col 1:28)

Notice that Christ's command above is to **"make"** obedient followers of Jesus Christ, **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** With such language our Lord implies that this is something we are able and expected to do. For all the talk in Christianity that spiritual growth and sanctification is a work of God and therefore His responsibility, Jesus says otherwise. His plan and purpose is to bring about spiritual growth in His people through our teaching. And it is not that we simply have the ability and responsibility to verbalize Christ's commands, but to produce Christians who are actually obeying His commands. Simply put, Jesus commanded us to "go and change lives."

²³¹ Dr. MacArthur adds:

The church's mission is not simply to convert but to teach. The convert is called to a life of obedience to the Lord, and in order to obey Him it is obviously necessary to know what He requires. As already noted, a disciple is by definition a learner and follower. Therefore, studying, understanding, and obeying "the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27) is the lifelong task of every true disciple. . . . [His] first mission was to provide salvation for those who would come to Him in faith, that is, to make disciples. His second mission was to teach God's truth to those disciples. That is the same twofold mission He gives the church. Ibid.

While the Church is His intended vehicle for changing the way His people live, we recognize it is through His divine power that such a supernatural task is accomplished. This is why He sandwiched the "Great Commission" between the fact that, **"All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me"** and **"surely I am with you always, to the very end of the Age."** Christ has granted us His sovereign authority over the hearts of humans, and the supernatural power of His presence in our own hearts through His Holy Spirit, so that we are authorized and enabled to produce transformed followers of Jesus Christ.

A.2) The "Micro" Great Commission: *Renewing the mind*

But how is the "Great Commission" to actually be fulfilled? How do we produce the life transformation that it requires? The Apostle Paul succinctly tells us when he writes:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve [and obey] what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1-3)

There are several phrases here that describe a mature disciple of Christ. They live a life that is sacrificial, **"holy and pleasing to God."** They have been **"transformed"** into those that **"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world."** They are people who recognize how **"good, pleasing, and perfect"** **"God's will is"** and therefore desire to obey His will.

How did the Apostle think the Roman Christians would obtain such a way of life, fully fulfilling the "Great Commission"? He told them, **"by the renewing of your mind."** In chapter 4.3 we discussed the importance of renewing the mind for the purpose of life change.²³² Accordingly, we quoted Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland and his own comment on Romans 12:2:

We are so familiar with this verse that some of its oddness or peculiarity is lost on us. But to see how truly peculiar this teaching is, think of what Paul could have said but did not. He could have said, "Be transformed by developing close feelings

²³² For further discussion of the place the mind plays in our spiritual growth see section 4.3.B

toward God," or "by exercising your will in obeying biblical commands," or "by intensifying your desire for the right things," or "by fellowship and worship," and so on.

Obviously, all are important parts of the Christian life. Yet Paul chose to mention none of them in his most important *precis* [summary] of the spiritual life. Why is that? What is it about the mind that justifies Paul's elevation of it to such a position of prominence in religious life? . . .

The mind is the soul's primary vehicle for making contact with God, and it plays a fundamental role in the process of human maturation and change, including spiritual transformation. In thought, the mind's structure conforms to the order of the object of thought. Since this is so, and since truth dwells in the mind, truth itself is powerful and rationality is valuable as a means of obtaining truth and avoiding error. . .

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Likewise, we summarized the Apostle's thought:

[L]ife transformation is essentially a process of replacing the lies we believe with the truth of God . . . Accordingly, the NLT translates Romans 12:2 as "**let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think,**" and the NCV has it, "**be changed within by a new way of thinking.**" ²³⁴

This reminds us of the importance of beliefs regarding how we live, of which we have written elsewhere:

[B]elief is *the knowledge we think is true with various levels of certainty*. . . . Beliefs, then, are an incredibly important concept because they essentially dictate who we are and what we do. Proverbs says, "**For as he thinks within himself, so he is**" (23:7 NASB). As Dr. Moreland puts it: "Beliefs are the rails upon which our lives run." ²³⁵

Accordingly, if we change the beliefs of our mind, we will change our life. And if those changed beliefs conform to the truth of God's word, we will be transformed into a person of increasing godliness, therefore fulfilling the "Great Commission" in our own heart.

The graphic below illustrates the typical understanding of the "world" in which the "Great Commission" needs to be

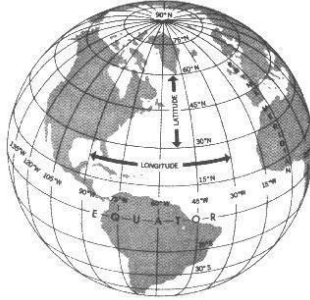
²³³ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (NavPress, 1997), 65, 67.

²³⁴ Excerpt from section 4.3.B.

²³⁵ Excerpt from section 2.3.B.2.

accomplished. Jesus said to **"go and make disciples of all the nations"** [*ethnē*: "races"].

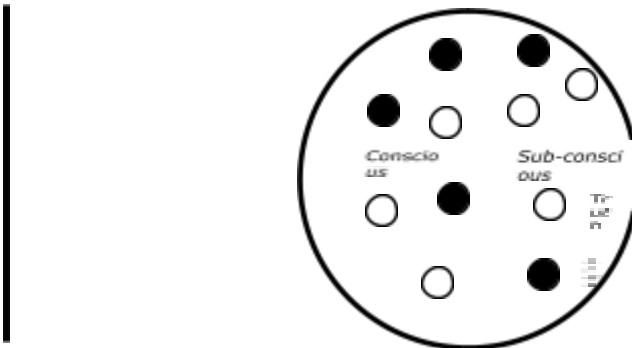
The World of the Great Commission on Earth



Accordingly, the goal of the world-wide "Great Commission" can be segmented into making mature disciples in every nation. Some races and peoples are more "discipled" than others, and as we disciple more parts of the world, we continually reach our goal.

But this is only the "macro" view of the "Great Commission." Making mature disciples in **"all the nations"** requires making mature disciples of individual people. And according to the Apostle in Romans 12:2 this occurs by transforming individual minds. Accordingly, the "world" of the "Great Commission" in a person is their mind. Therefore, the "macro" Great Commission of making mature disciples of all peoples will only be fulfilled to the extent that we fulfill the "micro" Great Commission of renewing each disciple's mind.

The World of the "Great Commission" in the Human Mind



Obviously, the macro world in which we are to make disciples is very complex. But probably not any more complex than the micro world of the human mind where the "Great Commission" must be accomplished.

First, as we have discussed elsewhere, both experience and Scripture indicate that our minds have both conscious and sub-conscious parts. We have written:

Defining human reason is notoriously difficult. However, understanding it can be enhanced by differentiating some aspects of it. First, any discussion of human reasoning must take into account the differences of both its *conscious* and *subconscious* aspects. Simply put, the thoughts in our *conscious* mind are those we are aware of, while we are unaware of our *subconscious* thoughts, until they are brought into our *conscious* mind.

For example, our breathing normally operates in our *subconscious*, but if and when we "think" about it, this rather automatic human process enters the *conscious* part of our mind. The *conscious* part of our mind is normally what we think of . . .

Christian counselors in growing numbers are discovering the vital importance of addressing the *subconscious* beliefs of their clients in order to truly help them **"be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind"** (Rom 12:2). It would seem that an abundance of truth can be processed by the *conscious* mind by way of even memorizing Scripture. But if there are suppressed areas of our *subconscious* mind that have not "accepted" such truth, we will continue to act contrary to what we "believe" and know in our *conscious* mind. Christians are learning that when the Apostle pointed to the mind as the center for spiritual renewal (Rom 12:2) and the King spoke of loving Him with *all* of our mind (Matt 22:37), that these critical aspects of spirituality include the *subconscious* part of our mind.²³⁶

Simply put, the conscious mind contains beliefs that we are aware of, and the sub-conscious mind contains beliefs that we are not aware of, but which nevertheless greatly affect us. While we give several biblical references to the subconscious mind in chapter 4.3, perhaps the clearest reference to it is when David writes: **"Surely You desire truth in the inner parts** [*tūhôt*: "to cover"];

²³⁶ Excerpt from section 4.3.A.2.

You teach me wisdom in the inmost place [*sātam*: "hidden"]" (Ps 51:6). While words for mere "mind" were available to the psalmist (e.g. *lēb*), David seems to use wording to suggest an "inner mind." OT scholars C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch write that David is referring to "the hidden part of his mind."²³⁷

In addition, the contents of the mind can be understood as beliefs that are true (symbolized by clear circles in the graphic above) or false beliefs (dark circles in the graphic above). Life transformation then occurs as the lies are replaced with the truth.

A.3) The Means of Renewing the Mind: *Teaching*

Jesus said the maturing of disciples will be accomplished through "**teaching** [*didaskō*]," the Greek meaning: "to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting."²³⁸ Obviously the instruction required to change people's minds and lives includes being an example of what you are teaching (cf. 1 Tim 4:11-12). But the reason that there are over 30 references to formal teaching in the Pastoral Epistles is because this is God's primary means in the Church for changing minds and lives and making mature disciples.

The Apostle Paul shares more detail concerning how teaching changes lives when he writes:

For though we live [in a physical human body, *sarki*²³⁹], we do not wage war in a physical way. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons used [with a physical body, *sarkika*: "human"]. On the contrary, they have divine [spiritual] power to demolish strongholds.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of

²³⁷ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000), Ps 51:6.

²³⁸ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (BADG), 3rd ed., F. W. Danker ed. (Chicago University Press, 2000).

²³⁹ We think the Apostle is contrasting the type of battle that is fought in the physical realm with spears and swords, against that fought in the spiritual realm with the word of God. The more literal translation of *sarx* here as a human body is preferable as the Apostle says "**we are living in a *sarx*.**" See BADG.

disobedience, once your obedience is complete. (2 Cor 10:3-6)

Here the Apostle is contrasting a physical war fought in our body and with physical weapons, with a spiritual war fought in our mind with spiritual weapons. Notice that the battlefield of this "**war**" is in the mind, where "**strongholds**," "**arguments**," a "**pretension**," or a "**thought**" can "**set itself up against the knowledge of God**" and keep us from being "**obedient to Christ**." What else would be the spiritual weapon against such lies except the word of God (cf. Eph 6:17)?

Accordingly, we have argued elsewhere that Paul is referring to his teaching ministry to believers to help them mature such that their "**obedience is complete**."²⁴⁰ The Apostle is saying something very similar to what he told the Colossians: "**We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom [God's word], so that we may present every man complete in Christ** (Col 1:28).

Notice then that this spiritual war is simply between lies and truth. The lies we believe put us in bondage to "**the father of lies**" (John 8:44) making us obedient to satan. On the other hand, "**The truth will set you free**" (John 8:32) to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and be "**obedient to Christ**" (2 Cor 10:5). What the "**renewing of the mind**" (Rom 12:2) means then is replacing the lies we have been imprinted with and are contained in our "old programming" with the truth of God's word.

The conscious mind is renewed through being exposed to the truth, recognizing a related lie, and choosing to reject the lie and receive the truth. This happens on a regular basis in many different ways, not just spiritual ones. Perhaps we have a belief about something or someone and with more information it becomes obvious that our belief was a lie and needs to be changed in order to conform to the truth.

B) Recognizing Wounded Parts of our Heart

B.1) Why can't I believe this?

What do we do when we know the truth about something but still struggle to have that truth control us? Let us take worry for

²⁴⁰ For discussion of the interpretation of 2 Cor 10:3-5 see section 5.12.A.

example. You understand the biblical commands and promises concerning worry. You know you understand them because you could explain them to someone else. And when you worry you try to apply these truths to combat your feelings of worry and it doesn't work. You still worry. What is going on? Don't you believe the promises enough?

Yes and no. It is important to understand that our "hearts" are in parts. We have already distinguished between the conscious and subconscious part of the mind. Accordingly, while the conscious part of our mind may believe the truth, there may be a part of our subconscious mind that does not. How can this happen?

Through past experiences. We have seen this hundreds of times in our ministry. Suppose a woman is sexually molested as a young girl who is not a Christian and has no support or way of properly processing such an event. Accordingly, the message she receives from that event can be things like: "you're dirty," "you're damaged," "you're not safe." After she becomes a Christian, she can memorize all sorts of Scripture regarding these false messages, but it doesn't seem to heal her sense of feeling dirty, damaged, or unsafe. This is because the truth is not getting to where it is needed.

We have elsewhere suggested that our mind is much like a computer.²⁴¹ For a moment, let us understand our conscious mind as the RAM (random access memory) or the data that we (or the computer) is "consciously" aware of. This data is "on the screen" and accessed. Now let's imagine that our subconscious mind is analogous to a hard drive where our memory is stored. There is an abundance of data there, but it needs to be accessed and brought into our RAM (conscious mind) in order to be used or changed.

Now, let's say there is some bad data on a certain sector of the hard drive. How can it be replaced? Will the corrupt data be changed by just feeding more correct information into the RAM? No, because the new correct data must get to the place on the hard drive that is corrupted.

Along the same lines, you could tell the Christian woman described above over and over "God loves you, God loves you" and it will not compute. You cannot "feed" new information into the "front end" of her "computer" and expect it just to replace the bad information on her "hard drive." That memory needs to be accessed, so that the correct data in her RAM (conscious mind) can replace the incorrect data on her hard drive (subconscious memory). Accordingly, we need to understand some things about

²⁴¹ Regarding the analogy of a computer to describe our mind see section 4.3.A.1.

the subconscious mind in order to help people with these deeper wounds in their heart.

B.2) Two levels of victory

It is important to understand different levels of spiritual victory. Let us start with what total defeat feels like. Hopeless. The devil has a person so deceived that that they have essentially forgotten their identity in Christ and are not even trying to fight the lies they believe. Perhaps they have been trying for some time, with no apparent progress and have given up. There is no victory here at all. Spiritual victory in this life is a choice. Christians can live their entire life being defeated. And when they lose hope, they stop fighting. This is where our enemy really wants us to be. Hopelessness is the pinnacle of vices in his realm- it is living like there is no God. It is the opposite of loving God for the Christian. We will never hate God, but we can lose hope and it is the closest thing to hating Him for the Christian. At this point we really have no love for Him.

At this point it is probable that God must do something. Perhaps He allows the pain we are experiencing to get worse in order to motivate us to get help. Perhaps it is our own pride that has caused us to lose hope- we are being me centered instead of God centered- we want His gifts (comfort, freedom, etc.) more than God Himself.

Nonetheless, a first level of victory is that we *are* fighting our temptations. We are saying "no" to emotions of the flesh and choosing to walk in the Spirit. And on some days, for some hours, we are succeeding. We are successfully suppressing our bad emotions and "grinding it out." There is no joy, but at least there is less sin.

Unfortunately, many Christians believe this is the normal Christian life. Constant struggle with sin and satan. Battling everyday almost every minute to control our mind *And it is exhausting!*

Thankfully, there is another level of victory beyond struggling, and it is *freedom*. At this level we have renewed the part of our mind that believes a lie that gives us sinful desires. The Lord Jesus now reigns over that part of our heart and we are hardly even tempted in that area any more. Living in the Spirit with love, joy, and peace is our normal operating mode now, and we are free to

love others and serve God and we have the emotional and spiritual strength to do so!

One of the reasons this can happen is that there is a limited number of demonic footholds in our life. We will discuss further in the next section what these are and how they form. But these footholds are especially controlling in our life, and when they are eliminated, we regain a very significant amount of control.

As we will note below, one of the best examples of demonic footholds is unforgiveness that causes bitterness. When we forgive we are released from that foothold. Fortunately there is a rather limited number of people we need to forgive, and when we do, we will find our struggle with bitterness radically changed.

While we will never get to the end of the lies we believe until the resurrection, we can renew the "big ones" and live at a level of freedom we never thought possible. Don't ever settle for a state of hopelessness. Not if you are a chosen child of God. And don't ever settle for just struggling, but continue to be transformed by the renewing of your mind so you are really living the life of freedom and love that He has called all of His children to.

Don't ever settle for a state of hopelessness. Not if you are a chosen child of God. And don't ever settle for just struggling, but continue to be transformed by the renewing of your mind so you are really living the life of freedom and love that He has called all of His children to.

B.3) How wounds of the heart happen: *Demonic footholds*

When we experience a particularly traumatic, emotional, and/or painful event, there is a message in it. As we noted in the previous chapter:

[T]he data we receive in the context of emotionally charged events makes a far greater impression on us than otherwise. Often our most powerful beliefs (good or bad) have been imprinted in the atmosphere of experiencing powerful emotions.²⁴²

If we do not have the truth or are not able to process the truth about that event, we receive the world's interpretation of it and a lie is imprinted on a part of our mind. The Apostle spoke of this when he wrote: **"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a**

²⁴² Excerpt from 4.6.A.3.

foothold [*topon*: "a place of habitation"²⁴³] (Eph 4:27).

²⁴³ BAGD gives the possible definitions of *topon* as: *a place of habitation, a position held, or an opportunity*. Accordingly, the Apostle is translated/interpreted here in two different ways. 1) a warning that anger can give the devil a *place* of control in an *individual's* heart, (NIV, NLT, KJV, NKJV, MSG, JBP, JB or; 2) a warning that the anger of a person gives the devil an *opportunity* to influence a *congregation* as a whole (NASB, ESV, NCV, TEV, NET). Other translations are less clear (RSV "room," NCV "a way," and NEB "loop-hole").

Most modern commentators interpret the warning as applying to opportunity within the congregation (cf. John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* [Intervarsity, 1979], 187; A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* [Word, 1990], 302; Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* [Baker, 2009], 623; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans, 1984], 361-2; Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* [online at www.ccel.org], *in loc.*).

Some commentators see the possibility of both meanings (Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians* [Eerdmans, 1999], 141; Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans, 1999], 341. However, O'Brien adds, "it does not signify, as Robinson, 112, an 'opportunity for the entry of an evil spirit' into the person (341).

First of all, the lexical data strongly suggests the proper translation is "place of habitation" rather than "opportunity." The Greek word *topon* is used in the NT 93 times and in the NASB is given the meaning "place of habitation" 88 times and only 3 times as "opportunity." Obviously the vast majority of the time it means "a place of habitation" rather than an "opportunity," so we would assume it to have the former meaning unless the context demands otherwise. This certainly isn't the case at Ephesians 4:27, and therefore the normal meaning of *topon* is the correct one. In fact, we must ask how else would the devil have opportunity in a congregation unless he has a foothold in an individual?

Accordingly, we believe John Calvin (1509–1564) interpreted it best:

Neither give place (τῷ διαβόλῳ) to the devil. I am aware of the interpretation which some give of this passage. Erasmus (and Luther, Barclay), who translates it, "neither give place to the Slanderer," (*calumniatori*,) shews plainly that he understood it as referring to malicious men.

But I have no doubt, Paul's intention was, to guard us against allowing Satan to take possession of our minds, and, by keeping in his hands this citadel, to do whatever he pleases. (*Commentaries*, online at www.ccel.org)

John MacArthur has a similar view (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* [Moody, 1986]). Like Calvin, there is no doubt in our minds that by using *topon* the Apostle meant to warn that unresolved anger will give the devil control of a part of our heart. Of course, then, this would give him influence in a community of believers to spread that anger. But the individual foothold in the believer's life must not be excluded from the Apostle's meaning.

Webster's Dictionary defines "foothold" as "a position usable as a base for further advance."²⁴⁴ Paul is warning us that if a person does not resolve their anger in a godly way, it will imprint their mind in such a way that gives the devil control of that part of their heart.

Accordingly, John Calvin (1509–1564) commented on Ephesians 4:27:

Paul's intention was to guard us against allowing Satan to take possession of our minds, and, by keeping in his hands this citadel, to do whatever he pleases. We feel every day how impossible, or, at least, how difficult it is to cure long-continued hatred. What is the cause of this, but that, instead of resisting the devil, we yield up to him the possession of our heart? Before the poison of hatred has found its way into the heart, anger must be thoroughly dislodged.²⁴⁵

Or as Charles Hodge (1797–1878) commented here: "Anger when cherished gives the Tempter great power over us."²⁴⁶

Let us consider this example for a moment. Someone says or does something to us that hurts us emotionally. Instead of believing and obeying the truth we respond with anger. We hold on to that anger, and over time "forget" about it. But it is still unresolved. Because we don't want to keep consciously thinking about our hurt and anger we push it into our subconscious mind, still unresolved. There is now a part of our heart in which the devil has "**a foothold**," "a position usable as a base for further advance." Accordingly, later, when someone says or does something similar to hurt or offend us, that part of our mind is triggered and the stored up anger comes out in an almost uncontrollable fashion.

These corrupted parts of our "heart" can also be understood as "pain bubbles." When something painful occurs in our life and we do not process it with God, we simply stuff it into our subconscious. Our mind was created by God to do this in order to protect us when we are not capable of processing pain. What forms in our sub-conscious is a "pain bubble" which can be pricked and may leak if we experience something similar to the original event that hurt us.

While the mind is able to encapsulate these painful memories for a time, it requires a considerable amount of emotional energy. As

²⁴⁴ Online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/foothold>.

²⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries*, online at www.ccel.org.

²⁴⁶ Hodge, *in loc*.

we get older, it is quite common for the "pain bubbles" or "anger bubbles" or "fear bubbles" to start leaking their emotions. When this occurs for the Christian, it is an indication that we are now mature enough to process the pain that we have suppressed so that it is relieved completely.

And remarkably, we will find that the emotionally painful part of the memory was the lie about ourselves that we believed. When that lie is resolved with God's truth, even the most horrific events in our life are no longer emotionally painful.

We can also speak of these corrupted parts of our heart as wounded. When we experience pain, fear, shame, or other overwhelming negative emotions in a traumatic event we are wounded. If we don't know how to process that hurt, or choose not to, our God-given defense mechanisms respond and we cover up the hurt, trying to forget it and thinking that we have. Over time, we just put layer after layer of "bandages" on that wound, but never really resolve it. Therefore, it is always "hanging around," chasing us, and ready to present itself given the opportunity.

Perhaps another example will help. The author was counseling a Pastor who was struggling with discouragement. He said the reason was that he just felt like he could never do enough to feel good about himself. He thought that if he became a Pastor that then he would feel like he was valuable. He was asked to focus on that feeling of worthlessness, and then asked to remember the first time he felt that way. Immediately his mind went to a time as a young boy when his dad told him he would never amount to anything. Because he was so young and didn't have Christ he could not properly process that message and it imprinted that part of his heart with the message "you're worthless." And even though he tried to forget about that painful message, it was always running in the background, driving him to prove it wrong. It was "**a foothold**" of the devil in his life that controlled much of what he did.

As an 8 year old he processed the experience wrongly, and believed a lie that he carried with him for 30 years. Now as a mature Christian he was able to reinterpret correctly what happened, renew that part of his mind and be changed- set free from this feeling of being a bad person.

C) Renewing Wounded Parts of Our Heart: *Biblical meditation*

Healing these corrupted parts of our heart is a matter of the biblical practice of meditation. In our fast paced, microwave, superficial, feelings-oriented world, we have lost the skill of meditation. But it is biblical. We read in Joshua:

Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate [*hāgâ*] on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:7-8; cf. Ps 1:2; 63:6; 77:12; 143:5)

Biblical meditation involves recognizing what is going on in our heart, confessing it to God, understanding it, and giving it to God for resolution. Meditating gets us from merely hearing, understanding, or knowing something to actually believing it and being changed by it. Christian meditation is applying the truth of God's word to the deceived places of our heart so we might be free of the pain, fear, and control those lies exercise. More specifically, meditation helps us to access and transform the subconscious parts of our mind that continue to affect us.

One very effective way to meditate is to ask yourself critical questions. Below we will suggest some very simple, but life-changing questions that help us get God's truth where it needs to go so that the parts of our mind that need renewing, can be

changed. We have seen these questions work hundreds of times to lead people to spiritual and emotional freedom from the most powerful painful experiences and persistent lies. The questions facilitate the steps of meditation necessary to heal wounded parts of our heart.

C.1) Recognize persistent negative emotions

Heart ? #1: Is what I’m feeling a fruit of the Holy Spirit?

The first step to healing such wounds is to honestly recognize them. Table 4.7: “Recognizing Spiritual Oppression,” the kinds of feelings produced by the Holy Spirit as opposed to those produced by the devil’s lies and work in our life.

Table 4.7: Recognizing Spiritual Oppression

Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; 2 Tim 1:7)	Possible Sign of Oppression <i>I feel . . .</i>	Sign of Freedom <i>I feel . . .</i>
Love	Angry	Compassion of Christ
	Lonely	Presence of Christ
	Envious	Content in Christ
	Unappreciated	Appreciated by Christ
	Selfish	Sacrificial for Christ
	Critical/Annoyed	Accepting like Christ
	Insignificant	Valuable in Christ
	Ugly	Created by Christ
	Embarrassed	Accepted by Christ
	Excluded	Wanted by Christ
Joy	Discouraged	Hopeful in Christ
	Discontent	Fulfilled in Christ
	Complaining	Grateful for Christ
Peace	Worried/Afraid	Secure in Christ
	Guilty	Forgiven by Christ
	Frustrated	Calm through Christ
	Dirty	Clean through Christ
	Fearful	Courageous in Christ
	Offended	Humility of Christ
	Rebellious	Submissive to Christ
Self-control	Addicted	Free in Christ
	Tempted	Focused on Christ

	Bored	Serving Christ
	Obsessive	Balanced in Christ
Power	Helpless	Able with Christ
	Fatigued	Energized by Spirit
	Hopeless	Hopeful in Christ
	Overwhelmed	Empowered by Spirit
	Trapped	Free in Christ
Sound mind	Confused	Peace from Christ
	Stupid	Competent in Christ

The table reflects the biblical fact that Christians are to be consistently experiencing the "**fruit of the Spirit**" which is "**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**" (Gal 5:22-23). Likewise, the Apostle reminds us that "**God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control**" (2 Tim 1:7).

Therefore, when we are not experiencing these fruits of the Spirit, we know we are not being controlled by the Holy Spirit but a different spirit.²⁴⁷ We must not be content with living like we don't have God living inside of us! The Holy Spirit empowered life is the normal Christian life. We must honestly admit this and recognize that consistent overwhelming negative emotions reveal that a part of our heart is not controlled by the Lord of truth, but the father of lies.

The Bible repeatedly warns us to monitor the emotions of our heart. Solomon said: "**Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life**" (Pr 4:23). While feelings are lousy guides to what really is true, they are very good indicators of what we believe is true. Paul reminds us, "**take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ**" (2 Cor 10:5). This requires constant vigilance. Peter writes: "**Be self-controlled**

²⁴⁷ Understand that we are not saying that a born-again Christian can be possessed by a demon in the same way an unregenerated person could. However, demonic control is always in the form of lies people believe, and if we believe lies, "**our struggle**" will be "**against the spiritual forces of evil**" operating in and around our life. For further discussion see the classic treatment by C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Crossway, 1987).

and alert because your enemy prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). We know we are being "devoured" by our enemy when we are overwhelmed with negative emotions contrary to the fruit of the Spirit.

We are in a spiritual battle and must be aware of when we are being attacked. And the first step is to recognize it by constantly asking the question: Is what I'm feeling a fruit of the Holy Spirit? Overwhelming negative emotions or confusion that are not of the Holy Spirit should alarm us that we are under attack and must fight back.

C.2) Reveal the lie

Heart ? #2: What am I believing that makes me feel this way?

Once we have recognized that we are experiencing something not of the Holy Spirit, we need to understand its source. We can ask for God's help in this as David did when he prayed:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious"] thoughts [*serappim*: "disquieting thoughts" ²⁴⁸; **And see if there be any hurtful** [*otsēb*: "painful," "sorrowful," NASB "hurtful" ²⁴⁹] **way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way** [which is truth]. (Ps 139:23-24)

David was looking for spiritual/emotional wounds, hurt places in his heart that were causing "**disturbing thoughts**." He knew he would have freedom when he discovered the truth that would set him free.

Likewise, when David was experiencing a negative overwhelming emotion, he confronted it with a question to better understand it. Three times David is recorded as saying:

²⁴⁸ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, Gleason Archer, R. Laird Harris, Bruce K. Waltke eds. (Moody, 1980), 880.

²⁴⁹ The *TWOT* tells us that *ōtseb* used here in Ps 139:24 means "sorrow" while its root word *āsab* "relates to physical pain as well as to emotional sorrow." (687-88)

Accordingly, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch interpret the statement as referring to "the pain, torture, viz., of the inward and outward punishments of sin" (*in loc.*). Therefore, "**Offensive**" (NIV, NLT) and "**wicked**" (RSV, KJV) seem misleading.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God. (Ps 42:5-6; cf. 42:11; 43:5)

This is biblical meditation. Recognizing unspiritual emotions in our heart and investigating them to resolve them.

What we are looking for in our meditation is the lie we are believing. The source of all experiences not of the Holy Spirit is believing a lie. That is how our flesh, the world, and the devil exert influence in our lives: by convincing us of a lie. This is why we must confront our negative emotions and ask: Why am I feeling this way?

The answer to that question will probably expose a lie, or a message that a part of our heart believes and is controlling us right now. It may be necessary to ask follow up questions such as: "Why do I believe that?" The goal is to expose the root lie we are believing *about ourselves*.

C.3) Resolve the past

Heart ? #3: When is the first time I remember feeling that way because I believed that?

Once we have exposed the lie, we need to determine when we were imprinted with it. Jesus said, "**You will know the truth and the truth will set you free**" (John 8:32). However, it is possible for a part of our heart to know the truth, and another part not to. Remember, for stubborn lies it will not help to just feed the truth into the "front" part of our mind hoping it will renew it. We have to locate the "bad sector" on our heart in our subconscious.

We do that by first focusing on the lie we are believing *and how that lie makes us feel*. The painful emotions that the lie produces are the smoke from the fire that burns inside. Follow the smoke and you will find the fire.

Finding the location of the "bad sector" of our memory, the wounded part of our heart, is then done by asking another question: When is the first time I remember feeling that way because I believed that? Your mind will normally be able to connect to a memory, if there is one, that relates to what you are feeling

and why you are feeling it. Now you are where the truth can truly set you free.²⁵⁰

C.4) Receive freeing truth

Heart ? #4: What would Jesus say about what happened or what you believed or experienced?

When we've gained access to the wounded, deceived part of our heart by following our emotions and memory, we are in a place where we can experience the truth in a way that truly sets us free. In our past experience we did not know the truth, or believe the truth. We maybe didn't even know Christ. But now we can go back with Christ and the truth and "re-experience" what wounded us and imprinted us with a controlling lie, and be set free from it.

C.5) Taking steps of faith

²⁵⁰ Some have claimed that it is unbiblical to meditate on your past based on Paul's statement: **"one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"** (Phil 3:13-14).

First, we cannot understand the Apostle literally here as if he had total amnesia about his past and had truly forgotten it. Writing late in life, he recalls: **"I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man"** and **"the worst of sinners"** (1 Tim 1:13, 16). The Apostle did not *forget* his past, but he *resolved it*. How do we know this? Because he speaks so much about a clear conscience, and that no doubt included how he had treated Christians before becoming one.

At some point, the Apostle had to address his past in light of God's grace, so that even though he had been involved in the murder of Christians, he could say later in life: **"I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men"** (Acts 20:26; cf. 2 Tim 1:3). There simply is no way the Apostle could have gained such peace about his past by merely **"forgetting what is behind."** In fact, the only way he could be **"straining toward what is ahead"** is by resolving his past with God.

If we still doubt that meditating and resolving our past has a vital place in the Christian life, then we need only think about what is involved in lasting forgiveness. We cannot truly forgive unless we go back and embrace the incident, are honest about its pain and cost, and then let it go, right there, in our heart, where it still hurts. True forgiveness requires meditation and resolution of our past.

Heart ? #5: Why am I resisting this process?

This process works. And it is fairly simple. But it can be very difficult. Primarily because we are resolving painful experiences and beliefs in our lives. The author remembers asking a counselee: "When do you remember first feeling that way because you believed that?" They responded: "Pastor, it's like you are asking me to put my hand on a red hot burner. I can't go there."

And they should not be forced to. Every step of this process must be taken in faith. The person must believe it is safe and worthwhile to address the painful parts of their heart before it will be helpful for them to do so.

The reason that a person has difficulty processing their wounds is that they are surrounded by what we call "guardian lies." These are beliefs that "protect" the wounded parts of our heart. Something like "I'm afraid what I'll find out," or "It will be too overwhelming and painful to go to that dark place in my mind," or "this is all just a bunch of garbage, I just need to buck up and live on instead of delving into my past." Believing such lies will keep us from having the necessary faith to go in our mind where we need to go to resolve wounds in our heart.

Accordingly, another very important question will often be: Why am I resisting this process? And then you will have to process through emotions and lies in order to get to the place in your mind where and when the original wound occurred.

It is possible to do such meditation on your own with God. However, because the issues that need to be resolved are so painful and emotional, most people need help to go through the process above. Their emotions and the demonic footholds being confronted simply overwhelm the person making it very difficult to *think*, and ask and answer questions, which is precisely what needs to be done. Accordingly, going through this process with a trusted friend is highly recommended.

D) Biblical Spiritual Warfare

D.1) The battle is simply between lies & truth

While for some the instruction here may sound too psychological, we would claim it is simply biblical spiritual warfare. The Scripture warns us of demonic "**footholds**" in our life caused

by not responding correctly to difficult experiences in our life (Eph 4:27). Later in Ephesians, the Apostle describes our spiritual warfare, **"against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"** (Eph 6:12). And what other way do such **"forces"** attack and influence us other than the lies they communicate through **"the pattern of this world"** (Rom 12:2) and the desires and deceptions of our sinful nature?

Biblical spiritual warfare is not about exorcising demons as many, particularly in *charismaticism*, suppose. Jesus warned us that mere exorcism without a renewing of the mind with truth will put a person in danger of being worse (cf. Matt 12:43-45).²⁵¹ As one of our favorite experts on the subject, Neil Anderson, has said, "What we are after is a *truth* encounter, not a *power* encounter."

The author has dealt with many demonic influences in his counseling ministry to Christians, and when the focus turns to the demon itself, resolution of the person's difficulty is only hindered. What is necessary is to expose the lies that the demon is using to control the person's thoughts and life, and then to help the person realize the truth that defends them against that lie. With every lie that is resolved, the demonic influence is weakened to the point that he simply leaves because he has no authority or power to be there.

Spiritual warfare is simply a battle between truth and lies. It really, truly is that simple. When the Apostle explains that **"we . . . wage war"** against **"strongholds . . . arguments and every**

²⁵¹ On the dangers of exorcism Jesus warned:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. (Matt 12:43-5)

It needs to be remembered that what gives a demon influence and authority in a person's life is the lies the person believes. If the mere *presence* of a demon is forced away, but the lies the person believes are not replaced with protective truth, and their mind is **"unoccupied,"** the person will be susceptible to even more deception and accordingly more demonic control.

Leon Morris comments on the parallel passage in Luke 11:24-26: "When anyone gets rid of an evil spirit and puts nothing in its place, he is in grave moral danger" (*Luke*, [Eerdmans, 1999], 218). Likewise, Darrell Bock concludes: "Exorcism alone is not sufficient. Exorcism only benefits when one then responds to God" (*Luke* [Baker, 1996], 1092).

pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" we understand that our fight is against lies. Accordingly, being **"devour[ed]"** by our **"enemy"** (1 Pet 5:8) is simply a result of not defending ourselves against **"the flaming arrows of the evil one"** (Eph 6:16), which again, are simply lies.

Therefore **"the weapons we fight with . . . have divine power to demolish strongholds . . . arguments and very pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge [truth] of God,** because the weapons are divine truth.

This is how we **"resist"** the devil. By **"standing firm in the faith"** (1 Pet 5:8). And what is faith? Simply believing and/or obeying the truth.

D.2) The importance of knowing our identity in Christ: *Free at last*

Accordingly, believing and obeying the truth is essentially what the spiritual armor that Paul describes is made of:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:14-17)

The **"breastplate of righteousness"** is not only our practical holiness which certainly protects us from demonic influences, but also the conviction of our positional holiness against the slander and guilt-inducing accusations of the evil one. The **"flaming arrows of the evil one"** are simply lies in our mind that we need to **"take captive [and] . . . make . . . obedient to Christ"** (2 Cor 10:5). This is accomplished by exercising our **"shield of faith,"** and faith is simply believing the truth. **"The helmet of salvation"** is our belief in our position and identity in Christ as accepted, secure, and significant children of God. And **"the sword of the Spirit"** that He uses to defeat the devil's designs on our life, **"is the word of God"** and the truth contained there.

The armor of God against the attacks of the devil is an understanding and conviction of our identity in Christ. This is what the devil attacks and it is doubts about who God has made us that cause sin and pain in our lives. On the other hand, a realization of our acceptance, security, and significance in Christ will set us free

and protect us from virtually everything the devil would ever say to us.

Throughout Romans 6-9 the Apostle is trying to explain this to us by reminding us we are dead to sin (cf. 6:1-14). This does not mean sin has ceased to exist. Death in Scripture means separation, not cessation. Before being regenerated we were separated from God and our nature was a sinner. Sin defined us. After regeneration we are joined to God and separated from sin—dead to it in the sense it no longer defines us, and our New Nature now is the Holy Spirit. We still sin because of the old programming in our minds, but when we sin it is not the real us.

The Apostle vividly portrays this in his description of his own struggle with sin:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin [old programming] living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [old programming]. . . . ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin [old programming] living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being [my real re-created self] I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law [old programming] at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. (Rom 7:15-23)

The Apostle simply said that when he sinned it was not the real him sinning. Sinning is no longer what the real him wanted to do, it is not a part of his identity. He has died to sin, been separated from being identified with it. He is a saint, not a sinner.

Christianity has developed all sorts of ministries and approaches to helping Christians overcome sin. But the only thing that really works is learning our identity in Christ. Listen to the testimony of Mike Quarles, the current Director of Neil Anderson's Freedom in Christ Ministries:

"I graduated from seminary and went into the pastorate. It was my custom to spend at least an hour a day in Bible study and prayer. I memorized chapters of Scripture. I fasted and prayed. I read hundreds of books and listened to numerous tapes. . . . I witnessed enthusiastically to anything that

moved. . . . I tried to do everything I had been taught in order to live the successful Christian life.

What was the result of all this? My wife and children didn't respect me because in my zeal to make them be good Christians, I became legalistic, harsh, and unloving. My marriage was a mess and my personal life was a shambles. I came to the realization that everything I had learned about living the Christian life just was not working for me. Finally I came to grips with reality and left the pastorate. . . . In a short period of time I became a full-fledged alcoholic. . . .

I . . . began trying everything I knew to stop, but nothing seemed to help. This is what I tried:

1. Consistent Quiet Time
2. Bible Study
3. Fasting
4. Visitation Evangelism
5. Christian Twelve Step Program
6. Accountability group
7. Hundreds of AA meetings and five different sponsors
8. Christian counselors
9. Christian psychiatrist
10. Secular psychiatrist
11. Christian psychologist
12. Secular psychologist
13. Addictions counselor
14. Flew to New Jersey and spent 3 days with an addictions specialist
15. Secular treatment center
16. Christian treatment center
17. Read every book on addiction I could find
18. Healing of memories session
19. Baptism of the Spirit session
20. Casting out of demons session (twice)
21. Public confession
22. Group therapy
23. Taking the prescription drug antabuse
24. Disciplined by my church
25. Rigid schedule with every minute planned
26. Hundreds of hours studying Scriptural principles
27. Memorized chapters of Scripture
28. Discipleship groups
29. Prayer
30. Promises to God and my wife.

Where did all of this get me? I became totally out of control. I was depressed for days on end and suicidal. . . .

Why didn't any of this work? All were things I was doing in the flesh and "sinful passions are aroused by the flesh" (Rom 7:5). Whenever we commit ourselves to a program, rules, method, principles, etc. to perform, we put ourselves under law and the law is what gives sin power in our lives (1 Cor 15:56). . . .

What was the problem? The problem was not the bad behavior but the belief behind the behavior that caused me to act that way. . . .

Finally a close friend handed me some tapes and said, "Here, listen to these, maybe they'll help you." . . . [Later] I was driving along listening to the third tape which was teaching on our death in Christ. Rom 6:6-7 says, "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."

[I thought] That's what I need, but how do I make that true in my life? Then [the teacher] said, "It is not something you do, it is something that has been done; our death with Christ is past tense, the old person that we were was crucified and anyone you has died has been freed from sin' (Rom 6:2), you are 'dead to sin' (Rom 6:11). I know you don't act dead to sin, you don't feel dead to sin, you don't even look dead to sin, you think that is just a positional truth, that's just the way God sees me. Listen, if that's the way God sees you, that is the way it is. If that is what God says about you, that is the truth about you."

It was at that moment that the lights came on and in that moment I knew the truth. I knew I had died with Christ and the old sin loving sinner had died and was no more. I had believed the lie and acted like it for all these years, but that was not who I was. . . .

I had believed the lie that I was a hopeless, helpless alcoholic and had lived in bondage all the years I believed it. But [now] I knew without a shadow of a doubt, that I, Mike Quarles, was a child of God who was "in Christ," because I had died with Christ, was dead to sin and had been freed from sin. Free at last, free at last! Praise God I was free at last !!!!!!!!

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²⁵² Testimony of Mike Quarles at <http://www.freedomfromaddiction.org/site/Mike.html>.

A born again Christian in bondage to sin is like an innocent man in a jail cell behind a closed, but unlocked door. As long as the man believes he is guilty or that the door is locked and he is incapable of opening it, he will unnecessarily remain behind those bars. But the moment he would believe he was innocent, did not belong in jail, that the door was not locked, and he could open it, he would rather effortlessly do so. What you believe is the difference between spiritual and moral victory or defeat. Which is why, as we describe below in section C.5, the spiritual "armor" that the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 6 is primarily made up of the understanding and belief we have in biblical doctrine.

Pastoral Practices

- Our identity in Christ is our spiritual armor. This is why the Apostle wrote three chapters or 66 verses in Ephesians before he gave them any commands to *obey*. He started with a focus on doctrines they needed to *believe*, so that they *could* consistently obey the commands in chapters 5-6, and successfully fight the war as directed in chapter 6.

This is the same reason the Apostle spends the first 11 chapters and 314 verses of Romans teaching theology. You can find only 4 verses out of those 314 that give a command to do something (cf. 6:11-13; 8:12), and it is essentially the command to believe the theology Paul is teaching and consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. In essence then, in the first 11 chapters of Romans Paul gives the Christians only one thing to do and apply.

Does such a priority reflect the teaching in our churches? The Apostle understood that right believing is the only way to consistently, and rather effortlessly produce right living. This is why it is so vital to the health of Christians that we teach doctrines to believe and not just commands to obey.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father, we thank You that when we know Your truth, that truth will set us free. Help us to recognize demonic "footholds" in our life? Those places that the Holy Spirit does not consistently control us. And give us the faith and love for You necessary to confront those places in our heart and see them healed. And may Your great grace be with us through the whole process of giving more of our heart to You.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is the "Great Commission"? What is the Micro "Great Commission"?
- 2) What four word command do we use to summarize the "Great Commission"? What are the ramifications and assumptions in such a command?
- 3) We claim that a "disciple" in Scripture is a Christian. Why? Do you agree or disagree?
- 4) Simply put, how does life transformation occur?
- 5) How does the understanding that our "hearts" are in parts, help us to understand how we can "believe" something, but not seem to consistently act upon it?
- 6) What is the danger of painful traumatic events in our life?
- 7) How is a demonic "foothold" formed in our lives? What is the result? Give some examples.
- 8) What is the source of the emotional pain in our memories? What then needs to occur for the pain to cease?
- 9) How do we describe meditation? How is it facilitated?
- 10) What are the 5 "Heart ?'s" that have proven successful in helping people resolve their painful past and demolish demonic "footholds"?

- 11) What do we need to vigilantly monitor to recognize if we are being attacked?
- 12) As you look over Table 4.7, are there any overwhelming negative thoughts that you struggle with? Do you have someone who can help you follow the process outlined above to resolve them?

Publications & Particulars

Book 4

Biblical Psychology

Part II

***Whole-hearted
Spirituality***

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Chapter 4.8

Whole-hearted Worship

In Spirit and In Truth

Overall Objective

To demonstrate the importance of reason in even Christian worship practices, and correct some of the error in modern *emotionalism*.

Table of Topics

A) Worshipping in Spirit & in Truth: *John 4:21-24*

B) Whole-hearted Christian Ecstasy: *Revelational & Rational*

B.1) Christian ecstasy is revelational and rational

B.2) Christian ecstasy is not being out of control

B.2.a) The spirits of Prophets are under the control of
Prophets: *1 Cor 14:32*

B.2.b) Paul was never "out of his mind": *2 Cor 5:12-13*

B.3) Christian ecstasy is not "possession"

C) Whole-hearted Worship: *I will praise you, O LORD, with all
my heart (Ps 9:1)*

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- To worship God **"in spirit and in truth"** (John 4:24), and to **"sing with my spirit [and] also sing with my mind"** (1 Cor 14:15) requires "whole-hearted" worship which engages all our mental faculties, not just the feelings as in paganism, and not just the lips as in formalism.
- The goal of "Half-hearted" worship (*emotionalism*) is to merely and momentarily affect the *emotions* of people, instead of *changing their lives*.
- Because of the popularity of music particularly among young Christians, the Teachers, Prophets, and Psalmists of the next generation will be the Christian pop artists, and they had better take that responsibility seriously.
- It is not merely emotional worship we are concerned about, but rather, *mindless* worship which often results in merely emotional worship.
- The **"truth"** that needs to be in our worship is the biblical understanding and appreciation of both the "high God" and "nigh God" of Scripture.
- Perhaps the most significant influence that *emotionalism* has had on American Christianity is that we clap more in our worship services.
- Having a more "emotional" worship service is simply a personal preference and has no automatic bearing on how God-pleasing our worship is.
- King David is a biblical example of the biblical balance needed in *whole-hearted worship*.
- Unlike many modern Christian songs, the Psalms were not valued for the emotion that came from the *tunes* in them, but the *truth* in them. Even the good Christian lyrics in many songs are ignored because people get so caught up in the beat, that they miss the meat.

A) Worshipping in Spirit & in Truth

Throughout *The Knowledge of God* series in Knowing Our God we have endeavored to practically illustrate the God-ordained importance of human reason in a life lived to please God. Especially in recent years, this issue has become important in the area of Christian worship and spirituality. What is the balance between emotion and understanding in God-pleasing worship? How is our reason involved in true spirituality? Unfortunately, this is not merely an academic issue, or one for just worship leaders. On the contrary, a lack of understanding regarding the issues discussed here result in sin and damaging the faith of God's people.

Worship is a multi-faceted topic in the Christian life. Of course, our whole life is to be worship (cf. Rom 12:1-3), but we also have specific times of worship, usually in a Sunday morning service, in which we are communicating with God in song. It is in this particular aspect of Christian worship in which we want to illustrate the importance of our mind and reasoning faculties in this section.

Along these lines in the previous chapter we wrote:

Supreme love will include all the positive emotions that result from an understanding and appreciation of God's attributes. This is why Christ described this *complete and supreme love* as loving **"the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"** (Matt 22:37). . . . God-pleasing spirituality and worship demand a "whole-hearted" approach which includes the beliefs of our reason, holy desires, and appropriate emotions. A suppression of any of these God-given aspects of our human makeup is what we call "half-hearted" worship.²⁵³

Accordingly, the King made it clear that our reasoning faculties are an essential component of God pleasing worship when He told the Samaritan woman:

The time is coming when neither in Jerusalem nor on this mountain will you actually worship the Father. You Samaritans worship something you don't understand. We understand what we worship, because salvation comes from the Jews. The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, and that time is here already. You see, the Father too is actively seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in

²⁵³ Excerpt from section 4.6.C.1.

spirit and truth. (John 4:21-24 NCV)

The context of Christ's statement was a religious culture that believed the *place* of worship mattered, whether it was the Jewish temple or a particularly famous mountain. Of course, that was often the case in the OT with God dwelling in a specific place, such as a tabernacle or the top of Mount Sinai. Obviously many religious people today continue to believe that certain places are especially sacred. Christ used such a suggestion to make the point that what really mattered to God was the *heart* of worship, not its location.

More specifically, the human "heart" is what matters to God in worship, including its functions of understanding, belief, desires, and emotions. The King was referring to *whole-hearted worship* when He described it as worshipping "**in spirit and truth**," because this kind of worship requires the whole "heart."²⁵⁴

The precise meaning of *pneuma* ("spirit") in Scripture is often difficult to discern because even when referring to the human spirit, as it would seem to here,²⁵⁵ it has a variety of meanings.²⁵⁶ *Vine's Expository Dictionary* lists one as "the sentient element in man, that by which he perceives, reflects, feels, desires,"²⁵⁷ with some uses particularly including our emotions (cf. Matt 5:3; Luke 1:47; Acts 17:16).

The point we wish to make from Christ's statement is this: proper beliefs enable us to worship God *correctly* ("in truth"), but

²⁵⁴ NT scholar Leon Morris comments on the phrase "**spirit and truth**":

The linking of the two nouns under a single preposition shows that they belong together. There is one complex idea. E. C. Blackman takes the expression as demanding worship "conformable to the divine nature which is spirit, and determined by the truth which God has made available concerning himself. . . . Cf. Westcott: "Worship is necessarily limited by the idea of the being worshipped. A true idea of God . . . is essential to a right service [and worship] of Him." (*The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans, 1995], 239).

²⁵⁵ Few translations (LB, CEV) or commentators render *pneuma* here as the Holy Spirit, but most understand Christ to be speaking of the human spirit. Accordingly, Morris comments, "It is not likely that "spirit" here means the Holy Spirit. . . . It is the human spirit that is in mind." (*Ibid.*)

Nevertheless, Jesus is certainly referring to a human spirit influenced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which would affect and control the emotions coming from the human spirit in a God-honoring way. (cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), 224-226).

²⁵⁶ See a rather complete listing of the variety of meanings for *pneuma* in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson, 1996), 593.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

our “spirit,” and the desires and emotions there, enable us to worship Him *completely*. We see here in Christ’s statement, a description of worshipping God with our whole “heart.” Our beliefs enable us to understand and know God, our desires enable us to love and serve Him, and our feelings enable us to experience delight in all of these things. And the emotion of delight is an integral part of God-pleasing worship (see Ps 1:2; 16.3; 37:4; 43.4; 112.1, 9 times in Ps 119; Jer 16.10; Isa 61.10).

Every aspect of our “heart” is important in God-pleasing worship. Unfortunately, some Christian traditions neglect or even disparage different parts of the “heart” in worship. For example, more formal and liturgical worship traditions often do not welcome the expression of emotion in a worship service. On the other hand,

modern *charismaticism* ²⁵⁸ would seem to often discount the place

²⁵⁸ By modern *charismaticism* we are primarily referring to what is commonly labeled the “charismatic” movement that began with the Pentecostals in the early 1900’s, spread into denominational churches in the 1960’s and 70’s, and has merged with what is referred to as the Third Wave churches today. Pentecostal churches include Assembly of God, Church of God, Open Bible, Apostolic, Foursquare Gospel, and Full Gospel. Third Wave churches include Vineyard and a variety of independent congregations.

We thank God for all He has done through the “charismatic” movement, and for the dear Christian brothers and sisters who would claim membership in it. However, throughout *Knowing Our God (KOG)* we refrain from referring to this movement as “charismatic,” because this erroneously implies a uniqueness and even superiority in Christian grace (*charis*), and by further implication, a superior possession or experience of the Holy Spirit.

Surely no right-minded “charismatic” would desire to claim such a superiority over their Christian brothers and sisters, especially since they cannot demonstrate one. Biblically speaking, being “**led by the Spirit**,” experiencing His power, and living “**not under law**” but by “**grace [charis]**” is most clearly manifested in the “**fruit of the Spirit**” which the Apostle Paul describes as “**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**” (Gal 5:4, 18, 22-3). “Charismatic” Christians in general are not superior in these virtues of love and holiness compared to other Christians, and these virtues are the real essence of Christian *charisma*, making all obedient Christians true “charismatics,” not just a particular sect.

In fact, the greatest and most important uniqueness of *charismatic* churches over other authentic Christian churches is not their love or holiness, but rather an emphasis on, and practice of: 1) emotional worship, 2) speaking and/or praying in an incoherent tongue, 3) claims to direct divine revelation through spiritual gifts such as prophecy, and 4) claims to a greater abundance of miracles in general through the gifts of healing and miracle working.

Therefore, throughout *KOG* we use the terms *emotionalism* (see chapters 4.8-11), *glossaism* (Gr. glossa: “tongue,” see Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues*), *prophetism* (see Book 9: *Divine Prophets*), and *super-supernaturalism* (see chapters 10.14-16) to refer to these distinctives respectively, while recognizing that they may exist elsewhere as well. Accordingly, we believe this allows us to address the areas of concern we have regarding the movement, and avoid speaking critically of the movement as a whole, which has many good, although not unique, attributes as well.

Likewise, we refrain from referring to those Christians who would differ from “charismatics” as “non-charismatics,” erroneously implying again that the latter is somehow lacking in grace. Rather, those who oppose the sometimes bizarre worship of *emotionalism*, the obscure utterances of *Glossaism*, the extra-biblical revelations of *prophetism*, and the miracle-a-minute mindset of *super-supernaturalism* are better labeled as

of our mind and reason in God-pleasing worship, making it “half-hearted” worship as well. This is what we call *emotionalism* which is the unbiblical neglect or intentional suppression of reason in spirituality or worship practices resulting in unbiblical practices such as modern *glossaism* (speaking in a mindless “tongue”) and being “slain in the Spirit” etc.

Elsewhere, we have pointed out another aspect of *emotionalism*:

A fundamental error of . . . *charismaticism* . . . is the confusion of the work of the Holy Spirit with human emotion. For example, it is popular to think that because a worship service was more emotional, that it was more influenced by the Holy Spirit. This need not be the case, and probably isn’t more times than *emotionalists* think. ²⁵⁹

When mere human emotion is being used to recognize or evaluate the presence of the Holy Spirit, we have full-blown *emotionalism*.

When we understand that the essence of the human “heart” is our reason by which we process and produce all of our beliefs, desires, and feelings, then we understand that “half-hearted” worship does not simply reflect a neglect of our desires or emotions, but our understanding as well. It is this latter error that will be our focus here. ²⁶⁰ While certainly our “**spirit**” (i.e. desires and feelings) is necessary in worship, so is our believing, understanding, and meditating on the “**truth**” which is the function of our reason. As discussed elsewhere:

Our reason is the place in our “heart” that we deal with truth, and whatever truth we possess is processed, produced, applied, and protected there. This includes the most

historicists. This reflects the fact that *for at least 1600 years of Church history, the great majority belief and practice of God’s people was opposed to all of the uniquenesses that the “charismatic” movement claims today.*

It is a historical fact that miraculous gifts such as healing, tongues, and prophecy ceased functioning in the church in the fourth century. Accordingly, the very few people since then who have promoted bizarre forms of worship, obscure utterances in prayer, claims to extra-biblical revelation, and miracle working abilities, were always thought to be deceived and dangerous, and not accepted as biblical Christians. What those in *charismaticism* also refuse to admit, or take seriously enough, is that the modern versions of the miraculous gifts being claimed do not match the attributes of their biblical counterparts. For a great deal of discussion on these matters see the books in *Volume 2* of KOG.

²⁵⁹ Excerpt from section 4.6.C.2.

²⁶⁰ For further discussion of the importance of emotion in the Christian life see esp. sections 4.6.A.2 and 4.6.C.1.

important truths including the Gospel and any knowledge of God. There is nothing we know of God either abstractly or personally that we do not know and keep in our reason. Likewise, God does nothing to us or through us that He does not do through our reason.²⁶¹

Therefore, when the King says that **"the Father is actively seeking . . . people to worship Him . . . in spirit and in truth,"** it is clear that He expects our reasoning faculties to be engaged. The King implies here that Samaritan worship was lacking, yet we doubt that it was primarily a lack of emotion that He was concerned about. Rather, He said Samaritan worship was deficient because, **"You Samaritans worship something you don't understand [oida]."** No doubt one of the reasons that the Samaritans did not adequately understand God for acceptable worship is that they had rejected much of the OT as divine revelation including the Psalms, Prophets, and historical books. Therefore, their worship was not what God wanted because they did not adequately understand the doctrinal truths contained in His written revelation.²⁶²

Essentially, then, we can say that the more truth we know about God, the more meaningful our worship is to *Him*, let alone ourselves. Real worship, the kind that God is seeking, always includes our thinking and understanding. The NT scholar Albert Barnes (1798–1870) summed up what Christ was saying when he wrote: "They shall worship God with a sincere 'mind.'"²⁶³

Also commenting specifically on Christ's description of "whole-hearted" worship in John 4 above, NT scholar John Stott has written:

Christ knew that the only worship acceptable to God is intelligent worship, worship "in truth," the worship offered by those who know whom they are worshipping and who love him

²⁶¹ Quoted from section 2.4.E.

²⁶² Accordingly, Dr. Morris writes concerning John 4:22:

Jesus' concern is with the essential nature of worship. He accordingly points out to the woman the inadequacy of Samaritan worship. Though they worshipped the true God the Samaritans did so very imperfectly. When we consider that they rejected the writings of the Prophets, the Psalms, the historical books of the Old Testament, and much more we realize that their knowledge of God was, of necessity, very limited. (*John*, 238)

²⁶³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999), *in loc*.

"with all their mind." ²⁶⁴

Commenting on the same passage, William Barclay (1907–1978) wrote in his well-known commentary:

A false worship is an ignorant worship. Worship ought to be the approach to God of the whole man. A man has a mind and he has a duty to exercise it. Religion may begin with an emotional response; but the time comes when that emotional response has to be thought out.

E. F. Scott said that religion is far more than merely the strenuous exercise of the intellect, but that nonetheless a very great part of religious failure is due to nothing other than intellectual sloth. To fail to think things out is in itself a sin. In the last analysis, religion is never safe until a man can tell, not only what he believes, but why he believes it. Religion is hope, but it is hope with reason behind it. ²⁶⁵

Perhaps Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) said it best when he wrote in his lengthy treatise on this very topic:

Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from the information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. . . . Now there are many affections which do not arise from any light in the understanding. And when it is thus, it is a sure evidence that these affections are not spiritual, let them be ever so high. ²⁶⁶

Several theologians have echoed the concern of Edwards about the pagan *mysticism* inherent in any act of spirituality that does not engage our reason. Along these lines, the respected Bible teacher John MacArthur gives a good description of such *mysticism* in general, and its prevalence, when he writes:

Mysticism is a system of belief that attempts to perceive spiritual reality apart from objective, verifiable facts. It seeks truth through feelings, intuition, and other internal senses. Objective data is usually discounted, so mysticism derives its authority from within. Spontaneous feeling becomes more

²⁶⁴ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (Intervarsity, 1973), 30.

Jonathan Edwards,

²⁶⁵ William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, CD-ROM (Liguori Publications, 1996).

²⁶⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (online at www.ccel.org), III.4.1.

significant than objective fact. Intuition outweighs reason. An internal awareness supercedes external reality. . . .

Mysticism is at the heart of modern existentialism, humanism, and even many forms of paganism—most notably Hinduism and its close ally, New Age philosophy. Irrational mysticism is also at the heart of the Charismatic [movement's] experience.²⁶⁷

Along these lines, the respected Protestant theologian Bernard Ramm (1916-1992) wrote something that applies to how we worship God on a Sunday morning: "The difference between a wise man and a fool is not in the degree of experience but in the measure of truth extracted from experience,"²⁶⁸ including a church worship service.

Finally, the Christian philosopher/theologian Gordon H. Clark (1902-1985) asked some questions that need to be asked of modern day *emotionalism*:

It is extremely difficult to appreciate the motives, at least in the case of those who are attached to the Bible, which lead to a disparagement of the intellect. Why should emotion be the only way or even the best way to God? Why is it that thinking, meditating, understanding are to be condemned? Why is knowing, conceiving, or apprehending God a poor way, an impossible way, or an impious way of worshipping him? What is wrong with intellectual activity? . . . Those "religious" people who decry logic lack every basis for proclaiming any message at all.²⁶⁹

No doubt feelings and emotions can be a part of God pleasing worship, but these men remind our "sight and sound" generation that the kind of worshipers that God is looking for are those who worship with their reason and mind as well. Surely this is precisely what the Apostle is teaching when he says, "**I shall sing with the spirit and** [at the same time] **I shall sing with the mind also**" (1 Cor 14:15).²⁷⁰ Purely emotional, empty-minded, feelings-centered worship is only *half-hearted worship* to God, and therefore, disappointing to Him. Which should caution our *emotionalist*

²⁶⁷ John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1992), 36.

²⁶⁸ Bernard L., Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Eerdmans, 1957), 45.

²⁶⁹ Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), 110.

²⁷⁰ For further discussion of 1 Cor 14:14-15 see section 4.9.D.

brethren in regards to their common boasts that they worship God better than others. In fact, we would suggest that their mindless worship is inferior, and not superior at all.

Accordingly, the rightly respected British Bible teacher D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) pointed out:

At no point, then, are we deliberately to abandon our intellects. There is never instruction in the Scriptures for us to do that. Deliberately to stop thinking and to let ourselves become blank, as it were, and to surrender ourselves to other forces--that is never advocated in the Scriptures. . . .

You must have seen and read about the kind of thing that happens amongst the more primitive races, how they slowly work themselves up by these means into a condition in which they are no longer thinking and have lost the power of reasoning and understanding. Anything that does that should be suspect. There is nothing approaching it in the New Testament, indeed you find the exact opposite.²⁷¹

If we remember that everything God tells us is for our own good, we can assume the same is true of His instructions for worship. Not only is mindless worship not good for God, but we can be assured that it must not be good for us either. As Leon Morris (1914-2006) put it:

It is not simply that he accepts such worship [**"in spirit and in truth"**] when it is brought to him. He is a God of love, a God who seeks the best for people, and therefore a God who actively seeks them out.²⁷²

In other words, God seeks people who will worship Him **"in spirit and in truth"** because that is what is best for them as well. "Whole-hearted worship" and prayer is hard work. But when we consider Who we are worshipping and praying to, we know it really is one of our greatest joys and privileges.

Along these lines, the Christian theologian E. J. Carnell (1919-1967) shares a biblical example:

Feelings are only as secure as the system of truth which fortifies them. Nehemiah, chapter eight, gives an example of the concomitance of faith and feeling in Christianity. When Ezra opened the law of Moses, the people heard the reading of the word and understood it with their minds. Being convinced in the whole soul that it was the truth, the people wept for

²⁷¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning the Gifts* (Harold Shaw, 1985), 72, 75.

²⁷² Morris, *John*, 240.

their sins. This was contrition. Then they celebrated with eating and drinking and made great mirth, "because they had understood the words that were declared unto them" (Verse 12).

This was emotional joy. Here, in perfection, we see the Christian doctrine of the primacy of truth and the ability of that truth to assuage the whole man. Proper feeling, like proper mysticism, follows upon the establishment of the truth of the law of God. Truth establishes feelings; feelings do not establish truth.²⁷³

One important aspect of the "truth" that needs to be in our worship is a biblical understanding and appreciation for both the "high God" and "nigh God" of Scripture. The God we worship is a "high God," the holy, demanding, sovereign, "**unapproachable**" (1 Tim 6:16) Creator and Judge of the Universe, Who makes people tremble in His presence (cf. Dan 8:15-18), and Who said:

"[M]y thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "As the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55:8-9)

He is equally the "nigh God" who is the humble, compassionate, gracious Father of His children. The Psalmists said: "**God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble**" (Ps 46:1). God the Son came to live with us and then said upon His departure: "**Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age**" (Matt 28:20).

We are not worshipping God "**in truth**" when we neglect or over-emphasize either the "high" or "nigh" facets of Him. While many more informal and contemporary churches tend to neglect our "high God" in their worship, other, more liturgical churches neglect the "nigh God" aspects of our Father. Perhaps if both worshipping communities would use their mind more in worship, letting the Scriptures inform their understanding, a God-pleasing and life changing balance may return to worship in American Christianity.

In our human-centered, feelings oriented culture, a lack of doctrinal content in worship has resulted in a neglect of the "high God" and an overemphasis on the "nigh God" in many churches. Accordingly, NT scholar D. A. Carson writes:

[M]uch modern evangelicalism tends to portray him [God] as

²⁷³ E. J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Eerdmans, 1956), 88.

exclusively personal and warm. Somehow his sovereignty and exalted transcendence disappear. If you enter certain American churches you will hear the enthusiastic singing of some such ditty (I can scarcely grace it with "chorus") as "He's a great big wonderful God." Regrettably, I never fail to think of a great big wonderful teddy bear.

Such "choruses" are not quite heretical, not quite blasphemous. I sometimes wish they were, for then they could be readily condemned for specific evil. They are something much worse than isolated blasphemy and heresy. They constitute part of a pattern of irreverence, shallow theology and experience-dominated religious criteria, which has eviscerated a terribly high proportion of evangelical strength in the Western world.

This does not contradict my earlier comments concerning the personal nature of God as portrayed by the designation "our Father." When Jesus taught his disciples to pray in this fashion [cf. Matt 6:9], he was addressing men who were already convinced of the awesomeness of God's transcendence, the grandeur of God's ineffable exaltation. When they first timidly prayed, "Our Father in heaven," no doubt they deeply felt the tremendous privilege of approaching this marvelous God in so personal and intimate a fashion. But today, those who have lost sight of God's transcendence can no longer cherish the sheer privilege of addressing him as Father.²⁷⁴

One of the reasons for this imbalance is that the primary goal of too many worship leaders is to merely and momentarily affect the *emotions* of people, instead of endeavoring to *change their lives*. Emotion is only one part of the human "heart" and not even the most important part in terms of causing a lasting, positive affect in the worshipper. And in some cases, this may not be simply a poor choice in worship technique, but real sin.

Accordingly, all worship leaders should ponder how the Apostle Paul described his ministry to change lives:

[W]e have renounced secret and shameful ways [*panourgia*: "craftiness, trickery"]; **we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience** [*suneidēsin*: moral reasoning] **in the sight of God.** (2 Cor 4:2)

²⁷⁴ D. A. Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, (Baker, 1978), 63-4.

Here, the Apostle is contrasting his ministry with the corrupt ministers in Corinth who used, “**secret and shameful [crafty] ways**” to bring about their intended affect on the people. No doubt their ministries were popular, or the Apostle would not have been concerned about them. However, they were the kind of ministers whom he later describes as those, “**who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart**” (2 Cor 5:12). The Apostle calls these false ministers “**fools**” who enslave, exploit, and take advantage of those they are ministering to (11:19-20). Because such manipulative people had ministered to the Corinthians he was, “**afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ**” (11:3). He feared this because these ministers preached a different Jesus than he preached, and had even possibly ministered to them with a different spirit than the Holy Spirit (cf. 11:4).

We see similarities in some contemporary worship leaders and these false ministers in Corinth. They, “**distort the word of God**” (2 Cor 4:2) and promote a “**different Jesus**” (11:4) because they neglect either the “high God” or “nigh God” doctrines of Scripture. For the Apostle, on the other hand, ministry required, “**setting forth the truth plainly**” (4:2). Neither did the Apostle direct his efforts to appealing to people’s emotions, but rather, to their “**conscience**,” or moral reasoning. This would have included both truth about grace to soothe unnecessarily guilty consciences, and truth about who God is and what He wants, to address uninformed, immature, or hardened consciences, all to change people’s lives in the *only* place where such change takes place—our reason (cf. Rom 12:1-3).

Accordingly, because the Apostle’s goal was changing lives instead of mere emotions, he targeted his ministry to their understanding, not just their feelings. And the Apostle did this “**in the sight of God**,” being more concerned with the fact that He was watching, rather than what the people saw, because the Apostle knew that, “**we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad**” (5:10), including worship and worship leading.

Because of the popularity of music particularly among young Christians, the Teachers, Prophets, and Psalmists of the next generation will be the Christian pop artists, and they had better take that responsibility seriously. We are warned in James 3:1 that, “**Not many of you should presume to be Teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.**” Therefore, anyone leading or performing

Christian music had better be more than just entertaining, but equipped with a biblical view of worship. We hope to help with that in what follows.

Pastoral Practices

- As Pastors of our church, we have a responsibility to ensure that the singing part of our worship service reflects worshipping the Father “**in spirit and in truth.**” In particular, we should closely monitor the lyrics of the songs chosen for worship, and instruct the worship leader in what has been shared above.

B) Whole-hearted Christian Ecstasy: *Revelational & Rational*

B.1) Christian ecstasy is revelational and rational

Before we criticize “half-hearted” religious and worship practices that bypass or diminish the human mind, we need to distinguish between what may be called Christian *ecstasy* and the non-Christian variety. The Greek noun *ekstasis* (verb: *existēmi*) from which we get our word “ecstasy” had three meanings/applications in the ancient Greek world of the NT. David Aune, Professor of NT and Christian Origins at Loyola University, and a foremost authority on early Christian worship experience, explains in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*:

While the Greek words literally mean displacement or change, metaphorically they refer to at least three states of mind, each having characteristic behavioral features:

- (1) mental or psychological distractions such as excitement and astonishment, fear and terror [cf. Mark 5:42; 16:8; Luke 5:26; Acts 3:10; 8:9, 11, 13];

- (2) the pathological mental state of madness or insanity [cf. Mark 3:21; cf. 1 Cor 14:23 (*mainomai*: “**out of your mind**”)]; and
- (3) the trancelike state in which people are considered particularly susceptible to communications from supernatural beings [cf. Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17].²⁷⁵

The first Greek meaning of *ecstasy*, “amazement,” is the most common, but not relevant to our current discussion, while the second and third meanings are. In general, *ecstasy* was regarded as either a mindless, irrational state, often referred to as “madness” (*mania*), or a rational revelatory state referred to as “trance.”

It is our point here, and throughout this section, to demonstrate that while the mindless variety of *ecstasy* was often characteristic of pagan spiritual practices, the rational variety is always used in the Scriptures in the context of Christian *ecstasy*. Therefore, those who would profess to experience any kind of spiritual *ecstasy* in their relationship with God, while claiming it is apart from their reason, cannot claim to be experiencing Christian *ecstasy*, but rather the pagan variety.

Accordingly, we read of the Apostle Peter’s “ecstatic” experience in which “**he fell into a trance** [*ekstasis*: lit. “an ecstasy”]. . . **and saw Heaven opened**” (Acts 10:10-11; cf. 11:5) and received a divine revelation of God’s revolutionary change to include Gentiles in the New Covenant (cf. Acts 10:34; 11:18). The purpose of this state of *ecstasy* was not for merely an emotional experience, but to receive direct, divine revelation that was to exercise authority over all Christians. And obviously you cannot receive revelation in a purely emotional and non rational experience because revelation is truth, and truth must be received, understood, and then communicated with our rational faculties.

Some have suggested that the trance state that Peter experienced would be a catatonic, mindless, “foaming at the mouth” type of event. On the contrary, a trance is understood as merely a sleep state of varying degrees in which the senses are diminished but not necessarily eliminated. *Webster’s* defines “trance” as “a sleeplike state usually characterized by partly suspended animation with diminished or absent sensory and motor activity.”²⁷⁶ Accordingly, the first revelatory trance we encounter in Scripture is described as sleep, not a seizure: “**As the sun was setting,**

²⁷⁵ David Aune, “Ecstasy,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* . (ISBE), Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), II:14.

²⁷⁶ <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him” (Gen 15:12).

A revelatory trance of Paul also reflects its rational nature because he is having a conversation with Jesus. He describes this experience as follows:

“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance [*ekstasei*] and saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick!’ He said to me. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’

‘Lord,’ I replied, [while in the trance] ‘these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in You. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ” (Acts 22:17-21)

Finally, a related concept is the Apostle John’s description of being **“carried . . . away in the Spirit”** which was always for the purpose of receiving Scripture-quality direct divine revelation from God (cf. Rev 17:3; cf. 1:10; 4:2; 21:10), but was not a mindless, irrational, purely emotional experience.

Obviously, this can be demonstrated in the OT as well, where such “ecstatic” experiences involve instances of such divine revelation, (cf. Gen 15:12; Num 24:4, 16; 1 Kgs 22:19-23; Ezek 1:1-3:15; Amos 7:1-8:14; Zech 4-6).

Therefore, the overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that Christian *ecstasy* was for the purpose of receiving a vision of absolutely authoritative divine revelation. Accordingly, and very pertinent to our discussion in this chapter, it also invariably *engaged the mind*. One cannot receive and process, let alone later communicate a divine revelation unless their mind is active. Hence, our claim that the biblical use of the idea of *ecstasy* always involved a rational, revelational event.

B.2) Christian ecstasy is not being out of control

B.2.a) The spirits of Prophets are under the control of Prophets: 1 Cor 14:32

Along these lines, we read in the *ISBE*:

The ecstasy of the true prophets did not usually display itself in peculiar behavior, for their ecstasy was basically a private experience of [and response to] the conscious reality of God's presence. Ecstasy as a psychological state was concurrent with but distinct from the reception of God's message. Its importance lay in assuring the prophet that God had spoken. . . . The prophets' profound spiritual experiences should not, therefore, be confused with mystical experience, nor with the frenzied and irrational behavior of heathen prophets.²⁷⁷

Accordingly, as we shall see in the following chapter, pagan spiritual *ecstasy* was often described as "madness" (*mania*). Accordingly, NT scholar Anthony Thiselton remarks after detailing an extensive study of the concept in relation to Greek spirituality:

[I]n the classical Greek background . . . [the] Hellenistic understanding of [*mania*] in the context of religion . . . was emotionally "high" or out of control. . . . [T]he verb often applies . . . to the production of sounds while someone is out of his mind . . . hence it hardly overtranslates to use . . . two English terms: raving and out of your mind. [T]he term carries the double meaning of emotional lack of self-control, expressed as raving, and an unattractive, even frightening loss of rational sanity.²⁷⁸

While pagan "ecstatic" madness may have included a supposed divine revelation and intelligible content, we will discover that often it did not, especially in the practice of "praying in a tongue." *Mania* was never involved in Christian *ecstasy*, but human rationality and divine revelation always was. Accordingly, the early influential Church leader Clement of Alexandria (c. 180) wrote that "speaking in an ecstasy" was "one of the marks of a false prophet."²⁷⁹ More recently, F. David Farnell, Chairman of the Department of Ministerial Studies, Southeastern Bible College, has written an extensive study of this topic and concludes:

The "ecstatic" state of biblical prophets was qualitatively different from that of pagan prophetism, especially since the Holy Spirit [whose fruit is self-control] was so intimately involved in the prophetic process of biblical prophets (Neh 9:30; Micah 3:8; Zech 7:12; Ezek 2:2; 3:12-14). Such a

²⁷⁷ G. V. Smith, "Prophet," *ISBE*, III.996

²⁷⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2000), 1126.

²⁷⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.17; online at www.ccel.org.

state prepared the prophet for receiving divine revelation, and at no time was he irrational.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ F. David Farnell, Chairman of the Department of Ministerial Studies, Southeastern Bible College, has written extensively on the issue of pagan *ecstasy*, contrasting it with the Christian variety. After describing the latter he writes:

This is in contrast to the secular [pagan] prophet, whose experiences often were irrational. Expressions like μάντις ("soothsayer"), χρησμός ("oracle-relater"), μαινομαι ("to rage"), ἐνθουσιασμός ("god-possessed") which convey an irrational ecstasy are not used in the New Testament of biblical prophets.

In the Septuagint μαντεύομαι and μάντις are almost always used of pagan soothsayers and false prophets. . . . In the New Testament μαντεύομαι is also used in a negative sense of soothsaying (Acts 16:16). In the Septuagint, the word μαινομαι is used in Jeremiah 32:16 (Heb., 25:16) and conveys a negative connotation of "going mad," while in Jeremiah 36:26 (Heb., 29:26) it is also used negatively to refer to madness.

In the New Testament μαινομαι has a negative connotation. In John 10:20 it is used by the Jews who asserted that Jesus was demonized and was thus "insane" (δαιμόνιον ἔχει καὶ μαίνεται). In Acts 12:15 the girl Rhoda was considered "mad" because she reported that Peter was standing at the door. When Paul gave his defense before King Herod Agrippa II, Festus used the word twice in referring to Paul as insane (Acts 26:24). Paul denied that he was "mad" (v. 25). Paul also used the term negatively in 1 Corinthians 14:23 where the word again has the idea of "insane" or "mad."

In the Septuagint the verb χρησμολογέω occurs in Jeremiah 45:4 (Heb., 38:4), where government officials who opposed Jeremiah requested his death for not "giving oracular responses," or pronouncements, of peace (χρησμολεγεῖ εἰρήνην). Ενθουσιάζειν and its cognates do not appear in the Septuagint or the New Testament. .

. .

For a refutation of the concept of an irrational ecstatic state, consult Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Baker, 1979), 37–56, and idem, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1976), 90–112. ("Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149, 150, Parts 1-4 (July-Sept 1992 through Apr-June 1993), Part 3, 150:598; 179, note 28)

Dr. Farnell's study is in contrast to Dr. Aune who writes in his *ISBE* article on "ecstasy" under "behavioral features":

In the NT the revelatory state of consciousness has external behavioral features that allow it to be confused with drunkenness (Acts 2:13, 15; Eph. 5:18) or insanity (Mk. 3:21; 1 Cor. 14:23). . . .

At times it is accompanied by bizarre behavior (Mk. 5:2-5; 9:22; Acts 16:17f.; 21:11). (*ISBE*, II.15)

This implies that Christian "ecstasy" and the revelatory state of Christian Prophets was much like their pagan counterparts. However, none of the verses that Dr. Aune uses to support his claims do so.

All of this is in line with the biblical teaching that the fruits and effects of the Holy Spirit always include “**peace**” (Gal 5:22), not agitated, gross behavior, “**self-control**” (Gal 5:23), not just emotion, and a “**sound mind**” (2 Tim 1:7 NKJV), not something that would look like mental disease. If someone claims to be experiencing the Holy Spirit but is not experiencing peace, self-control, and a sound mind, then they are not experiencing the Holy Spirit but possibly a demonic one.

Accordingly, any suggestion that pagan *mania* was an experience, particularly of biblical Prophets, is denied by the Apostle’s claim that “**The spirits [mind] of Prophets are subject to the control of Prophets**” (1 Cor 14:32). As Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee comments on this verse:

With these words Paul lifts Christian “inspired speech” out of the category of “ecstasy” as such and offers it as a radically different thing from the mania of the pagan cults.”²⁸¹

Along the same lines, H. Wayne House writes in regards to Paul’s description of Christian prophecy:

Contemporary descriptions [of pagan worship and “prophets”] take note of the fact that such self-control was totally lacking in the orgiastic ecstasies of the mystery cults. Hence, these safeguards would protect the church by distinguishing the

The “drunkenness” perceived by those listening to the Apostle speak in tongues was not due to their stumbling around or other physical manifestations, but was due to their speaking in several foreign languages that many of those present wouldn’t understand. Ephesians 5:18 has absolutely no bearing on the topic.

The claim that some would perceive a Christian as “insane” is equally non-relevant to the issue. Like Acts 2, the reason that visitors to the Corinthian church would think they were crazy was because they too would sound like they were speaking gibberish as they spoke in tongues in the hearing of those who would not know the foreign language being spoken. The reference to Mark 3:21 describes the fact that Jesus’ *family* accused Him of being crazy, not that He exhibited any spiritual experiences that would reflect such a state.

The charge of “bizarre behavior” is unsupported as well. Mark 5 and 9 refer to demon possessed people, which actually serves to make our point that Holy Spirit possession does not result in “bizarre behavior.” And the Acts 21 reference is to the Christian Prophet Agabus who merely tied his hands and feet with Paul’s belt to indicate how Paul would be bound. Hardly an “ecstatic” action. In summary, Dr. Aune doesn’t have the biblical data to make his claims.

²⁸¹ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Eerdmans, 1987), 696.

counterfeit from the genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit.
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Likewise, Anthony Thiselton comments here:

Needless to say, any notion of a community “working itself up” by psychological autosuggestion or repetitive devices designed to heighten emotion would be entirely alien to Paul’s ethics of controlled speech. “All of these directives presume that the gift is in some sense under the speaker’s control. One can *choose* whether to speak out in tongues [or in prophetic speech] or to remain [or to become] silent” (Hay’s).²⁸³

Along the same lines, Leon Morris comments:

Just as those speaking with ‘tongues’ had the ability to keep silent when they chose, so it is with prophecy. It is not an irresistible divine compulsion that comes upon the prophet.²⁸⁴

Charles Hodge paraphrased Paul’s statement that Christian Prophets were under their own control:

‘You are not compelled to speak by any irresistible impulse.’ That influence was not of such a nature as to destroy the self-control of those who were its subjects. It did not throw them into a state of frenzy analogous to that of a heathen pythoness. The prophets of God were calm and self-possessed.²⁸⁵

John MacArthur summarizes concerning Christian revelatory *ecstasy*

The Bible knows nothing of out-of-spirit or out-of-mind revelations. Those to whom God revealed His Word did not always fully comprehend the message they were given, but they were always fully aware of what the message was and aware that it was given to them by God. God does not bypass men’s minds either to reveal or to teach His Word. There were no ecstatic, bizarre, trancelike experiences related to divine

²⁸² H. Wayne House, “Tongues and the Mystery Religions at Corinth,” *BSac* 140:558 (Apr 83), 146.

²⁸³ Thiselton, 1145.

²⁸⁴ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians (TNTC)* (Eerdmans, 1999), 196. Barrett has little comment (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians (BNTC)*, (Hendrickson, 2000), 1 Cor 14:32.

²⁸⁵ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 14:32; online at ccel.org.

action or the prophet, such as occurred and occurs with demonic revelations. That was one clear test to distinguish the work of the Holy Spirit from the work of demons, and assumes the Corinthians were having difficulty so distinguishing (cf. 12:3).²⁸⁶

Of course, we have instances in Scripture where an encounter with God had physical effects on their body. But it was in the context of a *miraculous communication* from God, and because they had come to a *rational understanding of something*, like their guilt or God's glory. It was never simply because they wanted to *feel* something and call it experiencing God.²⁸⁷

B.2.b) Paul was never "out of his mind": 2 Cor 5:12-13

Some have thought that the Apostle Paul described himself as experiencing some sort of out of control *ecstasy* when he writes to the Corinthians:

We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are out of our mind [*ekestēmen*], it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind [*sōphronoumen*] it is for you. (2 Cor 5:12-13)

Not surprisingly, there is some debate over what the Apostle is talking about here. Is he admitting that at times he was "out of his mind" in an uncontrollable fashion? On the contrary, we believe he is responding to accusations from his critics that he was just like the other pagan religious leaders in the mystery cults in Corinth.

First, the context of virtually all of 2 Corinthians is a defense of Paul's ministry as an authoritative representative of God. It is

²⁸⁶ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Cor 14:32.

²⁸⁷ Regarding distinguishing fleshly bodily effects from spiritual ones in our encounters with God see section 4.11.C. For further discussion of the effects of *miraculous communication* on humans see section 10.2.C.2.

generally agreed that the Apostle's remark is prompted by accusations of "the detractors who lurk behind the scenes in the Corinthian correspondence."²⁸⁸ Evidently, the Apostle's critics were attempting to equate him with the pagan soothsayers in the Greek mystery religions of the time. They are aptly described by the Apostle as those who **"take pride in what is seen"** as they were known for their showy, emotional, incoherent "prophecies" that were intended to merely gain the attention of men. Accordingly, NT scholar Colin Kruse writes regarding Paul's comment that **"If we are out of our mind [ekestēmen], it is for the sake of God:**

First, it could be Paul's response to charges that he was mad. Such charges were certainly made later in his career, and they had also been made against his master. Jesus was accused of being mad because of his unflagging zeal in ministry (Mk. 3:21) and because his teaching offended his hearers (Jn. 10:20). This latter reason underlay the charge of madness that Festus made against Paul (Acts 26:22-24), which charge, of course, Paul rejected: 'I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth' (Acts 26:25).²⁸⁹

Evidence for this understanding is the fact that, as noted above, out of mind or out of control *ecstasy* was a pagan thing, not a Christian thing. Accordingly, it is clear Paul is contrasting being **"out of our mind"** [ekestēmen] with being **"in our right mind [sōphronoumen]."** This latter word literally means "sound mind" and in ancient Greek meant "to be prudent with focus on self-control."²⁹⁰ Elsewhere, the word is used to encourage Christians to have **"sober judgment"** (Rom 12:3), be **"clear minded"** (1 Pet 4:7), or **"young men to be self-controlled"** (Tit 2:7). Greek synonyms refer to the Holy Spirit as being a spirit of **"self-control [sōphronismos, "prudence"]"** (2 Tim 1:7), and are used to describe the required **"self-control [sōphrona]"** that Church elders must possess.

Accordingly, do we really think Paul is admitting that he engaged in behavior that would disqualify a man from being a Pastor? He is contrasting being **"in our right mind"** which even young men were

²⁸⁸ Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), 120.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 2 Cor 5:13. For a similar view see Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999).

²⁹⁰ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), F. W. Danker, ed., 3rd ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

exhorted to be, with being **"out of our mind,"** and if he really intended to admit he practiced the latter then he was a hypocrite to tell Titus that elders and young men should not act this way.²⁹¹

In summary, modern day *emotionalists* will find no biblical support for claiming that bizarre, overly emotional, and irrational behavior is a sign of being "in the Spirit" or super spirituality, but rather reflects pagan spirituality.

²⁹¹ Calvin agreed that Paul's enemies were making an accusation, but felt the Apostle accepted it, paraphrasing Paul as saying, "I shall be quite content that the world reckon me *beside myself*, provided only it is not to myself, but to God" (*Calvin's Bible Commentaries*; online at www.ccel.org)

While Hodge also believed that Paul was replying to an accusation from his enemies, he does not believe that it involves madness, but another possible meaning of *ekestēmen*: "undue excitement or extravagance" (*Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 5:12-13; online at ccel.org). As usual, Dr. Hodge's view is worth serious consideration.

Barnes shared essentially our view of the passage as noted above.

Barrett seems non-committal on what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 5:12-13 (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC), (Hendrickson, 1997).

Barnett says that the arguments against our view are 1) the verb used in Acts 26:24-25 [by Festus- "mad"] is *mainesthai* instead of *existēmi*, and 2) the antithesis in the text are against it. As for the first issue, the words can be synonyms, and as for the second, it is more probable that the antithesis that Paul intends is the one we are advocating, between being out of control and being self-controlled.

Interestingly, Barnett goes on to relate that the Corinthians would have been well aware of "ecstatic behavior" because it occurred in the mystery cults:

Ecstatic behavior would have been well known to the Corinthians through the cultic practices at Delphi. Lucian, *The Civil War* 5.67ff., describes the frenzied ecstasy of the Pythian priestess at Delphi: "the wild frenzy overflowed through her foaming lips; she groaned and uttered loud inarticulate cries with panting breath . . . and at last . . . the sound of articulate speech. The frenzy abides; and the god whom she has not shaken off, still controls her" (LCL). In *Phaedrus* 244.A-B, Plato sets *sōphronoumen* [sound mind] in contrast with *mainouen* [madness], which is a synonym for *existēmen* [beside ourselves]. . . In the Greek world religious madness was seen as divine inspiration. (284)

Accordingly, Barnett seems then to be saying that Paul was claiming the same experiences.

The popular opinion that the Apostle is referring to praying or speaking in an unintelligible "ecstatic" tongue (cf. 1 Cor 14:2) has no biblical warrant, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, 4.9.

B.3) Christian ecstasy is not “possession”

When the Apostle says “**The spirits [mind] of Prophets are subject to the control of Prophets**” (1 Cor 14:32), he also debunks the idea that they were “possessed” in the sense of losing control over their mind and body.

Nevertheless, it has been common to suggest that particularly Prophets were possessed by the Spirit in a way that controlled both their mind and body, when they received or spoke their revelations. Accordingly, the early Church Fathers typically defined “divine inspiration” in terms of divine possession. Athenagoras (c. 177) wrote that the Spirit of God “moved the mouths of the Prophets like musical instruments.”²⁹² Likewise, Chrysostom (c. 400) taught:

The Holy Spirit took possession of them [Prophets], sometimes suppressed their personality to a certain degree, and then employed their consciousness for his purpose. . . . In the case of the prophets it was the entrance of a foreign element, a foreign power into their lives.²⁹³

Long before that, the Jewish/Greek philosopher Philo (c. 20 B.C. – 50 A.D.) had written:

[A prophet] is the vocal instrument of God, smitten and played by his invisible hand . . . The mind is evicted at the arrival of the divine Spirit, but when that departs the mind returns to its tenancy. Mortal and immortal may not share the same home. And therefore the setting of reason and the darkness which surrounds it produces ecstasy and inspired frenzy . . .

The prophet, even when he seems to be speaking, really [is not], and his organs of speech, mouth and tongue, are wholly in the employ of Another, to show forth what he wills. Unseen by us that Other beats on the chords with the skill of a master-hand and makes them instruments of sweet music, laden with every harmony.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Athenagoras, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: A Plea for the Christians*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 1989), 132.

²⁹³ Chrysostom, *Homily on 2 Corinthians*, 2Cor. 13:2b, 3; online at www.ccel.org.

²⁹⁴ Philo, quoted by James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Westminster Press, 1975), 305.

More recently, David Aune, in his article on "ecstasy" in the *ISBE* suggests that it is "the extraordinary experience of full possession of the Spirit, in contrast to the normal, rational state of consciousness."²⁹⁵

Unfortunately, such descriptions of "possessed prophecy" or *possession revelation* are more reflective of pagan prophets rather than biblical ones. What all such descriptions ignore is the Apostle Paul's clear description of biblical Prophets even when they are prophesying: **"The spirits of Prophets are subject to the control of Prophets"** (1 Cor 14:32). Accordingly, NT scholar Albert Barnes wrote concerning this verse:

The evident meaning of this is, that they were able to control their inclination to speak; they were not under a NECESSITY of

²⁹⁵ David Aune, "Ecstasy," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* . (*ISBE*), Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), II:14.

Dr. Aune at times describes revelational "ecstasy" as involving "possession" and equates this with "divine inspiration." Several biblical references to supposed divine possession are given in the article, but upon closer examination, they do not clearly describe such a thing (cf. Num 24:4, 16; 1 Sam 10:5-13; 19:8-24; Ezek 2:1; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17; 1 Cor 14:27-33; 2 Cor 5:13; Rev 1:10; 4:1). Admittedly, the Spirit is strongly affecting such people, but He does not displace their person while giving them a vision or otherwise communicating to them.

Dr. Aune goes on to write: "Another type of revelatory experience, which is an example of uncontrolled inspiration, is the call reported by many prophets (Ex. 3:1-4:17; 1 S. 3:2-14; 2 K. 2:9-14; Jer. 1:4-10; Isa. 6:1-13)." This is simply false. Indeed, God irrevocably called these men into ministry, but there is no hint in these texts that they experienced "uncontrolled inspiration." (Ibid.)

Dr. Aune later admits Paul's statement that, **"the spirits of Prophets are subject to Prophets"** but suggests this was not true of all divine Prophets and that Paul had probably *learned* how to control the operation of the Spirit in his life which, evidently, would have otherwise been rather identical to what demonic pagan prophets experienced. Dr. Aune writes:

In the NT, as in the OT, the revelatory state is not always attained in an uncontrolled manner, for the very fact that prophecy and other manifestations of the Spirit occur within the framework of Christian worship (Acts 11:27f.; 13:1; 1 Cor. 14:26-33) indicates that both the time and place of the onset of the revelatory state is subject to control. Paul urges even greater control in I Cor. 14:27-32. It is probable that Paul himself, who claims to have had many experiences while in a revelatory state (I Cor. 14:6, 26; 2 Cor. 12:1, 7; Gal. 1:12; 2:2), learned to control the experience and on that basis could exhort the Corinthian community to exercise control over their experiences. (Ibid.)

Such speculations are absolutely unnecessary.

speaking, even though they might be inspired. There was no need of disorder. This verse gives confirmation to the supposition, that the extraordinary endowments of the Holy Spirit were subjected to substantially the same laws as a man's natural endowments. They were conferred by the Holy Spirit; but they were conferred on free agents, and did not interfere with their free agency. . . .

In this the spirit of true inspiration differed essentially from the views of the pagan, who regarded themselves as driven on by a wild, controlling influence, that compelled them to speak even when they were unconscious of what they said. Universally, in the pagan world, the priests and priestesses supposed or feigned that they were under an influence which was uncontrollable; which took away their powers of self-command, and which made them the mere organs or unconscious instruments of communicating the will of the gods.²⁹⁶

Such possession is a demonic act, not a divine one, and there are no biblical examples to prove otherwise. It is to be admitted that biblical Prophets describe "**the strong hand of the Lord**" being "**upon**" them (cf. Isa 8:11; Ezek 1:3) and even whisking them away in a vision that comes upon them (cf. Ezek 3:14; 8:3; 37:1). But these descriptions pertain to how revelation *came to them*, not how they spoke or communicated the revelation. Indeed, biblical Prophets seemed to often have no control over when and how they experienced a revelatory event, but we do not see such lack of control in when and how they spoke the revelation. It is true that Jeremiah wrote the following:

But if I say, "I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name," His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. (20:9)

Most preachers have experienced the same burden. However, we are still able to exercise self-control and neither we nor Jeremiah was possessed and "taken over" in the sense that he became a puppet or robot forced to communicate the revelation he had received.

Some have pointed to the description of prophetic revelation in 2 Peter 1:21 as describing some sort of event that does dispossess the Prophet. There we read: "**Men spoke from God as they were**

²⁹⁶ Barnes, 1 Cor 14:32.

carried along [*pheromenoi*] **by the Holy Spirit.**" Admittedly, the Greek word here is a strong one, Charles Swindoll commenting:

The Greek word here is *pherō*, and it literally means to be "moved along apart from one's own power." It's a nautical term used for a ship without a rudder or a sail, carried along at the mercy of the waves and the wind and the current. Here the word is used for the prophets, moved not by their own power, but by the power of God as He spoke through them and revealed His will.²⁹⁷

This suggests to some the mindless *mania* and uncontrolled behavior of pagan prophets. But it needs to be reconciled with the Apostle's clear statement in 1 Corinthians 14, distinguishing Christian Prophets from pagan ones and insisting that **"The spirits of Prophets are subject to the control of Prophets"** (1 Cor 14:32). Accordingly, Michael Green concludes in his commentary on 2 Peter:

The fact of God's inspiration did not mean a supersession of the normal mental functions of the human author. The Holy Spirit did not use instruments; he used *men*. God's way is ever one of truth through personality, as was perfectly demonstrated at the incarnation. Moreover, he did not use any men, but holy men, those who are dedicated and pledged to his service. And even with such men, he did no violence to their personalities, but cooperated with them while revealing himself through them.

"He says they were moved, not because they were out of their minds as the heathen imagine in their prophets, but because they dared nothing by themselves but only in obedience to the guidance of the spirit, who held sway over lips as in his own temple" (Calvin). . . .

Peter's words are equally in contrast to the mechanical understanding of inspiration to be found in Philo, his Jewish contemporary. Philo sees it as a compulsive divine possession which turned man into a *theophoros*, 'God bearer' (*Mut. Nom.* i, p.609, *de Somn.* p. 689). Peter sees it as a personal and ethical cooperation between god and holy men. There's no suggestion that the sacred authors are beside themselves like the analogy from Bacchic [pagan] frenzy cited by Philo; they are carried along the path of God's will by their own glad and willing consent.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Charles Swindoll, *The Mystery of God's Will* (Word, 1999), 32.

²⁹⁸ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1987), 103.

Again, if one is going to interpret Paul at face value, this must be our understanding of biblical prophetic revelation.²⁹⁹

C) Whole-hearted Worship: *I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart (Ps 9:1)*

It is not our desire here to depreciate our God-given human emotions in any way, including their importance in our relationship with God.³⁰⁰ One only needs to read the Psalms and observe how emotional a relationship with God can and should be. We would hope that every Christian would sometimes experience the exhilaration of laughing, crying, or even shouting and dancing in the presence of God. When God says we are to love Him with all our heart (cf. Matt 22:37), He certainly includes our emotions. Accordingly, we have noted above that Christ's description of worshipping the Father "**in spirit and in truth**" certainly includes the emotions. Along these lines we have also written:

We must ensure that the ministries of our church reflect and minister to all the aspects of the human "heart." For example, it can be suggested that in a general way the *teaching* of the church builds and corrects our beliefs, the *mission* of the church engages our desires, and its *worship* gives us the opportunity to emotionally celebrate. If any of these ministries are neglected, a part of the "heart" of the church and the Christian will be deprived.³⁰¹

Along these lines, Jonathan Edwards pointed out long ago in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* that emotion has its place in real religion:

That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference. God, in his word, greatly insists

²⁹⁹ Unfortunately, neither David Aune (*Prophecy in Early Christianity & the Ancient Mediterranean World*), nor the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* provide any commentary on 2 Peter 1:21.

³⁰⁰ For further discussion of the place of emotion in the Christian life see chapter 4.6.

³⁰¹ Quoted from 4.1.B.3.

upon it, that we be good in earnest, "fervent in spirit," and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: Rom. 12:11.³⁰²

Unfortunately, it would seem the *emotionalist* movement has generally used Edward's writings as an excuse for their abuses, rather than a guide for their correction. A reading of the *Treatise* reveals that Edwards defined "religious affections" as desire and devotion in one's private life, rather than mere emotion in public worship. God has made humans with emotions, but just like sex, if it is abused, or used apart from the purposes God created it, it becomes a vice, not a virtue, a blessing and not a curse.

No one can deny that such *emotionalist* churches are more expressive in their corporate worship. Accordingly, *perhaps the single most significant and acceptable influence that emotionalism has had on American Christianity is that we clap more in our worship services*. We can find one verse of Scripture that even suggests this is biblical (cf. Ps 47:1).

However, at best this is simply a personal preference and has no automatic bearing on how God-pleasing our worship is. Saying that your church has more emotional or expressive worship is like saying your worship music includes a heavier element of the drums or violin. It makes the worship different than elsewhere, but not necessarily better from God's point of view, which is the only perspective that matters.

Unfortunately, *emotionalists* have illegitimately criticized less expressive and more liturgical worship, assuming that it cannot be as God-pleasing or life changing as their brand of worship. On the contrary, the King said, **"true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks"** (John 4:23). Understanding that **"in spirit"** means much more than emotions, "charismatic" worship has no automatic superiority over other authentic forms of Christian worship and its overly emotional element can actually be selfish and sinful. And considering much of the content of the lyrics that has come out of "charismatic" worship, and the mindless nature of much of it, they are clearly inferior when it comes to the Father's desire that we **"worship. . . in truth."**

While modern *emotionalism* has perverted the place of emotion in God-pleasing worship by over-emphasizing it, there have been movements in Christianity which have erred in the opposite direction. One thinks of the continual debate regarding

³⁰² Edwards, *Affections*, 10.

contemporary music in Christian worship.³⁰³ For example, Dan Lucarini in his book, *Why I Left The Contemporary Christian Music Movement* seems to have an unhealthy perspective on emotion and Christian worship when he writes:

Rock and roll is a musical style that was created for immoral purposes by immoral men, and has always been used by the world to express its immoral attitudes in song. . . . Rock music and its offspring have the power to make our flesh and our minds do something. That 'something' must be conducive to the list of immoral behaviours we have just noted, or else these people would simply not use rock music. They would find something else to suit their fleshly desires. It should be no surprise then that this music, which emphasizes sensuality and rebellion, often gives rise to other behaviour that evidences a spirit of immorality. . . .

We are allowing Satan a wide-open door to seduce the saints, to keep our attention on what feels good to us, and to keep us walking in the flesh not walking by the Spirit. . . . We believe we can handle rock music safely and clean it up, because we are saved and we ask God to use it. Wrong! We cannot separate the style of music from its immoral associations. Rock music inevitably corrupts Christians. Look at what the Apostle says in Ephesians. Ephesians 2:3: '...we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the other'

As leaders of the church, we are never to lead the saints into temptation or any hint of immorality. Why would you even permit an environment of potential sexual temptation and emotional adultery to exist in your church service? Of course, this type of sin can rear its ugly head in any musical environment, but Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) creates an atmosphere that actually fosters it. . . .

CCM is stuck with this stigma of immorality, because the music styles carry with them the baggage of the world's immorality. It does not matter if you change the lyrics. It does not matter if you change the musicians. It does not matter if you change the record labels. It does not matter if you ask God to sanctify it. Rock music and all its children, and

³⁰³ For further discussion regarding the debate around style of worship music see section 3.2.C.3.b.

by association CCM, can and will corrupt the morals of everyone who practices it.³⁰⁴

While we would certainly agree with the author's concern for Christian worship that centers on emotion and entertainment, there are several imbalances here. First, in Lucarini's interpretation of Ephesians 2:3, and throughout the book, he automatically correlates emotional worship with our sinful flesh. This simply is not biblical.

Secondly, there is a mindless, irrational nature to these arguments because of the insistence that merely the rhythm of music can make it evil. On the contrary, authentic Christian music is not identified by the notes and chords attached to it, but rather its words, because it is our minds that are the most important thing in worship. While some music may distract from the words of Christian songs, decreasing its effectiveness, music cannot be evil apart from its words. Therefore, while the style of "rock" music may promote the mindless *emotionalism* that is unbiblical, the culprit is not "rock" music itself, but the devaluation of the human mind that *emotionalism* seeks to create.

Nonetheless, Lucarini's warnings about "rock" music in Christian worship have some important truths. Unlike many modern Christian songs, the Psalms were not valued for the emotion that came from the *tunes* in them, but the *truth* in them. Even the good Christian lyrics in many songs are ignored because people get so caught up in the beat, that they miss the meat. If any music is used as merely a temporary fix of emotion to escape reality and leaves us unchanged in truly Christian ways, then it is probably of the flesh instead of the Spirit. And if Christian artists use their God-given gifts merely to attract attention, it is only **"a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal"** (1 Cor 13:1) to God, no matter how popular among people.

Few have articulated the balance between emotion and reason in worship better than the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) in his rather famous treatise, *The Idea of the Holy*. Dr. Otto had traveled extensively researching the religions of the world in contrast to his own Christianity. First, he describes at length the fact that the Christian God is to be apprehended and worshipped through our reason, and that, "Only on such terms is belief possible in contrast to mere feeling."³⁰⁵ In fact, the

³⁰⁴ Dan Lucarini, *Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement* (Evangelical Press, 2002), 68, 72-3.

³⁰⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, (Penguin, 1957), 15.

rationality of Christianity is, "a very real sign of its superiority over religions of other forms and at other levels."³⁰⁶

However, while the rational nature of God and our relationship with Him, "must be asserted at the outset and with the most positive emphasis," Dr. Otto writes, "we have to be on our guard against an error which would lead to a wrong and one-sided interpretation of religion."³⁰⁷ Thereafter, the author attempts to explain the balance between mere "*rationalism*" and "*emotionalism*" in our relationship with God. Neither is desirable in themselves, but when our whole "heart" is engaged (desires, reason, feelings), we have authentic Christianity.

Accordingly, Dr. Otto writes:

All depends upon this: in our idea of God is the [emotional] overborne, even perhaps wholly excluded, by the rational? Or conversely, does the [emotional] itself, preponderate over the rational? . . . By the continual living activity of its [emotional] elements a religion is guarded from passing into 'rationalism'. By being steeped in and saturated with rational elements it is guarded from sinking into fanaticism or mere mysticality or at least from persisting in these, and is qualified to become a religion for all civilized humanity.

The degree in which both rational and [emotional] elements are jointly present, united in healthy and lovely harmony, affords a criterion to measure the relative rank of religions; and one, too, that is specifically religious. Applying this criterion, we find that Christianity, in this as in other respects, stands out in complete superiority over all its sister religions. . . . And thus Christianity, in the healthily proportioned union of its elements, assumes an absolutely classical form and dignity.

³⁰⁸

All need to admit that if either the emotional or rational elements are removed from Christian worship that we will have something less than biblical Christianity. Still, we would suggest that the relative superiority and "dignity" of Christianity over other religions that Dr. Otto suggests has been threatened far more by *emotionalism* than Evangelical rationalism.

We would suggest that the biblical balance is found in King David, a biblical character best known for his God-pleasing worship. No doubt emotions were a part of his relationship with God. We see

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 16.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 17, 159.

this vividly displayed in 2 Samuel when **“he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets”** (6:12), returning it to Jerusalem after many years of being absent. It is here that we read, **“David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might”** (v. 14). God forbid that we would be like David’s wife Michal who, **“when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart”** (v. 16). David’s response was that he would **“become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes,”** (v. 22) in his worship to God.

There is no hint here that David was out of control or simply trying to draw attention to himself, as he said his worship, **“was before the LORD”** (v. 21). Those who would drain God-pleasing worship of all emotion must simply ignore the biblical example of this man of God. Therefore, we repeat that it is not simply *emotional* worship that we have been concerned with here, but *mindless* worship which often results in merely emotional worship.

Of course, some would want to make this one instance in Scripture the model for all real worship. David himself would rebuke them. *Meditating* before the Lord in worship is mentioned many more times in Scripture than *dancing* before Him. David describes one of his times of worship when he writes:

I meditate (*hagah*) on all Your works and consider (*siach*: “meditate on”) what Your hands have done. I spread out my hands to You; my soul thirsts for You like a parched land” (Ps 143:5).

We see the whole “heart” involved here, including the desires, reason, and emotion.

Likewise, David describes “whole-hearted” worship when he writes:

They will speak of the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and I will meditate on Your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of Your awesome works, and I will proclaim Your great deeds. They will celebrate Your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of Your righteousness. (Ps 145:5-7)

Elsewhere in Psalms, worship is described as a mental exercise as well. For example, we read in Psalm 104:34 **“May my meditation be pleasing to Him, as I rejoice in the LORD.”** The Sons of Korah sang, **“Within Your temple, O God, we meditate on Your unfailing love”** (Ps 48:9).

Likewise, Asaph describes the kind of worship that enabled him to rise above despair, and it was not feelings-oriented, but rather reason-oriented:

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered [zakar, "to be mindful of"] You, O God [a thinking exercise], and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. . . . I was too troubled to speak.

[Then] **I thought [chashab] about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered [zakar] my songs in the night. My heart mused [siach] and my spirit inquired [chapas: "to ponder"]:** "Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never show His favor again? Has His unfailing love vanished forever? Has His promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has He in anger withheld His compassion?"

Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember [zakar] the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember [zakar] Your miracles of long ago. I will meditate [hagah] on all Your works and consider [siach] all Your mighty deeds. (Ps. 77:1-12)

This description of a heart changing worship experience contains all kinds of actions that require our reasoning faculties.

As usual, the biblical view of something, including worship, is more balanced than what we see in much of American Christianity. To worship God **"in spirit and in truth"** (John 4:24), and to **"sing with my spirit [and] also [at the same time ³⁰⁹] sing with my mind"** (1 Cor 14:15) requires "whole-hearted" worship which engages all our mental faculties, not just the feelings as in paganism, and not just the lips as in formalism. May God help us to regain and maintain such a balance in both our private and corporate worship so that we may have God-pleasing worship.

Pastoral Practices

³⁰⁹ While *emotionalists* claim that the Apostle is referring to a mindless type of prayer and singing in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15, he is actually advocating praying and singing with the human mind and spirit *simultaneously*. For further discussion see section 4.9.D.

- All of us need to evaluate both our personal and our corporate worship to ensure it is “whole-hearted” worship. Some questions we can ask are: Is there room to grow in either our understanding of our “high God” or “nigh God”? Has worship *ever* been an emotional experience for us, and if not, why not? Are we going to stop our mind from wandering from focusing on God in our worship times so that **“the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart [will] be pleasing in Your sight, O LORD”** (Ps 19:14)? Is our congregation a place that promotes “whole-hearted” worship with meaningful content and freedom for expression?

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our heavenly Father, we praise You for the privilege of worshipping You with all of our heart, soul, and mind. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord (Ps 19:14), especially in our times of worship. Help the Church gain and maintain a balance of "spirit" and "truth" in its worship.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How do we define "whole-hearted" worship?
- 2) What is our primary Scripture for promoting "whole-hearted" worship? Do you agree with our application of Christ's words? Why or why not?
- 3) How do we define "half-hearted" worship or *emotionalism*?
- 4) Why do we claim that Christian pop artists have a special responsibility to promote "whole-hearted" worship? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What do we mean by the "high" God and the "nigh" God? How do these concepts help us maintain a balance in "whole-hearted" worship?
- 6) What do we suggest is the most significant contribution more "emotional" or "charismatic" worship has made to American Christianity? What is your opinion of this?
- 7) How do the Psalms exhibit "whole-hearted" worship?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.9

Whole-hearted Prayer

With Spirit & Mind

Overall Objective

To demonstrate the essential part that our mind plays in our relationship with God in the area of prayer, and to point out errors on this issue in the modern "tongues" movement.

Table of Topics

- A) Peter's Command to Pray With Our Reason:** *1 Pet 4:7*
- B) The Unbiblical Nature of Modern Mindless "Tongues"**
- C) The King's Command to Not "Babble Like Pagans":** *Matt 6:5-9*
- D) Paul's Command for "Whole-hearted" Prayer:** *1 Cor 14:14-15*
- E) Paul's Rebuke of Mindless Self-edification:** *1 Cor 14:4*
 - E.1) The charge of self-edification was a rebuke to the selfish Corinthians
 - E.2) Real spiritual gifts are for the edification of others
 - E.3) Edification requires understanding

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- The Bible commands that the mind be engaged in any form of Christian prayer.
- Praying in a tongue does not engage our understanding and is therefore pagan, *half-hearted*, and not Christian.
- "Praying in a tongue," violates the Apostle's command to **"think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray."**
- The modern version of "praying in a tongue" is the same thing as the pagan version practiced in the Greek mystery religions in Corinth and is practiced world-wide in religions today.
- Jesus condemned the mindless **"babbling like pagans"** when praying, which seems to include the tongues phenomenon.
- It is not the *content* of the Lord's Prayer that distinguished it from the pagan's prayer, but the *method*.
- *Emotionalists* too easily dismiss the significance of the Apostle's statement that the person who prays **"in a tongue"** does it with **"my spirit"** (i.e. seat of human emotions), not the *Holy Spirit*.
- A major mistake *emotionalists* make is to assume that the Apostle is advocating two kinds of prayer, one which only engages the human "spirit" and a type of praying that only engages the mind. When the Apostle said, **"I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind"** (1 Cor 14:15) he meant simultaneously.
- *Emotionalists* do not consider carefully enough how derogatory the Apostle is toward those who **"pray in a tongue"** when he says their **"mind is unfruitful [akarpōs: "barren"]**.
- When Paul says, **"One who speaks in [an "unknown"] tongue [glosse] edifies himself,"** it is a rebuke, not a recommendation.
- Perhaps the clearest biblical contradiction to the *emotionalists* claim that they possess a Christian spiritual gift for the exclusive purpose of edifying themselves is the Apostle's clear claim that, **"to each one the manifestation of the [Holy] Spirit is given for the common good"** (1 Cor 12:7).
- Edification doesn't happen in a human apart from our understanding. Emotions will, but not real spiritual edification.
- For all the claims in modern *emotionalism* that their "prayer language" is so spiritually edifying, we would ask, "Do those who practice this seem more spiritually mature than those who don't?"
- The Day is coming when all who practice the *half-hearted prayer* of "tongues" will know that they were actually **"speaking into the air"** (1 Cor 14:9) just as the Apostle said.

A) Peter's Command to Pray With Our Reason:

1 Pet 4:7

Just as *whole-hearted worship* requires our faculties of understanding to be engaged, so does biblical *whole-hearted prayer*. The Apostle Peter speaks of the place of reason in our prayer when he writes, “**be of sound judgment** [*sōphronēsate*] **and sober** [*nēpsate*] **spirit for the purpose of prayer**” (1 Pet 4:7 NASB). The Apostle is clearly implying that the mind is to be engaged in any kind of prayer that is Christian. The NCV renders it, “**think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray.**” The NIV translates the Apostle as saying, “**be clear-minded so that you can pray,**” and he certainly didn't mean “empty-minded” which describes a great deal of the *half-hearted* kind of prayer many are advocating today when they promote “praying in a tongue.”

Again, when we understand that the human “heart” contains not only emotions, but essentially reason, we understand that it is not just a lack of emotional fervor that results in *half-hearted prayer*, but a neglect of our intellect as well. The Apostle Peter's explicit instruction that our reason must be fully engaged in anything claiming to be Christian prayer is something the modern “tongues” movement has not taken seriously enough.

Pastoral Practices

- Is our prayer life *whole-hearted*? Do we feel the freedom to emotionally express what is in our “heart,” whether it be praise or pain? Have we ever yelled at God? Don't worry, He can handle it. And are we being *whole-hearted* in our prayer life by being “**clear-minded so that you can pray,**” as Peter instructed? (1 Pet 4:7). Some people are helped to stay focused during prayer by praying through Scripture, through a list, or even journaling their prayers. Be *whole-hearted* in your prayer life and teach your church the same.

B) The Unbiblical Nature of Modern Mindless “Tongues”

When we think particularly of the popular practice of “praying in a tongue,” it would seem to be an example of *half-hearted prayer*, and the Apostle's command to “**think clearly and control**

yourselves so you will be able to pray" would therefore clearly condemn it. Our suggestion that "praying in a tongue" is *half-hearted* is illustrated in the description of it in the following from a foremost promoter of it, Archbishop Michael Green of the Anglican Church:

Perhaps one of the areas of profit that we may need to be reminded of in an over-cerebral age is this: [praying in an incoherent tongue] allows the human spirit to pray, even when the mind is unfruitful because it cannot understand (I Cor. 14:14).

Many people pray in tongues while driving a car or washing up - their mind can be employed elsewhere. Clearly, therefore, tongues is a valuable gift for private edification. It can bring a profound sense of the presence of God, and lead, as a result, to a release from tension and worry, and a deepening of love and trust. As the Holy Spirit leads the believer in such prayer, there is often a deep sense of being in harmony with God.³¹⁰

On the contrary, NT scholar Thomas Edgar remarks:

The tongues movement presupposes that communication with the spiritual realm is more direct when it is apart from the mind. Such a concept, though found in various [pagan] religions, is contrary to biblical [and historical] Christianity.³¹¹

While we biblically evaluate the modern "tongues" movement elsewhere,³¹² it is appropriate to discuss it in the context of the apparent disparagement of the Christian mind. Practitioners of "praying in a tongue" freely admit that it is rather mindless, in that they do not know what they are "saying" or if they are saying anything at all. In other words, it hardly requires our thinking faculties to utter incoherent sounds, and therefore, if this is a way in which the Holy Spirit edifies the Christian, it is agreed by all that He is not using the mind to do so.

Nonetheless, there are those who insist that in 1 Corinthians 14 the Apostle Paul introduced another, even more spiritual method of praying "**in a tongue**" that purposely leaves the "**mind**" "**unfruitful** [*akarpos*: "barren, useless"]" (1 Cor 14:14). Elsewhere in *Knowing Our God* we argue in detail that the Apostle Paul is not

³¹⁰ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 2004).

³¹¹ Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bsac* 145 (1988), 384.

³¹² For a full discussion of the modern "tongues" movement see Book 12.

advocating a mindless *half-hearted* kind of prayer, and that the modern version of “praying in a tongue” is the same thing as the pagan, non-Christian variety that was being practiced in the Greek mystery religions in Corinth and is practiced world-wide among all kinds of non-Christian religions today.³¹³

Accordingly, Joseph Dillow, in his book, *Speaking in Tongues*, summarized the religious context of Corinth and its implications on the issue at hand:

Corinth was an extremely immoral city, full of pagan superstition and idol worship. In the heathen worship there of the goddess of Diana the use of gibberish, or unintelligible language, was common. . . . [Tongue utterances] had an important place in this pagan worship. The words were believed to be revealed by a god or spirit to the priest or devotee. . . . Through this the worshiper believed that he was having a privileged, intimate contact with his god not possible when he spoke to it in his native language. . . .

Kittel [in the highly regarded *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*] mentions the “muttering of words or sounds without interconnection of meaning” as part of the idol worship at Corinth, and notes that it occurred commonly in the cults of various other Greek gods and goddesses as well. . . .³¹⁴

Pagan tribes all over the world have been speaking in [tongue utterances] for centuries. The similarities between their practice and that of the tongues movement is striking. At its root the movement is simply a merger of Christianity with paganism . . . the practice of the Corinthians paralleled their involvement in the Greek mystery religions prior to becoming Christians. The same battle that Paul fought in Corinth is being raised again.³¹⁵

Dr. Dillow’s point that “tongue” utterances as found in modern *emotionalism* are found in pagan religions all over the world is an important point regarding the true nature of the contemporary phenomenon.

In the *Encyclopedia of Religion* under the entry “Glossolalia,” which is the technical term for tongues speaking in general we read:

³¹³ For a demonstration of the pagan roots of the modern “tongues” movement see the next chapter 4.10 sections A-B.

³¹⁴ Joseph Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues* (Zondervan, 1975), 12-13.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 189-90.

Glossolalia (from the Greek *glosse*, "tongue, language," and *lalein*, "to talk") is a nonordinary speech behavior that is institutionalized as a religious ritual in numerous Western and non-Western religious communities. Its worldwide distribution attests to its antiquity, as does its mention in ancient documents...

There are references to it in the [Hindu] Vedas (c. 1000 BC), in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, and in Tibetan Tantric writings. Traces of it can be found in the litanies of some orders of the Islamic Sufi mystics... [Tonques speaking] occurred in some of the ancient Greek religions and in various primitive religions . .

Paul urged restraint in the practice . . . since such a spectacular spiritual gift could be abused. Edification, as opposed to personal satisfaction, was set as the test of acceptable glossolalia. If the meaning could not be disclosed, Paul regarded it with suspicion. . . .

In the circumpolar region, many shamans [witch doctors], among the Intuit [Eskimo] . . . use their religious ritual's secret languages that consist of a mixture of nonsense syllables. . . . [T]hese secret trance dialects are taught by the master shamans to their neophytes. . . . From Africa we have reports of a secret religious trance language used exclusively by women.

When speaking in tongues . . . if the pronouncement is in nonsense syllables, as, for instance, among Christians speaking in tongues or among the nomadic, reindeer-hunting Chukchi of Siberia, an "interpretation" may be provided. . . . In the *zar* cult of Ethiopia, the shamans talk to the *zars* [spirits] in a "secret language." The shamans of the Semai of Malaysia use glossolalia to invite the "nephews of the gods" to a feast, and the Yanomamo Indians of Amazonia chant while in a trance to their *hekura* demons, calling them to come live in their chests.³¹⁶

Obviously, then, it is imperative that careful discernment is exercised in evaluating modern "tongue speaking," as the modern version of the gift is indistinguishable from the world-wide pagan variety.

Accordingly, we demonstrate elsewhere that in 1 Corinthians 12-14 the Apostle was differentiating between the real spiritual gift of tongues and the pagan counterfeit operating in the Corinthian

³¹⁶ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, "Glossolalia," Mircea Eliade ed., 16 vols. (Macmillan, 1987), Vol. V, p. 562-565.

church. The real gift was the ability to miraculously speak a real foreign human language as an authenticating sign of new divine revelation, as it is clearly described throughout Acts, and in Paul's clear statement that the gift of **"tongues . . . are a [miraculous] sign . . . for unbelievers"** (14:22).

Neither the ancient nor modern pagan practice of a mindless, meaningless, self-edifying private prayer language is either miraculous, or a sign of anything to unbelievers but being **"out of your mind"** (i.e. "insane" 14:23). Simply put, the Bible's description of the real gift of tongues cannot be reconciled with the modern version claimed in *emotionalism*, but its attributes perfectly fit the pagan counterfeit that the Apostle Paul was combating in Corinth and which is practiced in heathen and even demonic worship practices all over the world.

Those who claim the Apostle Paul is encouraging "praying in a tongue" in 1 Corinthians 14 must at least admit that its mindless nature violates the Apostle Peter's clear command to **"think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray"** (1 Pet 4:7 NCV), and contradicts everything else the Bible says about prayer, as the conscious engagement of the Christian's mind is always either clearly commanded or presupposed. Our primary purpose here is simply to note that such a practice violates both explicit and implicit instruction in Scripture that God-pleasing *whole-hearted prayer* will always engage our God-given faculty of understanding.

C) The King's Command to Not "Babble Like Pagans": *Matt 6:5-9*

While the Apostle Peter's instruction above is explicit, we would suggest that the King's own instruction on prayer is implicit in advocating the place of the mind in prayer. For example, we read in Luke:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say [using your mind, of course]: "Father, hallowed be Your Name, Your Kingdom come. . ." (Luke 11:1-2).

It should be noticed that when Jesus taught the disciples how to communicate with God, He told them to use logically based propositional statements like, **"Our Father Who is in Heaven"**

(Matt 6:9) which require logical and reasonable thought to formulate, understand, and express.

It is obvious that when the King was praying here, it was not in a "tongue" and when His disciples specifically asked Him to teach them how to pray He did not advocate such a practice. Accordingly, there is no mention of the King ever praying in an obscure tongue, including the very intimate and emotional prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His "high priestly prayer" recorded in John 17. His prayers in both these cases were *from God to God*. It would seem if there was ever a time for the "super prayer language" that is claimed in *emotionalism* to be demonstrated, these events would have provided the opportunity to validate such a thing. God the Son spoke naturally to God the Father and instructed us to do the same, not in the obscure utterances that are being exalted today.

In fact, the King would seem to have condemned several practices particularly in *emotionalism* regarding prayer when He taught:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, Who is unseen. Then your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling [*battalogēsēte*] like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many utterances [*polulogia*]. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name . . . " (Matt 6:5-9)

When the King speaks of "**secret**" prayer He obviously is not advocating a "private prayer language." However, it would seem possible to apply His rebuke to someone standing in a public assembly praying audibly in obscure gibberish just "**to be seen by men**" to a great many prayer meetings in *emotionalism*.

The King's command that "**when you pray, do not keep on babbling** (*battalogēsēte*) **like pagans**" would also seem to condemn the modern tongues phenomenon. Obviously the King is not condemning *meaningful* repetition in prayer as is exemplified by His own prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane and encouraged in His parable of the unjust judge and the widow (cf. Luke 18:1-8).³¹⁷

³¹⁷ Accordingly, Dr. Stott writes:

In addition, Christ's mention of the pagans praying with "**many utterances**" (*polulugia*) can be translated without the implication that the utterances have meaning as real words.³¹⁸

Accordingly, the more important word to understand is "**babbling**" (*battalogēsēte*). Matthew's use of such a rare word to reflect Christ's meaning is very significant. Many assume that the King was merely referring to repetitive prayer such as practiced in Roman Catholicism by praying through the rosary. If this was so, other common Greek words could have been used by the Apostle to translate what Christ meant (e.g. *palin*: "again"; cf. 2 Cor 11:16; 13:2; "repeat" in NIV). However, Christ obviously meant to describe a kind of prayer that was much more than mere repetition, but an incoherent "**babbling**."

The Greek *battalogēsēte* is a unique word and only used here in the NT. The well-respected *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD) defines *battalogēsēte* as "to speak in a way that images the kind of speech

The familiar KJV rendering, 'Use not vain repetitions,' is therefore misleading, unless it is clear that the emphasis is on 'vain' rather than on 'repetitions.' Jesus cannot be prohibiting all repetition, for he repeated himself in prayer, notably in Gethsemane when 'he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words'. Perseverance and even importunity in prayer are commended by him also; rather is he condemning verbosity, especially in those who 'speak without thinking'. So RSV 'heap up empty phrases' is helpful. (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* [Intervarsity, 1978], 143.

³¹⁸ "Much speaking" is the literal translation of *polulugia* (used only here in the NT) given by Vine (591) and the *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance* (Robert L. Thomas, ed. [Foundation, 1998, 1559]).

Although cognates of *logos* such as *polulugia* normally imply words with meaning, BAGD gives a literal meaning of "utterance," apparently not necessarily an intelligible one. Accordingly, the Apostle implies in 1 Corinthians 14 that *logon* may not contain cognitive meaning when he writes:

Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible [*eusēmon*: clear] **words** [*logon*: utterance- seeming to imply that one can speak *logon* that is not intelligible] **with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.** (1 Cor 14:7-9).

The Apostle recognizes that "utterances" (*logon*) may be spoken that are not intelligible or meaningful and his statement here regarding the incoherent tongue that the Corinthians are using has a striking resemblance to Christ's words regarding pagan characteristics of prayer.

pattern of one who stammers, use the same utterances again and again, speak without thinking.”³¹⁹ Accordingly, the NIV “**babbling**,” which *Webster’s* defines as: “to utter meaningless or unintelligible sounds” is a very good translation, and a very good description of modern tongues speaking.³²⁰

³¹⁹ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), F. W. Danker ed., 3rd ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

³²⁰ John Nolland in his entry to the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* notes:

[*Battalogēsēte*] may be related to a Greek root used for stuttering. If so, it is likely to be a deprecatory way of speaking about the formulaic repetition of either intelligible (names of gods, petitionary formulas, etc.) or unintelligible ('words' of magical power or the language of the gods) elements in order to multiply effectiveness with the gods.

Schlatter has noted that in compound verbs *-logein* means 'to gather'; so the intended sense could well be something like 'to string together [i.e., gather] stuttered elements of speech.' The translation 'babble on' above is not quite precise, but catches something of this.

...

Others look for a Semitic derivation of the *batt* element and point to the Aramaic *btl*, meaning 'empty, ineffectual', and the Hebrew *bt'*, meaning 'speak rashly, thoughtlessly'. (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Eerdmans, 2005], 284)

W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison generally agree, noting: “In the opinion of G. Delling (*TWOT* 1.598) [*battalogēsēte*] was simply formulated on the analogy of the better known *batrizō* (= ‘stammer, stutter’) in connection with *-logein*” (*The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC) [T & T Clark, 1988], 588).

Thomas Edgar relates the consensus of the Greek lexicons on the meaning of *battalgeo*:

The word *battalgeo* does not occur in the Septuagint [Greek translation of OT] and occurs only in this passage in the New Testament. Arndt and Gingrich define it as “babble, to speak without thinking” (Lexicon, 137).

Moulton and Milligan see a connection between *battalgeo*, *battolgeo*, and *battalos*, the nickname of Demosthenes who was so called “because of the torrent of words at his command, which made envious rivals call him “the gabbler” (Vocabulary, 107). Liddell and Scott refer to similar words, all meaning to stammer, and define *battolgeo* as “speak stammeringly, say the same thing over and over” (Lexicon, 311).

Beare feels that Jesus' meaning in this passage is that the disciples are not to “babble meaningless sounds” (“Speaking with Tongues,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 [September 1964] : 229). Delling agrees that it means “babble” in this verse (“Battalgeo,” TDNT, 1:597).

It is agreed by most that “praying in a tongue” is indeed mindless as *battalogēsēte* suggests. In addition, it is admitted that tongue utterances are meaningless to the speaker, an aspect that is captured in the NCV translation of *battalogēsēte* as “**saying things that mean nothing,**” and the ESV and RSV which reads, “**heap up empty phrases.**” The NASB translates *battalogēsēte* as “**meaningless repetition**” which linguists around the world would confirm perfectly reflects the practice of “praying in a tongue.”³²¹

Lampe defines the term as it was used shortly after New Testament times (Patristic Greek Lexicon, 294). One example is clearly speech apart from understanding (Damasus Tropbaea 2.4.4., which states, “*me epistamenos alla battologeon*, not understanding, but babbling”). Another example from an early church father refers to unintelligible utterance (Gregory Nyssa). (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* [Kregel, 1996], 198-9)

While John Stott includes the idea of real words in the meaning of *battalogēsēte*, he writes:

The word describes any and every prayer which is all words and no meaning, all lips and no mind or heart. *Battalogia* is explained in the same verse (7) as *polulugia*, ‘much speaking’, that is, a torrent of mechanical and mindless words. (143-4)

Likewise, John MacArthur sees a reference to real words in the “**babbling**” but then describes it in a way that could certainly apply to *emotionalism*:

Use meaningless repetition is one word (from *battalogeo*) in the Greek and refers to idle, thoughtless chatter. It was probably onomatopoeitic, mimicking the sounds of meaningless jabber. . . .

Prayer that is thoughtless and indifferent is offensive to God, and should also be offensive to us. . . . It is not honest, properly motivated repetition of needs or praise before God that is wrong, but the mindless, indifferent recital of spiritual-sounding incantations or magical formulas over and over. Not only must our hearts be right before God will hear our prayer, but also our minds. Thoughtless prayer is almost as offensive to God as heartless prayer. In most instances they go together. (*MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], Matt 6:7)

Unfortunately, in our opinion, D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount* [Baker, 1978]) and *emotionalist* Michael Green (*The Message of Matthew* [Intervarsity, 2000]), both confine the meaning of *battalogēsēte* to speaking many words. While Christ was probably including this concept as well, it is a mistake to think this was His exclusive intention.

³²¹ Many linguists who have studied the modern phenomenon of “speaking in a tongue” have commented on the fact that its contents are made up of repeating cycles of identical syllables. The *Encyclopedia of Religion* concludes the following after describing extensive, world-wide research on the tongues phenomenon:

Also, as demonstrated elsewhere, praying in an incoherent “tongue” was commonly known to be a frequent practice in the Greek mystery religions right at the time when the King lived on the Earth.³²² We noted there that we have considerable evidence that praying publicly in meaningless, “**babbling**,” gibberish was thought to be a more spiritual kind of prayer practiced in the pagan mystery religion temples.

It seems quite reasonable then to interpret the King’s condemnation of “**babbling** (*battalogēsēte*) **like pagans**” to refer to this very thing. Accordingly, the NLT reads, “**don’t babble . . . as people of other religions do.**” It is suggested here then that a legitimate translation of the King’s words would simply be, “When you pray, do not make meaningless and incoherent “babble” like the pagans do in their temples, for they think they will be heard because they do this a lot. But when you pray, do it in a meaningful, coherent way like ‘Our Father . . .’”³²³

Accordingly, NT scholar John Stott remarks regarding the King’s instruction, “**when you pray, do not keep on babbling** (*battalogēsēte*) **like pagans**”:

To sum up, what Jesus forbids his people is any kind of prayer with the mouth when the mind is not engaged. . . . Jesus intends our minds and hearts to be involved in what we are saying. Then prayer is seen in its true light—not as a meaningless repetition of words, nor as a means to our own glorification, but as a true communion with our heavenly Father. . . .

Whatever takes place in the nervous system during [a tongue utterance] causes the utterance to break down into phrases of equal length, provided we also include the pauses. That is, using a concept taken from music rather than linguistics, it causes the phrases to be divided into bars, each of which is accented on the first syllable, and it causes the bars to pulsate, to throb rhythmically in a [repeating] sequence of consonant-vowel, consonant-vowel. The trance state is responsible for the haunting intonation of glossolalia; never varying, it rises to a peak at the end of the first and third of the unit of utterance and drops to a level much lower than that at the onset as it comes to a close. (Mircea Eliade ed., 16 vols., [Macmillan, 1987], V:564).

³²² For evidence that the modern version of tongues mimics the worship practice of the first century Greek mystery religions see chapter the next chapter 4.10 sections A-B.

³²³ Carl F. H. Henry adds regarding Christ’s instruction on prayer: “Whether addressing God or man, Jesus placed a premium on intelligibility. (*God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 Vols. [Word, 1979], 4:489).

Thus Christian prayer is seen in contrast to its non-Christian alternatives. It is God-centered (concerned for God's glory) in contrast to the self-centeredness of the Pharisees (preoccupied with their own glory). And it is intelligent (expressive of thoughtful dependence) in contrast to the mechanical incantations of the heathen.

Therefore when we come to God in prayer, we do not come hypocritically like play actors seeking the applause of men, nor mechanically like pagan babblers, whose mind is not in their mutterings, but thoughtfully, humbly and trustfully like little children to their father.³²⁴

While Dr. Stott does not specifically condemn "praying in a tongue," one could hardly describe those who do, any better than those, "whose mind is not in their mutterings."

It is clear that the King's command to pray coherently with understandable content is clearly violated by "praying in a tongue" that is admittedly incoherent. It is not the *content* of the Lord's Prayer that distinguished it from the pagan's prayer, for surely the pagans desired many of the same things listed (e.g. daily bread, protection from evil, etc.) No, it was the *method* of the Lord's Prayer that distinguished it from the pagan practice. Pagans prayed *half-heartedly* in mindless merely emotional gibberish (*battalogēsēte*). The King told us to pray *whole-heartedly* in coherent, meaningful, natural speech which requires our mind.

One could hardly suggest a better description of the pagan "tongue" prayer than that of Gerd Theissen, Professor of New Testament Theology at the University of Heidelberg, who refers to it as "the language of the unconscious."³²⁵ It would seem then that the practice of "praying in a tongue" resembles the ancient pagan practice and violates the King's command because its practitioners: 1) admit that they do not understand what they are praying in a tongue, and 2) according to linguists, the prayer language consists of repeating cycles of the same meaningless syllables, and 3) It violates the King's clear command to pray coherently and meaningfully in natural human language.

If some still doubt that the King's words apply to praying in incoherent utterances, then it is suggested that they imagine themselves on "the Mount" that day, sitting in front of Him, when He spoke these words:

³²⁴ Stott, *Sermon*, 143-45; 151-2

³²⁵ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (T&T Clark, 1999), 79

When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans . . . Do not be like them [pagans] . . . This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father Who is in Heaven . . . (Matt 6:7-9)

Now, imagine that immediately after personally hearing these words of the King, someone stood up in the crowd and audibly uttered a "prayer" in an incoherent "tongue." Imagine further that afterwards the person explains to the crowd: "What He just said about not **"babbling like pagans"** really doesn't include 'praying in a tongue.' Sure, it obviously resembles what the pagans do in their temples, but it can also be a spiritual gift from God, and in fact a special and even more spiritual way of communing with God that should be sought by all of God's children." Do you think the King would be nodding with approval? Neither do we think He approves of it today.

It is admitted that what is being suggested here is quite serious: praying in obscure gibberish is not just meaningless but sinful. It is also admitted that the King did not explicitly use the words "praying in a tongue" when he condemned **"babbling like the pagans"** and some may understandably object to the above interpretation. However, understanding the religious context of His statement, and the popularity of **"babbling"** in a tongue in the Greek mystery religions at the very time He said this, provides considerable support for our view.³²⁶ Nonetheless, the concepts are clearly related enough that one could ask why someone would even want to come close to something our Lord seemed so passionately against?

Especially since we will be held accountable for everything we do or say. Accordingly, the following warning from Christ comes to mind in regards to the debate on praying in mindless gibberish:

[O]ut of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. [and the empty-minded man brings empty things out of the empty-mindedness in him].

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every [argos: "useless"] word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matt 12:33-36)

³²⁶ For a great deal more discussion on the practice of praying in an obscure tongue in the Greek mystery religions of the 1st and 2nd centuries see chapter 12.7.

It is not “careless” words that Christ is **condemning** here, as many translations erroneously render *argos*,³²⁷ but rather, “unfruitful, barren”³²⁸ and “unprofitable, hollow”³²⁹ utterances that mean nothing. Therefore, when we read that God will hold us accountable for even meaningless utterances to Him, those who pray in a meaningless tongue should take notice. This is, no doubt, another reason that the King did not want His people to be mindlessly and meaninglessly “**babbling like the pagans**” customarily did when they prayed.

We are reminded here of the Lord’s rebuke to His people, “**Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense** [symbolic of prayer?] **is detestable to Me**” (Isa 1:13). How can those who “pray in a tongue” know for sure that their obscure, unintelligible utterances in a babble are not meaningless? Just because it feels good?

God says, “**I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct**” (Jer 17:10). What then does God find in the mind of those who pray in a mindless tongue? Nothing. And it is not good to come before God with empty prayers and praise, which is what empty-minded prayer and praise will automatically be. The Apostle writes, “**we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad**” (2 Cor 5:10). Praying in a meaningless tongue is something we do “**in the body**” and it is “**bad**” because it mimics ancient and modern practices in pagan religions and offers God an empty mind, instead of a worshipful one.

While modern tongue practitioners can assume there is something meaningful in their meaningless utterances, God knows it is empty and will one day expose it as such because “**There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known**” (Luke 10:2). “**This will take place on**

³²⁷ For example, see NIV. Accordingly, John Nolland writes: “In the present context ‘careless’ or ‘thoughtless’ have also been suggested, but there seems to be no evidence of such a meaning for [*argos*] (*The Gospel of Matthew* NIGTC [Eerdmans, 2005], 507)

³²⁸ *Argos* denotes “inactive, idle, unfruitful, barren (*a*, negative, and *ergon*, “work”). *Vines*, 316.

³²⁹ William Mounce defines *argos* as: “unprofitable, hollow, or by impl., injurious.” (*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* [Zondervan, 2006], 1096.

the Day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ" (Rom 2:16). If those praying meaningless, empty things to God do not know it now, they will know it on that Day, and we will mourn their loss of reward and waste of time, mind, energy, and "prayer" with them.

D) Paul's Command for "Whole-hearted Prayer: *1 Cor 14:14-15*

The King's and the Apostle Peter's instruction regarding the need for our reason to be involved in authentic Christian prayer was repeated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. He tells the Corinthians:

[A]nyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. If I pray in a tongue [glosse, "unknown utterance" ³³⁰], my spirit [not Holy Spirit!] prays, but my mind is unfruitful [akarpos: "unproductive, barren"]. So what shall I do? [and what should Christians do?] I will pray with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] sing with my mind. (14-15)

The Apostle is simply stating something here very much like what Christ was alluding to when He said, **"True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit [emotions] and truth [reason], for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. . . . His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth"** (John 4:23-24). In the previous chapter we argued that Christ was speaking of "whole-hearted" worship in which all the functions of our "heart" are involved, including the **"truth"** which we process, possess, and protect in our reason, and our human **"spirit"** from which our desires and emotions come from. Likewise, here the Apostle is describing "whole-hearted" prayer in which both our

³³⁰ We argue elsewhere that some of the keys to understanding the Apostle's instruction concerning tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 is to 1) notice that his purpose is to distinguish the real Christian gift of miraculously speaking in a foreign human language as described in Acts and 1 Cor 14:22 ("**tongues are a** [miraculous] **sign to unbelievers**", and 2) notice that he distinguishes the real gift from the common pagan practice in Corinth by using the singular *glosse* instead of the plural *glossais* to refer to the "unknown" and possibly pagan variety. For further discussion see chapter 12.8.

reason (“**mind**”) and emotions and affections (“**spirit**”) are involved.

Emotionalists interpret the Apostle here as saying that there are two kinds of praying and singing, one with the mind and the other without the mind. More specifically, they claim that to “**pray with my spirit**” without the mind is the biblical gift of tongues and a superior way to pray. Accordingly, the Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee writes:

[The Corinthians'] error in understanding permit us to catch a glimpse of what otherwise would be unknown, namely, the Apostle's own interior life in the Spirit. . . . [W]hat we learn here is that his "spirituality" included a continual life of praying and singing in the Spirit-in this case, with glossolalia ["tongues"]. . . . [Here] we have especially the description of his own prayer life in 1 Cor 14:14-15, that it is of two kinds: praying [only] with his mind [or] praying [only] with his S/spirit.³³¹

There are several insurmountable problems with the idea that the Apostle is advocating a habit of mindless prayer. First, it violates the clear commands and instructions in Scripture, as discussed above, of the need to have our mind engaged in any prayer that would be pleasing to God.

Secondly, the Apostle prefaces the passage by saying, “**Anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says**” (v. 13). We would ask again, if praying in a mindless, meaningless way is so valuable, why would the Apostle say this? It is because he knew that it would be better even for the tongue speaker to know the meaning of what they were praying, because as we will discuss further below, there is no value in utterances that are not understood, not to the individual or others.

³³² Remember that the authentic gift of tongues (languages) was

³³¹ Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* [Hendrickson, 1994], 270, 581.

³³² Dr. Fee recognizes that the critical need for mental understanding is the face-value meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:13 and comments:

[T]he contextual difficulties are considerable if the [text] is original and the intent is that the tongues-speaker should pray for the gift of interpretation for the benefit of his or her own understanding, a view espoused by Calvin 292, Grosheide 325-26, Morris 194, Ruef 150, Mare 273. Not only does this contradict vv. 2, 4, and 15, but it places a premium on the mind as the only means whereby one may be edified personally, which also contradicts the intent of vv. 2 and 4. (*Presence*, 228-29)

the miraculous ability to speak in a real, but foreign human language that the speaker did not understand. Accordingly, while the speaker would be saying meaningful things, it would need to be interpreted for those who did not know the language.

Thirdly, *emotionalists* too easily dismiss or intentionally ignore the significance of the Apostle's statement that the person who prays "**in a tongue**" does it with "**my spirit**" (i.e. seat of human emotions), not the *Holy Spirit*. In fact, while *emotionalists* wish to continually insert a mention of the *Holy Spirit* in 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle *never* does, always intentionally speaking of the human seat of emotion in regards to speaking in an unknown tongue (cf. 14:2, 14, 15, 32). It would have been very easy for the Apostle to specify the involvement of the *Holy Spirit* here, but he intentionally does not. Accordingly, NT scholar Anthony Thiselton writes:

A disastrous move [in 1 Cor 14:14-15], however, is to confuse ["spirit" here which is] a noncognitive or "spiritual" human capacity, with Spirit as the *Holy Spirit* of God. . . . [T]o read this into 14:15 is to fall into the very trap to which the Corinthians and many today fall prey, namely, of associating the operation of the *Holy Spirit* more closely with noncognitive "spontaneous" phenomena than with a self-critical reflection upon the word of God as that which addresses the understanding and thereby transforms the heart (cf. 14:23-25).

Contrary to his usually more judicious assessments [Gordon] Fee [as in the quote above ³³³] repeats this disastrous

On the contrary, the Apostle's intention to "place a premium on the mind" does not contradict "the intent of vv. 2 and 4" as thoroughly explained in our Book 12, chapter 11. Dr. Fee's solution to what he perceives as a contradiction is to argue that the text of v. 13 is not original, which is unacceptable, and again, exposes the weakness of his view.

³³³ The Pentecostal Dr. Fee, of course, insists that *pneuma* here refers to the *Holy Spirit*. His argument, based on a rule of Greek grammar regarding the complex and often uncertain subject of definite articles is unconvincing, and even he admits the rule is not consistent in the NT (1 *Corinthians*, NICNT [Eerdmans, 1987], 578, n. 43). Additionally, Dr. Fee ignores the contextual evidence provided by verses 14 and 15 as demonstrated above, which is surely a better guide.

Elsewhere, Dr. Fee claims:

All of this is to say that the small case "spiritual" probably should be eliminated from our vocabulary, when it comes to this word in the Pauline corpus. (*Presence*, 32)

confusion explicitly in his commentary and in his two more recent volumes: "my S/spirit prays." ³³⁴

The Greek word used throughout 1 Corinthians 14 is the common *pneuma* which can either be translated with a small "s" or a capital "S" depending, again, on the context. The NASB, NIV, KJV, NKJV, PME, and JB translate it "spirit," whereas what could be termed the "looser" translations (TLB, NLT, CEV, NCV, TEV) have it "Spirit." It would seem certain that in verses 14-16 "**spirit**" is the most likely translation based on the Apostle's reference to "**my** [*mou*] **spirit**." The Greek text there leaves no doubt that praying or singing in a "**tongue**" is merely by the person's spirit, not the Holy Spirit.

It should be recognized that the human spirit is often distinguished from the Holy Spirit in Scripture (cf. Rom 8:16; 12:11; 1 Cor 2:11; 5:3-5; 7:34; 14:14-16, 32; 16:18; 2 Cor 2:13; 7:1, 13; Gal 6:18; Eph 4:23; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Tim 4:23; Plmn 1:25). ³³⁵ Therefore, there is no reason to interpret the Apostle's references to "**his spirit**" (1 Cor 14:2) and "**my spirit**" (14:14-16) as referring to the Holy Spirit. ³³⁶ These are references to the human spirit.

On the contrary, as noted here, the Apostle obviously and often distinguished between the human spirit [i.e. seat of emotions] and the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, Dr. Thiselton wrongly claims that the major reason we would interpret *pneuma* here as the person's spirit is because "Many commentators before the 1950's were unduly influenced by a view of human personhood dominated by idealist or Cartesian dualism." (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGNT [Eerdmans, 2000], 1086). Nonsense. Even he admits that *pneuma* must be interpreted as the human spirit a few verses later because of the context, and this is precisely what we are basing our view on as well.

For further discussion of what the Apostle meant by the human "spirit" see chapter 12.9.

³³⁴ Thiselton, 1112-1113.

³³⁵ As the *NIDNTT* notes, references to the human spirit "occurs nearly 40 times," in the NT (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (*NIDNTT*), Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], III:693). Although instead of seeing it as the emotional, affectional aspect of a human, it is defined here as "man in so far as he belongs to the spiritual realm and interacts with the spiritual realm." (*Ibid.*).

³³⁶ For a fuller discussion of "**his spirit**" at 1 Cor 14:2 see chapter 12.9.

What then is meant in Scripture by the human “spirit”? While references to it can refer to various aspects of our “heart,”³³⁷ *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* lists a primary one as “the sentient element in man, that by which he perceives, reflects, feels, desires,”³³⁸ with some uses particularly including our emotions (cf. Matt 5:3; Luke 1:47; Acts 17:16). And this is especially the meaning of the human spirit when it is being contrasted with the mind, as it is here. Accordingly, Charles Hodge (1797–1878) reflected the common view of NT scholars when he wrote: “When *spirit* is to be distinguished from the *understanding*, it designates the affections [i.e. emotional desires].”³³⁹

The fact that the Apostle intentionally says those who utter something in a “**tongue**” do so merely with their human spirit instead of the Holy Spirit should be another clear indication that the Apostle is not speaking of the same supernatural gift of tongues he had earlier described as a “**manifestation of the [Holy] Spirit**” (12:7), and also as a “**work of one and the same [Holy] Spirit**” (12:11). Again, the Apostle will not, and cannot, assume that such an “unknown” utterance is a “**manifestation**” or “**work**” of the Holy Spirit and neither should we.

A fourth consideration in the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:14–15 is that *emotionalists* do not consider carefully enough how derogatory the Apostle is toward those who “**pray in a tongue**” when he says their “**mind is unfruitful** [*akarpos*: “unproductive, barren”]. When would being “**unfruitful**” in prayer or singing or anything else be a good, Christian thing? On the contrary, it is a bad pagan thing. As we quoted Dr. Edgar above:

The tongues movement presupposes that communication with the spiritual realm is more direct when it is apart from the mind. Such a concept, though found in various religions, is contrary to biblical Christianity.³⁴⁰

As is often the case, nobody says it better (or harsher sometimes) than John Calvin (1509–1564), even if it was more than 400 years ago. Commenting on this very passage (1 Cor

³³⁷ See a rather complete listing of the variety of meanings for *pneuma* in *Vine’s*, 593.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1 Cor 14:2; online at ccel.org. Although as discussed in chapter 12.9, Hodge believed these were references to the Holy Spirit.

³⁴⁰ Edgar, “Cessation,” 384.

14:14-15), Calvin expressed the universal conviction of the Christian Church for about 1600 years when he wrote:

Let us take notice, that Paul reckons it a great fault if the mind is not occupied in prayer. And no wonder; for what else do we in prayer, but pour out our thoughts and desires before God? Farther, as prayer is the spiritual worship of God, what is more at variance with the nature of it, than that it should proceed merely from the lips, and not from the inmost soul? And these things [should] have been perfectly familiar to every mind, had not the devil besotted the world to such a degree, as to make men believe that they pray aright, when they merely make their lips move.³⁴¹

Likewise, in a treatise on how to pray, Martin Luther (1483-1546) reflected the historical view of prayer when he wrote regarding those who do not think about what they are praying: "When it is all over they do not know what they have done or what they talked about,"³⁴² which describes "praying in a tongue" very well. Luther went on to write:

But, praise God, it is now clear to me [although apparently not to many today] that a person who forgets [or doesn't even know] what he has said has not prayed well. In a good prayer one fully remembers [and understands] every word and thought from the beginning to the end of the prayer.³⁴³

More recently, other commentators on this passage have agreed with our concerns. The highly respected British NT scholar C. K. Barrett writes concerning the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:15:

The upshot of the matter is that if I pray in a tongue, part, and that a most significant part, of my nature remains out of action. This is not good for me, and it is not good for the community I ought to serve.³⁴⁴

Likewise, John MacArthur writes that the answer to the Apostle's question, "What should I do?" in 14:15 is that:

there is no place for mindless ecstatic prayer. Praying and singing with the spirit must be accompanied by praying and

³⁴¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries, in loc.*, online at ccel.org.

³⁴² Martin Luther, "A Practical Way to Pray," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull, (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 15.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (BNTC)* (Hendrickson, 2000), 320.

singing with the mind also. It is obvious that edification cannot exist apart from the mind. Spirituality involves more than the mind, but it never excludes the mind (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10).³⁴⁵

Along the same lines, NT scholar Leon Morris (1914-2006) interpreted this passage as follows:

Anyone who prays in a tongue is not using his mind (*nous*). The Christian life is considerably more than a mental exercise, but anyone whose mind is unfruitful is not being true to his Christian calling. This passage is very important for its insistence on the rightful place of the intellect. Notice that this is secured without any diminution of spiritual fervour. Paul is not arguing for a barren intellectualism.

There is a place for the enthusiasm so strikingly exemplified in the use of 'tongues'. But it must be allied to the use of the mind, and this 'tongues' by itself does not provide. Paul singles out two activities specially appropriate in public worship: prayer and singing. Both must be done intelligently, with the mind. . . . Clearly Paul is not looking for unintelligible [mindless] prayers. .

³⁴⁶

Perhaps the best synopsis of what the Apostle is teaching here is found in Richard Oster's commentary:

In 14:14-15 Paul enters into specific instruction which, in my judgment, makes the most sense when viewed against the backdrop of residual pagan thinking among certain converts. Specifically, Paul's corrective use of the mind/spirit dichotomy seemingly assumes a situation where the tongue speakers are relying only on their "spiritual" component to the neglect of their rational self. Even though there is no such radical antithesis between mind and spirit in Pauline anthropology, there is apparently such in the thinking and practice of these Corinthian saints.

Accordingly, Paul's observation about the unfruitfulness of the mind of the Corinthian tongue speakers during their prayers-in-tongues implies an "irrational" dimension to their spirituality and piety that Paul finds unacceptable. . . .

This type of "irrational" focus in communion with the divine was well known in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish

³⁴⁵ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), *loc. cit.*

³⁴⁶ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1985), 190.

materials of antiquity. E. R. Dodd's classic work entitled *The Greeks and the Irrational*, unfortunately neglected by most interpreters of 1 Cor 14, shows how widespread and deeply rooted the notion of the "irrational" was in the pagan concepts of prophecy, enthusiasm, and oracular possession.

This is the very reason why pagan visitors to the [Corinthian] worship service can so readily interpret this aberrant tongue speaking in light of the pagan oracular experiences and presume a deity is also in the midst of these tongue speakers in the church of God.³⁴⁷

Finally, a major mistake *emotionalists* make here is to assume that the Apostle is advocating two kinds of prayer and singing, one which only engages the human "spirit" and consequently also, a type of praying and singing that only engages the mind. There are obviously several problems with this.

First, *emotionalists* must be consistent, and if they are going to claim the Apostle is advocating a type of prayer or singing that only engages the "spirit" and not the mind, then they must also admit that he is equally advocating a type of prayer or singing that only engages the intellect, and not the affections. Not surprisingly, *emotionalists* never suggest an example of only praying or singing with the understanding and not our emotions and desires that is equally legitimate. What kind of worship would that be, and would the Apostle encourage it?

Obviously, it is hard to even conceive of authentic Christian worship that excludes the spirit of a person, and even if we could conceive of it, we certainly wouldn't advocate it. The same is true of the idea that authentic Christian praying or singing could exclude the mind. As usual, *charismaticism* is separating what God has joined together.³⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the Apostle recognizes that one could pray and sing with only the "spirit" which would seem to be doing so with merely a great deal of subconscious emotion and very little conscious understanding. Which, of course, describes both what was occurring in the pagan mystery religion temples of the time and

³⁴⁷ Richard E. Oster, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, Electronic Edition STEP Files (Parsons Technology, 1997)

³⁴⁸ In addition to separating human understanding from human affections, *charismaticism* separates the Holy Spirit from Scripture, as if He speaks apart from it, and they separate divine revelation from divine authentication, accepting claims to revelatory gifts without demanding miraculous authentication of those gifts. For a further discussion of these topics see the appropriate Books in our *The Revelation of God* series.

in the modern and unbiblical version of the gift of tongues. However, and contrary to the claims of *emotionalists*, the Apostle says that praying or singing with only the human spirit is “**unfruitful**” (14:14).

If this is the case, then what kind of prayer and singing is the Apostle advocating in 1 Corinthians 14:15? It is obvious to anyone except those needing to find biblical support for their mindless pagan prayer and worship practices. The Apostle writes:

So what shall I do [because praying and singing with only my spirit is *akarpōs*, unfruitful]? **I will pray with my spirit, but I will also** [*at the same time*] **pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also** [*at the same time*] **sing with my mind.** (14-15)

We are rather perplexed again as we are reminded of Dr. Fee’s interpretation that:

[Here] we have especially the description of his [the Apostle’s] own prayer life in 1 Cor 14:14-15, that it is of two kinds: praying [only] with his mind [or] praying [only] with his S/spirit.³⁴⁹

Again, Dr. Fee offers no support or examples of why the Apostle would ever only pray with his mind and not his spirit.

Contrary to *emotionalism*, the Apostle is describing the only legitimate way for a Christian to pray, which is with *both* the spirit (affections, emotions, and desires) *and* the mind (reason, thinking, understanding) *simultaneously*, just as is described throughout the rest of the Bible. He is describing what we have described above as *whole-hearted* worship, and singing or praying with only the spirit is surely a violation of the King’s encouragement to worship “**in spirit and in truth**” (cf. John 4:21-24).

Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton writes in his detailed commentary of the Greek text:

Paul argues equally against uncritical “enthusiasm,” uncritical “renewal” traditions, or uncritical mysticism on one side and against gnostics, theological theorists, or any who seek to intellectualize Christian faith into a mere belief system on the other. Christians are confronted not by an either . . . or . . . but by a both . . . and. . . . Paul declares that being “spiritual,” i.e., of the Holy Spirit, occurs “when the Holy Spirit [simultaneously] controls both the spirit and the mind.”³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Fee, *Presence*, 270, 581.

³⁵⁰ Thiselton, 1111, 1113.

Additional scholarly support for the fact that the Apostle is advocating prayer and singing that simultaneously engages the human spirit and the mind is found in the authoritative Greek lexicon *BAGD* which interprets the Greek of the latter half of v. 15 as: "sing praise . . . in full possession of one's mental faculties."³⁵¹

How then can any Christian find any encouragement here to pray or sing in an empty state of mind that the Apostle says is *akarpos*, useless and barren (1 Cor 14:14)? On the contrary, he essentially says, "I would do something better than mindlessly, emotionally, uselessly, and selfishly just pray or sing with my spirit like the pagans do, I will also pray and sing with my mind so I and others know what I'm praying and singing!"

E) Paul's Rebuke of Mindless Self-edification:

1 Cor 14:4

E.1) The Charge of Self-edification Was a Rebuke to the Selfish Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 14:4 the Apostle says, "**One who speaks in** [an "unknown"] **tongue** [*glosse*] **edifies himself.**" Wayne Grudem reflects the typical *emotionalist* interpretation of this statement when he writes:

[W]e would certainly expect that edification would follow [speaking in a tongue], even though the speaker's mind does not understand what is being said. . . . Just as prayer and worship [which engages the mind] in general edify us as we engage in them, so this kind of prayer and worship [that disengages the mind] edifies us too, according to the Apostle.

³⁵²

First, such an interpretation ignores the moral context of the Apostle's statement which makes it very unlikely that he is advocating a self-centered practice to the selfish Corinthians. As demonstrated further in Book 12 (chapter 6), in all the NT, you will not find a more detailed description of, and a more challenging call to, a selfless love than in the verses immediately preceding the one in question.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 1076.

In that description the Corinthians had been told that any kind of utterance without love is simply noise (cf. 13:1), which is why the Apostle instructed would-be tongue speakers who were not going to love others by edifying them, to **"keep quiet"** (14:28). They had been told that others-oriented love is the necessary attribute of anything claiming to be a work of the Holy Spirit or being valuable at all (cf. 13:1-3).

This is precisely why the Apostle says that the **"one who speaks in a tongue"** does so in **"his spirit,"** not the Holy Spirit (14:2), and that to speak unintelligible words which no one understands is uselessly **"speaking into the air"** (14:9), and to **"pray in a tongue"** is to leave the **"mind"** barren (14:14).

If the Corinthians doubted that Christian love is *only* others-oriented, the Apostle clearly stated that it is **"not self-seeking"** (13:5). Accordingly, you will find in 1 Corinthians the most consistent, unrelenting verbal attack on selfishness (cf. 1:10, 3:1, 3; 4:7, 16, 18; 5:6; 8:9; 9:19; 10:23-24, 31, 33; 11:1, 12:7, 12-27, 31, 14:1, 16:13-14), including the clear commands: **"Let no one seek his own good"** (10:24) and **"Do everything in love"** (16:13-14).

Unless one wishes to claim the Apostle was contradicting himself, such commands leave no room for the one who **"edifies himself"** to be interpreted as doing something that pleases God. Love is the essential ingredient of anything truly from the Holy Spirit, and one thing is for sure, praying in an obscure, meaningless tongue has nothing to do with love. *Emotionalists* can continue to presume it builds themselves up in some way, but they cannot claim with the slightest sincerity that such a practice has anything to do with Christian love.

Finally, not more than three sentences before the Apostle says, **"he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself,"** the Corinthians had read the Apostle's summary statement on this whole issue: **"Follow the way of love,"** which is *always* others-oriented, as you **"eagerly desire spiritual gifts"** (14:1). Why do *emotionalists* seem unable to see how incompatible such a statement is with their interpretation of this passage and their practice of a tongue? The Apostle is essentially saying in 14:1 and 4: *"Pursue spiritual manifestations that are loving, like prophecy. Uttering something in an unknown tongue is a spiritual manifestation that is not loving because it is self-centered."*

With all that said, it would seem presumption to assume that the Apostle thinks that when one **"edifies [oikodomei] himself"** that this is a good thing. Accordingly, we should notice that *in this very epistle, the Apostle uses oikodomei "edify" in a negative sense.* NT scholar Thomas Edgar writes:

There are two possible basic meanings for the expression "he that speaks in a tongue edifies himself." The verb "edify," *oikodomeo*, means "to build up." Although this verb normally has a beneficial meaning, in I Corinthians 8:10 the Apostle uses the same verb to refer to a negative aspect of building up. He refers to a strong brother who may lead the weaker brother to an action which violates his conscience. This building up of the weak brother's conscience is not positive edification but a negative building up or hardening that results in sin.

The direction of the edification, positive or negative, must be derived from the context. There are several indications that to "edify oneself" in I Corinthians 14:4 may have the negative connotation to build oneself up in the eyes of others. One of the basic problems the Apostle addresses in the letter to the Corinthians is the exaltation or building up of self. There were divisions apparently based on pride and self-glory (1:26-29; 3:3-7, 18, 21). Statements such as I Corinthians 4:6-7 make it probable that some were puffed up in regard to their gifts, particularly the gift of tongues. Thus, a negative self-exaltation was one of the problems at Corinth.³⁵³

Indeed, in the same context as 8:10 where *oikodomeo* is used in a negative way, the Apostle likewise tells the Corinthians, "**Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up**" (8:1). They obviously did have a problem with wanting to puff themselves up, which the Apostle states here is absolutely opposed to "**love**" which "**builds up**" others. And so is someone who "**speaks in a tongue** [and merely] **edifies himself**." Both a person who "**puffs up**" themselves and one who "**edifies himself**" are violating the essence of Christian love, and therefore, we would suggest that the "edification" that the Apostle speaks of in 14:2 is synonymous with the selfish, arrogant, empty puffing up he speaks of in 8:1 and that the Corinthians were obviously grossly guilty of.

Accordingly, immediately after, and in the context of these instructions about love, it is obvious that when the Apostle says "**One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself**" that this is a *rebuke*, and only the self-centered Christianity that is so prevalent today would even allow it to be interpreted otherwise. It is a fact that our Christian ancestors for over 1900 years of Church history understood the Apostle's words as a rebuke of a selfish spiritual practice, and our generation should be ashamed for not insisting the same. Instead, unlike millennia of Christian forefathers, we have

³⁵³ Edgar, 170.

allowed, and even promoted this rebuke of a self-centered practice as an apostolic encouragement to hotly pursue such a thing.

In fact, we would suggest that the difficulty of interpreting this text was an intentional sovereign act on the part of God to test His people. Would we let the devil twist this passage in our minds to claim a gift we do not have and puff ourselves up over our brethren who do not have it? Would we seek some sort of self-esteem in an experience we ourselves create, desperately wanting to believe it is God? Would we let a deception divide us from our Christian brothers? Perhaps we will know one Day that the *interpretation* of some Scriptures were a test of our true spirituality.

Interpreting **"He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself"** as a rebuke not only reflects the contexts (selfishness and pagan worship practices), but also a style of rebuke that the Apostle has already used in this letter. In 11:21 he tells the Corinthians **"When you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else."** Imagine then, that we would interpret this as a good thing that we should seek more of. This description of what they were doing is not intended to be a commendation of a selfish practice, but rather a condemnation of it and 14:4 is likewise.

If our generation does not understand this as a rebuke, it is clear that the Corinthians were to understand that authentic spiritual gifts granted by the Holy Spirit were inseparable from love *for others*, and diametrically opposed to self-centered edification. Modern readers may interpret the Apostle as saying that there is a legitimate and valuable spiritual gift that works privately to edify only the self, but it is absolutely certain that the Corinthians were not to understand the Apostle that way when this letter was first read to them in their congregation. One can easily imagine, in fact, that many of them no longer even dared to claim such a "gift" afterwards, for fear of embarrassment.

A private, self-centered "super prayer language" is a *popular pagan and modern practice*, but it is not *an authentic Holy Spirit-empowered spiritual gift*. The Holy Spirit gives gifts for public use, not private, and for the edification of others, not the self.

Accordingly, John MacArthur suggests that the Apostle is being "sarcastic" when he charges the tongue speaker with self-centered edification:

His sarcasm can also be seen in [1 Cor.] 4:8-10, and reaches its height in 14:16, "was it from you that the word of God first went forth?" . . . The Apostle here [in 14:4] is referring to the *supposed* value the Corinthians placed on their self-styled tongues-speaking. The satisfaction many of the believers experienced in their abuse of tongues was *self-satisfaction*, which comes from pride-induced emotion, not from spiritual

edification. It is an illegitimate self-building, often building up nothing more than spiritual pride.³⁵⁴

Pastoral Practices

- It is rather easy to critique modern *emotionalists* for their selfish tongues habit, but have we monitored all that occurs in our own life and church to ensure that we **“Do everything in love”** (1 Cor 16:13)? Even legitimate ministries and practices in the Church can be done for selfish reasons, and we should learn from the rebuke the Apostle gives to modern *emotionalists*.

E.2) Real Spiritual Gifts are For the Edification of Others

Perhaps the clearest biblical contradiction to the *emotionalist* claim that they possess a Christian spiritual gift for the exclusive purpose of edifying themselves is the Apostle’s clear claim that, **“to each one the manifestation of the [Holy] Spirit is given for the common³⁵⁵ good”** (1 Cor 12:7). Simply put, there is no such thing as an empowerment or gift of the Holy Spirit that is exclusively for the good of self, like ancient pagan and modern versions of “praying in a tongue” operate. As NT scholar Leon Morris put it: “Spiritual gifts are incompatible with spiritual selfishness.”³⁵⁶ Likewise, Frederick Dale Bruner has written, “In the Apostle’s understanding, it appears, you cannot take a gift home with you.”³⁵⁷

In this very section concerning the nature and purpose of authentic gifts from the Holy Spirit, the Apostle gave his analogy of the mutually dependent and perfectly united **“body of Christ”** (12:12-26) which was to leave no room in the Corinthian’s mind for a self-centered spiritual gift given only for *private* use. Likewise,

³⁵⁴ MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, 372-373.

³⁵⁵ “Common” is added to the English text of 12:7, as it does not appear in the Greek. However, the addition is understandable considering the nature of spiritual gifts in general, and the immediate context of the church as an interdependent body. Not even Dr. Fee questions this interpretation. (cf. *1 Corinthians*, 584, 589).

³⁵⁶ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1985), 187.

³⁵⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 1970), 290.

since all spiritual gifts are given by God for the benefit of others, the Apostle had told them, **"since you are zealous of spiritual [pneumatikos: things], seek to abound for the edification of the church"** (14:12 NASB). Clearly then, when a person **"speaks in a tongue [and merely] edifies himself,"** it is not a good spiritual thing to seek.

Therefore, there is no such thing as a Christian spiritual gift that is to be used "alone with God." That's not what they are for and the Apostle never taught such a thing. This is, of course, true for all the other descriptions of spiritual gifts in the NT as well.³⁵⁸ The Apostle prefaces his description of spiritual gifts in Romans by again alluding to the interdependent body analogy he uses in 1 Corinthians and reminds the Roman Christians in regards to spiritual gifts that, **"each member [of the body] belongs to all the others"** (12:5).

In Ephesians, the Apostle explains that the gifts are given, **"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ"** (Eph 4:12), not the self. The Apostle Peter says, **"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another"** (1 Pet 4:10), not the self.

Although it is true that the use of one's gift will edify them in the process, this is merely a by-product of serving God and others. There simply is no room in the NT for claiming that the sole purpose of any legitimate gift of the Holy Spirit is to edify yourself. Does the Evangelist evangelize for himself? Does the Teacher teach for

³⁵⁸ Some have found support for the notion that there are gifts *not* designed for public edification at 14:12 where the NIV has the Apostle saying, **"Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts [pneumatōn], try to excel in gifts that build up the church."** Such a translation gives the impression that there could be authentic spiritual gifts that *do not* edify the Church.

Unfortunately, this is an example of the error concerning those who automatically translate *pneumatikon* (spiritual things) as authentic spiritual gifts (*charismata*). (see section 12.8.A) Unfortunately, the NIV inserts the word **"gifts"** twice, even though the Greek word for "gifts," *charisma*, does not occur here.

The RSV is the most helpful translation here rendering the Greek: **"since you are eager for manifestations [not necessarily gifts] of the Spirit [pneumatōn], strive to excel in building up the church."** So, essentially what the Apostle is simply saying to the Corinthians is that "Since you are so eager for spiritual manifestations, pursue the spiritual manifestations that edify the church (like prophecy) instead of the ones that puff yourselves up (like the pagan practice of praying in a tongue)." Again, the Apostle cannot conceive of an authentic spiritual gift that *does not* serve to build up others, like speaking in an incoherent "tongue."

himself? Does the person with the gift of serving serve for their own personal edification? If they do, their gift certainly is not motivated by love, making its use meaningless (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3). To claim that there is a legitimate spiritual gift given *only* for the edification of self is absurd and unbiblical.³⁵⁹

Accordingly, John Calvin (1509-1564) correctly comments in reference to 1 Corinthians 14:4, and expresses the universal belief of the Christian church for over 1900 years when he writes:

He [the Apostle] accordingly shows, from principles already assumed, how perverse a thing this is, inasmuch as it does not at all contribute to the edifying of the Church. . . . The Apostle does, in effect, order away from the common society of believers those men of mere show, who look only to themselves.³⁶⁰

Likewise, commenting on spiritual gifts in the analogy of the body as the Apostle taught, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* states the obvious:

1 Cor. 12 teaches that the church is the body of Christ in both reality and function. It is made a reality by the presence of the Holy Spirit whose gifts are enjoyed and practiced by numerous individuals. But taken by themselves in isolation they [spiritual gifts] are without significance. They have significance only in relation to the whole fellowship. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good". . .

These manifestations of the Spirit are marked out for the Apostle as given (not achieved by man), as expressions of divine energy (not human potential), as acts of service which

³⁵⁹ We might question how the authentic gift of speaking in real human foreign languages was edifying to the early Church. It has already been pointed out that it authenticated divine revelation and could even contain it when interpreted (cf. 1 Cor 14:5). Dr. Dillow adds also that "tongues edified the early church by preventing the future establishment of a Jewish church versus a Samaritan church versus a Gentile church." (35). The giving of the gift to the Jews in Acts 2, to the Samaritans in Acts 8, to the Gentiles in Acts 10, and to followers of John the Baptist in Acts 19, all served to unify these groups and underscore the fact that God was dealing with all peoples in one way so that now "Salvation is found in no one else (but Jesus Christ), for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

³⁶⁰ Calvin, at 1 Cor. 14:4.

promote the common good (not for personal edification or aggrandizement).³⁶¹

Even the Pentecostal seminary professor R. E. Cottle, states the obvious, but contradicts his own *emotionalist* position³⁶² in his entry under "Gifts of Healing" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

The charismata of 1 Cor. 12 are literally benefits or graces conferred upon certain individual members of the body of Christ for the use and benefit of the worshiping Church (v. 7). They are not the personal possession of the members who exercise them within the church community. They are, rather,

³⁶¹ Reference unavailable.

³⁶² However, it is not only *emotionalist* teachers who contradict themselves on the nature of spiritual gifts. For example, the respected NT scholar C. K. Barrett recognizes that in 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle clearly teaches that: "No member has his gift for his own private use; all are intended for the common good" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) [Hendrickson, 2000], 284). Unfortunately, however, he apparently contradicts himself, as do many commentators today, when he says concerning 1 Corinthians 14:4-5: "speaking with tongues is . . . a gift from God by which you may . . . be individually built up" (Ibid., 316).

The venerable G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) would seem to make the same mistake. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:7 he says:

[T]he gift is bestowed upon the individual, not for the perfecting of his own life, but to profit withal [others]; the great fellowship is there seen. Whatever gift is bestowed upon me, upon you, it is bestowed upon us personally and individually in order that in its use we may profit withal [others]. (*The Corinthian Letters of The Apostle* [Revell, 1946], *in loc.*)

However, he later seems to contradict himself when he writes:

If used in public the gift of tongues demands interpretation. . . . [I]f interpretation is not there, the gift is not to be exercised in the presence of others, but is to be exercised when the recipient is alone with God [making it impossible to be edifying to others]. (Ibid., 112)

The same contradiction can be found more recently in Dr. Thiselton, who at one point accepts the idea of a spiritual gift for self-centered "private prayer language" but at 1 Cor 12:7 writes:

To the primary criterion of pointing to the Lordship of Christ or Christlikeness (12:3) as a mark of being authentically activated by the Spirit, Paul now adds a second criterion: the Spirit is at work where the public manifestation serves the common advantage of others, and not merely self-affirmation, self-fulfillment, or individual status. The Spirit produces visible effects for the profit of all, not for self-glorification. If the latter is prominent, suspicion is invited. (936).

manifestations of the Spirit through Christians who are serving the spiritual edification of the Church as a whole (vv. 8-11).³⁶³

Yet the modern version of the gift of tongues supported by Dr. Cottle does not match his own description of a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit.

The usually astute D. A. Carson, however, would seem to completely ignore the moral context of 1 Corinthians 14 when he says:

Some commentators find the notion of self-edification so difficult that they interpret this [such that] the Apostle is actually rebuking the tongues-speaker for edifying himself. But this scarcely fits the context, when the Apostle goes on to encourage tongues-speaking (v. 5), which here must be tongues-speaking *without* interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification.³⁶⁴

First of all, “the context” is not “to encourage . . . tongues-speaking without interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification” as Dr. Carson remarkably claims. The context is a diplomatic *rebuke*, promoting the public, others-oriented, and only-authentic gifts of the Holy Spirit, *to* the self-centered, contentious, puffed up Corinthians, *in a city* where “tongues-speaking without interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification” is a hotly pursued habit in the local temples of the Greek mystery religions.³⁶⁵

Finally, Dr. Carson claims that real spiritual edification could occur even though the *emotionalist* would not understand what they are praying. This ignores the fact that God does not beneficially edify us apart from our mind, which is precisely why the Apostle insists throughout this passage that the utterances be interpreted so that there can be edification.

³⁶³ R. E. Cottle, “Gifts of Healing” in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), 2: 647. At the time of writing (copyright 1982), Cottle was the Executive Vice President of the Assemblies of God Graduate School in Springfield, MO.

³⁶⁴ Carson, *Spirit*, 102, n. 89. (underlining added for emphasis, italics in the original).

³⁶⁵ For evidence that the modern version of tongues mimics the worship practice of the first century Greek mystery religions see the next chapter 4.10 sections A-B.

E.3) Edification Requires Understanding

If some deny that the Apostle is rebuking the self-centered Corinthian *emotionalist* for edifying themselves, we would ask, how *could* meaningless utterances be spiritually edifying anyway? Dr. Fee attempts to answer when he writes:

The edifying of oneself is not self-centeredness, but the personal edifying of the believer that comes through [unintelligible] private prayer and praise [they do not understand]. Although one may wonder how "mysteries" that are not understood even by the speaker can edify, the answer lies in vv. 14-15 [where the Apostle says praying in a tongue leaves the mind barren]. Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain.³⁶⁶

While Dr. Fee offers references to psychological studies that claim beneficial psychological effects for those who "pray in a tongue," he does not answer the question how such a person can experience spiritual edification from the Holy Spirit without understanding, when the Apostle insists throughout 1 Corinthians 14 that nobody else can. While *emotionalists* can claim some sort of positive psychological or emotional effect from uttering sounds they don't understand, the Apostle emphatically insisted that no spiritual edification could take place unless the utterances in a tongue were interpreted and therefore *understood* (cf. 1 Cor 14:5-17). Accordingly, never in Church history, did any orthodox branch of Christianity ever claim that spiritual edification could occur apart from our mental understanding, until modern *emotionalism*.

Edification simply doesn't happen in a human apart from our understanding. Emotions and feelings will, but not real spiritual edification. Pagans believe that having bodily sensations and feelings aroused results in spiritual edification, but there's no such thing in authentic Christianity. Christian edification is *whole-hearted* involving the understanding, not the *half-hearted* stimulation that pagans settle for, as we thoroughly discuss elsewhere as well.³⁶⁷ That is what the Apostle believed, and that is why he insisted that no real spiritual edification could take place

³⁶⁶ Fee, *Presence*, 65.

³⁶⁷ For further discussion of the mindless *half-hearted worship* practiced in paganism and "Christian" *emotionalism* today see chapters 4.10-11.

unless the utterances in a tongue were interpreted and therefore *understood* (cf. 1 Cor 14:5-17, 26-28).

Speaking considerably more reasonably, biblically, and humbly than practitioners of “praying in a tongue” often do, J. I. Packer states the obvious when he writes:

It is hard to believe that in [1 Cor 14:4] Paul can mean that glossolalists [tongue speakers] *who do not know what they are saying* will edify themselves, when in [the very next] verse 5 [and throughout the whole chapter!] he denies that the listening church can be edified unless it knows what they are saying . . . [The truth] that edification presupposes [requires] understanding is hard, biblically, to get round [or deny]; accepting it, however, would seem to entail the conclusion that glossolalia as practiced today cannot edify, which is a most unfashionable view to hold.³⁶⁸

But, we believe, a true view nonetheless. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, God does nothing to or through us except through our mind. That is how He created us.³⁶⁹ God did not create us to be spiritually edified apart from our reason, because all spiritual edification comes from an understanding and belief of the *truth*. Which is why the Apostle is so repetitive and insistent on the need for teaching in the Church throughout the Pastoral Epistles. It is because *truth* alone edifies Christians, that the King Himself taught the truth, and that the Apostle says the edification of the Church comes through truth-giving gifts (cf. Eph 4:11-15).

Not only should we understand from Scripture that spiritual edification requires mental understanding, we can know this from experience. Once again, if in fact praying in an incoherent tongue is so spiritually edifying, why are its practitioners no more spiritually encouraged or empowered than those who do not? They may be more emotional, but everyone knows it would not only be unhistorical and inaccurate for tongue practitioners to claim any kind of practical spiritual superiority, but grossly arrogant as well. If praying in a tongue does what *emotionalists* claim it does, than it would show in lasting, obvious ways. But it does not.

Unfortunately, the anti-Christian and pagan idea that anything meaningful can occur without the mind is fashionable in our day. Accordingly, the very popular NIV *Study Bible* is unfortunately typical when commenting on 14:4:

³⁶⁸ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 209, 280, n. 18.

³⁶⁹ For further discussion of the importance of our mind in a relationship with God see chapters 2.4 and 6.12-14.

This edification does not involve the mind since the speaker does not understand what he has said. It is a personal edification in the area of the emotions, of deepening conviction, of fuller commitment and greater love.³⁷⁰

This all seems to be a great deal of presumption. First, it can be immediately asked that if the gift had such wonderful self-edifying spiritual affects for Christians, why wouldn't God grant it to all His children, because the Apostle clearly said He would not (cf. 1 Cor 12:30)? Do those who "pray in a tongue" have an avenue of intimate intercourse with our Father that He denies the rest of us? That is the unavoidable conclusion of *emotionalism*, and it is not only unbiblical, but arrogant and offensive.

Secondly, how can something that "does not involve the mind" result in a "deepening conviction," "fuller commitment," or "greater love" of anything? Do *emotionalists* exhibit a superiority in these things? Obviously not. Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) stated the obvious:

There is no other way by which any means of grace whatsoever can be of any benefit, but by knowledge. . . . Men . . . receive nothing, when they understand nothing; and are not at all edified, unless some knowledge be conveyed.³⁷¹

Edification simply doesn't happen in a human apart from our understanding. Emotions and feelings will, but not edification.

Of course the practice of praying in a tongue can affect the emotions and ego of the user, just as it has for Eskimo witch doctors, Haitian voodooists, Amazonian Indians, and Corinthian-like pagans who have practiced the same thing the world over for centuries.³⁷² It becomes obvious then that just because a practice may give us good *feelings*, it in no way proves that it builds us in a spiritual manner, and it cannot because the mind is not engaged.

Pastoral Practices

- The fact that any real spiritual edification requires truth to be understood with the mind, should affect our ministry. Ensure

³⁷⁰ *The NIV Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker, ed., (Zondervan, 1985), 1753, n. 14:4.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, I:223.

³⁷² For further discussion of alarming environments in which the modern version of tongues is practiced see chapter 12.14.

that the worship music is full of truth, not just emotion. Appeal to the mind in your teaching for the Apostle said we can “**be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind**” (Rom 12:2).

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, we consider it one of our greatest joys and privileges to worship You with our whole-heart, not only in life, but in song, prayer, and meditation as well. Search our hearts Oh God and see if there is any part of it that is not engaged when we approach You in worship or prayer. We do not worship or pray simply for our pleasure, but more importantly for Yours. **"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer"** (Ps 19:14); and **"I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to Him, as I rejoice in the LORD."** (Ps104:33-34)

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What Scriptures do we use to support our claim that *whole-hearted prayer* must include our reasoning faculties?
- 2) Why do we suggest the King condemned praying in a mindless, incoherent tongue? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 3) Why do we suggest a mindless, incoherent "praying in a tongue" was unacceptable to the Apostle Paul? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 4) Why do we suggest that the *Emotionalist* movement has prideful elements? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 5) We claim that when the Apostle says, **"One who speaks in [an "unknown"] tongue [glosse] edifies himself,"** it is a rebuke, not a recommendation. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What is a biblical argument we make to support our claim that no spiritual gift, including tongues, was ever for the purpose of self-edification?
- 7) What is a practical argument we make for denying that the practice of "praying in a tongue" spiritually edifies those who do it?

Recommended Reading

- *Knowing Our God* Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues* - Provides an in-depth Bible study concerning the gift of tongues.
- *The Experience That Counts!* by N. R. Needham (Grace Publications Trust, 1997)- Even after over 200 years, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards is still the most insightful study of distinguishing between true and false spiritual manifestations. However, for many, the length and language of the original is burdensome. Fortunately, Needham's abridged and modernized version will allow any reader to more easily capture what happened when one of the greatest theological minds in history, put that mind to answering one of the most important and difficult questions in history.
- I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (Routledge, 2003)- An Amazon.com reviewer notes:
States of spirit possession, in which believers feel themselves to be "possessed" by the deity and raised to a new plane of existence, are found in almost all known religions. From Dionysiac cults to Haitian voodoo, Christian and Sufi mysticism to shamanic ritual, the rapture and frenzy of ecstatic experience forms an iconic expression of faith in all its devastating power and unpredictability. *Ecstatic Religion* has, since its first appearance in 1971, become the classic investigative study of these puzzling phenomena.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.10

A History of Half-hearted Spirituality

From Ancient Paganism to Modern Mormonism

Overall Objective

To demonstrate the unbiblical nature of ignoring the mind in true Christian spirituality and worship throughout the history of the Church by understanding several heretical movements inside and outside of it.

Table of Topics

- A) Half-hearted Spirituality in NT Era Paganism**
- B) Half-hearted Spirituality in Corinth**
- C) Half-hearted Spirituality in the Middle Ages**
- D) Half-hearted Spirituality in the Great Awakening**
- E) Half-hearted Spirituality among 17th to 19th Century Heretics**
 - E.1) Jansenists
 - E.2) French Prophets
 - E.3) Shakers
 - E.4) Irvingites
- F) Half-hearted Spirituality in Early Mormonism**

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- The universal Church has historically rejected the *half-hearted* approach to spirituality advocated by *emotionalism*.
- Mindless pagan *half-hearted worship* (i.e. *emotionalism*) would seem especially evident in modern *charismaticism*.
- Mindless, *half-hearted worship* has been a common element in the spirituality of many non-Christian cults throughout history and is technically referred to here as *emotionalism*.
- *Emotionalism* is the unbiblical neglect or intentional suppression of reason in spirituality or worship practices resulting in unbiblical practices such as modern *glossaism* (speaking in a "tongue") and being "slain in the Spirit" etc.
- Paul was concerned that pagan *half-hearted worship* had infiltrated the church in Corinth.
- For many centuries before and after the inception of Christianity, the very popular Greek mystery religions promoted a highly emotional form of worship that included weird physical actions, spontaneous and obscure utterances, and generally what was described in terms of madness. These were considered as signs of a higher spirituality, as opposed to the fruits of the Holy Spirit which are virtue.
- The Corinthian Christians lacked discernment. Accordingly, all ten times that the Apostle Paul used the word *anakrino* ("to examine, investigate, distinguish") are in 1 Corinthians.
- The Apostle warned the Corinthians their mindless *emotionalism* was not only harmful, but evil.
- What was rejected as dangerous and unbiblical error in the Middle Ages is rampant in Christianity today in many forms.
- Because modern proponents of mindless *half-hearted worship* have no biblical support for it, they routinely cite experiences in real spiritual revivals of the past as historical support. However, they intentionally ignore the fact that these manifestations were predominantly experienced by *unbelievers* being convicted of sin under hell-fire preaching. The manifestations today are predominantly seen among expectant and susceptible believers after someone says, "Get 'em spirit."
- The Great Awakening teaches us that satan can infiltrate and derail a genuine work of God through *emotionalism*.
- Our belief that *emotionalism* has historically been denounced by Christians is demonstrated in a number of heretical movements in the history of the Church.

A) *Half-hearted Spirituality in NT Era Paganism*

Pagan worship in NT times was primarily made up of what is referred to as Greek mystery religions. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* relates:

Mystery religions were secret cults of the Greek-Roman world that offered to individuals a way to feel religious experiences not provided by the official public religion. . . . The mystery religions reached their peak of popularity in the first three centuries A.D. At that time an individual could choose among many religions of this type. . . . Christianity originated during the time . . . at which the mysteries reached their height of popularity.³⁷³

These religions received their designation as “mysteries” because these were essential to their spirituality. Dr. H. Wayne House **explains:**

In heathen religions this word referred to the hidden secrets of the gods which only the initiated could know. Those initiated into such mysteries claimed to have contact with the spirit world through emotional excitement, revelations, the working of miracles and the speaking of unknown words revealed by the spirits.³⁷⁴

Dr. House goes on to point out the differences in Christianity regarding a “mystery.” In addition to the fact that, “In the New Testament Church every Christian is initiated,” he adds:

The term *mystery* is used in the New Testament but with a different force. . . . In the New Testament it refers to the things of God that could not be known by man except through revelation from God. The revelation given of these things by the Holy Spirit is not obscure but clear and is given to be communication to God’s people (1 Cor 2:1–16). It is not given privately in unknown words.³⁷⁵

As far as the perspective of worship in these Greek mystery cults, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* tells us, “The

³⁷³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th edition, (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968), Vol. 8, 75 (Underlining added for emphasis).

³⁷⁴ H. Wayne House, “Tongues and the Mystery Religions at Corinth,” *BSac* 140:558 (Apr 83), 141. See also Mark Harding, “Church and Gentile Cults in Corinth” *Grace Theological Journal* 10:2 (Fall 1989), 216-19.

³⁷⁵ House, *Ibid.*

mystery-cults of the [Roman] empire were designed to induce both higher and lower forms of ecstatic feeling.”³⁷⁶ In fact, the historical descriptions we have of such spirituality reveals that they were characterized by the *half-hearted* irrational “madness” we noted in chapter 4.8 which we have labeled *emotionalism*. *Emotionalism* is the unbiblical neglect or intentional suppression of reason in spirituality or worship practices resulting in unbiblical practices such as modern *glossaism* (speaking in a “tongue”) and being “slain in the Spirit” which we discuss in the next chapter.

One of the earliest descriptions of spirituality in the Greek mystery religions is from the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484-425 B. C.). In *Melpomene* he writes of a certain King Scylas of the Scythians who secretly “formed a desire to be initiated in the rites of Bacchus-Dionysos,” an ancient Greek mystery religion, after which Herodotus records:

Now the Scythians make the rites of Bacchus a reproach against the Hellenes, for they say that it is not fitting to invent a god like this, who impels men to frenzy [*manesthai*: mania]. So when Skyles had been initiated into the rites of Bacchus, one of the Borysthenites went off to the Scythians and said: “Whereas ye laugh at us, O Scythians, because we perform the rite of Bacchus and because the god seizes us, now this divinity has seized also your king; and he is both joining in the rite of Bacchus and maddened [*manetai*: mania] by the influence of the god.”³⁷⁷

Regarding a time somewhat later, Christopher Forbes, Professor of NT and Hellenistic History at Macquarie University reports:

The use of drums, cymbals and flutes is a recurrent theme in the orgiastic worship of Cybele, as is frenzied shouting. . . . That various forms of shouting, along with violent physical activity, were characteristic of Dionysian worship in [the early centuries A.D.] is amply attested in our sources. . . . [A]n abnormal state of mind [for] participants in Dionysian rituals . . . is normally assumed . . . [and] a feature of the rituals, and . . . this state is accompanied by violent physical activity and/or shouting.

Several very clear statements of this are to be found in Latin literature of the first century B.C. The best known of these is

³⁷⁶ W. R. Inge, “Ecstasy,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, (New Scribner’s & Sons, 1955-8), 5:158.

³⁷⁷ Herodotus, 4.79, online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hh/hh4070.htm>.

the account given by Livy of the "Bacchanalian Conspiracy" of 187-6 B.C. Livy writes as follows:

[I]nitiatory rites which at first were imparted to a few, then began to be generally known among men and women. . . . [A]mid the howlings and the crash of drums and cymbals no cry could be heard. . . . Men, as if insane, with fanatical tossings of their bodies, would utter prophecies. . . . [T]here are men very like the women, debauched and debauchers, fanatical, with senses dulled by . . . noise and shouts at night.

A pattern is clearly evident here. The features that are considered characteristic of the cults of Dionysus and Cybele are outbursts of shouting, the music of cymbals, drums and flutes, and frenzied dancing, sometimes also accompanied by frenzied cries.³⁷⁸

So much so that worship in the Greek mystery religions of this time was commonly referred to as, "Dionysiac frenzy."³⁷⁹ Forbes goes on to relate:

This impression is reinforced by a reading of Vergil's [70-19 B.C.] and Lucan's descriptions [39-65 A. D.], in their "Aeneid" and "The Civil War" respectively, of visits to oracles [pagan prophets]. . . . Lucan's Pythia [prophetess] is frenzied, and a shriek . . . marked the onset of her inspiration. . . . Vergil describes the prophecy of the Sibyl in the following terms:

[H]er heart swells with wild frenzy . . . nor has her voice a mortal ring, since now she feels the nearer breath of deity. . . [and speaks with] her raving mouth. . . . In such words the Cumaean Sibyl chants from the shrine her dread enigmas . . . wrapping truth in darkness. . . . [Then] the frenzy ceased and the raving lips were hushed. . . .

In the account of Appius Claudius' visit to Delphi [a shrine of the ancient Greek mystery religions] [we read of the prophetess that] . . . wild frenzy overflowed through her foaming lips; she groaned and uttered loud inarticulate cries with panting breath.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity And Its Hellenistic Environment* (J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), 133-5.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 136-8.

Such practices persisted into the second century, as the early Church critic Celsus (c. 170) described pagan mystery religion worship when he wrote:

There are many who, although of no name, with the greatest facility and on the slightest occasion, whether within or without temples, assume the motions and gestures of inspired persons . . . [who speak] strange, fanatical, and quite unintelligible words, of which no rational person can find the meaning: for so dark are they, as to have no meaning at all.

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In the third century, the early Church leader Origen (c. 185-c. 254) distinguished pagan spirituality from the biblical kind by remarking that when "the Jewish prophets" had contact with the Holy Spirit, "they became *clearer in mind*." He asks then:

If, then, the Pythian priestess [in a Greek mystery religion] is beside herself when she prophesies, what spirit must that be which fills her mind and clouds her judgment with darkness, unless it be of the same order with those demons which many Christians cast out of persons possessed with them? ³⁸²

Origen is contrasting the effect of the Holy Spirit on the real Prophets with that of demonic spirits on pagan prophets. The latter seemed to be out of their mind, instead of "clearer in mind," and the out-of-control body movements made by pagan prophets could be contrasted with the self-control exhibited by those filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Tim 1:7; Gal 5:23).

NT scholar Grant R. Osborne confirms the consensus of modern scholarship that:

In the ancient world, pagan prophets were commonly associated with ecstatic utterances, trances, and frenzied behavior. . . . In the hellenistic [ancient Greek] world the prophetess of Delphi and the Sibylline priestess spoke in an unknown or unintelligible speech. Moreover, the Dionysian

³⁸¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Westminster Press, 1975), 304.

³⁸² Origen, *Against Celsus*, VII.4, online at www.ccel.org.

rites contained a trancelike state as well as glossolalia [unintelligible tongue utterances³⁸³].³⁸⁴

Along the same lines, NT scholar J. D. G. Dunn relates:

What Celsus (and Lucian) understood as the nonsense [speech] born of madness was accepted at the level of *Volksreligion* [popular religion] as the sure sign that a prophet was genuinely inspired by the god for whom he spoke. By lifting the prophet to this high level of ecstasy, the deity thereby authenticated the message delivered previously in understandable language. Put simply, among the common people [obscure, meaningless] "tongues" was recognized as the divine legitimization of prophecy in the Hellenistic age.³⁸⁵

In addition, Anthony Thiselton agrees and writes:

[There was a] widespread assumption in hellenistic religions that a major criterion of the presence of divine inspiration or divine indwelling was the suspension of the rational or the ordinary in ecstatic experiences or ecstatic speech.³⁸⁶

Finally, Martin Nilsson, in his book, *A History of Greek Religion* notes that mindless *half-hearted* worship was common in all ancient mystery religions, and explains why:

Not every man can be a miracle-worker and a seer, but most are susceptible to ecstasy, especially as members of a great

³⁸³ *Glossolalia* is the technical term for the spontaneous, obscure, and unintelligible utterances observed particularly in religious settings from ancient history, to the modern times, and throughout the world. It is derived from the Greek words *glossa* (tongue, language), and *lalos* (speak), and literally means "language speaking." However, modern linguists agree that glossolalia is not a real human language. Accordingly, while *glossolalia* is an apt term for the unintelligible utterances occurring in the modern tongues movement, *xenolalia* (derived from the Greek *zenos*: "foreign"), is used to refer to the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign human language which you have not learned naturally, and is a better technical term for the biblical gift of tongues.

³⁸⁴ Grant R. Osborne, "Tongues," in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT), Walter Elwell, ed., (Baker, 1984), 1100.

³⁸⁵ Dunn, 304. Dunn is relating the thoughts of T. W. Gillespie, "A Pattern of Prophetic Speech in First Corinthians", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 97, no. 1, 1978, pp. 74-95 p. 82.

³⁸⁶ Anthony Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGNT (Eerdmans, 2000), 913.

crowd, which draws the individual along with it and generates in him the sense of being filled with a higher, divine power. This is the literal meaning of the Greek word "enthusiasm," the state in which "god is in man." The rising tide of religious feeling seeks to surmount the barrier which separates man from god, it strives to enter into the divine, and it finds ultimate satisfaction only in that quenching of the consciousness [mind] in enthusiasm which is the goal of all mysticism.³⁸⁷

To summarize, for many centuries before and after the inception of Christianity, the very popular Greek mystery religions promoted a *half-hearted*, irrational, although highly emotional form of worship that included weird physical actions, spontaneous, obscure, and meaningless utterances, and generally what was described in terms of raving, frenzy, and madness.³⁸⁸ These were considered as signs of a higher spirituality, as opposed to the fruits of the Holy Spirit which are virtue. Unfortunately, this unbiblical ancient pagan perspective was carried into the Corinthian church.

B) *Half-hearted Spirituality in Corinth*

As discussed in the previous chapter, it was precisely first century pagan *emotionalism* that Christ was concerned about when He said regarding prayer, "**when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans**" (Matt 6:7). Accordingly, His words should be interpreted in the cultural/religious context described above.

The Apostle Paul was concerned about the same pagan worship influences in Corinth. If we remember the nature of first century pagan worship described above, it should not surprise us that some of the Corinthians had carried such practices into the Church. Accordingly, John MacArthur writes:

³⁸⁷ Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Norton, 1964), 205.

³⁸⁸ Dr. Forbes has specifically questioned just how extensive speaking in obscure, unintelligible utterances was, in first century pagan religions, in his book *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity And Its Hellenistic Environment* (J. C. B. Mohr, 1995). This is rather remarkable as we have quoted from his very own book, descriptions of pagan prophetesses chanting "dread enigmas . . . wrapping truth in darkness" and groaning as they "uttered loud inarticulate cries." For a more detailed critique of Dr. Forbes' theories, see footnote in section 12.7.A

In Corinth paganism was spelled with a capital P. . . . One of the greatest threats of all [to the Corinthian church] was the continuing influence from pagan mystery religions that they had formerly practiced. For over a thousand years these religions had dominated that part of the world. . . . Several pagan practices were especially influential in the church at Corinth. . . . New Testament Corinth was filled with priests, priestesses, religious prostitutes, soothsayers, and diviners of the mystery religions who claimed to represent a god or gods and to have supernatural powers that proved their claims. Unbelievably, some of their dramatic and bizarre practices were mimicked in the church.³⁸⁹

When the Apostle writes to this church, in this city, his obvious concern regarding pagan, and even demonic influence in the Corinthian church, is to be expected and it is obvious. This concern is demonstrated, for example, by his comments regarding pagan sacrifices to idols in this letter (cf. 8:1-13; 10:14-22). Even though many of the Corinthians were probably Christians, he is still compelled to tell them:

[M]y dear friends, flee from idolatry . . . the sacrifices [i.e. worship practices] of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord [Christian communion] and the cup of demons too [pagan worship practices]; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons [pagan worship practices]" (10:7, 14, 20-21).

Either ignorance or a refusal to recognize the non-Christian elements in pagan worship led the Corinthians to "**be participants with demons.**" That should sober any Christian to ensure that their worship is "**in spirit and in truth**" instead of ignorance or merely emotion.

The Apostle also reminds them in chapter 12: "**You know that when you were pagans [worshiping like they do], somehow or other you were influenced and led astray [apagomenoi] to mute idols**" (v. 2). Here, the Apostle describes the Corinthians' worship experience "**when [they] were pagans**" as being *apagomenoi*, a strong word implying a total lack of self-control (cf. Matt 27:2, 31). Accordingly, C. K. Barrett comments on this passage in his well regarded commentary and says the Apostle's wording:

³⁸⁹ John MacArthur, *First Corinthians* (Moody Press, 1984), 196-197, 280.

suggests moments of ecstasy experienced in heathen religion, when a human being is (or is believed to be) possessed by a supernatural. . . . Paul himself in this verse appears to think of demons as ravishing those who take part in heathen worship.³⁹⁰

David Aune, a recognized expert on first century worship practices, as well writes:

A careful examination of the context shows that when Paul referred to the pagan background of the Corinthian Christians in I Cor. 12:2, he was in all probability referring to pagan religious experiences of possession trance³⁹¹

In agreement, Frederick Dale Bruner describes the mindless, ecstatic worship that the Apostle feared was occurring in Corinth:

The very characteristic of the Corinthians' heathen past, [Paul] argues, was the sense of being overpowered and carried away by spiritual forces. . . . "There is no doubt at all," Schrenk comments, "that Paul intends to say here, The truly spiritual is not marked by a being swept away . . . that was precisely the characteristic of your previous fanatical religion."

It is important to notice that Paul places this valuation of the spiritually "sweeping" at the very outset of his treatment of "spiritual things" in Corinth. As the superscription to his essay in chapters twelve to fourteen Paul has written: Seizure is not necessarily Christian or paramously spiritual.³⁹²

Likewise, Dr. Thiselton remarks here:

Needless to say, any notion of a community "working itself up" by psychological autosuggestion or repetitive devices designed to heighten emotion would be entirely alien to Paul's ethics of

³⁹⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hendrickson, 2000), 278-279. Raymond F. Collins in his well regarded commentary agrees and says:

More likely the phrase is one that had been spoken by non-Christians in Corinth . . . The Christian presumption is that such a curse was uttered under demonic influence (*1 Corinthians* [Sacra Pagina, 1999], 446).

³⁹¹ David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Mediterranean World* (Eerdmans, 1983), 257.

³⁹² Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 1970), 286-87.

controlled speech.³⁹³

Then in chapter 13 the Apostle's mention of "**a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal**" was most likely an allusion to musical instruments that were well recognized as being used in pagan temples. Accordingly, the Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee explains a "**clanging cymbal**" refers to:

an instrument expressly associated with the pagan cults. . . . In particular with the cult of Cybele, where some of the more bizarre forms of "ecstasy" also occurred. . . . Perhaps, then, this is an allusion to 12:2 and their former associations with such cults.³⁹⁴

Likewise, Dr. House writes regarding the mention of these particular musical instruments in the context of correcting Corinthian worship:

This may be an allusion to the use of these instruments in the mystery cults. These instruments were used to produce the ecstatic condition that provided the emotional intoxication needed to experience the sacramental celebration.³⁹⁵

Then in chapter 14 the Apostle's hypothetical description of how a Corinthian unbeliever would react to seeing all the Corinthian believers speaking in tongues is significant. The Apostle says the Corinthian visitors will "**say that you are mad** [*mainesthe*]" (v. 23). The Greek word here means much more than just "crazy" as an American might interpret it. In the context of religious worship at the time, it was used in Greek literature as a technical term referring to the ecstatic state of worshipers in the Greek mystery religions. Accordingly, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* notes:

mainesthai is the technical term of the cult of Dionysus and of the inspired "mantic" divination, the best known of which were the Sibyls [prophets] in the grip of divine power. . . . The use of *mainesthai* [in 1 Cor 14] reminds us of the madness in

³⁹³ Thiselton, 1145.

³⁹⁴ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), 632, and n. 30.

³⁹⁵ House, 134.

[Greek mystery religions] in which a man is carried away in *mania* . . . into an ecstasy caused by the deity.³⁹⁶

Likewise, Dr. Thiselton writes concerning the meaning of *mainesthai*:

[I]n the classical Greek background . . . [the] hellenistic understanding of the verb in the context of religion . . . was emotionally "high" or out of control. . . . [T]he verb often applies . . . to the production of sounds while someone is out of his mind . . . hence it hardly overtranslates to use . . . two English terms: raving and out of your mind. [T]he term carries the double meaning of emotional lack of self-control, expressed as raving, and an unattractive, even frightening loss of rational sanity.³⁹⁷

Obviously, some of the Corinthian Christians thought the mindless, emotional *half-hearted worship* of their pagan past was an acceptable part of authentic Christian worship. What was needed was the discernment to distinguish the two. That this church lacked such discernment is illustrated by the fact that the Apostle Paul used the word *anakrino* ("to examine, investigate, distinguish") ten times in his writings, and every one of them was in 1 Corinthians.

Accordingly, the Apostle gave the following instructions to the Corinthians in order to ensure that their worship services would be distinguished from those of the pagan mystery cults. First of all, he speaks to the selfishness inherent in pagan worship. Professor House writes:

Ecstatic religion by its very nature is self-oriented. Christians were to use their Christian *χαρίσματα* [*charismata*, "gifts"] for the common good [1 Cor 12:7], but the pagans were totally

³⁹⁶ J. Schattenmann, "Ecstasy" in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), 1:529.

Some have claimed that the response of these hypothetical Corinthian unbelievers is best described as perplexity because they would never have been exposed to such a phenomenon, thus proving that tongues were not practiced in pagan temples at the time. This ignores a good deal of evidence to the contrary. Their accusation of "madness" refers directly to what these unbelievers would have witnessed in a pagan temple when tongues speaking was occurring. For further discussion of this see chapter 12.7.

³⁹⁷ Thiselton, 1126.

concerned about their own personal experience, an attitude also prevalent among Corinthian Christians.³⁹⁸

Accordingly, in the context of instructions for corporate worship, the Apostle tells them that any, **"manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good"** (1 Cor 12:7), that **"Love . . . is not self-seeking,"** and that in their congregational worship they should **"Follow the way of love"** (1 Cor 13:4-5; 14:1). Such instructions were intended to combat the fact that, as Dr. House says, "pagans were totally concerned about their own personal experience."

This is why a few sentences after the Apostle writes that others-oriented love must be followed in the worship service (14:1), the Apostle addresses the kind of incoherent tongue speech practiced in the pagan temples and says, **"He who speaks in [that kind of] a tongue edifies himself"** (14:4), which had nothing to do with the Christian religion but everything to do with the pagan kind. Elsewhere we demonstrate in detail that the Apostle was not referring here to the supernatural Christian variety of tongues that manifested itself in the ability to speak understandably in a human foreign language unknown to the speaker as a miraculous sign to unbelievers (cf. 14:22).³⁹⁹

Here the Apostle is addressing the world-wide phenomenon found in many pagan religions where people speaking babble think they're being spiritual. It was selfish worship to babble in a speech no one understood and for the sake of Christian love the Apostle insisted that if the babble could not be interpreted like a human language into something coherent and edifying for others that the would be speaker was to remain silent (cf. 14:27-28). While pagan worship was centered on the personal experience of the worshipper, the Apostle did not want this kind of self-centered worship occurring in the Christian assembly.

Secondly, because pagan worship was often mindless, the Apostle told the Corinthians **"I will pray with my [human] spirit, but I will also [at the same time⁴⁰⁰] pray with my mind; I will sing with my [human] spirit, but I will also [at the same time]**

³⁹⁸ House, 141.

³⁹⁹ For more concerning the proper interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12-14 see Book 12 chapters 12.6-11.

⁴⁰⁰ Additional scholarly support for the fact that the Apostle is advocating prayer and singing that simultaneously engages the spirit and the mind is found in *BAGD* which interprets the Greek of the latter half of v. 15: "sing praise in spiritual ecstasy and in full possession of one's mental faculties." (Thiselton, 1111)

sing with my mind (14:15). This is because if he prays with only his spirit like the pagans, "**my mind is unfruitful** (*akarpos*: unproductive, barren)" (14:14), which is not a good or Christian thing, but a pagan thing.

As argued in the previous chapter, the Apostle is not advocating two types of prayer and singing, a mindless one and a mindful one. Rather, he is describing *whole-hearted* worship, and worship that is "**in spirit and in truth.**" While pagan worship involved only the "**spirit,**" the only legitimate way for a Christian to pray and sing was with both the "**spirit**" (emotion) *and* the mind (reason, thinking, understanding, desires).

Thirdly, because pagan worshippers who seemed to be the most *ecstatic* were considered to be the most spiritual, the Apostle insisted on self-control in the Christian service. Accordingly, he wrote: "**The spirits of Prophets are subject to the control of Prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace**" (1 Cor 14:32-33). As noted in a previous chapter, Dr. House writes:

Contemporary descriptions take note of the fact that such self-control was totally lacking in the orgiastic ecstasies of the mystery cults. Hence, these safeguards would protect the church by distinguishing the counterfeit from the genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit. . . . In the pagan glossolalia [tongues speaking], no thought was given to the harmony of participants in group worship. Only the individual experience was important. Paul wrote that unity is a sign of the Spirit's activity.⁴⁰¹

Therefore, the Apostle instructed that no more than two or three people with the real Christian gift of tongues were to speak in the service, and then only one at a time (cf. 14:27). If anyone were to prophesy they were not to do so in an uncontrollable frenzy like the heathen prophets but with self "**control**" (14:32).

Fourthly, because pagan worship services tended to be chaotic, disorderly, and dominated by female prophetesses, the Apostle reminded the Corinthians that "**God is not a God of disorder but of peace,**" and that "**women should remain silent in the churches**" (14:33-34).⁴⁰²

Finally, the Apostle warned the Corinthians that breaking these rules for God-pleasing worship was *evil*, not just harmful. In the context of correcting their congregational worship the Apostle

⁴⁰¹ House, 146.

⁴⁰² For further discussion of these important and controversial statements see section 12.5.A.4.

wrote, **"Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults"** (1 Cor 14:20). At the conclusion of his instruction he writes, **"If anybody thinks he is a Prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored"** (1 Cor 14:37-38). In other words, if the Corinthians did not heed these corrections to the mindless *emotionalism* they were practicing, they would be disobeying God.

In fact, it would seem that pagan influences had infiltrated the Corinthian church service to such a degree that it was almost indistinguishable from what occurred in the pagan temple down the street, causing visitors to think they were mantic (cf. 14:23). We are reminded of God's response to another pagan-like worship service when He said, **"Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me"** (Isa 1:13). It would seem the Corinthian congregation was on the verge of the same kind of condemnation.

C) *Half-hearted Spirituality in the Middle Ages*

It is popular in *emotionalism* literature to support this perspective by calling upon the extra-biblical writings, opinions, and experiences of what we will refer to as *classical mysticism* in which there is an emphasis on spiritual disciplines and a claim that these will result in an intimate experience with God. D. D. Martin defines such *classical mysticism* in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* when he writes:

Briefly and generally stated, mystical theology or Christian mysticism seeks to describe an experienced, direct, nonabstract, unmediated, loving knowing of God, a knowing or seeing so direct as to be called union with God.⁴⁰³

During the Middle Ages, it was primarily through extremes in *classical mysticism* that *emotionalism* was practiced in the Church. It must be noted that the monastic orders preserved true spirituality in the Church throughout long periods of its history, and several of the godliest people who ever lived were monks. However, it was the mystical aspect of the life of some monks that illustrated the dangers of *emotionalism*. The historical foundation

⁴⁰³ D. D. Martin, *EDT*, "Mysticism" 744.

for this in *classical mysticism* is described by John McClintock and James Strong:

The number of the Mystics was not large in the Church until the 6th century, when they rapidly increased, under the influence of the Grecian writings of the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. . . . The object of the author of these writings was to give a Platonic development and coloring to the deep mysteries of the Christian faith, and to lead the soul on by contemplative energy to adulation with the Deity.

The highest attainment in Christian philosophy he teaches is to behold in spirit and to become one with God, who is neither darkness nor light, neither negative nor positive. Three steps lead to this blissful consummation: purification, illumination, and vision; terms adopted from the various grades of Eleusinian [Greek mystery cult] initiation. ⁴⁰⁴

These renowned Christian historians go on to relate:

That among this class of devout men there was often genuine piety, with a living faith which realized Christ within them the hope of glory, is not to be doubted. But delusion soon sprang up, and men, given to mental introversion, mistook the dreams of their own distempered imagination for realities. Sudden impressions were cherished as the illapse of the Spirit. . . . The obscure, unintelligible, and even absurd descriptions given by Mystics of these phenomena, reproduced even by modern theological writers, make mysticism synonymous with *quietism* (q.v.), and all forms of fanaticism and enthusiasm. ⁴⁰⁵

To their credit, many medieval mystics rightly denounced a merely intellectual, philosophical approach to God, and highlighted the importance of a personal relationship with Him. However, while historical Christendom has stressed the exclusive superiority of Scripture, reason, prayer, and obedience for experiencing God, *classical mystics* exalted other practices as well.

Dr. Martin explains that in *classical mysticism* there are generally three stages which the mystic passes through in order to reach a union with God. These include the *Purgative Way* in which one enters certain strict disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and confession in order to purify one's soul from all spiritual sin,

⁴⁰⁴ John McClintock and James Strong, "Mystics," *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (M&S)*, CD-ROM (Ages Software, 2000).

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

distractions, and temptations. Next is the *Illuminative Way*, in which the person disengages and separates themselves completely from the world in order to prepare themselves for a closer experience of God.

The final stage of *classical mysticism* is described as the *Unitive Way*, in which one enters the focused contemplation on God through which a deeper experience of communion with God is supposed, and which is often referred to as the *beatific vision*. The classic description of these mystical stages is found in John of Cross' (1542-1591) book, *Dark Night of the Soul*.

While a Christian can recognize value in such spiritual disciplines, there seems little biblical justification for the extreme teachings and practices of *classical mystics*. Dr. Martin explains:

Scriptural sources for [classic] Christian mysticism are found largely in the Logos-incarnation doctrine of John's Gospel, in imagery such as that of the vine and branches (John 15) or Christ's prayer for union (John 17), as well as in aspects of the Pauline corpus. The latter include the description of Paul's rapture into the third heaven (II Cor. 12:1-4) or statements such as that referring to a life "hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3) . . .

For medieval mystics Moses' "vision" of God (Exod. 33:12-34:9) and his reflection of God's glory upon leaving Mount Sinai (Exod. 34:29-35; cf. 11 Cor. 3:7) served as proof texts, and the allegorized spiritual marriage of the Song of Solomon, together with the other OT wisdom literature, provided unlimited scriptural resources until the shift to spiritual from literal-grammatical humanist and Reformation hermeneutics took place.⁴⁰⁶

We will not take the time to address these biblical passages here, but even a cursory examination of them clearly reveals that clear support for mystical claims is not found among them. One gets the sense, really, that *classical mysticism* can be both selfish and works oriented. Particularly when it is implied that the performance of certain acts result in a formula for communion with God.

Accordingly, the respected Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch, rather an expert on *classical mysticism* writes:

[F]aith is a gift of God whereas mystical rapture is to some degree a work of man. To be sure, the final union with God is regarded as a divine gift, at least in the circles of Christian mysticism, but it is held that one can prepare oneself for this

⁴⁰⁶ Martin, 746.

union by spiritual exercises . . .

Faith is a response to Agape, the outgoing love that God has for man, whereas mystical religion is centered in Eros, the self-regarding love that prompts man to seek union with the divine. Faith speaks of the descent of God to man, while the concern in mysticism is man rising to God . . . the knowledge that it brings is self-knowledge, not a knowledge of the will and purpose of God. . . .

It is not self-fulfillment or self-realization but self-denial that characterizes the way of faith. Mystics also speak of self-denial, but only as a means to self-realization. They may well engage in rigorous practices of mortification but for the ultimate benefit of the self.⁴⁰⁷

While mystics claim the kind of relationship we will have with God in Heaven, it needs to be remembered that not only is His revelation progressive, but so is our relationship with Him.⁴⁰⁸ In our feelings oriented culture, it is not surprising that Dr. Martin comments that "Western interest in Eastern mysticism and religions" are growing.

Along these lines, one Bible Teacher remarks:

The fact is that the various ancient practices of [*classic mysticism*] are not unique to Christianity. The meditative techniques that make people feel closer to God work for those who do not even know God. Thomas Merton (who is recommended by Dallas Willard) went to the East to find spiritual practices. They work just as well for those who do not know Christ, probably better. Many ancient Roman Catholic practices were invented at times when many illiterate pagans were ushered into the church, sometimes at the point of a sword. Those pagans were not exactly the type to search the Scriptures daily in order to find the things of God.⁴⁰⁹

In addition, a few remarks about some of the more prominent medieval mystics would seem to reveal unbiblical extremes in their lives. One of the more exemplary examples of *classical mystics* was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153). While his personal virtue and religious reforms in the Church are to be admired, his emphasis on

⁴⁰⁷ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Ground of Certainty* (Eerdmans, 1971), 142-3.

⁴⁰⁸ Regarding the God-intended progression of our experience with Him see chapter 14.5.

⁴⁰⁹ Bob Dewaay, "Why Evangelicals Are Turning to Rome" *Critical Issues Commentary*, #105, 3.

mega mysticism led him to confidently affirm that his own extra-biblical thoughts were in fact God's thoughts.⁴¹⁰ He constantly promoted the seeking of emotional experience rather than the study of the Scriptures.

Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) was encouraged to pursue a more experiential spirituality when he visited a small, dilapidated church, and heard a voice from the crucifix above its altar commanding him to repair the building. Assisi was later to experience *stigmata*, or the supposed wounds of Christ, on his body, which contributed to his death sometime after.⁴¹¹

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) supposedly had numerous visions of Christ, the first of which occurred at the age of forty when she fell into a trance. She was eccentric to say the least, wearing a shirt made of hair and often whipping herself to experience pain.⁴¹²

Francis de Sales (1567–1622) promoted the mystical way as well and his orthodoxy comes into question when history records him as a foremost opponent of the Reformed doctrines of grace and one who reclaimed thousands back to the heretical doctrines of *Romanism*.⁴¹³

Of course, other religions have had their own mystics who promoted and alleged the same things. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Muslim Sufi mystics claimed a direct, immediate knowledge of God through contemplation, and practiced severe physical abuse on themselves.⁴¹⁴

Accordingly Dr. Bloesch adds:

While mainstream Catholic theology became increasingly sacramental, movements arose in and outside the church that emphasized the immediacy of spiritual experience. Some of these were in fact heresies-grave imbalances in thought or devotion-whereas others represented completely new faith orientations that often assumed a Christian veneer.

All these movements can be regarded as variations of religious enthusiasm, denoting a rapturous experience of being taken up into God or being transported beyond materiality into the realm of "pure spirit." Religious enthusiasm in this sense is closely related to spiritualism, which makes the inner light

⁴¹⁰ M&S, "Mysticism."

⁴¹¹ R. Vonderlack, "Francis of Assisi" in *Who's Who in Christian History (WWCH)* J. D. Douglas and Philip Comfort eds. (Tyndale, n.d.)

⁴¹² P. M Bassett, "Teresa of Avila", *WWCH*.

⁴¹³ R. D. Shuster, "Francis de Sales," *WWCH*.

⁴¹⁴ "Mystics" M&S.

rather than holy Scripture the indefeasible criterion. The appeal is often to new revelations that supplement or supersede Holy Writ. A religious enthusiast is also likely to be a perfectionist, since the promise of the Spirit is the complete transformation of the human psyche.⁴¹⁵

Remarkably, what was rejected as dangerous, unbiblical, unspiritual error in the Middle Ages is rampant in Christianity today in many forms. Just how ridiculous such mysticism can become is illustrated by Yale Professor of Church History, Kenneth Latourette who writes concerning this period of time:

In the Eastern as in the Western wing of the Catholic Church there was mysticism. . . . A special form of contemplation arose which is known as Hesychasm. It sought through special practices to attain the beatific vision of God. . . . The Hesychasts claimed that by holding their breath, fixing their eyes upon their navels, and making the spirit reenter the soul, they could be enveloped by the light which shone around Christ at the time of his transfiguration on Mt. Tabor.⁴¹⁶

Please don't try this at home.

D) *Half-hearted* Spirituality in the Great Awakening

Because modern proponents of mindless *half-hearted* worship have no biblical support for it, they routinely cite examples of outcries, faintings, and trembling recorded in real spiritual revivals of the past as historical support. However, they intentionally ignore the fact that these manifestations were predominantly experienced by *unbelievers* being convicted of sin under the hell-fire preaching of Wesley, Whitefield, and Edwards. The manifestations today are predominantly seen among expectant and susceptible believers after someone says, "Get 'em spirit."

Accordingly, Hank Hanegraaff, a long-time member of a charismatic church himself, writes:

Counterfeit Revival [i.e. all of which is in *charismaticism*] deceptions are not limited to visionary hoaxes. They extend to

⁴¹⁵ Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Intervarsity, 2000), 85.

⁴¹⁶ Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 2 vols. (Hendricksen, 1975), 570.

revisionary history as well. As [they have] exchanged God's enduring revelation for [their] own erroneous revelations, so, too, [they have] exchanged historical realities with historical revisionism. . . .

In teachings, transcripts, tapes, and television appearances, men like John Arnott (Toronto Airport Vineyard), Guy Chevreau (Catch the Fire), Gerald Coates (Holy Trinity, Brompton), and a host of other Counterfeit Revival teachers are actively deceiving devotees by revising history. Their primary ploy is to persuade people that sardonic laughter, spasmodic jerks, slaying in the spirit, and other "enthusiasms" were not only pervasive in the First Great Awakening, but were also promoted by such historical heavyweights as Jonathan Edwards. . . .

Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival have coopted one of the church's true spiritual giants and dishonestly claimed him for their own. In the words of Counterfeit Revival leader DeArteaga, "The Lord has already chosen the predominant theologian of this revival. It's not me! It's Jonathan Edwards."

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. . . . Dr. Nick Needham has well said that anyone who believes Edwards would have approved of this paradigm shift "must surely have kissed a final farewell to his mind." . . .

Nowhere is the paradigm shift that has taken place in Christianity and our culture more obvious than in the contrast between the ministry of Edwards and the message of the leaders of today's Counterfeit Revival. The ministry of Jonathan Edwards was characterized by dynamic expositional preaching. The message of the Counterfeit Revival is characterized by delusional experiential pandering. . . . The very thing that Edwards wanted people to be saved from is what Counterfeit Revival leaders are inducing people to indulge in.⁴¹⁷

This revision of history in order to find support for current phenomena is unfortunate. John Wimber (1934-1997), founder of the Vineyard movement, would seem to have done this very thing when he claimed that he was concerned after a church meeting

⁴¹⁷ Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival* (Word, 1997), 81-83, 101. See his thorough discussion of this matter on pages 81-101. See also Dr. Nick Needham, *Is Jonathan Edwards the Founding Father of the Toronto Blessing?* (Nick Needham, 1995), and Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 2 vols. (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), II:184-93).

where people were falling and in convulsions, and so he consulted "books about, revivals." He writes:

What I discovered was that our experience at the church service was not unique, people like John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Finney, and Jonathan Edwards all had similar experiences in their ministries.⁴¹⁸

Again, what he doesn't tell us is that with the exception of Finney, and at times, John Wesley, these men avoided this stuff like the plague. However, even Finney was to regret his promotion of *emotionalism* in evangelism. Dr. Tom Nettles relates:

Finney came to amend his views on "excitements." In an 1845 letter on revival he addressed this issue in detail:

I have sometimes witnessed efforts that were manifestly intended to create as much excitement as possible, and not unfrequently have measures been used which seemed to have no tendency to instruct or to subdue the will, or to bring sinners to the point of intelligently closing in with the terms of salvation; but on the contrary, it has seemed to me to beget a sort of infatuation through the power of overwhelming excitement. I cannot believe that this is healthful or at all safe in revivals.⁴¹⁹

Arnold Dallimore, perhaps the best biographer of early Evangelical Christianity, documents how a lack of discernment regarding overly emotional manifestations effected the great revival of the eighteenth century which we know of today as the Great Awakening. Specifically, the founder and foremost leader of the Awakening, George Whitefield (1714-1770), expressed several concerns regarding John Wesley's encouragement of mindless manifestations in his meetings.

Even John Wesley at times attributed such things as falling, uncontrollable laughing, and jumping, to demonic influences. In 1740, for example, when an epidemic of laughter broke out during a gathering in Bristol, Wesley wrote, "I was a little surprised at some, who were buffeted of satan in an unusual manner, by such a spirit of laughter as they could in no wise resist."⁴²⁰ This is, it

⁴¹⁸ John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (Hodder Headline, 1997), 24-25.

⁴¹⁹ Tom Nettles, "A Better Way: Church Growth Through Revival and Reformation" in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church*, Michael S. Horton ed. (Moody, 1992), 179.

⁴²⁰ Hanegraaff, 180. In addition to John Wesley's comment here regarding his belief that what is called "holy laughter" today was demonic in his

would seem, identical to the "holy laughter" practiced by *emotionalists* today as discussed in the next chapter.

Likewise, John's brother, Charles Wesley wrote in his journal:

June 4th. I went on at five expounding the Acts. Some stumbling blocks, with the help of God, I have removed, particularly the fits. Many no doubt were, at our first preaching struck down, both soul and body, into the depth of distress. Their outward affections were easy to be imitated. Many counterfeits I have already detected. . . .

Another girl, as she began her cry, I ordered to be carried out. Her convulsion was so violent as to take away the use of her limbs, till they laid and left her outside the door. Then immediately she found her legs, and walked off. . . .

Last night, before I began, I gave public notice, that whosoever cried [out] . . . without . . . judging them [would] be gently carried to the farthest corner of the room. But my porters had no employment the whole night, yet the Lord was with us, mightily convincing of sin and righteousness.⁴²¹

Despite the efforts of modern *emotionalist* teachers to claim the support of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) for their antics, the truth is that Edwards would have denounced them. No doubt, Edwards did not deny the place of emotion in God-honoring worship, but he insisted that such "holy affections" must be based on a *whole-hearted* worship that engages our rational and intellectual powers. No one, even to this day, has written more prolifically or

meetings, see Dallimore (I:174-176), for other examples of both John and Charles Wesley's suspicion of such manifestations.

Although John Wesley did misinterpret and even encourage such manifestations during his early preaching, he was later to regret such things. However, Wesley is, no doubt, difficult to understand at times. B. B. Warfield quotes William Warburton, who concluded after a careful study of John Wesley's journals, "This extraordinary man, hath, in fact, laid claim to almost every Apostolic gift and grace-, and in as full and ample a measure as they were possessed of old" (Counterfeit Miracles [Banner of Truth Trust, 1972], 129).

It becomes obvious that as one studies Wesley, you encounter a man sometimes struggling for self-esteem, power, and notoriety. Some of the things that happened in his ministry, marriage, and some of his doctrine, make one stand back in awe of God's grace to use such a man as He did. For further study on the immaturity of John Wesley see Dallimore Vol. 1, pp. 67-, 148-9, 196-273. 307-19, 451-2, 556-, 571-81, and Vol. 2, pp. 7, 9-21; 22, 23, 32; 38-40; 100.

⁴²¹ Jackson Thomas, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley* (1841), vol. 1, 333-4.

insightfully on *whole-hearted worship*, and in his monumental study of this topic entitled *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards writes:

Gracious affections [i.e. desires, emotions from the human "spirit"] do arise from the mind's being enlightened, richly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things. Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from the information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. The child of God is graciously affected, because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before, more of God or Christ, and of the glorious things exhibited in the gospel; he has some clearer and better view than he had before, when he was not affected; either he receives some understanding of divine things that is new to him; or has his former knowledge renewed after the view was decayed.

1 John 4:7, "Everyone that loveth, knoweth God." Phil. 1:9, "I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment." Rom. 10:2, "They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Col. 3:10, "The new man, which is renewed in knowledge." Psalm 43:3, 4, "O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill." John 6:45, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Knowledge is the key that first opens the hard heart, and enlarges the affections, and so opens the way for men into the kingdom of heaven; Luke 11:52, "Ye have taken away the key of knowledge."

Now there are many affections which do not arise from any light in the understanding. And when it is thus, it is a sure evidence that these affections are not spiritual, let them be ever so high. Many that have had mighty strong affections at first conversion, afterwards become dry and wither, and consume, and pine, and die away; and now their hypocrisy is manifest; if not to all the world by open profaneness, yet to the discerning eye of living Christians by a formal, barren, unsavory, unfruitful heart and course; because they never had light to conviction enough as yet. . . .

Such is the nature of man, that it is impossible his mind should be affected, unless it be by something that he apprehends, or that his mind conceives of. But in many persons those apprehensions or conceptions that they have, wherewith they are affected, have nothing of the nature of

knowledge or instruction in them. As for instance, when a person is affected with a lively idea, suddenly excited in his mind, of some shape or very beautiful pleasant form of countenance, or some shining light, or other glorious outward appearance; here is something apprehended or conceived by the mind; but there is nothing of the nature of instruction in it; persons become never the wiser by such things, or more knowing about God, or a Mediator between God and man, or the way of salvation by Christ, or anything contained in any of the doctrines of the gospel. Persons by these external ideas have no further acquaintance with God, as to any of the attributes or perfections of his nature; nor have they any further understanding of his word, or any of his ways or works.

Truly spiritual and gracious affections are not raised after this manner; these arise from the enlightening of the understanding to understand the things that are taught of God and Christ, in a new manner, the coming to a new understanding of the excellent nature of God, and his wonderful perfections, some new view of Christ in his spiritual excellencies and fullness, or things opened to him in a new manner, that appertain to the way of salvation by Christ, whereby he now sees how it is, and understands those divine and spiritual doctrines which once were foolishness to him. Such enlightenings of the understanding as these, are things entirely different in their nature from strong ideas of shapes and colors, and outward brightness and glory, or sounds and voices. That all gracious affections do arise from some instruction or enlightening of the understanding, is therefore a further proof, that affections which arise from such impression on the imagination, are not gracious affections.⁴²²

Edwards also had done his historical research and added:

Such sort of experiences and discoveries as these, commonly raise the affections of such as are deluded by them, to a great height, and make a mighty uproar in both soul and body. And a very great part of the false religion that has been in the world, from one age to another, consists in such discoveries as these, and in the affections that flow from them.

In such things consisted the experiences of the ancient Pythagoreans among the heathen, and many others among

⁴²² Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, III.4.1.; online at www.ccel.org.

them, who had strange ecstasies and raptures, and pretended to a divine afflatus, and immediate revelations from heaven.

In such things as these seem to have consisted the experiences of the Essenes, an ancient sect among the Jews, at and after the time of the Apostles. In such things as these consisted the experiences of many of the ancient Gnostics, and the Montanists, and many other sects of ancient heretics, in the primitive ages of the Christian church. And in such things as these consisted the pretended immediate converse with God and Christ, and saints and angels of heaven, of the Monks, Anchorites, and Recluses, that formerly abounded in the Church of Rome.

In such things consisted the pretended high experiences and great spirituality of many sects of enthusiasts, that swarmed in the world after the Reformation; such as the Anabaptists, Antinomians, and Familists, the followers of N. Stork, Th. Muncer, Jo. Becold, Henry Pfeiser, David George, Casper Swenckfield, Henry Nicolas Johannes, Agricola Eislebius; and the many wild enthusiasts that were in England in the days of Oliver Cromwell; and the followers of Mrs. Hutchison in New England; as appears by the particular and large accounts given of all these sects by that eminently holy man, Mr. Samuel Rutherford, in his "Display of the Spiritual Antichrist." And in such things as these consisted the experiences of the late French prophets, and their followers. And in these things seems to lie the religion of the many kinds of enthusiasts of the present day.⁴²³

There is no doubt then that Jonathan Edwards, the theologian of the First Great Awakening, disdained merely emotional spirituality, considered it deceptive and potentially demonic, and emphasized the critical place that human reason plays in any sincere, Holy Spirit-empowered worship.

Accordingly, the Pentecostal scholar Barry Chant is concerned about how *emotionalists* have misrepresented Edwards. He writes:

Edwards makes it very plain that, for him, consistent, godly lifestyle is the best argument for a true revival. . . . Some 'true friends of the work of God's Spirit' have done it discredit by yielding more to impressions and impulses than to the revelation of Scripture. . . . In all his writings, Edwards argued strongly for the need for the affections to be stirred. By the affections, he meant both the emotions and the will. . . . Yet, this does not mean that Edwards gave blanket approval

⁴²³ Ibid.

to any and all kinds of manifestations. In fact, he strongly disapproved of extremist behavior.

One of his favorite phrases in *The Religious Affections* is 'stony ground hearers,' by which he means people who demonstrate great emotional fervor, but who quickly fade away through lack of depth. Furthermore, Edwards was not even comfortable with the Quakers who relied on the experience of 'inner light' for guidance and direction. He was uneasy about dependency on feelings. . . .

Over recent years and in various places, falling, shaking, 'drunkenness', crying, laughter, jerking, animal noises, 'roaring', catalepsy, writhing, being thrown across the floor, trances and the like have all been reported during revival meetings. Edwards would have rejected most of this.

Many years later, when a group of Presbyterians in Virginia entreated Edwards to accept a pastorate there, Samuel Davies, the first permanent evangelical pastor in that colony, wrote this about him: "Fiery superficial ministers will never do in these parts: they might do good; but they would do much more harm. We need the deep judgment and calm temper of Mr. Edwards among us."

Edwards had the remarkable capacity both to welcome genuine expressions of emotional and volitional response to the gospel and yet to reject spurious extravagances. ⁴²⁴

We would wish modern Church leaders possessed and exercised the same capacity for discernment and courage.

Dr. Chant also helpfully clears the record on the wife of Jonathan Edwards, Sarah, and rightly distinguishes her well-known spiritual experiences from mindless worship:

⁴²⁴ Barry Chant, "Myths about Jonathan Edwards," *Renewal Journal*; online at www.renewaljournal.com. Dr. Chant adds concerning Edward's writings on revival:

When discussing his [Edward's] views on revival, most people quote mainly from his earlier writings. It is important to realize that he wrote four books on this subject and that his last work, not his first one, best reflects his position. As with most people, Edwards' views matured over the years, and with the benefit of experience, he was able to interpret with greater wisdom the phenomena he had witnessed. So it is to his *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*, first published in 1746 that we must turn for his 'final word,' as it were. Iain Murray says that Edwards, "never gave closer and more careful thought to anything than he did to this." To describe Edwards' view of revival without turning to this great piece of writing is to do him an injustice.

On occasions, Edwards' wife Sarah showed signs of what was then called 'enthusiasm.' For example, on Wednesday 27 January, 1742, after a lecture by the young Samuel Buell, she and others remained for a further three hours and during most of this time, she recalled, her 'bodily strength was overcome' and she was so full of joy and thankfulness that she conversed with those who were with her 'in a very earnest manner.'

The next morning, she was still so excited she found it difficult to complete her daily tasks. When Buell was speaking she felt so grieved at the apparent lack of gratitude among God's people she sank to the floor. People eased her into a chair and earnestly she shared with them her sense of God's wonderful grace towards her in redeeming her from hell.

During the next hymn, she was so impressed by heavenly truth that she leaped spontaneously from her chair, feeling as if she were ascending to heaven. After the reading of two more hymns, again, she collapsed and was taken and laid on a bed, where she continued to 'contemplate the glories of the heavenly world.'

During this time, she felt 'wholly indifferent' to the affairs of the world and to earthly glory and ambition. Her heart was filled with love and she felt so exhausted by emotions of joy that she could not rise or sit up for about four hours. That Thursday night she described as 'the sweetest night I ever had in my life.'

In recounting his version of Sarah's story, Edwards claims that two things in particular were evident-- 'a peculiar aversion to judging other professing Christians' and a 'very great sense of the importance of moral social duties.' Sarah's strength failed her, he says, because of her great mourning for sin and 'a sight of the fullness and glorious sufficiency of Christ.' Furthermore, her 'sense of the glory of the Holy Spirit' was such as to overwhelm her in both soul and body.⁴²⁵

Edwards concludes — "Now if such things are enthusiasm, and the fruits of a distempered brain, let my brain be evermore possessed of that happy distemper! If this be distraction, I pray God that the world of mankind may be all seized with this benign, meek, beneficent, beatifical, glorious distraction!"⁴²⁶ One can only say 'Amen' to this prayer. Would

⁴²⁵ Jonathan Edwards in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Banner of Truth, 1984), I:376f.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, I:378.

that more people were so overwhelmed by the wonder of Christ's sacrifice and love.

On the other hand, some popular authors seem to have misread Sarah's experience. Chevreau, for example, claims that she was 'out' for four hours, implying that she was in a comatose state.⁴²⁷ However, she makes it plain that although during this time she was too exhausted to rise or even to sit up, she spent 'most of the time' talking with friends about the things of God. Clearly, she was in full possession of her faculties.

Others have described her experience as being "slain in the Spirit." However, when she felt weak at the knees, it was the conscious result of her own insight into the glories of God, not an involuntary reaction to someone else's ministry or mediation or the laying on of hands. In the past, evangelical writers have attributed too little to Sarah Edwards' testimony; it is important not to go to the other extreme of attributing too much.⁴²⁸

The Great Awakening teaches us that satan can infiltrate and derail a genuine work of God through *emotionalism*. Indeed, satan will allow the supernatural and seductive to occur in order to turn men's minds from Christ. And this is what Whitefield and Edwards believed had happened in the revivals they witnessed. And it would seem that we should take notice if we are privileged to witness such a move of God in our own generation. Will we let the one who "**masquerades as an angel of light**" (2 Cor. 11:14) distract us from the real work of the Holy Spirit because we are not discerning about *emotionalism*? Perhaps we already have.⁴²⁹

Nonetheless, some leaders of the Great Awakening such as John Wesley (1703-1791) in Britain and James Davenport (1716-1757) in America, were fooled into thinking that such things were the work of God. Dallimore writes:

Though in its beginnings, the phenomenon undoubtedly resulted from the convicting work of the Spirit of God, it soon suffered the addition of a human element. The original experience began to be imitated, for certain of Wesley's hearers learned to make a practice of effecting a self-induced paroxysm during his services. The responsibility for this

⁴²⁷ G. Chevreau, *Catch the Fire* (Marshall Pickering, 1994), 79.

⁴²⁸ Chant.

⁴²⁹ For further discussion of what we see as the fake revival in *charismaticism* see section 10.15.A.

addition lay partly with Wesley himself, for, believing the emotional experiences to signify the special approval of God, he desired these demonstrations and encouraged them among the people.⁴³⁰

About this time, Whitefield, who had initially given Wesley the opportunity to preach, wrote his friend in an attempt to correct his error:

I cannot think it right in you to give so much encouragement to those convulsions which people have been thrown into under your ministry. Were I to do so, how many would cry out every night! I think it is tempting God to require such signs . . . the devil, I believe, does interpose. I think it will encourage the French Prophets, take people from the written word, and make them depend of visions [and] convulsions, more than on the promises and precepts of the Gospel.⁴³¹

Those who truly understand Whitefield's ministry and approach to it will readily recognize the error of the Evangelical Free pastor, Doug Bannister, who while firmly in the *emotionalist* camp himself, has recently written of Whitefield, "Drawing on his training as an actor, he stirred crowds into a frenzy with his dramatic oratory."⁴³² It is quite ironic that Mr. Bannister accuses Whitefield of the very *emotionalism* that Bannister himself is guilty of promoting. On the contrary, Mr. Bannister greatly exaggerates Whitefield's "training as an actor," and he purposely avoided the "frenzy" that Bannister charges him with. More accurately, Dallimore concludes, "Whitefield was not in the least convinced that these paroxysms were pleasing to the Lord and his dislike of them continued."⁴³³

Not only is Mr. Bannister wrong about Whitefield, his bias for the *emotionalist* Wesley is perhaps seen as well in his claim that Wesley "was the first to take the gospel to the masses."⁴³⁴ On the contrary, Whitefield was, and had been doing it for several months, and rather reluctantly asked Wesley to take his place in England so he could go to America, and only after two others had refused Whitefield's invitation.

⁴³⁰ Dallimore, I:325.

⁴³¹ Ibid. 328.

⁴³² Doug Bannister, *The Word and Power Church* (Zondervan, 1999), 127.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 50.

In the end, the lack of courage, sound doctrine, and discernment on the part of too many leaders in the Great Awakening, essentially ruined it, in Edward's opinion. Writing in reference to the year 1742 he wrote:

The work continued more pure till we were infected from abroad; our people hearing of, and some of them seeing, the work in other places, where there was a greater visible commotion than here, and the outward appearances were more extraordinary, were ready to think that the work in those places far excelled what was amongst us, and their eyes were dazzled with the high profession and great show that some made, who came hither from other places.⁴³⁵

Along these lines, John Gerstner notes:

In [Edwards'] *Religious Affections* spiritual knowledge is contrasted with "enthusiasm," a form of spurious knowledge. "Enthusiasm," Edwards insists, really is a delusion of Satan. Never does a revival occur without the devil planting his enthusiastic bastard children among the true disciples to confuse the work of God.

Accordingly, Edwards wrote:

It is a hard thing to be a hearty zealous friend of what has been good and glorious, in the late extraordinary appearances, and to rejoice much in it; and at the same time to see the evil and pernicious tendency of what has been bad, and earnestly to oppose that. But yet, I am humbly but fully persuaded, we shall never be in the way of truth, nor go on in a way acceptable to God, and tending to the advancement of Christ's kingdom till we do so. There is indeed something very mysterious in it, that so much good, and so much bad, should be mixed together in the church of God. . . .

It is by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true, not discerned and distinguished, that the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ, all along hitherto. It is by this means, principally, that he has prevailed against all revivings of religion, that ever have been since the first founding of the Christian church. . . .

So the same cunning serpent, that beguiled Eve through his subtlety, by perverting us from the simplicity that is in Christ, hath suddenly prevailed to deprive us of that fair prospect, we had a little while ago, of a kind of paradisaic state of the

⁴³⁵ John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Berea, 1991), I.165.

church of God in New England. . . . And so it is ever likely to be in the church, whenever religion revives remarkably, till we have learned well to distinguish between true and false religion, between saving affections and experiences, and those manifold fair shows, and glistening appearances, by which they are counterfeited; the consequences of which, when they are not distinguished, are often inexpressibly dreadful.

By this means, the devil gratifies himself, by bringing it to pass, that that should be offered to God, by multitudes, under a notion of a pleasing acceptable service to him, that is indeed above all things abominable to him. By this means he deceives great multitudes about the state of their souls; making them think they are something, when they are nothing; and so eternally undoes them; and not only so, but establishes many in a strong confidence of their eminent holiness, who are in God's sight some of the vilest of hypocrites. . . .

It is by such sort of religion as this, chiefly, that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light; and it is that which he has ever most successfully made use of to confound hopeful and happy revivals of religion, from the beginning of the Christian church to this day. When the Spirit of God is poured out, to begin a glorious work, then the old serpent, as fast as possible, and by all means, introduces this bastard religion, and mingles it with the true; which has from time to time soon brought all things into confusion.

The pernicious consequence of it is not easily imagined or conceived of, until we see and are amazed with the awful effects of it, and the dismal desolation it has made. If the revival of true religion be very great in its beginning, yet if this bastard comes in, there is danger of its doing as Gideon's bastard Abimelech did, who never left until he had slain all his threescore and ten true-born sons, excepting one, that was forced to fly.

Great and strict therefore should be the watch and guard that ministers maintain against such things, especially at a time of great awakening: for men, especially the common people, are easily bewitched with such things; they having such a glaring and glistening show of high religion; and the devil biding his own shape, and appearing as an angel of light, that men may not be afraid of him, but may adore him.⁴³⁶

Along these lines, Hanegraaff writes:

⁴³⁶ Edwards, *Affections*, III.4.4.

In the end the “peculiarities of wild enthusiasts” spelled the demise of the Great Awakening. The powerful expository preaching of men like Edwards, with its emphasis on esteem for Christ, an eternal perspective, essential Christian doctrine, and ego-effacing love, was replaced by excesses, errors, and extremes. The turning point, in Edward’s estimation, came when enthusiastic endorsers of the revival began to entertain and encourage such lying wonders.

According to biographer Ian H. Murray:

He came to believe that there was one principle cause of the reversal, namely, the unwatchfulness of the friends of the Awakening who allowed genuine and pure religion to become so mixed with “wildfire,” and carnal “enthusiasm,” that the Spirit of God was grieved and advantage given to Satan.

As lying signs and wonders took center stage in the Great Awakening, division arose between those who resisted “imprudences and irregularities” and those who promoted them. . . . By 1743 America’s clergy were evenly split over whether the revivals were a work of God or a work of the devil. . . . By the beginning of the American Revolution (1776) . . . Christianity was once again on the decline. The emotional excitement and spiritual effects of the Great Awakening had deteriorated into apathy and indifference. . . .

While the First Great Awakening had emphasized the rational understanding of essential Christian doctrine, it remained for the Second Awakening [e.g. Charles Finney], the next great wave of American revivalism, to advance almost purely emotional Christianity to a central position in popular American religion. In the First Great Awakening excesses had been the byproduct of revival; in the Second they would be the bottom line.⁴³⁷

Unfortunately, we would suggest that the American Church has allowed precisely what Edwards warned against. Just as he saw the true spiritual revival in his day be swallowed up with *emotionalism* so we have experienced the same great tragedy today. It seems apparent that mindless, emotional manifestations had a significant part in Satan’s desires to distract, dilute and eventually destroy the greatest revival in American history, and the same thing has and will no doubt have the same effect on any subsequent revivals.

⁴³⁷ Hanegraaff, 115-116.

Pastoral Practices

- Do we have the discernment to distinguish the real from the fake when it comes to spiritual manifestations? Would we have the wisdom and courage to protect a revival in our church from satanic counterfeits? Both of these would come from biblical convictions on the matter. Edward's treatise, *Religious Affections* would be a good place to start, and perhaps N. R. Needham's abridged and updated English version would be better (*The Experience That Counts!* [Grace Publications Trust, 1997]). Also, see relevant sections of *KOG* including: the rest of this chapter, the next chapter, and chapters 13-16 in book 10: *God's Miracle's: Words & Works*.

E) Half-hearted Spirituality Among 17th to 19th Century Heretics

E.1) Jansenists

Our belief that *emotionalism* has historically been denounced by Christians is demonstrated as well in other heretical movements. For example, a French group called the Jansenists, after their leader, Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), exhibited many of the modern "charismatic" phenomena. However, the Jansenists were probably not Christians, as they, "rejected justification by faith as the Protestants understood it and held that the full Christian life was possible only through the Roman Catholic Church."⁴³⁸ Convulsive fits, trances, prophetic utterances, miraculous cures, gravesite worship of dead saints, and "speaking in tongues" were all characteristics of this group that were eventually rejected by both Protestants and Roman Catholics as heretics.⁴³⁹

E.2) French Prophets

⁴³⁸ Latourette, 879.

⁴³⁹ Thomas Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts" *Bsac* 145 (1988), 211, 212.

Likewise, the warning concerning the French Prophets by both Edwards and Whitefield above deserves further comment. They were a heretical sect of the French Reformation in the early eighteenth century which spread to England and then to America. They were known for their claims to the gifts of prophecy and tongues and were universally rejected as heretics by both the Protestant and Roman Catholic branches of Christianity. Whitefield's disdain for them is illustrative of this.⁴⁴⁰

Dallimore explains that:

[The French Prophets] carried their occult practices to their new homes in England. [There] they attracted wide attention by exhibitions which included bodily contortions and unintelligible sounds, all of which they claimed were miraculous spiritual gifts. . . . Following Whitefield's ministry, the Prophets, aware of the new enthusiasm in [Whitefield's converts] decided that here was a people among whom they might easily make proselytes. . . .

Some leading men [including John Wesley] were led to believe that the convulsive fits and unintelligible sounds of the prophets—since they knew not how to explain them otherwise—must be supernatural. . . . Several [early Methodists] were strongly influenced by the French Prophets . . . and in their lack of Biblical understanding were beginning to copy the Prophets' emotional practices and prophetic speculations. . . .

The Prophets interjected the element of fanaticism and posed the threat which pseudo-supernaturalism always constitutes for earnest but unthinking Christian people.⁴⁴¹

Dr. Chant writes concerning the French Prophets:

According to [John] Knox [founder of Presbyterianism], when their preacher [a "French prophet"] shouted, people often fell on their backs while he 'conducted them' with his hand movements as if they were some kind of orchestra. It was 'a mark of reprobation if you did not fall when you were told to.' Some drove knives into themselves; others spoke in tongues; most were unconscious of what they did or said while under

⁴⁴⁰ For further discussion of how the leaders of the Great Awakening viewed the French Prophets see Dallimore, vol. 1, pp. 177, 316 n. 1, 327, 348, 505.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 174-5.

inspiration. 'Violent agitations,' foaming at the mouth and bodily swelling were common.

A speaker might lie as dead for an extended time and then begin to tremble violently until his limbs all shook. In at least one case, one person 'gobbled like a turkey cock.'

A contemporary writer refers to people shaking their heads, crawling on the floor, quaking and trembling, drumming, trumpeting, thundering, snuffling, blowing as with a horn, panting, sighing, groaning, hissing, laughing, pointing, shaking, threshing, using childish repetition, howling like a dog and generally acting in a disorderly fashion. While these descriptions all come from their critics, there seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest they are not widely inaccurate.

⁴⁴²

Many phenomena popular in modern day *charismaticism* were characteristic of the French Prophets, but none of it would seem to be Christian. They spoke of human perfectionism in prophetic utterances and believed such prophesying to be from God. They spoke and prayed in incoherent syllables, claiming it to be Huegenot French and a demonstration of the gift of speaking in tongues. Yet, there is no doubt that the leaders of the Great Awakening in England viewed the French Prophets as heretics and threats to the progress of the revival. ⁴⁴³

E.3) Shakers

The next group to exhibit "charismatic" phenomena was the Shakers. They were called such because of their convulsive style of worship including "the shakes" while worshipping, "working miracles," "calling forth signs and wonders," prophesying, "insight into the thoughts of others," animal sounds, drunken behavior in worship, and "speaking in their unknown tongues." ⁴⁴⁴ In the mid 1700's they were led by Mother Ann Lee (1736-1784) who taught many heretical things which concerned not only the Person of

⁴⁴² Chant.

⁴⁴³ Dallimore, 316 n. 1, 177, 327, 348, 505.

⁴⁴⁴ Alexander Mackie, *The Gift of Tongues: A Study in the Pathological Aspects of Christianity* (Doran, 1921), 83, 89, 90, 94, 95.

Christ, but that "the sin of our first parents [Adam and Eve] was in sexual intercourse."⁴⁴⁵ Donald Bloesch writes:

In the early years of the Shaker communities spiritual gifts abounded, including prophecies, visions, tongues and healings. One of their distinctive beliefs linking them to Gnosticism was that God is both male and female. The female principle was manifested in Mother Ann Lee, who was seen as the second appearance of Christ. In their view the millennium began with the founding of the Shaker church. In the 1840s twice-yearly love feasts were held during which believers were visited by American Indian spirits and the spirit of Mother Ann.⁴⁴⁶

Although the Shakers obviously exhibited many *emotionalists* phenomena, there was one practice no Christian group would hopefully claim and that was "the practice of men and women dancing together naked while they spoke in tongues."⁴⁴⁷

E.4) Irvingites

Another group at this time that manifested "charismatic" phenomena was the Irvingites. Their meetings were marked, as well, by "swoons, bedlam, laughing, and groaning."⁴⁴⁸ They encouraged tongues speaking and established both prophets and apostles in their churches. Although many of those involved in the movement might have been Christians, it becomes obvious that the group was heavily infiltrated by the evil one. "The prophets contradicted their own statements [and Scripture as well]. . . . One of the leading prophets admitted that he was deluded and had spoken by an evil spirit."⁴⁴⁹

Their founder, Edward Irving (1792-1834), "adopted a strange Christology, an extraordinarily subjective understanding of the leading of the Lord . . . [had] false views on healing,"⁴⁵⁰ and "was

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁴⁶ Bloesch, 150.

⁴⁴⁷ Smith, 17-18.

⁴⁴⁸ Edgar, "Cessation," 214.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker, 1987), 167.

ejected from the Presbyterian Church for heresy.”⁴⁵¹ Once again, the Irvingites obviously did exhibit many contemporary practices and beliefs in modern *charismaticism*, however, they were just as obviously another one of those “fringe heretical” groups.⁴⁵²

NT scholar Thomas Edgar, Professor of NT at Capital Seminary, would seem to sum up the remainder of historical evidence concerning *emotionalism* when he writes:

[H. B.] Sweet refers to frontier revivals in America where “sinners” or unbelievers jerked and became involved in convulsive movements and where there were sobs, shrieks, shouts, and spasms, dashing scores to the ground. However, we have no evidence that these were spiritual gifts or that tongues speaking occurred or that believers were involved in such actions.

In his study of the Holiness-Pentecostal movement, [Vinson] Synan refers to falling, jerking, barking, trances, holy laughs, and wild dances . . . [some would] crawl on all fours and bark like dogs. Even unbelieving students at the University of Georgia fell, jerked, shouted, and talked in tongues. These manifestations were not restricted to believers and therefore were not spiritual gifts. Some were so ridiculous that it is blasphemous to associate them with the Spirit of God.⁴⁵³

So while it would seem *emotionalist* phenomena certainly occurred in the past, it is consistently attached to unbelievers or groups that were heavily influenced by heretical doctrines and considered outside the Christian faith as a whole.

F) Half-hearted Spirituality in Early Mormonism

The reports of “charismatic” practices in early Mormonism demonstrates that such manifestations need have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. Alexander Mackie, a historian of early American spirituality, writes of the beginnings of the Mormon revivals:

During the fall and winter of 1830 and 1831, Kirtland was continually crowded with visitors, who came from all quarters to inquire after the 'New Religion.' About this time, as we are informed by credible historians and eyewitnesses, 'many in the

⁴⁵¹ Latourette, 1185.

⁴⁵² Carson, *Spirit*, 166.

⁴⁵³ Edgar, “Cessation,” 217.

church became very visionary and had divers [various] operations of the Spirit.' They saw wonderful lights in the air and on the ground and had many miraculous visions and experiences. . . . Others fell into a trance, and continued apparently lifeless for a long time, and woke only to relate the wonders they had seen touching the future glory of the saints, and the destruction of the unbelieving. Sometimes their faces, bodies, and limbs were violently distorted and convulsed, until they fell prostrate on the ground.

Indeed, it is reported by an eye-witness, that at first the laying hands on the heads of their converts to confer the gift of the Holy Spirit, generally produced an instantaneous prostration of both the body and mind, often followed by a wonderful gift of tongues, as was supposed, in Indian dialects; which, indeed, none could understand except by direct inspiration. . . .

Scenes like this were numerous. The preachers were fervent, the people "eager for the supernatural," and the message definite and dogmatic. . . . The expectations of the Latter Day Saints ran at this time very high. . . .

A description of one of the Kirtland meetings [by E. D. Howe] will convey some idea of the manner in which Mormon worship in the inner circle was conducted. There were some fifteen or twenty Elders and High Priests present. The meeting was held in a small room.

"After sundry exhortations by the priests, the Prophet [Joseph Smith] himself arose and with much seeming earnestness, warned his followers to be zealous, faithful in their duties, saying, 'It is our privilege to see God face to face-yes, (says he) I will prophesy unto you in the name of the Lord, that the day will come when no man will be permitted to preach unless he has seen the Lord. . . . They then concluded to spend the day in fasting and prayer. . . .

Joseph next passed round the room, and laid his hand upon each one, and spoke as follows, as near as the narrator can recollect: [gibberish in an obscure tongue]. . . . After administering the sacrament several of the brethren were called upon to arise and speak in tongues. . . . This gibberish for several months was practiced almost daily." ⁴⁵⁴

satan even tried to use the mindless practices of early Mormonism to hinder genuine Christian revival. Accordingly, the Methodist preacher Peter Cartwright (1785-1872) wrote:

⁴⁵⁴ Mackie, 9-10.

The camp meeting was numerously attended, and we had a good and gracious work of religion going on among the people. On Saturday there came some twenty or thirty Mormons to the meeting. . . . At length, an old lady Mormon began to shout, and after shouting a while she swooned away and fell into the arms of her husband. The old man proclaimed that his wife had gone into a trance, and that when she came to she would speak in an unknown tongue, and that he would interpret.

This proclamation produced considerable excitement, and the multitude crowded thick around. Presently the old lady arose and began to speak in an unknown tongue, sure enough. Just then my attention was called to the matter. I saw in one moment that the whole manœuvre was intended to bring the Mormons into notice, and break up the good of our meeting. I advanced instantly toward the crowd, and asked the people to give way and let me in to this old lady, who was then being held in the arms of her husband.

I came right up to them, and took hold of her arm, and ordered her peremptorily to hush that gibberish; that I would have no more of it; that it was presumptuous and blasphemous nonsense. I stopped very suddenly her unknown tongue. She opened her eyes, took me by the hand, and said: 'My dear friend, I have a message directly from God to you.' I stopped her short and said, 'I will have none of your messages. If God can speak through no better medium than an old, hypocritical, lying woman, I will hear nothing of it.'⁴⁵⁵

We would wish the modern Church would respond with the same discernment as Cartwright did in the midst of the revival he was leading.

⁴⁵⁵ Quoted in Mackie, 231.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You that You have made it clear in Scripture that virtue, not emotion, is the true fruit of the Holy Spirit. Help us to avoid the merely fleshly spirituality of modern emotionalism. And we pray that whoever may be true Christians and are involved in pagan worship practices may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How do we define *emotionalism*? Why do we refer to it as “half-hearted” spirituality?
- 2) What were some elements in first century pagan worship that would reflect *emotionalism*?
- 3) What do we claim are some biblical references to pagan *emotionalism* in 1 Corinthians? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) Why do we claim that the Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians their mindless *emotionalism* was not only harmful, but evil. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) Why do we claim that modern *emotionalists* claim such people as Jonathan Edwards as support for their practices? Are they wrong or right to do so?
- 6) Why do we claim that the Great Awakening teaches us that satan can infiltrate and derail a genuine work of God through *emotionalism*.
- 7) Obviously, we are arguing here that many of the worship and spiritual practices denounced in the history of the Church as unbiblical and even demonic are being popularized and practiced by the modern “charismatic” movement today. Do you agree or disagree? What are the ramifications of this?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.11

Modern *Half-hearted Spirituality*

The Emotionalism of Charismaticism

Primary Points

- *Emotionalism* is "half-hearted" spirituality that intentionally suppresses our God-given reasoning functions and abuses the power of emotions.
- Modern *charismaticism* is synonymous with modern *emotionalism*.
- There is no biblical support for being "slain in the Spirit," altered states of consciousness, "holy laughter" etc., but they can exist in demonic contexts.
- "Altered states of consciousness" are unusual conditions of perception achieved by the deliberate cultivation of abnormal mental states experienced with specific religious techniques and/or occult programs."
- The Apostle condemned *emotionalist* worship practices when he wrote: "**God is not a God of confusion** [*akatastasia*: "disorder, disturbance, tumult"] **but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints . . . everything should be done in a fitting** [*euschemonos*: "decent, attractive"] **and orderly** [*taxis*] **way.** (1 Cor 14:33, 40)
- All the pictures of the NT Church (human body, army, family) reflect a high degree of order, contrary to the disorder in some worship services.
- If *emotionalism* does not result in more selfless love and moral holiness, then it has no claim to a special experience of the Holy Spirit.
- Mindless *emotionalism* promotes lying about spiritual experiences, escaping reality, manipulating worshippers, embarrassing the Christian faith, and worshipping God in ways that displease Him.
- To love God is not so much to *feel* Him, but to *serve* Him. If you want to experience God, seek sacrificial obedience, not an emotional experience.

A) *Half-hearted Spirituality in Modern Paganism*

In the previous chapter we covered a history of “half-hearted” Christian spirituality up through the nineteenth century. There we illustrated the mindless, irrational, and unbiblical practices of *emotionalism*. *Emotionalism* is “half-hearted” spirituality because it intentionally suppresses our God-given reasoning functions and abuses the power of the emotional part of us to experience something. Even though movements promoting and practicing such things were condemned by the Church in the past we can point to modern versions of this as well.

First, we can look at forms of “half-hearted” irrational forms of spirituality in modern paganism. Along these lines, we have already quoted Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis concerning the commitment of Eastern religions to mindless worship:

Many approaches to meditation today under the influence of Hindu and Buddhist mysticism ask that a person's mind be rid of all conceptual thought from any source whatever, including propositional revelation. That may be an appropriate way to identify with the impersonal, nonintelligent energy of the cosmos, but it is not an acceptable way to commune with the heavenly Father to whom Jesus asked us to pray without vain repetition.⁴⁵⁶

Likewise, many elements of the New Age Movement reflect such mindless spirituality, as described in the following excerpt from the *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* concerning “altered states of consciousness”:

Altered states of consciousness (ASCs) . . . comprise unusual conditions of perception achieved by the deliberate cultivation of often abnormal mental states, states not normally experienced without specific religious techniques and/or occult programs . . . As America has turned to pagan spirituality, it has logically adopted pagan methods. . . . Also, for many people, altered states of consciousness are perceived as the key to personal and spiritual development . . . It is sobering to realize that, in many quarters, what was once termed “[demonic] spirit possession” is now often simply termed “altered consciousness.” . . .

[T]here are no indications in Scripture that people should enter altered states or trances in order to draw closer to God, a common theme in New Age circles. . . . According to 1 Peter

⁴⁵⁶ Bruce Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Zondervan, 1987, 1990, 1994), I:124.

4:7 (and other Scriptures), Christians are to be "clear minded and self controlled" so that they may pray or study Scripture. Thus, the biblical means of spiritual growth and sanctification, e.g. meditation on Scripture, prayer, fasting, are surely not meant to put us into altered states of consciousness. Further, as we have argued all along, these states are clearly open doors to the intrusion of demonic spirits. . .

In conclusion, to develop ASCs is not to participate in a form of higher consciousness or true spirituality, as New Age proponents would have us believe. Rather, it often involves abnormal, regressive states of consciousness-ones particularly conducive to demonic contact and manipulation. The radical change in worldview is characteristically toward the occult, encouraging both occult practices and occult philosophy. The growing acceptance of altered states by millions of people, their use in psychotherapy, medicine, education, and many other fields is a reflection of the growing influence of paganism in our society.⁴⁵⁷

Along the same lines, Dr. Elizabeth Hillstrom, a Christian psychologist, writes in her book, *Testing the Spirits*:

Altered states also have important commonalities. They can all impair one's ability to test reality, to think critically and logically or to remember. They create a passive state in which mental events seem to develop on their own and are simply experienced rather than being controlled. Many also weaken emotional restraints, allowing moods to swing from wild jubilation to deep fear and depression.

In addition, they can all create perceptual distortions and hallucinations and precipitate unusual bodily sensations like numbness, dizziness, tingling or rushes of energy . . . They can make people hypersuggestible, so they are open to many strange beliefs and are easily influenced by the suggestions of other people. Altered states have the singular ability to make all kinds of improbable events seem exceptionally real and significant. . . . One final effect of altered states is their apparent ability to facilitate or enhance mystical experience. . . .

It is obvious that such states could certainly magnify any influence that these [demonic] spirits might exert on the human mind. In fact, Satan and his forces could hardly find a more opportune situation in which to deceive or mislead people. If

⁴⁵⁷ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Harvest House, 1996), 18-25.

this seems like too strong a statement, stop and review the various characteristics of altered states.

In altered states, people are subject to vivid imagery, unconstrained imaginative processes that resist conscious control, and intense emotions. Having largely set aside their ability to think rationally and critically or to exercise their will, they have become hypersuggestible, which means that they are likely to accept any "spiritual truth" that enters their minds. Even more remarkably, they seem to be primed for mystical experiences and may attach great spiritual significance to virtually any event or thought, no matter how mundane or outlandish. Seeking mystical experiences through altered states, as defined here, looks like an open invitation for deception.⁴⁵⁸

One example of similar phenomena, which would seem to be derived not so much from a demonic source, but simply the flesh itself, is what Hindus call *Kundalini*. An entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mystical & Paranormal Experiences* states:

[*Kundalini* is a] psycho-spiritual energy . . . which is aroused either through spiritual discipline or spontaneously to bring new states of consciousness, including mystical illumination . . . The power of *kundalini* is enormous, and individuals who have experienced it say it is beyond description.

The phenomena associated with it vary, and include bizarre physical sensations . . . involuntary, jerky, or spasmodic body movements and postures, clairaudience [hearing of sounds, music, voices not audible to normal hearing], visions, brilliant lights . . . psychical powers, ecstasy, bliss, intensified sex drive. . . .

Knowledge and cultivation of *kundalini* has been most developed in Indian yoga. . . . Since the 1970's *kundalini* awakenings have been reported with increasing frequency in the West. . . . Not all *kundalini* awakenings follow the classic model set forth in yoga, but seem to vary in intensity and duration. The yogi meditates to arouse the *kundalini* and raise it up through his or her body. . . .

Scientific research of *kundalini* remains embryonic, hampered by the nonphysical nature of the energy and its unpredictability. Another difficulty in identifying cases is the

⁴⁵⁸ Elizabeth Hillstrom, *Testing the Spirits* (Intervarsity Press, 1995), 69-70, 79.

similarity of many symptoms to those caused by mental disturbance and stress.⁴⁵⁹

Hindu *Kundalini* has its counterpart in Zen Buddhism called *satori*. Norm Anderson explains:

Zen Buddhists believe that by rigorous self-discipline and a strictly prescribed method of meditation they may attain *satori*, the Japanese term for "enlightenment"--whether suddenly, as some teach, or gradually, as others hold--by means of a perception which is empirical rather than intellectual.⁴⁶⁰

Likewise, the Zen master Suzuki defines *satori* as completely different than rational knowledge:

Satori may be defined as an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it.⁴⁶¹ . . . The *satori*, after all, is not a thing to be gained through the understanding.⁴⁶² . . . In Zen there is an intellectual quest for ultimate truth which the intellect fails to satisfy; the subject is urged to dive deeper under the waves of the empirical consciousness.⁴⁶³

All of the examples above illustrate what can happen with "half-hearted" spirituality which bypasses the mind, and focuses on feelings and the self.

B) *Half-hearted Spirituality in Modern Emotionalism*

As noted in the previous chapter, there is a striking similarity between the worship practices of the pagan mystery religions, Corinthians, and fakes in the Great Awakening and the modern

⁴⁵⁹ Rosemary E. Guiley, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical & Paranormal Experience* (Harper Collins, 1991), 319-321, 552.

⁴⁶⁰ Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Intervarsity, 1984), 88.

⁴⁶¹ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (Grove Press, 1961), 230.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 243.

⁴⁶³ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series* (Weiser, 1970), 60.

"charismatic" movement. Likewise, the mystical, irrational *emotionalism* of Buddhism and New Age are prevalent in the movement as well. Along these lines, NT scholar Thomas Edgar writes:

The modern-day Charismatic movement is disturbingly similar to practices common in paganism. . . . Trancelike states and communications on a level apart from the mind are common in paganism. . . . The experience of a power or force "overcoming" the participants is similar to pagan practice. The bizarre and often wild practices of early Pentecostalism seem similar to pagan religion.⁴⁶⁴

Accordingly, *emotionalism* is synonymous with the movement we refer to as *charismaticism*. As we discuss further elsewhere, we believe the pagan *emotionalism* of *charismaticism* is caused by an infiltration of modern pagan culture in their churches.⁴⁶⁵ Along these lines, the eminent theologian J. I. Packer speaks of the authority given to mere experiences in pagan culture in general when he writes:

We are very self-absorbed: the human-centeredness of our Western culture has made us so. We are interested in experiences, meaning our "feelings" or our "reactions to something," for their own sake, as if experiences are all that matters. We are inclined to jump to the conclusion that the more intense an experience is, the more of God there must be in it. But by biblical standards that is not so at all.⁴⁶⁶

Nonetheless, this "self-absorbed . . . human-centeredness" has resulted in the *emotionalism* that exists in certain parts of the church today. Accordingly, Dr. MacArthur writes:

The entire charismatic movement has absorbed the erroneous notion that whatever is truly spiritual must transcend or bypass people's rational senses. Spiritual gifts supposedly operate by suspending the faculties of human reason. One might think that the strongest evidence of the Holy Spirit's power is when someone lapses into a stupor.

And so the lore of the charismatic movement is filled with outrageous accounts of behavior that resembles trances, seizures, subliminal messaging, hypnosis, suspended

⁴⁶⁴ Thomas Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts" *Bsac* 145 (1988), 384.

⁴⁶⁵ For further discussion of the explanation of the popularity of *charismaticism* being tied to cultural trends see section 10.15.B.

⁴⁶⁶ J. I. Packer, *Knowing Christianity* (Harold Shaw, 1995), 5-6.

animation, frenzy, hysteria, even dementia. These are often cited as proof that God is at work in the movement.⁴⁶⁷

For example, Doug Banister, an Evangelical Free Pastor and promoter of *charismaticism*, writes a whole chapter in a recent book, *The Word and Power Church*, insisting that the traditional teaching of Christianity regarding the fact that our feelings should follow our reason is all wrong. Rather, Pastor Banister encourages us to embrace the emphasis of *emotionalism* on being led by our feelings when he writes:

The charismatic world I intersected was anything but afraid of the feeling caboose. In fact, in some cases, the feeling caboose drove the train . . . This was a world where emotions were not the enemy of faith but the source of it. People laughed. People cried. People shook. People were slain [into unconsciousness] in the Spirit. People danced. People lay on the floor praying.⁴⁶⁸

In the process of bragging about *emotionalism*, the author unwittingly maligns himself with words that seem more descriptive of pagan spiritualism than biblical Christianity.

A fundamental error of the *emotionalism* that Pastor Banister is promoting is the confusion of the work of the Holy Spirit with human emotion. For example, it is popular to think that because a worship service was more emotional, that it was more influenced by the Holy Spirit. This need not be the case, and probably isn't more times than *emotionalists* think.

B.1) Altered States of Consciousness

Along these lines, the charismatic "Bible answer man" Hank Hanegraaff describes the deliberate suppression of the thinking faculties that is common in modern *emotionalism*:

There are a wide variety of techniques used by leaders of the Counterfeit Revival [all of whom, according to Hanegraaff, are in *charismaticism*] to work followers into altered states of consciousness. One of the most disarming methods is to sing one song over and over until participants finally lose touch with reality [and reason]. [A leader of modern *emotionalism*]

⁴⁶⁷ John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, (Zondervan, 1992), 185.

⁴⁶⁸ Doug Bannister, *The Word and Power Church* (Zondervan, 1999), 126.

Rick Joyner confessed that at one of his conferences participants sang one song "for over three hours." As a result, he said, "the gulf between heaven and earth had somehow been bridged"

Joyner reports that:

When that one song finally ended, some of the musicians were lying on the floor. I looked at Christine Potter and Susy Wills, who were dancing near the center of the stage and I have never seen such a look of terror on the faces of anyone. An intense burning, like a nuclear fire that burns from the inside out, seemed to be on the stage. Christine started pulling at her clothes as if she were on fire, and Susy dove behind the drums. Then a cloud appeared in the center of the stage, visible to everyone, and a sweet smell like flowers filled the area.

Leaders like Joyner see the mind as a lower form of consciousness. Thus, like Eastern gurus, they work their devotees into altered states of consciousness.⁴⁶⁹

Hanegraaff continues:

Whether in the ashrams of the cults or at the altars of churches, the objective of achieving altered states of consciousness is always the same: to dull the critical thinking processes because the mind is seen as the obstacle to enlightenment. As John Wimber and John Arnott [*emotionalist* leaders] put it, "God offends the mind to reveal the heart." Counterfeit Revival guru Rodney Howard-Browne explains that, "You can't understand what God is doing in these meetings with an analytical [discerning] mind. The only way you're going to understand what God is doing is with your heart [as if God didn't put reason there too]."

Thus, while Howard-Browne allows his subjects to make nonsensical sounds, he prohibits them from praying. On one occasion, as a woman was about to lapse into an altered state of consciousness, she became apprehensive and called out to God in prayer. Immediately Howard-Browne commanded her to cease. "Would you listen to me?" he shouted indignantly, "If your praying had helped, it would've helped you; now get laughing." . . .

What Hindu gurus like Baghwan Shree Rajneesh characterize as a trance state, Holy Ghost bartenders like Rodney Howard-Browne characterize as being "drunk in the Spirit" . . .

⁴⁶⁹ Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival* (Word, 1997), 221-2.

Today what was once relegated to the “back room” is centerstage in the Counterfeit Revival. Thousands testify to “getting drunk” and personally experiencing powerful psychological and physical manifestations. These experiences are so “real” that many key evangelical Christian leaders are convinced they cannot be explained apart from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tragically, many of them are dangerously ignorant of the striking parallels between their experiences and those of Eastern meditators who achieve altered states of consciousness through occult practices. As has been well documented from studies of the world of the occult, the dangerous effects may involve depression, detachment, depersonalization, disillusionment, and many equally serious disorders.⁴⁷⁰

Contrast the modern insistence among *emotionalists* that real spirituality bypasses the mind, with the expert opinion of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) whom we’ve quoted previously:

Now there are many affections which do not arise from any light in the understanding. And when it is thus, it is a sure evidence that these affections are not spiritual, let them be ever so high.⁴⁷¹

This promotion of emotional, mindless, *half-hearted* worship in *charismaticism* has resulted in some very bizarre, unspiritual, and unbiblical manifestations. Accordingly, Hanegraaff describes his first visit to the church of John Wimber (1934-1997), the founder of the Vineyard Association of Churches:

When I first visited the Anaheim Vineyard, the drunken behavior of devotees instantly took me back to [the effects of an Indian guru named Baghwan Shree Rajneesh]. A member of John Wimber’s family stood at the altar, testifying that the power of God was upon her as she jerked spasmodically in what Wimber refers to as a chicken walk. It wasn’t long before others had joined her in jerking while rhythmic clapping and repetitive choruses filled the auditorium with sound.

Before the evening had ended, the crowd was engaged in the very practices Rajneesh devotees use to achieve their altered states of consciousness. Some were jumping up and

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 223, 225, 227.

⁴⁷¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (online at www.ccel.org), III.4.1.

down furiously, chopping their hands frantically through the air. Others were violently throwing their heads backward and forward and bending wildly at the waist.

One woman looked as though an invisible hand had grabbed her and was shaking her like she was little more than a rag doll. All the while, sardonic laughter punctuated by animal noises rose eerily from the bodies writhing on the ground. Later, when I visited the Airport Vineyard in Toronto [home of the so-called "Toronto Blessing"], the sights and sounds I experienced were even more shocking.⁴⁷²

There is absolutely nothing supernatural or Holy Spirit-empowered about these mindless, emotional antics. Accordingly, the twentieth century humanist scholar Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), wrote in the context of his own research on pagan worship practices:

All we can safely predict is that, if exposed long enough to the tom-toms and the singing, every one of our philosophers would end by capering and howling with the savages.⁴⁷³

B.2) Being "Drunk in the Spirit"

Hanegraaff mentions several mindless, emotional phenomena above that have been familiar in "charismatic" worship meetings. "Drunken behavior" is a common experience in *charismaticism* and is presumptuously referred to as "being drunk in the Spirit." Victims suffer from blurred speech, numbness, light-headedness, and lack of self-control. This obvious lack of control experienced by those "drunk in the spirit" would seem to expose it immediately as something not of the Holy Spirit whose effect on people is always "**self control**" (Gal 5:23).

Likewise, the Apostle Peter writes, "**Be of sober** [*nēphate*: lit. "free from drunkenness"] **spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour**" (1 Peter 5:8 NASB). To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be sober, the opposite of drunken behavior. And if the devil is constantly "**seeking someone to devour**" then there is no place in the Christian life to ever be anything but "**sober**" and "**on the alert,**" including a worship service.

⁴⁷² Hanegraaff, 225-6 (Underlining added for emphasis).

⁴⁷³ Quoted by D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 69.

There is, of course, no biblical support for the drunken phenomenon. Some point to the experience of Saul "prophesying" in 1 Samuel 19 where we read:

So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. (vs. 23-24)

Some claim that here is a picture of God-pleasing worship. On the contrary, it is a picture of God's *judgment*. Remember the context here? Wicked Saul is chasing righteous David to murder him. The Spirit of God came upon Saul in this way to *stop* him and humble him, not to give Him a wonderful worship experience. Saul experienced this event while completely outside of God's will and under His condemnation.

This can be compared to an earlier experience of Saul's in 1 Samuel 10 where, **"a procession of Prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying"** (v. 10). There are three major differences in this occurrence of "prophesying" from the one above. First, there is no record of Saul losing control in some drunken state. Secondly, Saul was under God's blessing, having just been anointed as God's choice as king (cf. 10:1) and being told by Samuel, **"do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you"** (v. 7). Thirdly, the account says this experience was to change Saul **"into a different person"** (v. 6, cf. v. 9). The later experience described above served only to harden Saul, not help him (cf. 1 Sam 20:28-32). There simply is no support in 1 Samuel 19 for a God-pleasing worship experience of drunken behavior.

Nonetheless, *emotionalist* are so eager to find biblical support for the kind of worship they want, that John Wimber attempts to find such support in the Apostle's admonition in Ephesians 5:18: **"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."** Hanegraaff relates:

Wimber ends his series of sermons titled "Spiritual Phenomena: Slain in the Spirit" by recounting the story of how in one of his meetings a man by the name of "Lonnie, was praying [or preying?] on some gals":

They became so intoxicated . . . they began falling. . . . They began dancing around the room and people were just sort of enjoying them, you know, 'cause they were in a very ethereal state. . . . And one young lady walked up to me and she said, "What's that?" Now I said, "I perceive you disapprove of that?" (I've got discerning of spirits.) And she

said, "What rational basis can there be for that kind of behavior?" And I said "Be not drunk with wine, which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit."

Hanegraaff goes on to correctly point out that:

What Wimber did not say is that once again he's taken a text out of context. Paul, in the passage Wimber quoted (Eph. 5:18), is not saying that drunkenness is desirable and has a spiritual counterpart. Rather, in context he is presenting a consistent series of contrasts between cultic and Christian behavior. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he makes it clear that as Christians we must be "alert and sober" rather than being in an altered state of consciousness or slain in the spirit.⁴⁷⁴

Along the same lines, Dr. Edgar writes:

Paul provides an instructive perspective on the continuing activity of the Spirit in the church in the one passage in the New Testament where believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). The verses that immediately follow (vs. 19–21) are dependent syntactically on this command and so indicate what is characteristic of the Spirit's filling work.

Paul then goes on to elaborate at some length on the element of mutual subjection, in particular, by spelling out its implications for marriage, the family, and work (5:22–6:9). From this it is plain that the filling or fullness of the Spirit is not, at least primarily, a matter of unusual or enrapturing experiences, but is the reality of the Spirit's working in the basic relationships and responsibilities of everyday living.⁴⁷⁵

Another fact that puts the "drunk in the spirit" phenomenon under great suspicion is the false teaching espoused by the foremost promoters of it. Rodney Howard-Browne, known as the "Holy Ghost Bartender" because of his ability to facilitate a drunken effect on people is applauded in modern *emotionalism* as a man gifted from God. Yet, he denies the deity of Christ, commonly forbids prayer at his meetings because it interferes with "the spirit," and is obviously given to gross exaggeration and delusory "prophecies."⁴⁷⁶ Would you want a man like that to touch you and give you the sensation of drunkenness?

⁴⁷⁴ Hanegraaff, 195.

⁴⁷⁵ Edgar, "Cessation," 371-2.

⁴⁷⁶ Hanegraaff, 87, 103-104, 107-108, 155-157, 223.

B.3) Being “Slain in the Spirit”

Benny Hinn, a celebrity of modern *emotionalism*, has a nationally-aired television broadcast on which people are “slain in the spirit” nearly every week. Hinn will occasionally “release the anointing” on an entire auditorium, prompting most of the crowd to fall backward. In his bestselling book, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, Hinn claims that his gift is empowered by the Holy Spirit. There are several reasons to doubt this.

First of all, we can be suspicious of his motives in using the “gift.” Hinn relates that when he witnessed the popular, although woefully ineffective, faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman (1907-1976) ⁴⁷⁷ having this affect on people, he exclaimed, “I’ve got to have this . . . I want what Kathryn Kuhlman’s got. I wanted it with every atom and fiber within me.” ⁴⁷⁸

All should be reminded here of the wicked Simon the Sorcerer who envied the unique ability of the Apostles John and Peter to give the Holy Spirit to people. In Acts 8 we read:

Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the Apostles’ hands, he offered them money and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”
(Acts 8:17-23)

What was actually a miraculous authenticating sign of the unique authority of these Apostles of Jesus Christ to introduce the

⁴⁷⁷ For further description of the fraudulent nature of Kathryn Kuhlman’s ministry see section 11.8.E.2.

⁴⁷⁸ Benny Hinn, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit* (Nelson, 1990), 9, 11-12.

Gospel to a new people group like the Samaritans, was seen by Simon the Sorcerer as an opportunity for personal advancement. Likewise, Hinn's "gift" has earned him world-wide fame and untold millions of dollars (some of which he has spent on a huge mansion for himself).

Secondly, the whole thing is a little spooky when Hinn admits that he frequently visits Kuhlman's gravesite to replenish "the anointing" from her bones.⁴⁷⁹ Finally, a woman attending a Hinn crusade in Oklahoma City was killed because of the man's antics. Ella Peppard died from complications she suffered after someone was "slain" right on top of her.⁴⁸⁰ Is that something the Holy Spirit would do?

What kind of biblical evidence is there for being "slain in the spirit"? The leading theologian of *charismaticism*, Wayne Grudem says:

Some people today say a purifying (or healing) work of the Holy Spirit occurs when they are "slain in the Spirit," an experience in which they suddenly fall to the ground in a semi-conscious state and remain there for minutes or hours. Although the phrase "slaying in the Spirit" is nowhere in Scripture, there are instances when people fell to the ground, or fell into a trance, in the presence of God.⁴⁸¹

In a footnote Dr. Grudem offers 14 passages of Scripture that supposedly depict the modern *emotionalist* phenomenon. First of all, there are no instances in the Bible that even remotely resemble people being "slain" by another person through touch, gesture, command, or throwing objects at them, as occurs in "charismatic" meetings. Two of Dr. Grudem's verses speak only of the "**glory of the Lord**" entering the OT temple and are totally irrelevant to the issue (cf. Exod 40:35; 1 Kgs 8:11). The remaining twelve passages that Dr. Grudem cites all involve people who are receiving direct and divine revelation from God, such as Prophets or Apostles, and never people who were merely worshipping God (cf. Gen. 15:12; 1 Sam. 19:24; Ez. 1:28; 3:23; Dan. 8:17-18, 27; 10:7-17; Acts 9:4; 10:10; Rev. 1:17; 4:10). This is the Christian revelatory *ecstasy* that we discussed in chapter 4.8. In addition, many of Dr. Grudem's examples involve men clearly falling down on their own

⁴⁷⁹ Benny Hinn, "Double Portion Anointing," Part #3, Orlando Christian Center, Orlando, FL, audiotope, aired on Trinity Broadcasting Network, 4-7-91.

⁴⁸⁰ Hanegraaff, 173.

⁴⁸¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 640.

power, not being “slain by the Spirit.”

Dr. Grudem’s last reference (John 18:6) reveals how desperate *emotionalists* are to find biblical support for their pagan practices. Here, soldiers had come to arrest the King and upon announcing who they wanted we read, **“When Jesus said, ‘I am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.”** Inexplicably, Wimber uses this verse to support the *emotionalist* phenomenon of being “slain in the Spirit.”⁴⁸² Such an interpretation hardly deserves a refutation, but because it is the most cited biblical evidence for the “slain in the spirit” phenomena, we will note the following.

Notice the text says of the soldiers that, **“they drew back”** not that Jesus or the Holy Spirit pushed them back. The Greek word here *apēlthan* literally means simply “to go away.” Therefore, it is inexcusable that, as Hanegraaff relates, Wimber “tells his audience, ‘the Greek says they were *propelled* back and were *flung*, in effect to the ground.’”⁴⁸³ That is both inaccurate and irresponsible exegesis.

Wimber adds that the Lord causing Adam to sleep is another biblical affirmation of the “slain in the spirit” phenomenon.⁴⁸⁴ Unfortunately, it is just this kind of proof-texting that has given the *emotionalist* movement a questionable reputation for accurately interpreting and applying Scripture.

Despite Wimber’s efforts to find biblical support for the “slain in the spirit” phenomenon, even the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* admits:

An entire battalion of Scripture proof texts is enlisted to support the legitimacy of the phenomenon [of being “slain in the Spirit”], although Scripture plainly offers no support for the phenomenon as something to be expected in the normal Christian life.⁴⁸⁵

Accordingly, Dr. Edgar writes:

Acts chapter 2, which describes the great initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, doesn’t have the slightest hint of anyone being “slain in the spirit.” The baptism of fire (Matt 3:11, Luke 3:16) was a visible tongue of fire above the head

⁴⁸² Hanegraaff, 191-93.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. 191.

⁴⁸⁴ John Wimber, “Spiritual Phenomena: Slain in the Spirit—Part 2 audiotape.” Quoted from Hanegraaff, 191.

⁴⁸⁵ *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Burgess, Stanley M., Gary B. McGee, and Patrick H. Alexander eds. (Zondervan, 1988), 790.

(Acts 2:3) and *not* an incapacitating “electrocution.” Slaying in the Spirit is simply unbiblical, and should be considered a counterfeit.⁴⁸⁶

One of the foremost promoters of the “slain in the spirit” phenomenon is the *emotionalist* Catholic priest Francis MacNutt. His book, *Overcome by the Spirit*, is a rather detailed study of it and he documents its occurrence around the globe. Like Benny Hinn, he traces his initiation to being “slain in the spirit” to the supposed faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman. It is surprising that he is such a strong advocate of the practice considering some of his own experiences and the result of some of his research. He relates his first experience with the phenomenon:

As Kathryn [Kuhlman] approached me I stood determined not to fight it, whatever it was. A “catcher” stood behind me while several thousand people watched. I felt the gentle pressure of Kathryn’s hand on my forehead. I had to make a decision; if I didn’t take a step backward, her hand’s pressure would push me off-balance and I would fall. But, I thought to myself, *I don’t want to resist in any way if this is from God.* So I didn’t step back and sure enough I fell [amazing!]. . . .

Then I scrambled to my feet, not sure that I hadn’t been pushed. Again Kathryn prayed; again I felt pressure on my forehead that I did not resist. Once more I fell. It was confusing. Others, I knew, had experienced something remarkable [really? How did he know?]. But if I had only my own experience to go on, I would have judged that nothing in particular had happened—that I might simply have been pushed off-balance. I didn’t know what to make of it.⁴⁸⁷

If he didn’t “know what to make of it” then how could he be so sure it was an experience of the Holy Spirit? It seems obvious that MacNutt *wanted* something to happen and this no doubt had something to do with what *did* happen. Both an ardent desire to “feel” some supernatural experience, and a heightened expectation that it will happen would seem to make one fairly susceptible to such an experience and it may not be supernatural at all, but simply psychological.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* (Kregel, 1996), Page number unavailable

⁴⁸⁷ Francis MacNutt, *Overcome by the Spirit* (Chosen, 1990), 19-20. (underlining added for emphasis, italics in original).

⁴⁸⁸ For further discussion of the power of “suggestion” see chapter 11.9

MacNutt freely admits in his book that in his research he has "seen people pushed over," slain by the "power of suggestion," and "knocked down by evil spirits." He points out that the phenomenon is similar to "manifestations of voodoo and other magic rites" and is "found today among different sects in the Orient as well as among primitive tribes of Africa and Latin America."⁴⁸⁹ Accordingly, there are several legitimate explanations for the phenomenon that have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit.

When we witness a phenomenon that has no biblical justification or purpose and it is duplicated in obviously demonic environments, demonic influences are a reasonable candidate for explaining the phenomenon. Remember it Christian and remember it well: *not everything supernatural is holy*. And certainly not everything that occurs in a supposedly "Christian" meeting (cf. Matt 7:21-23)

Accordingly, demonic influence may be the best explanation for the "slain in the spirit" phenomenon in the ministry of Joseph Smith (1805-1844) in the early days of Mormonism. A Mormon biographer of Smith describes a meeting very early in Mormonism where Smith:

called upon one of the brethren to speak, who arose, and made the attempt, but was immediately seized with a kind of spasm, which drew his face, arms, and fingers in a most astonishing manner. Hyrum [Joseph Smith's brother] by Joseph's request laid hands of the man, whereupon he sunk back in a state of complete exhaustion.⁴⁹⁰

The similarities between what was performed by the founder of one of the biggest demonic cults in history, and what can be observed in an *emotionalist* service are remarkable.

Forms of hypnotism have also been demonstrated to produce the same phenomena. Hanegraaff reports:

Back in the eighteenth century Franz Anton Mesmer, from whose name the word *mesmerize* is derived, caused people to laugh, fall into trance, and jerk spasmodically by simply gesturing in their direction. . . . Even those who questioned his motives [and the source of his powers] admitted that the impact he had on patients was dramatic. Their convulsions were reported as "extraordinary for their number, their duration, and their force." By simply pointing a finger dramatically in the direction of one patient, "she moved

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁴⁹⁰ Alexander Mackie, *The Gift of Tongues: A Study in the Pathological Aspects of Christianity* (Doran, 1921), 219.

convulsively as if in great pain and arched her body from shoulders to feet into a rigid position until he released her. ⁴⁹¹

Two British royal commissions investigating "Mesmerism" in 1784 reported that the convulsions of Mesmer's patients were "marked by violent, involuntary movements of the limbs and the whole body . . . by rapid blinking . . . by piercing cries, tears, . . . and uncontrollable laughter." ⁴⁹² Sound familiar? Mesmer is also accredited with several remarkable healings, all in the name of what he called "animal magnetism."

Likewise, the "father of hypnotism" James Braid (1795-1860) demonstrated that by:

inducing his subjects to fall into a[n] . . . altered state of consciousness, they became extraordinarily responsive to suggestion. . . . The phenomenon can be traced to virtually every culture, every civilization, and every century. As one writer observed, "it is as common in Polynesia today as it was at the fortune-telling shrines of ancient Greece and Rome" [and in *emotionalist* churches today?]. ⁴⁹³

In addition, Hanegraaff's personal description of a performance given by "Tony Angelo—The World's Greatest Stage Hypnotist" reveals that Benny Hinn can do nothing supposedly in the name of Jesus, that Angelo cannot do in the name of entertainment. ⁴⁹⁴

Finally, many are just plain faking being "slain in the Spirit" out of a desire not to be embarrassed or to embarrass the "slayer." Hanegraaff relates:

A classic case in point involves a well-known Charismatic leader who participated in a Benny Hinn television extravaganza. Hinn was "slaying" his subjects "in the Spirit" when suddenly he moved in this man's direction. He stretched forth his hand and shouted, "In the mighty name of Jesus!" Immediately the man fell backward into the hands of a designated "catcher."

Later he confessed that his experience had nothing to do with the power of God. Peer pressure had caused him to fake his fall. Ironically, when he asked a cameraman to edit out

⁴⁹¹ Hanegraaff, 216-17.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid. 219

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 5-8.

the faked fall, the cameraman merely chuckled and told him it was common for people to fake it.

Like Hinn, leaders of the Counterfeit Revival use peer pressure to conform their prospects to predictable patterns. . . . Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival have carefully crafted their services to enhance the likelihood that Christians will cave in to the power of peer pressure. They kick off their meetings with the testimonies of those who allegedly once feared deception but now embrace the exotic experiences of the Counterfeit Revival as a genuine move of God. The "time of testimony" is followed by a "time of teaching" designed to further pressure people. . . . The peer pressure to participate during "the ministry time" is so potent that even otherwise discerning Christians often end up casting caution to the wind.

. . .

Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival seem well aware that people in crowds are prone to believe that the behavior of their peers is a standard that should not be questioned. They further reinforce this proclivity by intimating that to resist these manifestations is tantamount to resisting the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁹⁵

Some Christians have moved a long way from worshipping the Father **"in spirit and in truth"** (John 4:24).

B.4) Other Suspicious Manifestations

We would mention here as well the popular mystical practice of "tarrying." The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* describes the Pentecostal view of this practice as follows:

Since glossolalia [tongues] is the one initial evidence of Spirit baptism, everyone must seek the gift in that sense. It is the key to greater spiritual power in one's life and so must be sought. For this reason "tarrying" meetings developed within Pentecostalism, as groups of people would "tarry" and be taught how to expand their consciousness in order to bypass the intellect and to open themselves to the baptism of the Spirit [and speaking in "tongues"]. ⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 230-32.

⁴⁹⁶ Grant R. Osborne, "Tongues," in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT), Walter Elwell, ed., (Baker, 1984), 1102-3.

Again, there is no biblical support whatsoever for such a practice and while *emotionalists* habitually insist that it is spiritual and God-pleasing to repress our thinking faculties in our relationship with God, Christ and the Apostles never did.

"Jerking" and uncontrollable "shaking" are other common phenomena in *emotionalism*. Again, being reminded that the fruit of the *Holy Spirit* is self-control, we should be immediately suspicious of such behavior, and there is no biblical support for them.

Emotionalist author Jack Deere attempts to alleviate legitimate concerns by saying, "It was not at all unusual for the people of the Lord to tremble in his presence."⁴⁹⁷ Mr. Deere omits the fact that the trembling he alludes to in the Bible was quaking in fear at the holiness of God.⁴⁹⁸ One could wish that our *emotionalist* friends might gain a little fear of our Lord, for the source and affect of their convulsions and jerks is a far cry from the "trembling in the presence of the Lord" experienced by the men in the Bible. As we have noted elsewhere:

Of course, we have instances in Scripture where an encounter with God had physical effects on their body. But it was in the context of a *miraculous communication* from God, and because they had come to a *rational understanding of something*, like their guilt or God's glory. It was never simply because they wanted to *feel* something and call it experiencing God.⁴⁹⁹

Likewise, Mr. Deere is again attempting to validate what is commonly recognized in *emotionalism* as "trance states." No doubt, the Bible describes people as entering God-induced trances, *but it was always and only to rationally receive direct and divine*

⁴⁹⁷ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 91.

⁴⁹⁸ See Exod 20:18; Ps 96:9; Isa 21:2-4; Jer 5:22; 23:9; Acts 7:32-33.

⁴⁹⁹ Excerpt from section 4.8.B.2. For further descriptions and comments of the reactions of people encountering *miraculous communication* from God see section 10.2.C.2.

revelation from God, not to worship God.⁵⁰⁰ And trance states, spasmodic jerking, and uncontrollable convulsions have all been well documented manifestations in blatantly demonic or flesh enhanced environments.

"Holy laughter" has at times been a fad in *emotionalism*. Again, it is always described as "uncontrollable" which argues against it being the work of the *Holy Spirit*, and there is no biblical justification for it. In fact, none is even offered by *emotionalist* leaders. The most common reason given as evidence that the phenomenon is from God, is to point out how good it makes people feel. Indeed, satan would never make us feel good in order to deceive us and enslave us to our sinful nature, would he?!

"Animal noises" is another bizarre occurrence where *emotionalists* claim the *Holy Spirit* is working. John Arnott, leader of the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church admits that the phenomenon is scary to many, but attempts to refute those whom he believes are "shutting down the *Holy Spirit*" by questioning the practice of "acting like lions and oxen and eagles and even warriors." His basic argument was that since "God Himself has no hesitation of comparing Himself to an animal," we shouldn't either.⁵⁰¹ Again, not only is such behavior not found in the Bible, it is found in abundance among heretical sects throughout Church history, such

⁵⁰⁰ For further discussion of the biblical view of "trance states" see discussion of Christian *ecstasy* in section 4.8.B. Dr. Hillstrom adds concerning the relationship between trance states and divine revelation:

In a few biblical cases, contact with spiritual beings [i.e. godly angels] had such a profound impact that it apparently induced an altered state. In one of Daniel's visions (Dan. 10:9) he saw an angel, and the experience was so powerful that he fell into a "deep sleep, [his] face to the ground." Interestingly, the angel did not try to communicate with Daniel when he was in that state. He awakened him and told him to stand up and listen carefully to the message [and think!] so he could record it accurately. (78).

⁵⁰¹ Hanegraaff, 82.

as the Shakers,⁵⁰² and among demon possessed witch doctors today.

C) The Apostle's Condemnation of *Emotionalism*:

1 Cor 14:33, 40

On the issue of distinguishing mindless, merely emotional worship from biblical worship, we should again turn to Jonathan Edwards. Along these lines he wrote:

[Merely emotional] affections really arise from ignorance, rather than instruction, in these instances which have been mentioned; as likewise in some others that might be mentioned. . . . And there are some instances of persons, in whom it seems manifest, that the first ground of their affection is some bodily sensation.

The animal spirits, by some cause, and probably sometimes by the devil, are suddenly and unaccountably put into a very agreeable motion, causing persons to feel pleasantly in their bodies; the animal spirits are put into such a motion as is wont to be connected with the exhilaration of the mind; and the soul, by the laws of the union of soul and body, hence feels pleasure.

The motion of the animal spirits does not first arise from any affection or apprehension of the mind whatsoever; but the very first thing that is felt, is an exhilaration of the animal spirits, and a pleasant external sensation it may be in their breasts. Hence through ignorance the person being surprised, begins to think, surely this is the Holy Ghost coming into him.

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⁵⁰² The *Concise Dictionary Christianity in America* says of the Shakers:

A millenarian communal society . . . The Shakers [named after their convulsive style of worship] originated in England as a loose union of enthusiasts. . . . The group did not fare well until visionary member Ann Lee lead a band of eight Shakers from Manchester to New York in 1774. . . . At its height, there may have been five thousand members. (Daniel Reid, *et al.* [InterVarsity Press, 1995], 312).

Apart from the practice of dancing naked, the Shakers were known for speaking in tongues, having visions, and prophecies, laughing hysterically in worship services, and animal noises. (see Mackie, 82-128).

⁵⁰³ Edwards, *Affections*, III.4.1. Nonetheless, we do not wish to deny the fact that experiencing God can have an effect on our bodies. Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards wrote:

But it is not. Edwards demonstrates throughout his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* that it requires a great deal of discernment to distinguish fleshly and demonic manifestations in a worship service from those empowered by the Holy Spirit. The very kind of discernment that too many leaders in the Church today lack.

Mr. Deere admits that many of the weird and even grotesque manifestations occurring in *emotionalist* meetings understandably makes the normal (and *reasonable, discerning, and truly "Spirit-filled"*) person very uneasy. However, he attempts to allay our apprehension by predictably exhorting us:

We are not to evaluate something by how bizarre or strange it may seem to us [i.e.- don't use or trust your God-given reasoning!]. Strangeness is not a scriptural rule to determine whether an action or ministry is from God.⁵⁰⁴

Admittedly "strangeness" is not the *only* scriptural rule for detecting false instead of true worship, but Mr. Deere is dead wrong to claim that it is not *a* scriptural rule. The Apostle told the Corinthians, in the very context of discerning the nature of spiritual manifestations in a worship service:

God is not a God of confusion (*akatastasia*: "disorder, disturbance, tumult") **but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints . . . everything should be done in a fitting** (*euschemonos*: "decent, attractive") **and orderly (taxis) way.** (1 Cor 14:33, 40)

That such ideas of God's glory as are sometimes given in this world, have a tendency to overbear the body, is evident, because the Scripture gives us an account, that this has sometimes actually been the effect (Hab. 3:16; Ps. 119:120; Dan. 10:8; Rev 1:17) . . .

I would farther observe, that it is plain the Scripture often makes use of bodily effects, to express the strength of holy and spiritual affections; such as trembling, Psal. 119:120. Ezra 9:4. Isa. 66:2, 5. Hab. 3:16. groaning, being sick, Cant. 2:5, and 5:8. crying out, Psal. 84:2 panting, Psal. 38: 10, and 42:1, and 119:131. and fainting, Psal. 84:2, and 119:81. These took place under the preaching of the gospel and because of conviction of sin. (*Affections*, II.1)

Of course, we have instances in Scripture where an encounter with God had physical effects on their body. But it was in the context of a *miraculous communication* from God, and because they had come to a *rational understanding of something*, like their guilt or God's glory. It was never simply because they wanted to *feel* something and call it experiencing God. For further discussion of the effects of *miraculous communication* on humans see section 10.2.C.2.

⁵⁰⁴ Deere, 96.

The Apostle's words could not be clearer, and there is not a more obvious condemnation of some of the popular worship practices today in *emotionalism*. The Greek *akatastasia* ("**confusion**") means, "a state of disorder, disturbance, tumult."⁵⁰⁵ It is included in a list of gross sins when the Apostle Paul later writes the Corinthians:

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be. . . . I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder [akatastasiai]. (2 Cor 12:20)

It is undeniable that although *God* does not promote *akatastasia* in the Christian assembly, some worship leaders do, and even interpret it as a sign of true spirituality. And this is precisely what the Apostle was commanding the Corinthians not to do.

Like the Apostle Paul, we read in James of the impossibility of "**disorder**" (*akatastasia*) being present in a Holy Spirit controlled environment: "**For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder [akatastasia] and every evil practice**" (Jas 3:16). Obviously demonic influences are a prime candidate for such disorderly and unbiblical behavior, but the fleshly "**envy and selfish ambition**" that James warns us of are no doubt a factor too.

An accurate translation of the Apostle's use of *euschemonos* ("**fitting**") is "decently" or even "attractively," and it is therefore wrong for *emotionalists* to question our apprehension towards their practices when they do not seem "decent" or "attractive" to the rest of us. Whereas Mr. Deere suggests that our sense of decency is *not* a good guide of what is from the Holy Spirit, the Apostle says it most definitely is.

Additionally, the Apostle commands that real Christian meetings be *taxis* ("**orderly**"), and it is obvious that many modern worship meetings, particularly in modern *emotionalism*, are not. W. E. Vine noted on this word: "*taxis*: 'an arranging, order.' Is used . . . of due 'order' in contrast to confusion in the gatherings of a local church, 1 Cor. 14:40."⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson, 1996), 122. Similarly, BAGD and other lexicons offer disturbance, commotion, and unruliness alongside disorder.

⁵⁰⁶ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson, 1996), 450.

Accordingly, NT scholar Peter O'Brien comments on the use of this word in Colossians 3:5: "'*taxis* denotes the well-ordered Christian behavior of the community.'" ⁵⁰⁷ Likewise, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* comments here that, "Paul insisted that the freedom of the Spirit is not anarchy." ⁵⁰⁸ Accordingly, all of the pictures in the NT of the Church (human body, army, family) reflect a high degree of order. A fact that certainly brings into question what *is* the source of disorder and anarchy in some of today's worship services.

Along these lines, Erwin Lutzer at Moody Bible Church comments:

The proliferation of talk shows, with their banality and trash, has helped our culture normalize the bizarre. Fringe behavior is extolled as if it is on the same continuum as that which is moral, acceptable, and decent. . . .

[J]ust as talk shows normalize fringe behavior, so many prophets and so-called faith healers have normalized bizarre experiences and doctrines. All kinds of ideas are expressed without rebuke or the slightest hint that they might be false. If God wants to heal a woman by having her head shaken for twenty minutes, who are we to judge? Any spoken revelation is believed to be from God, no matter whether it is contrary to Scripture or just plain silly. ⁵⁰⁹

Robert L. Saucy, Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Talbot points out: "the most Spirit-filled of all human beings, Jesus, showed no evidence of physical manifestations as a result of his being controlled by the Spirit." ⁵¹⁰ Certainly not the kind of manifestations being witnessed in many worship services today. Accordingly, the *emotionalist* Evangelical Free pastor Doug Bannister is wrong to equate Christ's "deeply passionate spirituality" and sorrowful praying as biblical support for *emotionalists* worship practices. ⁵¹¹ Spiritual passion does not equal *emotionalism*, but as Mr. Bannister admits himself, "Scripture teaches that love . . . is the

⁵⁰⁷ Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word, 1982), 99.

⁵⁰⁸ K. H. Bartels, "First," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), I:667.

⁵⁰⁹ Erwin Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge?* (Moody, 2002), 59-60.

⁵¹⁰ *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Wayne Grudem ed., (Zondervan, 1996), 142.

⁵¹¹ Doug Bannister, *The Word and Power Church* (Zondervan, 1999), 130

great passion”⁵¹² and *emotionalists* obviously hold no superiority in that.

The influential Baptist NT scholar James D. G. Dunn tries to put a positive spin on all of this when he writes:

The Charismatic renewal has challenged us to recognize the importance (not exclusive importance, but importance) of the emotional and non-rational in a fully integrated faith and life, to give place to these less structured and less predictable elements in our worship, and to take seriously the third article of the creed- "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Life-giver."⁵¹³

This of course sounds nice, and our *emotionalist* brothers and sisters would heartily agree with it. The problem, however, is that there is not one verse in all of Scripture that would support Dunn’s praise. Dr. Dunn implies that non-*emotionalists* do not take the Holy Spirit seriously enough because they are not emotional enough. Where does God say that being more “emotional and non-rational” is more spiritual, or even a valuable part of Christian spirituality?

Along these lines, as we discuss further elsewhere, it is important to note that while 1 Corinthians 14 is a primary biblical passage used by *emotionalists* to support their worship practices, *the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in the entire chapter*. On the contrary, there are several references to the human spirit, the seat of emotions, which, again, is not synonymous with the fruits of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹⁴

While emotions certainly have many God-given and important purposes, being a criterion for spirituality is not one of them. Would we describe the King or the Apostles as being highly emotional? How about the godliest people throughout Church history? Being Spirit-filled is not synonymous with being emotional. Any spiritual superiority that *emotionalists* might claim in the area of worship merely because of greater emotion is simply self-delusion.

Accordingly, the eminent theologian J. I. Packer would seem to touch on something that is important to remember when comparisons are made regarding Christian spirituality:

⁵¹² Ibid., 129.

⁵¹³ James Dunn, “Ministry and the Ministry: The Charismatic Renewal’s Challenge to Traditional Ecclesiology” in *Charismatic Experiences in History*, Cecil M. Robeck Jr. ed. (Hendrickson, 1985), 81.

⁵¹⁴ For further discussion of the proper interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14 see chapters 12.6.6-11.

An important question to ask at this point is: How far are the distinctives of Charismatic experience confined to professed Charismatics? I suspect that something of an optical illusion takes place here, from the strangeness to them of Charismatics' outward gestures, other Christians infer that Charismatics' inward experiences must be very different from their own. But I doubt whether this is so.⁵¹⁵

For example, Dr. Packer points out that the common Christian experience of being visited in a special way by the Holy Spirit is labeled (erroneously) by Pentecostals as "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Dr. Packer concludes:

I suggest that, in reality, Charismatic and nonCharismatic spiritualities differ more in vocabulary, self-image, groups associated with, and books and journals read, than in the actual ingredients of their communion with the Father and the Son through the Spirit. Charismatic experience is less distinctive than is sometimes made out.⁵¹⁶

The Holy Spirit's signature is a transformed life of love and holiness, not lifeless bodies on the floor, or mindless, emotional worship. Feelings are not the mark of true Christian spirituality, but a biblical faith that results in obedience to God's written commands. This is particularly why the Apostle Paul wrote his detailed description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. He wanted to teach the Corinthians what real manifestations of the Holy Spirit look and feel like.⁵¹⁷ Along these lines, Dr. Bruner writes:

Paul's first positive definition of Christian love [and an authentic manifestation of the Holy Spirit] is *makrothumei* (v. 4), i.e., Christian love is not so much emotional, passionate, or fiery (*thumos*) as it is the "making broad," the stretching out, the extension of "fire" (*makro-thumos*). ["patience" is actually the restraint of emotion"] This "long-suffering" should be compared with the superscription to the twelfth chapter where the emotionalism of heathendom is contrasted with the sober confession of the church (12:2-3).

Paul would not wish for it to appear that superior Christian devotion were necessarily identical with ardent Christian expression -either vertically, toward God (12:2-3), or

⁵¹⁵ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With The Spirit*, (Revell, 1984), 64.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵¹⁷ For further discussion of the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 see chapters 12.6-11.

horizontally, toward men (13:4) . . . he sees Christian love not so much in the expression as in the extension of emotion, the drawing out, taming, literally the "lengthening" (*makro-*) of emotion. . . .

It is interesting to observe, for example, that the spiritual pride or inflated sense of one's own spiritual experience ("puffed up," *phusioun*) which Paul saw as the peculiar affliction of the Corinthian higher-life Christians (cf. 4:6, 18, 19; 8:1) appears in its negative in this passage: "love is . . . not *phusioutai*" (v. 4). Paul's description of love in chapter thirteen, then, is not simply poetry; it is a concrete apostolic application of truth to elements of a church in need of learning what being Christian really and not spectacularly meant.

The final description in chapter thirteen to which we shall refer is in verse 5, which reads, literally, that love "does not seek its own." This definition becomes important for the understanding of the fourteenth chapter, especially the fourth verse. It is sufficient now to observe that Christian love has as the goal of its seeking something other than its own advancement.⁵¹⁸

So do the experiences of *emotionalists* make them more obedient to God's commands? Are they more loving and holy? Not at all, and therefore, we can know for certain that Christian *emotionalism* is not experiencing more of the Holy Spirit, in spite of their claims. The *virtue apologetics* that we have spoken of at length elsewhere, is not only the best test of salvation, but any claim to an experience of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹⁹ If *emotionalism* does not result in more selfless love and moral holiness, then it has no claim to a special experience of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, while *emotionalism* is not known for its superior love and holiness, what is it typically characterized with by the world? Frenzy, feelings, factions, fakes, and moral failures.⁵²⁰ Even the unbelieving world could tell us if *emotionalists* were experiencing more of the Holy Spirit by a noticeable difference in their holiness and love, and yet, neither the world nor the Church thinks these people are any more righteous or patient.

⁵¹⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 1970, 296.

⁵¹⁹ For further discussion of the test of virtue to discern the nature of movements within Christianity see chapter 5.6.

⁵²⁰ Regarding the gross moral failures of *charismaticism* see section 5.6.B; 10.15.A.7; 11.7.B.9; 11.8.E-F.

Quite frankly, for all the jumping, rolling, and hollering in some worship services, there is no sign whatsoever that the participants are more like the King than other Christians. More emotional, yes, but not more godly, and therefore neither is their worship to be considered more spiritual. *Emotionalism* is singing just for the sake of emotion itself, and is no different than what pagans do at a rock concert. And such mindless merely emotional worship never produces sacrificial lovers because it is inherently selfish lust.

D) The Harmful Heritage of *Emotionalism*:

Lying, escapism, manipulation, arrogance, apathy, embarrassment, & idolatry

As with any false teaching in the Church, it always hurts God's people, and the doctrinal errors within *emotionalism* are no exception. We have already noted the inherent lying and faking that occurs in such environments, particularly surrounding the "slain in the spirit" phenomenon. Indeed, mindless *half-hearted* worship makes people liars not lovers. Whether they're faking it, or just feeling it, they are often lying to themselves, God, and others that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit. It is sad and ironic that *emotionalists* habitually claim to be more spiritual when in fact they are not more holy or loving. Therefore, while *emotionalism* is not producing any more lovers, it is producing a multitude of liars.

Along these lines, former member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Vineyard Churches, Tom Stipe, admits that in Vineyard meetings:

Some began to fake the shaking and eye fluttering symptoms they had been told were signs of the Holy Spirit coming upon them. They hoped the ministry team would recognize the sign of God and rush to their sides, lifting their hands and praying, "More, Lord!" Shaking, laughing, weeping, and eye twitching always ensured that the parishioner would attract the immediate attention of the leaders and their peers.⁵²¹

If this is true of some of our *emotionalist* friends, then there would appear to be some great spiritual and emotional needs in their lives. And it should remind all of us to be careful of the ways we perform in order to gain the approval of men. Let us affirm one another with all our heart as infinitely valuable children of the King. And let us also discard an empty, performance-based religion that

⁵²¹ Hanegraaff, xiii

makes our faith no better than the cults. If we are raising our children in such a fake spiritual environment, will they not be tempted to wonder if much more of our Christianity is fake as well? If they have been lied to about this, will they not wonder what else they have been lied to about?

In addition to promoting lying, we believe Christian *emotionalism* has perverted the meaning of loving God. For them, it would seem to be primarily experiencing an emotion, rather than emphasizing its more important attribute of sacrificial obedience.⁵²² To love God is not so much to *feel* Him, but to *serve* Him and God demonstrates His love to us not by making us feel good but by saving us. Biblically speaking, if you want to experience God, seek sacrificial obedience, not an emotional experience.

Unfortunately, as a result of *emotionalism's* redefinition of spirituality as emotional rather than devotional, it lures particularly people who may be going through difficult times. It offers an escape from the hard reality of living by faith and obedience. Accordingly, Doug Bannister suggests that *emotionalism* saved him from an emotionless Christianity when he writes:

My foray into the charismatic world was driven, in part, by a quest for spiritual feelings. My encounter in the cabin when I received the new spiritual language [i.e. tongues] from God

⁵²² Douglas McLeod writes concerning what we consider another aspect of perverting love in our relationship with God:

[Jack] Deere's discussion of "passion" for Jesus sounds a lot like the "eros piety" confronted by Anders Nygren. Eros piety, found in Greek religion, Gnosticism, and the mystery religions expresses "an appetite, a yearning desire for God which seeks Him in order to satisfy the believer's spiritual hunger by the possession and enjoyment of the divine perfections." It is seen in many choruses, which are almost romantic in quality.

The agape love of the NT is not "a longing and striving after something that man lacks and needs but a response of gratitude for something freely and bountifully given." It is a wholehearted surrender to God, whereby the believer becomes God's willing slave, content to be at His disposal, having full trust and confidence in Him. Sensitivity and humility are needed in evaluating spiritual life teaching.

I would point out, however, that the NT does not use the kind of quasi-romantic expressions that Deere uses (i.e., falling in love with Jesus). Nor does it promise the kind of immediacy of contact that he hungers for. I would suggest that we all need to remember that heaven and the kingdom come later (Acts 14:22). Today we live by faith and not by sight (*Emmaus Journal* 10, 146).

was the first time ever I had felt anything in my spiritual life.
And I liked it.⁵²³

Quite honestly, one is moved to pity for a man who claims to have been a born-again Christian for many years, and was even in the ministry, and yet would say he had never, "felt anything in my spiritual life," until he began speaking in gibberish. Either Mr. Bannister is unfortunately exaggerating just to persuade the reader, or he seriously brings into question his own salvation previous to his "encounter," because one thing is for sure: If someone really has the Holy Spirit come and live in them, they will feel something! The King says in John, for example: **"Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this He meant the Spirit, Whom those who believed in Him were later to receive**" (John 7:38-9). The King is certainly describing some feeling! And feelings that all Christians will experience, not just emotional ones.

Thirdly, there is a manipulative characteristic of *emotionalism* that is not biblical. Along these lines, Dr. Packer, who is actually fairly sympathetic to *charismaticism* writes:

There is an [emotional] element in the makeup of each human individual, to be expressed in any genuine appreciation and of another's love, whether it be the love of a spouse or the love of God in Christ . . . [But] only a fine line divides healthy emotion from unhealthy *Emotionalism* [his word] and any appealing to or playing on emotion crosses that line every time.

Though the white-collar Charismatic movement of today is (for cultural rather than theological reasons, it seems) generally calmer than original blue-collar Pentecostalism ever was, its preoccupation with expressing feelings of joy and love makes it vulnerable here. Its warmth and liveliness attract highly emotional and disturbed people to its ranks, and many others find in its ritual *Emotionalism* some relief from strains and pressures in other areas of their lives (marriage, work, finance, and so forth).

But such sharing in group emotion is a self-indulgent escapist "trip" that must debilitate in the long run. Generally the movement seems to teeter on the edge of emotional self-indulgence in a decidedly dangerous way. . . .

"Charismania" . . . is Edward D. O'Connor's word for the habit of mind that measures spiritual health, growth, and maturity by the number and impressiveness of people's gifts

⁵²³ Bannister, 14.

and spiritual power by public emotional manifestations. The habit is bad, for the principle of judgment is false; and where it operates, real growth and maturity are likely to be retarded.

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Likewise, D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), a British preacher who *emotionalists* are increasingly quoting in support of their doctrines and practices, would no doubt also condemn the kind of emotional manipulation that is all too common in their movement. The “altered states of consciousness” that Hanegraaff warns about, can lead to the “power of suggestion” which Lloyd-Jones warned about when he wrote:

The power of suggestion is a very real and definite thing. It is always one of the dangers with a crowd, or a mob—we speak of mob or mass psychology. Hitler would never have come to power but for this. He may not consciously have realized what was happening but he was certainly illustrating this very point—He had a kind of hypnotic power; clearly he could make suggestions, and by repetition he could get people to accept them.

The people addressed were not conscious of what was happening [i.e. they weren’t thinking], but it was the power of suggestion. Now this phenomenon can come into the realm of things spiritual and we are but victims in these matters unless we realize this.

Everything that appears to be conversion is not conversion. You will often find people responding to a call forward in a time of excitement or in a highly organized campaign with large numbers. If you ask them afterwards, ‘Why did you go forward?’, they will often say, ‘I don’t know.’ And that is the truth—they do not know. It was the power of suggestion; seeing others going forward, they felt an impulse to go and to do the same thing [without thinking].

Now this can be illustrated, as I say, in many realms. In the political realm it can often be seen in meetings, addressed by someone who is anxious to propagate a doctrine. It is one of the things of which we have to be most wary . . . it is because one realizes these dangers that one should avoid them. Far from using psychological techniques and so on, you should avoid them.

We all know and have read about these things. You dim the lights and perhaps put a cross, one red cross only, above the pulpit light, and tremendous things can be done. We are all

⁵²⁴ Packer, 186, 192, 193.

gullible, all liable to these things. And, again, the history of the church tells us a great deal about this-how men, unscrupulous men sometimes, for very mercenary reasons, have used and employed all these things in order to serve their own unworthy purposes . . .

We are right to be suspicious of anything that tries either by its methods or by suggestion to stop us thinking. I mean by that the employment of certain well-known psychological techniques such as putting out the lights and having a rhythmic repetition of music or of phrases.

You must have seen and read about the kind of thing that happens amongst the more primitive races, how they slowly work themselves up by these means into a condition in which they are no longer thinking and have lost the power of reasoning and understanding. Anything that does that should be suspect. There is nothing approaching it in the New Testament, indeed you find the exact opposite. . . .

The devil, of course, will tempt us, as he has always tempted people throughout the centuries, to be interested merely in phenomena and experiences. We are all in the flesh, and we are all anxious to have certainty and assurance. The danger is that that may be turned inwards in such a way that we are only interested in sensation and experiences, and so forget the profiting; there are undoubtedly people, who go to meetings not that their minds may be enlightened or that they may be profited in their understanding, but because they want a thrill, they want to feel something. . . .

You will know full well of great rallies where some people just go from meeting to meeting waiting for some feeling, some thrill or excitement. They do not grow, they do not profit, nor do they increase in understanding. For they are not interested in those things. All they want is the excitement of the experience.⁵²⁵

As usual, there is a very human side to this debate. In an environment where emotional experiences are promoted as a sign of spirituality, all kinds of illegitimate and eventually harmful motivations can drive some Christians in their pursuit of such experiences. Along these lines, K. Stendahl wrote in his study of early Christian worship: "few human beings can live healthily with high-voltage religious experience over a long period of time."⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Spirit*, 98-9. 75, 131.

⁵²⁶ K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (SCM, 1977), 123.

Accordingly, John MacArthur writes:

I suspect a[n] . . . anxiety reaches right into the ranks of the Charismatics themselves. Could it be that some who attend these fellowships are tempted to exaggerate, dramatize, or even fabricate some miracle of special experience because of their need to keep up with the brethren who appear to be more spiritual?" . . . Most Charismatics believe progress in the Christian life is having something more, something better, some electrifying experience.

An ex-Charismatic in my congregation told me why he had grown frustrated in the Charismatic movement: "You spend the rest of your life trying to find another experience." The Christian life becomes a pilgrimage from experience to experience, and if each one is not more spectacular than its predecessor, many people begin to wonder if something is wrong.⁵²⁷

We share the concern of our *emotionalist* brethren concerning the lack of passion that has characterized much of particularly American Christianity. And it is joyfully conceded that the *emotionalist* movement has encouraged some to grow in authentic "religious affections." But the movement could have influenced many more if it were more biblical and humble in this area. And *emotionalist* leaders are certainly not generally humble.

For example, one of the movement's foremost theologians, J. Rodman Williams, writes unabashedly in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* that the Apostle praises singing without the mind in an incoherent babble in 1 Corinthians 14:15 and that such a practice is to be considered the "apex of worship," as compared with the "more usual [kind of] singing." Dr. Williams goes on to claim that when the Apostle says elsewhere that we are to, "**sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs**," (Col 3:16; cf. Eph 5:19) that the first two kinds of worship ("**psalms, hymns**") refer to the "more usual singing," but that the "spiritual songs" refer "climactically" in a Christian worship service to singing in an incoherent, mindless babble of tongues.⁵²⁸

There is no other response to such self-exalting claims other than it is arrogant and offensive, not to mention a misguided interpretation of Scripture. And what would *emotionalist* say about *all* of the *most* influential Christians in Church history, *none* of whom shared their belief or practices?

⁵²⁷ John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1992), 22, 206.

⁵²⁸ J. Rodman Williams, "Charismatic Movement," in *EDT*, 207.

Even here, Dr. Williams fails to point out that in Ephesians 5:19 the Apostle says, **“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.”** Would Dr. Williams claim then that we are to be speaking to one another in a congregation’s worship service in unintelligible tongues? The Apostle taught that if something cannot be understood it is meaningless and worthless, which would include singing (see 1 Cor 14:9ff). Again, the *emotionalist* view falls short of clear biblical support and is merely another instance of finding proof texts to defend their experiences rather than biblical texts to test and evaluate those experiences.

The arrogance in *emotionalism* is demonstrated by the popular Christian apologist J. P. Moreland who writes to those who follow a more biblical and historical view of worship:

There is too little power in your churches, too little extravagant worship in which your people pour out their hearts to God on Sunday.⁵²⁹

How dare Dr. Moreland claim a superiority in spiritual power among *emotionalist* churches when there is no superiority in love or holiness. How dare he redefine “extravagant worship” in terms of *emotionalism* instead of sacrificial service to God (cf. Rom 12:1-2).

It is both disappointing and ironic that many of those who claim some spiritual superiority in their method of worship, are actually the most vivid examples today of the mindless *half-hearted worship* that Christ and the Apostle condemned. Rather than helping the Church gain a more spiritual understanding of worship, many Christians today have even more disdain for emotional worship than is warranted, and the abuses allowed in *emotionalism* movement are largely to blame.

Along these lines, Edwards wrote:

But now, when the ill consequences of these false affections appear, and it is become very apparent, that some of those emotions which made a glaring show, and were by many greatly admired, were in reality nothing; the devil sees it to be for his interest to go another way to work, and to endeavor to his utmost to propagate and establish a persuasion, that all affections and sensible emotions of the mind, in things of religion, are nothing at all to be regarded, but are rather to be avoided, and carefully guarded against, as things of a pernicious tendency. This he knows is the way to bring all

⁵²⁹ J. P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle* (Zondervan, 2007), 180.

religion to a mere lifeless formality, and effectually shut out the power of godliness, and everything which is spiritual.⁵³⁰

Edwards points to a legitimate fear that actually occurred in his day. The revival he led was swept up in *emotionalism* and within a few years people were simply burned out on the fake spiritualism that resulted and the revival died, leaving a great deal of apathy.

Likewise, Dr. Needham writes:

Edwards had to fight on two fronts. On the one hand, he had to argue against those who dismissed the entire revival as mindless hysteria. On the other hand, he had to argue against those who seemed to think everything that happened in the revival was 'of God', no matter how strange, wild or unbalanced it was. Do these two opposite reactions sound familiar? . . .

We may not be living in the midst of a revival, but these questions, and the answers Edwards gives to them, are profoundly relevant to us today. Feelings and experiences have perhaps never been emphasized so strongly and sought so eagerly as they are among Christians in our generation. The results have too often been unbalanced, undiscerning and spiritually harmful. Reacting against this, others have retreated into a hard, cold, dry orthodoxy, looking with deep suspicion on anything 'emotional'.⁵³¹

Because modern *emotionalism* has lacked the will, courage, and biblical discernment to keep emotions in their place, their abuses have tarnished, rather than promoted, expressive worship. In fact, mindless worship in *emotionalism* has simply embarrassed the Church. There is a reason that the mainstream media loves to catch *emotionalists* on camera at their weirdest. We are reminded again of the description above of an *emotionalist* meeting:

A member of John Wimber's family [founder of the Vineyard Movement] stood at the altar, testifying that the power of God was upon her as she jerked spasmodically in what Wimber refers to as a chicken walk. It wasn't long before others had joined her in jerking. . . . Some were jumping up and down furiously, chopping their hands frantically through the air. Others were violently throwing their heads backward and forward and bending wildly at the waist.

⁵³⁰ Edwards, *Affections*, I.3.1.

⁵³¹ N. R. Needham, *The Experience That Counts!* (Grace Publications Trust, 1997), 9-10.

One woman looked as though an invisible hand had grabbed her and was shaking her like she was little more than a rag doll. All the while, sardonic laughter punctuated by animal noises rose eerily from the bodies writhing on the ground. Later, when I visited the Airport Vineyard in Toronto, the sights and sounds I experienced were even more shocking.⁵³²

Imagine watching a news clip of that on TV with an unbelieving friend and trying to explain that this is a special way in which the Holy Spirit may affect you when He comes into your life. It would be rather humiliating.

Accordingly, the Apostle Paul warned the *emotionalists* in Corinth if an unbeliever walked into a "Christian" assembly while **"everyone speaks in tongues . . . will they not say that you are out of your mind?"** (1 Cor 14:23). No doubt a number of modern examples of this very thing have occurred. Along these lines, Frederick Dale Bruner shares the following experience:

I once attended a large breakfast sponsored by the Pentecostal group, Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International. A local high school had been invited to participate in the program. After the choir's number the festivities became increasingly Pentecostal. Soon, to our embarrassment the high school students, who were seated conspicuously near the head table, began gradually to leave the large hall until almost all of them had gone.

Discourteous as this departure unquestionably was, I felt that it provided, nevertheless, a symbol of a disturbing fact. Many are turned away from the Christian faith by the irrational Pentecostal manifestation of it. I affirm this in the face of Pentecostalism's advertisement of its missionary successes. Unfortunately, those who are driven out cannot always, like those who come in, be counted The evangelistic-missionary concern of the Apostle should be taken into consideration in any final decision by a church on the public use of spiritual gifts.⁵³³

Accordingly, Hanegraaff points out that in *emotionalist* worship:

Sardonic laughter, spasmodic jerks, signs and wonders, super Apostles and prophets, and people being "slain in the spirit" are pointed to as empirical evidence of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The form and function of the

⁵³² Hanegraaff, 225-6.

⁵³³ Bruner, 299-300

church is being so radically rearranged that even the secular world has taken note.

Time magazine, in an article titled "Laughing for the Lord," pointed out that Anglican parishes across England today bear a greater resemblance to "rock concerts" and "rugby matches" than to Christian worship. The article says that sanctuaries throughout the world are littered with bodies as "supplicants sob, shake, roar like lions and strangest of all, laugh uncontrollably."

Newsweek, in an article titled "The Giggles Are for God," reported that people in churches worldwide were jerking spasmodically, dancing ecstatically, and acting like animals. . .

ABC News aired a prime-time television special titled "In the Name of God." Host Peter Jennings asked his audience . . . if the changes [and phenomena] he had documented may be "compromising the essence of Christianity."⁵³⁴

Unfortunately it would seem so, and we have to agree with even an unbeliever's rebuke of the obvious lack of real spirituality in modern day mindless worship.

Finally, based on the evidence above, we fear that Christian *emotionalism* has violated the command of the Lord many years ago when He told His people: "**Do not worship the LORD your God in the way these pagan peoples worship their gods**" (Deut 12:4 NLT). If so, this offense is the most serious of all those we have suggested here.

What Church leaders have allowed in American Christianity in general, and *emotionalism* especially, reminds us of the failed courage, conviction, and integrity of another spiritual leader many years ago. When the Israelites lost patience in waiting for Moses to bring them the word of God, they enticed Aaron to introduce another religion which involved worshipping something they could make and see (a golden calf), and would accordingly appeal to their physical senses (cf. Exod 32:1).

Did this new religion that Aaron allowed promote spiritual virtue? No. Rather these ancient *emotionalists*, "**indulged themselves in pagan revelry**"⁵³⁵ [*tsachaq*]" (Exod 32:6 NLT), and

⁵³⁴ Hanegraaff, 10.

⁵³⁵ In the context of the Apostle Paul's own reference to this incident in 1 Corinthians, NT scholar Anthony Thiselton writes:

Paul cites the LXX wording, the LXX [*paizein*] was presumably chosen as the nearest equivalent to the Hebrew which it translated [*tsachaq*]. BDB renders the Qal form to laugh, but the form used in

exhibited loud **"shouting"** and **"singing," "dancing," "running wild,"** and being **"out of control"** and a **"laughingstock"** all as a **"festival to the Lord"** (cf. 32:5-6, 18-20, 25. NLT) as Aaron erroneously called it, because **"Aaron saw how excited the people were about"** (v. 5 NLT) this new religion.

OT scholars point out that the kind of worship being described here reflects the idolatrous worship practices of the Egyptians whom the Israelites had lived with for centuries.⁵³⁶ The true nature of this worship is revealed when God said He was angry, wanted to destroy the people (v. 10), commanded Moses and the Levites to slaughter 3000 of them (v. 28), and **"struck the people with a plague because of what they did"** (v. 35). These people were certainly worshipping **"in spirit"** just not **"in truth,"** (John 4:23) as God demands.

When Moses arrives, he asks Aaron an important question: **"What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"** (v. 21). Answer: appealed to his ego and need to be popular. And in the process, this high priest with the God-given responsibility to shepherd and protect the people, and set an example of the sacrificial obedience, and spiritual self-control required in any claim to real spirituality, led them on the destructive path of pagan *emotionalism*. We fear that the same cowardice and egotism has infected far too many churches today that have been swayed by feelings-oriented crowds rather than faith-oriented Christianity.

the context of Exod 32:6 is to make sport, allowing for a probably triple meaning: (i) "letting their hair down" in the absence of Moses with nuances of (ii) idolatrous dancing before the golden calf, and (iii) sexual license approaching orgy - all in contrast to the theological and ethical restraint and sober self-control (cf. 9:24-27) demanded of God's covenant people.

This demands a more forceful translation than to play (NRSV) and a more sinister nuance than to revel (REB). [Pentecostal commentator Gordon] Fee criticizes NIV's to indulge in pagan revelry as reading pagan into the text, but his criticism overlooks Bertram's exegesis of Exodus 32 in "cultic dancing" or overly harsh in the light of the Hebrew and the context of Exod 32:1-6, where "pagan-like" is implicit. The combination "lifting the lid" of control or restraint, fired by drink, a party mood, and the absence of the patriarchal figure of Moses led to more than mere play. (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGNT [Eerdmans, 2000], 734-5)

⁵³⁶ See for example, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, who specifically relate it to the manner "in which the Egyptians celebrated their feast of Apis (*Herod.* 2, 60, and 3, 27)." (*Commentary on the Old Testament* Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.com, 2000]).

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, please rid Your Church of the spiritual plague of emotionalism. We pray that you would humble and discipline those who promote it, and rescue those who practice it, restoring them all to whole-hearted spirituality and authentic Christianity.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How do we define *emotionalism*?
- 2) Why do we suggest that *emotionalism* is synonymous with *charismaticism*?
- 3) What are some worship practices in *emotionalism*? Why do we claim they are unbiblical? Do you agree or disagree?
- 4) What are altered states of consciousness? How are they achieved in religious contexts? Why are they harmful?
- 5) What verse of Scripture do we claim clearly condemns *emotionalist* worship practices? Do you agree or disagree?
- 6) What practical evidence do we suggest proves that those in *emotionalism* are not experiencing the Holy Spirit any more than other Christians?
- 7) What are the harmful results of *emotionalism*? Why does this perspective encourage these results?
- 8) We claim that if you want to experience God, seek sacrificial obedience, not an emotional experience. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

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Part III
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Chapter 4.12

devil-darkened Reason

Explaining the Insanity of Humanity

Primary Points

- Many errors in both philosophy and theology are caused by either over-valuing human reason *before* salvation, or under-valuing reason *after* salvation.
- There is a considerable difference between the regenerate and unregenerate in regards to the ability to mentally process spiritual truth.
- Born again Christians are an entirely different species of human being than their unregenerated counterparts. Thus, the Apostle Paul refers to Christians as the "**enlightened**" ones (Eph 1:18).
- The fundamental spiritual reason for the dysfunctionality of unregenerated reason is demonic influences, thus our term, *devil-darkened reason*.
- This demonic, God-hating influence on the mind of unbelievers comes through the sinful nature that possesses them.
- "**Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom**" (3:17) to properly receive divine revelation. Thus our term, *Spirit-liberated reason*.
- The reason that humanity "**cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ**" is because, "**The god of this age [satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers**" (2 Cor 4:4). Accordingly, God had to *make*, "**His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ**" (v. 6). "**He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit**" (Tit 3:5) because only "**where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is [supernatural/psychological] freedom**" (2 Cor 3:17) in the reasoning faculty of a human "**to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins**" (Acts 26:17-18).

A) ***Spirit-liberated vs. devil-darkened Reason:*** *Eph 4:17-24*

Many in the Church have consistently condemned the value and use of human reasoning.⁵³⁷ However, as one listens to their concerns, it often becomes obvious that they are ignoring the immense difference between the mind and conscience of a born again Christian, and that of an unregenerate spiritually dead person.

Elsewhere in *Knowing Our God* we describe these differences at length in regards to the ability to properly receive and process spiritual truth.⁵³⁸ Accordingly, we wrote:

As a matter of fact, from God's perspective, there are only two kinds of people in the world: those spiritually "**dead in transgressions**" and those He has "**made [spiritually] alive**" (Eph 2:5). The King put it this way: there are "**the people of this world**" and then there are "**the people of the light**" (Luke 16:8). He never even hinted at any other category of humanity. . . .

The Apostle John likewise described this universal human dichotomy when he wrote: "**He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life**" (1 John 5:12), the former alone being "**children of God**" and all of the latter being "**children of the devil**" (1 John 3:10). There is no third kind of person, and no doubt the spiritually alive children of God have some significant advantages over the spiritually dead children of the devil when it comes to ascertaining spiritual truth. . . .

To put it bluntly, born again Christians are an entirely different species of human being than their unregenerated counterparts. So much so that God says our old self died (cf. Rom 6:1-11). Accordingly, all regenerated Christians can say: "**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me**" (Gal 2:20). A human being with Christ living in them is a radically different kind of human being, resulting in differences far greater than merely skin color, gender, or culture. This is because the minds, hearts, natures, desires, perspective, and abilities of spiritually

⁵³⁷ For examples of Christians unnecessarily devaluing the place of reason in the Christian life see section 2.4.A.2.

⁵³⁸ For further discussion of how the Scriptures describe the difference between regenerate and unregenerated humans see especially section 2.2.B.

regenerated humans have all been radically re-created. Thus, the Apostle Paul refers to Christians as the “**enlightened**” ones (Eph 1:18).⁵³⁹

It is clear that there is a fundamental difference in the ability of those *with* the Spirit to understand the “**things of the Spirit**” because, as the Apostle says, “**The man without the Spirit does not [and cannot] accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned**” (1 Cor 2:13-14).

Nonetheless, theologians commonly ignore this difference in human reasoning between the regenerate and unregenerate.⁵⁴⁰ Accordingly, the Reformed theologian Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) expressed the importance of this distinction when he wrote:

There have been, generally speaking, two tendencies among orthodox theologians on this question of the function of reason in theology. In the first place, there have been those who have been so afraid of “reason” that they have assigned to it no place at all. On the other hand, there have been those who have been very anxious to prove that theology has a perfect right to consider itself a science. Both tendencies failed to distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian use of reason. . . . It will not do to ignore the difference between Christians and nonChristians and speak of reason in general.

⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹ Quoted from section 2.2.B. Unfortunately, the NIV and many modern translations do not reflect the perfect tense of the Greek here and give the inaccurate impression that Paul is praying that the Ephesians would yet be enlightened. On the contrary, the literal Greek reads, “**the eyes of your heart having been enlightened**” which reflects the fact that Paul sees the Ephesians as already possessing this enlightenment. For further discussion see section 14.18.A.4.

⁵⁴⁰ The failure to distinguish between the epistemological abilities of regenerated believers over unregenerated humans seems to be a major error in *neoorthodox theology* which claims an ongoing revealing ministry of the Spirit is needed. On the contrary, regeneration “fixes” our reasoning faculties such that we are now able to correctly process divine revelation.

⁵⁴¹ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, (Unpublished syllabus, 1955), 21, 25. While Van Til pointed out Lewis Sperry Chafer’s systematic theology as being particularly guilty of this (p. 16), many examples in historical and modern theology and epistemology could be pointed out.

Many errors in both Christian philosophy and theology are caused by either over-valuing human reason *before* salvation, or under-valuing reason *after* salvation. Examples of the former include *rationalism*,⁵⁴² *natural theology*,⁵⁴³ and *classic apologetics*⁵⁴⁴ and *fairism* (i.e. Arminianism) which generally claim that the reason of unbelievers is sufficient for obtaining spiritual truths without spiritual regeneration or divine revelation. On the other hand, examples of under-valuing reason after regeneration include *fideism*⁵⁴⁵ and *neoorthodoxy*⁵⁴⁶ which deny the place of reason in faith, *charismaticism*, which consistently downplays the place of

⁵⁴² *Rationalism* is the view that the only information available to us is through human research (i.e. there is no divine revelation), and that only what we can understand is true. It is essentially the illegitimate exaltation of *devil-darkened reason*. For further discussion see chapter 2.9.

⁵⁴³ *Natural theology* is the view that people can come to a real belief in God simply from observing Creation. At its extreme, it claims that people can gain a saving relationship with God through this means as well. For further discussion see section 2.12.B.

⁵⁴⁴ For a definition and critique of *classic apologetics* see section 5.10.A.1.

⁵⁴⁵ Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli describe *fideism* as follows:

Belief in God, at least from this perspective, would not be rational; one must believe on faith alone. This position, fideism, maintains that one should believe in God in the absence of, or contrary to reason. (*Handbook of Christian Apologetics* [Intervarsity, 1994], 35).

For further discussion see chapters 2.10 and 6.12.

⁵⁴⁶ *Neo-orthodoxy* is a relatively complex theological perspective best known as the position Karl Barth (1886-1968) promoted. R. V. Schnucker relates in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT):

Neo-orthodoxy . . . does not have the popularity it enjoyed earlier in the [20th] century. Certain inherent elements have precluded its continuing influence. For example . . . its view of Scripture, "The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be his Word" (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 123), has been seen as a rejection of the infallible *sola Scriptura* of conservative Protestantism. . . .

Perhaps the greatest weakness within the movement has been its pessimism concerning the reliability and validity of human [even Christian] reason. [Its critics claim] If human reason cannot be trusted, then it follows that since neo-orthodoxy relied on human reason, it could not be trusted. ("Neo-orthodoxy," [Baker, 1994], 756)

Which is the same inevitable result of any philosophy or theology that degrades the God-given place of especially *Spirit-liberated reason*.

reason in Christian spirituality or edification,⁵⁴⁷ and *mega mysticism*⁵⁴⁸ which disparages the use of reason in determining God's will.

Likewise, denying the effect of sin on our moral reasoning can result in another faulty world-view called *moral relativism*. Such a world-view operates on the assumption that whatever seems right to reason (*pragmatism*) and feels right in our feelings is morally right for our life. *Moral relativism* does not take into account that we may desire things that do indeed seem pragmatic and promise good feelings, but are actually evil. It was those with "hearts" not controlled by the Spirit that Solomon wrote: **"There is a way that seems right to a man [rationally, emotionally, and morally], but in the end it leads to death"** (Prov 14:12).⁵⁴⁹

Accordingly, Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch remarks regarding the error we are describing:

Theology is constantly deceived into supposing that the only two options are fideism and rationalism. Certainly these are obvious viable possibilities, but they are not the only ones. We need today a reaffirmation of a theological method that goes beyond and overcomes this polarity.⁵⁵⁰

We believe that the most vital part of the answer to the problem Dr. Bloesch points to is understanding and recognizing the significant differences between the *devil-darkened reasoning* of the unregenerate and the *Spirit-liberated reason* of born again Christians.

The Apostle clearly describes the difference when he writes to the Ephesians:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the [unregenerated] Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking [*nous*: mind]. They are darkened in their understanding [*dianoia*] and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance [and dysfunctional reasoning] **that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts [*kardia*]. Having lost all**

⁵⁴⁷ For further discussion of *charismaticism's* devaluing of reason in spirituality, worship, and prayer see chapters 4.8-11.

⁵⁴⁸ *Mega mysticism* is the belief that God regularly communicates to us regarding extrabiblical matters (e.g. what job to choose) through more direct and miraculous means of extrabiblical divine revelation such as inspired intuitions, miraculous "signs," and the spiritual gifts of "knowledge" and "prophesies." For further discussion see Book 14.

⁵⁴⁹ For further discussion of *moral relativism* see section 5.15.A.

⁵⁵⁰ Donald Bloesch, *A Theology of Word & Spirit* (Intervarsity, 1992), 57.

sensitivity [*apalgeō* - “cease to feel pain” of moral reasoning of conscience], **they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.** (Eph 4:17-19)

Remembering that there is a good deal of overlap between biblical terms such as “heart,” “mind,” “conscience,” and even “thinking,” and that all of these functions can be referred to as reasoning, we can notice that in the first part of this passage, the Apostle describes what we would call *devil-darkened reasoning*. Those who have not been born again by the Spirit are described in terms of the **“futility of their thinking,” “darkened in their understanding,”** and possessing spiritual **“ignorance”** and a lack of moral **“sensitivity”** because of, **“the hardening of their hearts.”** This is a graphic description of dysfunctional moral and logical reasoning.

Elsewhere, the Apostle describes others with *devil-darkened reason* as those possessing an **“unrepentant heart”** (Rom 2:5), **“men of corrupt mind”** (1 Tim 6:5), **“men [who] oppose the truth--men of depraved minds”** (2 Tim 3:8), and those **“who are corrupted and do not believe [for whom] both their minds [nous] and consciences [syneidesis] are corrupted”** (Tit 1:15). While most of the examples of *devil-darkened reason* in Scripture concern specifically moral reasoning, this last instance would seem to include the depravity of both moral reasoning (**“consciences”**) and logical reasoning (**“minds”**).

Along these lines, John Calvin (1509-1564) described the repression of *devil-darkened reason* in his memorable depiction of unregenerated philosophers:

The greatest [unregenerated] geniuses are blinder than moles! . . . They are like a traveler passing through a field at night who in a momentary lightning flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can take even a step — let alone be directed on his way by its help. ⁵⁵¹

Likewise, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) described the workings of *devil-darkened reason* in various ways. In a sermon entitled, “Man's Natural Blindness in the Things of Religion,” Edwards said, “there is an extreme and brutish blindness in things of religion, which naturally possesses the hearts of mankind.” Edwards did not believe that there is any fault to be found with

⁵⁵¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection*, CD-ROM, (Ages Software, 1998), II.1.18.

humanity's "natural faculties" but "there is a principle in his heart, of such a blinding and besotting nature, that it hinders the exercises of his faculties about the things of religion." ⁵⁵² Edwards illustrates the biblical view when he notes:

Though they [the Greeks] were so wise in other things, yet in matters of religion they were very absurd and brutish. . . . The blindness of the mind, or an inclination to delusion in things of religion, is so strong, that it will overcome the greatest learning, and the strongest natural reason. ⁵⁵³

Like Edwards, we are not implying that spiritually dead humans cannot reason morally or logically at all. Unregenerate people have consciences, and can even be found protesting injustice and other evils. However, their moral reasoning is distorted such that they are usually quite content with their own sins while condemning those of others. Admittedly, believers are not immune to this, but hypocrisy and sin are a way of life for unbelievers. ⁵⁵⁴

J. I. Packer succinctly explains why humans are incapable of finding God with merely their own resources:

Now, however, there is a second reason why man's knowledge of God must depend on God's revelatory initiative. *Man is sinful*. His powers of perception in the realm of divine things have been so dulled by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4) and sin (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14), and his mind is so prepossessed by his own fancied 'wisdom', which runs contrary to the true knowledge of God

⁵⁵² John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Berea, 1991), I.108. John Piper adds along these lines:

In this tradition, Jonathan Edwards explained that all people are enslaved, as Saint Paul says, either to sin or to righteousness (Rom. 6:16-23; see also John 8:34; 1 John 3:9); but slavery to sin, inability to love and trust God (see Rom. 8:8), does not excuse the sinner, for this inability is moral, not physical. It is not an inability that prevents a man from believing when he would like to believe; rather, it is a moral corruption of the heart that renders motives to believe ineffectual. The person thus enslaved to sin cannot believe without the miracle of regeneration, but is nevertheless accountable because of the evil of his heart, which disposes him to be unmoved by reasonable motives in the gospel. (*God's Passion for His Glory* [Crossway, 2006], 88.)

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, II.347.

⁵⁵⁴ For further discussion of the distinction between the unregenerate and the fact that Christians can sin, see section 4.15.A.2.

(Rom. 1:21ff.; 1 Cor. 1:21), that it is beyond his natural powers to apprehend God, however presented to him.⁵⁵⁵

Therefore, while evidences for the Christian faith are reasonably adequate to prove it, *devil-darkened reason* is unreasonable. B. B. Warfield explained:

Evidence cannot produce belief, faith, except in a mind open to this evidence, and capable of receiving, weighing, and responding to it. A mathematical demonstration is demonstrative proof of the proposition demonstrated. But even such a demonstration cannot produce conviction in a mind incapable of following the demonstration.⁵⁵⁶

After describing the *devil-darkened reason* of the unregenerate, the Apostle goes on to describe believers:

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude [pneuma: spirit] of your minds [nous]; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. . . . For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

NT scholar Peter O'Brien adds concerning this passage:

The contrast with the preceding section of the paragraph (vv. 17-19) could hardly be sharper. There, the desperate condition of Gentiles outside of Christ is depicted in terms of their being darkened in their understanding [reasoning] so that they are blind to the truth, and their alienation from God is the result of the ignorance within them. . . . Here, the ongoing transformation of the mind [reasoning] leads to just and holy living which reflects the character of God himself (cf. Rom. 12:2).⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ J. I. Packer, "Revelation" in *New Bible Dictionary*, Packer, J. I., et al eds., (Intervarsity, 1996), 1015.

⁵⁵⁶ B. B. Warfield, "On Faith In Its Psychological Aspects," in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Oxford University Press, 1932; Repr. 2000 by Baker), IX: 335-6.

⁵⁵⁷ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1999), 331.

The Apostle's claim that the regenerated Christian is "**made new in the attitude** [*pneuma*: spirit] **of your minds**" (Eph 4:23) is especially significant. While the precise meaning of "**the spirit of [our] mind**" is unclear, the NIV translation of "**attitude**" seems insufficient. As described further in a subsequent chapter, the change is more than merely in perspective, or attitude, but we receive a new *aptitude* to discern spiritual things which the unregenerate do not have (cf. 1 Cor 2:12-15).⁵⁵⁸ While the unregenerate are spiritually dead (Eph 2:1), the "**spirit of [our] mind**" has been "**made new**" by the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle would seem to summarize our epistemological regeneration when he says, "**You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord**" (Eph 5:8). When someone can simply be described as "**darkness**" (not just *in* darkness) and being transformed into being "**light**," we have a graphic description of the "**new creation**" of those who are "**in Christ**" (2 Cor 5:17) which, as we have said, makes them an entirely different species of human being in a moral, spiritual, psychological and epistemological sense.

As far as the *devil-darkened reason* of the unregenerated is concerned, one is reminded of the Proverb which says, "**Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him**" (Prov 27:22). Along these lines, the Reformed scholar Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) spoke eloquently of the sinful nature that reigns in unregenerated humanity when he wrote:

The fathers have correctly observed that this [sinful] disposition imparts itself also to the will. And it can not be otherwise. The will is like a wheel moving the arms of a windmill. In sinless Adam this wheel stood squarely upon its shaft, turning with equal ease to the right and to the left—i.e., it moved freely toward God as toward Satan. But in the sinner this wheel is partly moved from the shaft so that it can turn only to the left. When he wants to sin, he can do so. In this direction the shaft is clear; he has the power to sin. But the wheel can not turn the other way; a little perhaps, with much difficulty and much squeaking, but never sufficiently to grind corn. The working of his will can never produce any saving good. He cannot make the wheel of his life run with the energy of the will toward God.

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⁵⁵⁸ For further discussion of the epistemological changes that occur upon regeneration see chapter 4.16.

⁵⁵⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri De Vries, (Eerdmans, 1946), 403-4.

Subsequently, a “hardening of the heart” is normally a temporary condition for the Christian, not an automatically permanent one as it is in the unregenerate.⁵⁶⁰ Accordingly Dr. Kuyper wrote:

Such is the temporal hardening of the called of God: a winter followed by spring, until the dawn of the eternal morning in the realms of the everlasting light. But the permanent, the eternal hardening [of the non-Christian] is not so. This causes us to think of the world of eternal snow and ice in the polar regions, where it freezes never to thaw, and where nature is covered with somber cerements [a shroud for the dead], to be uncovered only when the Lord shall come upon the clouds, and the whole world shall melt with fervent heat.⁵⁶¹

B) The Reason for the Difference is the Sinful Nature:

B.1) The Spiritual Cause of *devil-darkened Reason*

Above, the Apostle Paul described the cause of the impaired reasoning of the unregenerate in terms of being “**darkened in their understanding [*dianoia*] and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts**” (Eph 4:18). Why then do they harden their heart toward God and spiritual truth? Because the only possess a sinful, God-hating nature. Accordingly, earlier in the letter the Apostle described:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. (Eph 2:1-3)

⁵⁶⁰ For further discussion of the moral/spiritual state of the unregenerate see chapters 4.13-14.

⁵⁶¹ Kuyper, 597.

What is the fundamental reason that people are spiritually **"dead,"** following **"the ways of this world,"** and **"gratifying the cravings of [their] sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts"?** Because **"the [demonic] spirit" "of the ruler of the kingdom of the air" "is now at work in those who are disobedient."** The Apostle's description of satan's **"spirit"** being **"at work in [en] those who are disobedient"** suggests that in a sense all spiritually dead humans are demon possessed.

We believe that just as the New Nature in a Christian is synonymous with the Holy Spirit indwelling us, so the sinful nature in the unregenerate is synonymous with a demonic spirit indwelling people. It need not be an actual demon personality indwelling an unbeliever, which would manifest itself more in the sense of demonic possession in which even a person's personality and voice is controlled.

Rather, the sinful nature is a demonic spirit in the sense that it controls an unbeliever's **"desires and thoughts"** (Eph 2:2), so much so that they are **"slaves to sin"** (Rom 6:17) and, **"live according to the sinful nature [and] have their minds set on what that nature desires,"** resulting in a **"sinful mind [that] is hostile to God . . . does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"** because all spiritually dead people are, **"those controlled by the sinful nature"** (Rom 8:5, 7-8).⁵⁶²

In fact, it would appear that the Apostle makes this connection between the working of a demonic spirit in someone and the possession of the sinful nature when he writes of **"the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient"** and then immediately describes them as, **"gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."** (Eph 2:2-3). Paul did not intend to convey that there are two distinct influences on the unregenerate, but one, which can be described as the **"spirit"** of satan or the **"sinful nature."**⁵⁶³

Before regeneration it was not merely a free *human* spirit at work in us, and certainly not the Holy Spirit, but the **"spirit"** of the *devil*. NT scholar F. F. Bruce (1910–1990) comments that this

⁵⁶² For arguments that "those controlled by the sinful nature" (Rom 8:8) refer only to unbelievers and that Paul is contrasting believers and unbelievers in this passage, see section 4.14.B.3.

⁵⁶³ We believe our view that "the spirit" of satan that Paul says is at work in unbelievers is the sinful nature is strengthened by Harold Hoehner's conclusion that "the spirit" here actually "refers to [the] immaterial or inward part of a person [and] Paul is saying that the devil rules over the inward person." (*Ephesians* [Baker, 2002], 315. See entire discussion pp. 313-15).

Greek verb (*energeō*) to describe how satan's "**spirit**" works in unbelievers is the same word used in Ephesians 3:20 to refer to "**His power that is at work within us**" believers.⁵⁶⁴ In other words, the influence and power that the Holy Spirit exercises in the believer is the same kind of influence and power that the devil's "**spirit**" exercises in the unbeliever. In addition, however, while the Christian has a choice whether or not to be influenced by the Holy Spirit, the unregenerate do not, because the devil's "**spirit**" is the only "spirit" the unbeliever possesses.

Finally, we can bring the demonic influences of satan full circle by noting in the passage that unbelievers are described as having, "**followed the ways of this world**" (Eph 2:2). Obviously "**this world**" is demonically programmed in an anti-God way (cf. 1 John 5:19). This occurs because people controlled only by the demonic sinful nature are primarily the ones leading, teaching, and otherwise influencing the systems and institutions on Earth. Accordingly, the possession of the demonic sinful nature in spiritually dead humans results in a world exhibiting the same "**thoughts and desires,**" all of which results in the fact that satan is "**the ruler of the kingdom of the air**" all around us.

Our claim that demonic influences through the possession of the sinful nature are the fundamental cause of the dysfunctional reason of the unregenerate is well attested in Scripture. In describing his efforts to see people converted by the Gospel, the Apostle tells the Corinthians:

But their minds [unbelieving Jews] were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. . . .

[W]e do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

⁵⁶⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1984), 283.

And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age [satan ⁵⁶⁵] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God.

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, Who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Cor 3:14-17; 4:2-6)

Here the Apostle explains in the most fundamental terms why the **"Gospel is veiled"** and ineffectual. ⁵⁶⁶ At one level it is because the **"minds"** of people are **"made dull"** (3:14) and **"blinded,"** (4:4), such that **"a veil covers their hearts"** (3:15) **"so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel"** (4:4). This is the epistemological/psychological reason that people do not believe the Gospel. There is something fundamentally wrong with their reasoning. A dull and blind mind and a veiled heart simply will not properly process truth.

However, there is a deeper spiritual cause for this faulty reasoning capacity of unregenerate humans. *How* are **"the minds of unbelievers"** **"blinded"**? By **"the god of this age"** who is

⁵⁶⁵ While all modern respectable commentators argue that "the god of this age" refers to satan, Charles Hodge noted:

As the Arians argued from the fact that Satan is called God of this world, that Christ's being called God is no proof of his true divinity; and as the Manicheans quoted the passage in favor of their doctrine of two eternal principles, the one good and the other evil, many of the fathers, including even Chrysostom and Augustine, in violation of its obvious construction, make it to mean, "God hath blinded the minds of this world, i.e. of unbelievers." (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 2003], 2 Cor 4:4)

⁵⁶⁶ Both C. K. Barrett (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC [Hendrickson, 1997], 130) and Colin Kruse (*2 Corinthians*, TNTC [Eerdmans, 1987], 103) suggest that explaining the frequent "failure" of the Gospel to convert people is the Apostle's specific purpose in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

satan (cf. Matt 4:8-9; John 12:31; 1 John 5:19).⁵⁶⁷ Therefore, the fundamental problem is not merely psychological or physical, but spiritual.⁵⁶⁸

In our opinion the way in which the devil **"has blinded the minds of unbelievers"** (2 Cor 4:4) is through their possession of the sinful nature and because they **"live according to the sinful nature [and] have their minds set on what that nature desires,"** they have a **"sinful mind [that] is hostile to God . . . does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"** because all unregenerated people are, **"those controlled by the sinful nature"** (Rom 8:5, 7-8). That kind of nature and will in them is certainly going to affect their reasoning capabilities **"so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ"** (2 Cor 4:4).

The King spoke of this in His commissioning vision to the Apostle Paul when He said, **"I am sending you to them [unbelievers] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me"** (Acts 26:17-18). Psychological/epistemological hindrances are mentioned by Christ (i.e. closed **"eyes,"** living in **"darkness"**), but the fundamental spiritual problem is **"the power of satan"** operating in their minds through the sinful nature. Only when a person is rescued from **"the power of satan"** and that demonic **"power"** is exchanged with the **"power"** of God which is the New Nature, will the person **"receive forgiveness of sins."**

The King describes the supernatural spiritual invasion that must occur before salvation when He said:

⁵⁶⁷ Accordingly, Paul Barnett writes: "Such blindness is not merely the historic incapacity of the people of Israel under the old covenant (3:13-15). The darkness is universal, demonic, and cosmic." (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Eerdmans, 1997], 220)

⁵⁶⁸ *Fairist* Dave Hunt comments on 2 Cor 4:3-4:
[Paul] declares that the 'gospel is hid to them that are lost' because 'the god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not...'—an effort Satan would not need to expend if all men were totally depraved and thus totally unable to believe the gospel." (*What Love Is This?: Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* [Berean Call, 2006], 120).

What Mr. Hunt ignores is that the blinding of the devil is exactly *how* and *why* men are spiritually and mentally depraved and cannot believe the Gospel. The devil's blinding is not a secondary or subsequent act, but the very act that darkens their understanding.

[I]f I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. . . . [H]ow can anyone enter a strong man's house [a human possessed by demonic control] and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man [the demon]? Then he can rob his house" (Matt 12:28-29; cf. Acts 10:38).

It is just this very kind of radical spiritual invasion that must occur by the power of God before a person will be possessed by God instead of satan.

Again, the King recognized that the epistemological problem with His own critics was not merely psychological, but spiritual when He told them:

I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill Me, because you have no room for My word. . . . If God were your Father, you would love Me. . . . Why is My language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. . . . If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe Me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. (John 8:37, 42-44, 47)

How can those who "**have no room for**" the Gospel in their heart, or "**are unable to hear**" the Gospel, be able to believe it? They cannot until God makes the first, critical, decisive, and completely free, gracious, and unconditional act of giving them a new heart and "ears." Unbelievers are children of the devil and are bent on his desires and cannot even hear God without Him regenerating them.

This type of person is graphically described when the King explains in the parable of the sower and the seed: "**When anyone hears the message about the Kingdom and does not** [because they cannot; cf. 1 Cor 2:14] **understand** [mentally receive] **it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart**" (Matt 13:19). Notice that it is not a lack of *response* to the Gospel that gives opportunity for the devil, but the unregenerate do not even *understand* it in order to respond to it. Accordingly, the influence of the devil through the absolute control of the sinful nature must be dealt with before someone *can* "hear," "see," or receive the Gospel in a believing way.

This demonic interference with human reasoning regarding the Gospel has its psychological consequences which result in faulty

reasoning. The King illustrates this in His parable of the sower and the seed, in which the seed is the Gospel:

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (Matt 13:18, 20-23)

It is no wonder that many would initially receive the wonderful promises in the Gospel **"with joy."** But since an unregenerated mind is **"set on what [the sinful] nature desires"** (Rom 8:5) it allows no place for such God-honoring truth to take **"root"** and have the ability to grow in the mind and heart resulting in real faith. Therefore, when reasons such as **"trouble or persecution"** are submitted to such *devil-darkened reason*, it rather quickly concludes that it is not in its owner's best interest to retain such knowledge, and it is discarded. Likewise, because the sinful nature causes the spiritually dead mind to dwell on **"the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth,"** the truth is **"choke[d],"** and not allowed to bear the fruit of *saving faith* either.

Because any real saving regeneration will bear fruit (cf. Matt 3:7-10; 7:15-20; 12:23; 21:43; John 15:2-8), it is only the final **"man"** who truly has *saving faith* because **"He produces a crop."** The difference is, as Luke has it, **"The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart,"** which can only be produced by supernatural regeneration. And because the sinful nature is dethroned, and the reason enlightened, they **"hear the word [and] retain it"** (8:15). Mark says they **"accept it"** (4:20), which again, is something that *devil-darkened reason* cannot truly do. In all, Christ is illustrating the fact that people may initially receive the Gospel, but if they are not regenerated and the sinful nature dethroned, it is ultimately for selfish reasons that they have done so, and eventually it will be for selfish reasons that they will abandon it.

This is why the Apostle John wrote:

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We

know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. (1 John 5:19-20)

And no doubt, He has “**given us understanding**” because we are no longer “**under the control of the evil one.**”

The Apostle refers to this same difference between believers and unbelievers when he writes: “**We have not received the [demonic] spirit of the world but the Spirit Who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us**” (1 Cor 2:12).⁵⁶⁹

Accordingly, Paul tells the Corinthians that even though he and his companions were, “**setting forth the truth [of the Gospel] plainly**” to “**commend [it] to every man's conscience [reason]**”, that the “**Gospel**” was “**veiled**” because “**The god of this age [satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God**” (2 Cor 4:2-4). Again, if a human is not even able to “**see the . . . Gospel**” how can some claim that they are ultimately able and responsible to believe it?

B.2) The Spiritual Solution to *devil-darkened Reason*

⁵⁶⁹ Admittedly, most modern commentators do not interpret “**the spirit of the world**” at 1 Corinthians 2:12 as a demonic spirit. Accordingly, Leon Morris writes:

Some understand the spirit of the world to mean Satan, and this would give an excellent sense. However, Satan does not seem to be referred to in just this way (though 'the prince of this world', Jn. 12:31, comes near to it, and cf. Eph. 2:2). Further, it goes beyond what is required by the context. Throughout this passage Paul is opposing a 'wisdom' that is not satanic but human. It seems that we should accept some such meaning as 'the spirit of human wisdom', 'the temper of this world' (Lenski, 'It is what makes the world "world"'). (1 Corinthians, TNTC [Eerdmans, 1985], 57)

This seems inadequate to us on at least two fronts. One, where has the world ultimately obtained its anti-Christ wisdom? From the ruler and spirit of this world, satan. Secondly, in the text, the Apostle is no doubt speaking of a spirit, not just a worldly attitude or perspective, because he is contrasting it with another spirit, the Holy Spirit. All of this suggests that by “the spirit of the world” he is indeed referring to the devil, which would be completely consistent with much NT theology as demonstrated here. See especially Ephesians 2:2 and discussion at section 4.14.B.3.

B.2.a) The power of spiritual regeneration

Accordingly, it is because the epistemological/psychological *problem* of spiritually dead humanity is supernatural, the solution must be supernatural as well. Dead people, whether physically or spiritually, do not come to life by their own power and any other natural power, but only by a supernatural one. Accordingly, the Apostle says, “**God . . . [supernaturally, miraculously] made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ**” (2 Cor 4:6). This is because “**only in [en, better: “by” ⁵⁷⁰] Christ is it [the demonic veil] taken away,**” and only “**whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.**” (vs. 14, 16). Therefore, it is because the mental deficiencies of the spiritually dead are not natural, that natural means for bringing them to *saving faith*, such as merely reasoned persuasion, are inadequate in themselves. God ultimately holds the key to “fixing” the reason of unbelievers such that they can and will “**see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ.**”

In the most simple and fundamental terms, demonic influences through the sinful nature constantly affect the minds of unbelievers such that they are incapable of receiving and processing spiritual, biblical truth. However, in the process of regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit, God removes the God-hating influence of the sinful nature on the mind in regards to the “**Gospel of the glory of Christ,**” (2 Cor 4:4), enabling us to “**see the light.**”

Accordingly, “**where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom**” (2 Cor 3:17), ⁵⁷¹ freedom in the mind of the spiritually

⁵⁷⁰ For an extended discussion of the use of the Greek preposition *en* see the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, NIDNTT, Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), III:1190-93, and esp. 1192 in regards to 2 Corinthians 3:14.

⁵⁷¹ Admittedly, our interpretation goes against that of most commentators (e. g. Barrett, Kruse, Barclay, Barnett) who claim the Apostle is speaking of a freedom from the law or sin in general as is described in Romans 6-7.

But this does not reflect the immediate context in which the Apostle is speaking epistemologically here of dull minds and veiled hearts. The freedom, therefore, is an epistemological freedom reflecting Romans chapter 8 rather than chapters 6-7. And it is this epistemological freedom that would better account for the Apostle's confidence and boldness in preaching the truth, not a freedom from the Mosaic Law. Accordingly, the context seems to us to suggest the Apostle is referring to a freedom from the blinding nature of the “veil” which is not the OT law, but the demonic powers that hinder proper reasoning about the Gospel.

alive to correctly see the truth in both the Creation and Gospel. Thus our term, *Spirit-liberated reason*. And it is only those who have this supernatural "**freedom**" from "**the Spirit of the Lord**" who will be capable of perceiving, processing, valuing, and preserving spiritual truth.

Along these lines, the Reformed theologian Charles Hodge (1797–1878) wrote:

The blind cannot see; therefore they are ignorant of the beauty of creation, therefore they are destitute of delight in its glories. You cannot heal them by light [i.e. more truth]. The eye must first be [supernaturally] opened. Then comes vision, and then joy and love.⁵⁷²

B.2.b) The power of Gospel revelation

Not only is supernatural regeneration needed for anyone to "**see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ**" (2 Cor 4:4), but the supernatural revelation "**of the Gospel of the glory of Christ**" needs to be communicated. The Gospel "**is not something that man made up**" but "**revelation from Jesus Christ**" (Gal 1:11-12). It is neither "**human wisdom**" (1 Cor 1:17) or the "**wisdom of this world**" (v. 20). The Gospel is a supernatural divine revelation "**from God . . . that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ**" (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Accordingly, "**the Gospel . . . is the [supernatural] power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes**" (Rom 1:16). The reason for this is that supernatural regeneration of salvation only occurs in the hearing of the supernatural revelation of the Gospel (cf. Rom 10:14-16). Because the Gospel is needed for regeneration, the Apostle wrote the Corinthians:

[W]e do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth [of the Gospel] plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. . . . For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor 4, 2, 5).

Elsewhere, the Apostle makes it clear that the communication of supernatural revelation accompanies a supernatural work of the Spirit to release people from *devil-darkened reason*. To Timothy he wrote: "**Those who oppose him [“the Lord’s servant”] he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them**

⁵⁷² Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 2003), Eph 4:18

repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim 2:25-26). We see once again that the fundamental reason for any psychological/epistemological dysfunctionality of unregenerated humanity's reasoning regarding spiritual matters is the supernatural influence of demonic forces. Accordingly, the supernatural forces that break us free are first, God granting us repentance (i.e. a change of mind), and secondly, instruction in the divine revelation of Christianity.

Likewise, in the context of telling the Ephesians that their ministry of changing lives was against supernatural demonic forces (Eph 6:10), he told them to, **"Stand firm then, with the belt of [divine, supernatural] truth buckled around your waist . . . and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace"** (vs. 14-15).

Finally, in the same context of seeing people saved in his **"ministry of reconciliation"** (2 Cor 5:18), the Apostle explains:

Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God [with the supernatural work of the Spirit using the supernatural revelation of Christ]. (2 Cor 10:3-5)

Again, the reason that humanity **"cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ"** is because, **"The god of this age [satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers"** (2 Cor 4:4). Accordingly, God had to *make*, **"His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"** (v. 6). **"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit"** (Tit 3:5) because only **"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is [supernatural/psychological] freedom"** (2 Cor 3:17) in the reasoning faculty of a human **"to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins"** (Acts 26:17-18).

B.2.c) The mystery of going from darkness to light

When Jesus said that our ministry to spiritually dead humanity must **"open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light,**

and from the power of satan to God" (Acts 26:17-18) and the Apostle likewise wrote that, **"God . . . made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"** (2 Cor 4:6), we recognize that there is a great deal of mysterious, spiritual, psychological events being described here.

It must be admitted at this point that spiritual regeneration is a rather mysterious process. Such is to be expected of an act of the Holy Spirit of Whom Christ said: **"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit"** (John 3:8). Perhaps the simplest biblical explanation for this otherwise inexplicable event is given by Luke when he writes:

One of those listening [to the Gospel] was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. (Acts 16:14).

What that means in concrete psychological terms is beyond our understanding. As Wayne Grudem writes:

Exactly what happens in regeneration is mysterious to us. We know that somehow we who were spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1) have been made alive to God and in a very real sense we have been "born again" (John 3:3, 7; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). But we don't understand how this happens or what exactly God does to us to give us this new spiritual life.⁵⁷³

Probably one of the most helpful attempts to explain the psychological aspects of the phenomenon of *saving faith* was penned by B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) in his article, "On Faith In Its Psychological Aspects." In it he writes:

The mode of the divine giving of [saving] faith is represented as involving the creation by the Holy Spirit of a capacity for faith under the evidence submitted. It proceeds by the divine illumination of the understanding, softening of the heart, and quickening of the will, so that the man so affected may freely and must inevitably perceive the force and yield to the compelling power of the evidence of the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ as Saviour submitted to him in the gospel.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 701.

⁵⁷⁴ B. B. Warfield, "On Faith in its Psychological Aspects," in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Oxford University Press, 1932; Repr. 2000 by Baker), Vol. IX:337.

Another explanation of the psychological aspects of *saving faith* is offered by the great twentieth century English preacher D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981):

We can never by means of an intellectual process bring ourselves into the truth and into the kingdom of God. That is true. But it is equally important that we should remember that Christianity is not unreasonable and never irrational-never! You cannot reason yourself into it, but the moment you are in it you find that it is the most reasonable and rational thing of all

How, then, does one become a Christian? It happens like this: the Holy Spirit enlightens the understanding. He does not make us Christians apart from the understanding. What he does is to lift the understanding up to a higher level.

There is nothing wrong with reason except that it is governed by a sinful disposition, and that is why it can never bring us into Christianity or into the kingdom. But the Spirit can lift up the mind and the reason. A man is never saved against his reason and his understanding-never! What happens is that his understanding and his reason are enabled to see the truth which he formerly rejected.⁵⁷⁵

Pastoral Practices

- The biblical fact that the fundamental spiritual reason that the minds of unbelievers are blinded to the Gospel is demonic forces, should drive us to our knees in prayer. We desperately need supernatural divine help in order to combat this supernatural demonic hindrance, and through prayer we obtain it.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, we are again reminded today to thank You for giving us a repenting, God-fearing, God-loving, Spirit-liberated mind and conscience. When we see You divide the sheep from the goats on

⁵⁷⁵ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning the Gifts* (Harold Shaw, 1985), 72.

that Day, we will realize what a horrible thing it is to have a mind that refuses to accept spiritual truth. We look to You to break the mental bondage that our unsaved friends are in, so that they may truly believe in You for salvation. Amen.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why is it important to distinguish between *Spirit-liberated reason* and *devil-darkened reason*?
- 2) What are some Scriptures that reflect a considerable difference between the regenerate and unregenerate in regards to the ability to mentally process spiritual truth.
- 3) What do we suggest is the fundamental spiritual reason for the insanity of humanity regarding spiritual truth? What then is our term for the reason of the unregenerate, and is it appropriate?
- 4) What do we suggest are the two necessary supernatural solutions to the spiritual deadness of unbelievers?
- 5) What is our term for the reason of the regenerate and why?

Recommended Reading

- See chapter 4.16 for further discussion of the nature of spiritual regeneration in salvation.
- See chapters 6.2-5 on supernatural nature of *saving faith*.
- See chapter 2.2. for an introduction to the amazing epistemological differences between regenerated and unregenerated humanity.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.13**The Insanity of Humanity I***The Suppression of Revelation*

Overall Objective

To illustrate how dysfunctional unregenerated reason is even in the face of clear divine revelation.

Table of Topics**A) The Suppression of the Message of Creation:** *Rom 1:18-23*

- A.1) The Message is God's lordship & wrath, not just His existence
- A.2) Why is there no excuse? *The message really is understood*
- A.3) The real reason they don't believe: *Hating scary truth*
- A.4) The insanity of evolution

B) The Suppression of the Message of Miracles: *The insanity of Pharaoh & Pharisees***C) The Suppression of the Message of Conscience**

- C.1) The "unpardonable sin"
- C.2) Reaching a "point of no return"

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Not understanding that God created everything perverts

A) The Suppression of the Message of Creation:

Rom 1:18-23

A.1) The message is God's lordship & wrath, not just His existence

Many unregenerate scientists and mathematicians have demonstrated remarkable logical reasoning abilities. But the affect of *devil-darkened reason* in their lives leaves them blind to particularly spiritual truths that effect many scientific truths. For example, ignoring that humans and all the Universe were created by an all-powerful personal God, leaves unregenerate humans at a distinct disadvantage in fully understanding the nature and purpose of Creation and all of life. The Apostle illustrates how the reasoning of the unregenerate is dysfunctional when he describes how they erroneously process the clear data provided by Creation:

The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking [dialogismois: "reasoning"] became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Rom 1:18-23)

Several vital truths are taught here. First, the "message" that Creation sends is a demonstration of God's "**eternal power and divine nature**" (v. 20). In other words, Creation does not only demonstrate the *existence* of God, but His worthiness and right to be our only God. If it were enough to simply believe there was a god, than those who believe so would be excused. However, the message of Creation should have resulted in humanity recognizing not only that God exists, but that He should be "**glorified**" and honored as our rightful Lord, and given "**thanks**" for being our ultimate Provider and Sustainer (cf. v. 21). In other words, the message of Creation actually declares the First Commandment: "**I**

am the LORD your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exod 20:2-3).

The unbelief toward the full message of Creation results in idolatry because spiritually dead humanity misses the fact that God is to be worshipped above all, and instead they worship and serve other things before Him. Accordingly, the Apostle describes such idolatry a few verses later when he writes they, "**exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images**" (v.23). Even the most religious, but unregenerated person is guilty of idolatry if they do not submit to the message of God's lordship in Creation.

It is tempting to apply the Apostle's universal condemnation to only those who become particularly depraved as described in Romans 1:24-32, and conclude that moral, religious humans who actually do believe there is a God are not included here. While it is conceded that many humans live in accordance with a belief in God, even striving for morality, this is not enough. Even their "**righteous acts are like filthy rags**" (Isa 64:6) because they believe they can pay for their sin and earn their forgiveness, which ultimately is self-worship, not God-worship, and glorifies themselves, rather than the Savior.

In addition, the unregenerate who interpret Creation as merely revealing a Creator, usually interpret Him to their liking as a benevolent God Who loves them enough to create them and Creation. On the contrary, the Apostle states here that the intended message of Creation is not the love of God, but His "**wrath**" (cf. Eph 2:3; John 3:18, 36).

A.2) Why is There no excuse? *The message really is understood*

A second thing the Apostle teaches us in Romans 1 is that humanity is guilty, justly condemned, and "**without excuse**" (v. 20) for not responding correctly to the message of Creation. There are several reasons why. First, the message is unmistakable, "**plain**" (v. 19), and "**clearly seen**" (v. 20). Secondly, the God-given faculty of human reason is dependable and powerful enough to understand there is a Creator by recognizing His handiwork in the supernatural order and immensity of Creation. Like deciphering $1+1+1=3$, God has made the mind fully capable of observing the data of Creation, concluding there is a Creator, and further deducing enough about His character, that they would infer that they owe Him their worship. And those theological conclusions are hardly more difficult or complex than a simple mathematical conclusion.

It should not be missed here that the Apostle is extolling the capabilities of human reason. We do not need some direct, supernatural communication from God to make us inexcusable for not believing in God. And it is precisely because God has given us a reasoning faculty with such great capabilities that we are justly condemned for not reaching the right conclusions.⁵⁷⁶

However, the ultimate reason we are “**without excuse**” is because all reasoning humans *really do understand* the message of Creation. This is precisely what King David is implying about Creation when he writes:

The Heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the Earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Ps 19:1-4)

While David insists that all humanity has “**heard**” the message of Creation, the Apostle insists they have “**seen**” it (Rom 1:20). Creation is not simply an *opportunity* to see God that some will miss, and others will recognize. On the contrary, the Apostle says that if a person has seen Creation, then they have also automatically and inexcusably “**clearly seen**” and “**understood**” both God’s “**eternal power and divine nature**” (Rom 1:20). Accordingly, NT scholar Douglas Moo comments:

Just what does the Apostle mean when he claims that human beings “see” and “understand” from Creation . . . that a powerful God exists? Some think that Paul is asserting only that people have around them the evidence of God’s existence and basic qualities; whether people actually perceive it or become personally conscious of it is not clear. Paul’s wording suggests more than this. He asserts that people actually come to “understand” something about God’s existence and nature. How universal is this perception? The flow of Paul’s argument makes any limitation impossible.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁶ Some have suggested that sin has not only affected our ability to reason, but the laws of reason in Creation as well. Gordon H. Clark replies:

Logic, the law of contradiction, is not affected by sin. Even if everyone constantly violated the laws of logic, they would not be less true than if everyone constantly observed them. Or, to use another example, no matter how many errors in subtraction can be found in the stubs of our checkbooks, mathematics itself is unaffected. (*A Christian View of Men and Things* [Baker, 1981], 299).

⁵⁷⁷ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Eerdmans, 1996), 105.

J. I. Packer adds:

In all this, Paul's point is not that of [Thomas] Aquinas [and other "Natural" theologians], that the existence of God is abstractly provable by argument from created things, but the much more fundamental point that God's existence and law are actually known to all men, even where both are denied in theory and in practice.⁵⁷⁸

In other words, all reasoning humans have clearly *understood* that there is a God deserving their worship. They simply have not *believed* it. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

In simplest terms, our knowledge is what we understand. However, it is important to note here that we do not *believe* everything we know or understand. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul says that, in regards to unbelievers, the revelation of Creation has made God's "**eternal power and divine nature**" "**plain to them,**" "**clearly seen** [*kathorao*⁵⁷⁹], **being understood** [*noieo*⁵⁸⁰]" such that "**they knew** [*gnōntes*: "had knowledge of"] **God**" (Rom 1:19-21).

The *gnōsis* ("knowledge") word group of NT Greek does not automatically imply an *acceptance* of such knowledge such that it becomes belief. In general it means to merely understand, perceive, or know what a certain collection of data

⁵⁷⁸ J. I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man* (Westminster Press, 1965), 37.

⁵⁷⁹ *Kathorao* is used only here in the NT and literally means "to look [*horao*] down [*kata*]." A strengthened form of "seeing" would seem to be implied and is universally reflected in the translations by adding the adverb "clearly."

⁵⁸⁰ *Noieo* is the common Greek word for, "perceiving with the mind," as distinct from "perception by feeling" or simply perception by sight. (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* [Thomas Nelson, 1996], 650). Dr. Moo adds that the word "connotes an inner recognition, often without any reference to physical sight." (105, n. 65).

means.⁵⁸¹ However, such knowledge may fall short of believing that the data that we understand is also true.

Accordingly, understanding and knowing Creation's message about God is not the same thing as accepting it as true and therefore believing it. It is because unbelievers adequately *understand* and have a *knowledge* of the message of God's existence that they **"are without excuse"** (v. 20). It is because they do not *believe* the message that **"they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him"** (v. 21). This is because anyone who truly does believe the message of Creation will do so.⁵⁸²

Simply put, such people do not actually accept or *believe* what they *understand* about God. While it is necessary to first *understand* a message to believe it, it must also be accepted. *devil-darkened reason* understands the message of Creation, it simply will not accept it. People act according to their beliefs, and because of what people do with the information they receive about God, it is clear they do not believe what Creation says about God. As noted above, Creation does not simply declare that there is a

⁵⁸¹ John Murray interprets the use of *gnontes* in Romans 1:21 as "cognitive perception." (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans, 1959, 1965; reprint 1997], 41.)

While the *ginōskō* ("to know") word group can mean a personal and certain knowledge as discussed elsewhere (cf. section 2.5.E.1.b), it still primarily refers to merely understanding, not believing. Accordingly, Dr. Vine defined the verb *ginōskō* as "to be taking in knowledge [data], to come to know, recognize, understand," or "to understand completely." (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* [Thomas Nelson, 1996], 346).

Likewise, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (*NIDNTT*) defines *ginōskō* as "know, come to know, understand, comprehend, perceive, recognize" none of which automatically implies belief of what is understood. (E. Schütz, "Knowledge," II:392). Accordingly, we read elsewhere in the article:

The statement in Rom. 1:21 that those who had known God had become futile in their thinking must have appeared as a contradiction in terms to Hellenistic thought. . . . Paul, however, considered that the knowledge [i.e. real belief] of God necessarily included proper glorification and gratitude. Hence, the heathen who rejected God reduced this knowledge to mere intellectual activity [understanding]. . . . The very fact that, though the heathen undoubtedly knew God [understood], they refused him due recognition [faith, belief], is the measure of their lack of excuse (Rom. 1 :19 f.; cf. also Jn. 1: 10; 1 Cor. 1: 21; Gal. 4:8. (II:399-400

⁵⁸² Quoted from section 2.3.B.1.

god, but that there is one God worthy of our worship. Because humanity does not act accordingly, it is obvious that while they understand, they do not really believe the message of Creation.⁵⁸³

A.3) The real reason they don't believe: *Hating scary truth*

While the above can suffice for the philosophical answer as to why humans are not rightly affected by Creation's message, the Apostle shares the answer in psychological terms as well when he says they "**suppress the truth by their wickedness**" (1:18). The suppression of truth by a person's reasoning reflects a great deal of dysfunctionality. Accordingly, the Apostle says that as a result of such suppression of obvious truth to become belief, "**their thinking [dialogismois: "reasoning"] became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened**" (v. 21). As Dr. Moo notes: "It is in the 'reasonings' of people that this futility has taken place, showing that, whatever their initial knowledge of God might be, their natural capacity to reason accurately about God is quickly and permanently harmed."⁵⁸⁴

What does it mean then that this truth is suppressed "**by their wickedness**"? We would suggest that this does not refer so much to their wicked behavior, but to their wicked reasoning. The most

⁵⁸³ While we claim that the reason unbelievers do not properly act upon what they understand from Creation is because they do not believe what they understand, others might suggest that they do believe it, but only in their subconscious mind. Accordingly, the great Dutch Reformed theologian J. H. Bavinck (1854-1921) wrote regarding Romans 1:18:

It seems to me that in this case we should translate it [**"suppress"** Gr.: *katechontōn*] by "repress." We intentionally choose a word which has a specific meaning in psychological literature. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines the word "repression" as the process by which unacceptable desires or impulses are excluded from consciousness and thus being denied direct satisfaction are left to operate in the unconscious. (ref. unavailable).

The implication of "desires . . . left to operate in the unconscious" suggests that the unbeliever has come to some true beliefs and subsequent right desires regarding God, but that these reside in the subconscious and therefore do not affect the person's behavior.

While this may be true, it would seem to disregard the real and abiding affect that unconscious beliefs have on us (cf. section 4.3.A.2), and the fact that the Greek words used in this passage merely reflect cognitive understanding, not the type of mental acceptance that would result in desires, or the beliefs that such desires would depend on.

⁵⁸⁴ Moo, 107.

obvious message that the wicked desire to “**suppress**” is the fact that, “**The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven**” (v. 18). It is not that Creation *might* reveal “**the wrath of God . . . from Heaven**” but it, like any other divine revelation, fulfills the purpose God has for it,⁵⁸⁵ and it universally, unrelentingly, and unmistakably *does* reveal God’s anger toward sinful humanity. The divine communiqué from Creation is that the One powerful enough to create the Universe we see, is also very angry about our wickedness. Such a scary truth is understandably repressed. How would you like to be reminded day after day by a big billboard in the sky that the Creator is really ticked off at you because of the way you are living?

In addition, unregenerated humans have reasoned to beliefs that simply will not allow them to believe the message of Creation. Such beliefs include the fact that if “**God’s . . . eternal power and divine nature**” were allowed to be a controlling belief in their life, the result would be the pain of guilt (and the loss of happiness), because of their “**wickedness**” (Rom 1:18-20). It is their “**wickedness**” that they desire to pursue for pleasure, security, and significance, and any data that would hinder that will be suppressed. For anyone not intending to make the Creator their Lord, the message of Creation is a threat to their ultimate pursuit of happiness. Accordingly the Apostle also says they “**did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God**” (Rom 1:28).

The Apostle describes this internal suppression of belief in the unregenerate when he writes:

Those who live according to the sinful nature [i.e. only unbelievers⁵⁸⁶] **have their minds set on what that nature desires. . . . The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law** [or the reasonable conclusions regarding God from Creation], **nor can it do so.** (Rom 8:5-7).

Essentially, mental dysfunction regarding the truths about God is not because there is something lacking in the reasoning faculties of unregenerate humans, but rather, it is because unregenerate humans *hate God*.⁵⁸⁷ Along these lines, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote: “Human things must be known to be loved; but Divine things

⁵⁸⁵ For further discussion on the fact that the condemning revelation of Creation is fulfilling precisely God’s purpose for it, see section 7.4.A.3.

⁵⁸⁶ For arguments that the Apostle is contrasting unbelievers and believers in Romans 8:1-9, and does not have sinning unbelievers in mind, see section 4.14.B.3.

⁵⁸⁷ See above endnote.

must be loved to be known.”⁵⁸⁸ Accordingly, unregenerated humanity cannot know God because they hate Him and instead **“love delusions and [therefore] seek false gods”** (Ps 4:2).

Humans have a remarkable ability to believe what they want to believe, and reject what they want to reject, if it somehow serves themselves. Because the unregenerate mind is **“set on what [the sinful] nature desires”** it does not allow a place for God. Because **“the sinful mind is hostile to God,”** it *commands* and *coerces* unregenerated humans to ignore and repress what they know about God. More than this, the **“sinful nature,”** twists and redirects it to effectively and creatively reason *against* God, and *for* another god, really *any* god, except the God it hates. And because their mind will **“not submit to God’s law”** or His worship, **“nor can it [even] do so,”** it will not allow them to, **“think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God”** (Rom 1:28).

If the mind were allowed to retain the message of Creation, the sinful, God-hating nature would be dethroned. But it is not a willing martyr. Regardless of what truth about God is *understood* and even *known* by reason, the hostile, idolatrous, and satanically controlled nature will suppress such knowledge in order to maintain its lordship over its slave (cf. Rom 6:6, 16-17, 20; 7:14, 25).⁵⁸⁹ And there are no mere arguments strong or numerous enough to break the bondage and control that the sinful nature has over the unregenerated mind. This is why apologetic arguments for unbelievers often have a limited value, and why we must be supernaturally regenerated by God before being able to have saving faith.

Others have described this process of suppression as follows. NT scholar John Stott explains regarding Romans 1:18-23: “[T]hey have made an a priori decision to live for themselves, rather than for God and others, and therefore deliberately stifle any truth which challenges their self-centeredness.”⁵⁹⁰ It is because unbelievers believe that such God-ignoring self-centeredness will bring them happiness that they will not allow another belief to the contrary.⁵⁹¹

Along these lines, nineteenth century theologians John McClintock (1814-1870) and James Strong (1822-1892) provide an

⁵⁸⁸ Reference unavailable.

⁵⁸⁹ For those who would suggest that we over-personify the sinful nature, we would refer them to such passages as Romans 7:17, 20.

⁵⁹⁰ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Intervarsity, 1994), 72.

⁵⁹¹ For further discussion of the God-ordained and controlling nature of the pursuit of happiness in humans see section 4.1.C.

interesting illustration of how our fundamental beliefs can suppress what data we accept as true:

Let a man who hears the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid announced for the first time and trace the steps of the demonstration, and he *must* believe it to be true; but let him know that as soon as he does perceive the evidence of that proposition, so as to believe it on that ground, he shall lose his right eye, and he will never trace the evidence, or come to that belief which results from the force of the only proper evidence. You may tell him it is true, but he will reply that he does not know — he does not see it to be so. . . .

Certainly, if God has provided evidence as convincing as that for the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid, so that all men have to do is to examine it with candor, then they must be without excuse if they do not believe. . . . The difficulty will not lie in their mental constitution as related to evidence, nor in the want of evidence, but in that moral condition, that state of the heart [i.e. belief of what would happen if they did believe it]. . . which prevented a proper examination.⁵⁹²

Likewise, theologians R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey summarize our thoughts concerning the repression of the message of Creation in the unregenerated mind when they write:

The pagan's problem is not that he does not know that God is, but that he does not like the God who is . . . Here [Rom 1:18-32] the apostle charges that paganism is generated not by intellectual causes but by moral ones. The problem is not that there is insufficient evidence to convince rational beings of the existence of God, but that rational beings in their present fallen condition have a natural antipathy to the being of God. In a word, the nature of God (at least the true God) is repugnant to humans--pagan and secular . . .

It is important to note that Paul does not deny the ability of natural man to reason or even to reason correctly if free of prejudice. The problem is not in the capacity for thought per se, but in the thought process that begins and is maintained by prejudice to the facts. The intellectual problem is produced by

⁵⁹² John McClintock and James Strong, "Belief," in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (M&S) (Ages Software, 2000), I:225-6.

the moral problem, not the moral problem by an intellectual one.⁵⁹³

In other words, unregenerated humanity does not find God in Creation for the same reason a thief does not find a policeman. *They do not want to!*

A.4) The insanity of evolution

Thus far, then, we have noted that the message of Creation is unmistakable, and that humans are not only *capable* of understanding it, but actually *do* understand it. These facts make humanity's response all the more incredible. Even though all humans *perceive* the message of Creation, unregenerate humans do not *receive* it. Instead of acting in accord with what they understand, they do the opposite. **"For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him . . . and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles"** (vs. 21, 23). It is as if they look at 1+1+1 and *know* that it adds up to 3, but refuse to accept the correct answer and insist that the answer is 5. If someone were to do mathematics the way humanity does "natural" theology, they would rightly be called insane, thus explaining the title to this chapter: *The Insanity of Humanity*.

More specifically, the twisted creativity of the spiritually dead mind is fully illustrated by the fact that in spite of the *supernatural* attributes of Creation, much of humanity has concluded that such data proves *natural* evolutionary theories. There is no philosophy or scientific theory in all the history of the world that violates and denies the observed facts more than this one. Accordingly, many a Christian has looked at those facts, and scratched their head wondering how could "reasonable" intelligent people believe such an obviously impossible myth?

Erwin Lutzer describes the illogical "mathematics" involved when he comments that we "marvel that there are actually some

⁵⁹³ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984), 39, 52-3.

scientists who believe that nothing times nobody equals everything.”⁵⁹⁴ Likewise, the widespread denial of the obvious geological evidence for a worldwide flood is inexplicable apart from the Bible’s teaching that spiritually dead humans are mentally blind to such things.

No atheist was more influential in the last century than the brilliant biochemist and author Isaac Asimov (1920-1992). Asimov marveled at the complexity of the human brain, but his commitment to evolutionary theory forced him to answer the question how such a wonder could develop from sea slime. His answer: energy from the sun somehow provided the information necessary to create life and ultimately the human brain.⁵⁹⁵

Likewise, another of the more famous atheists of the twentieth century, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), wrote in his book, *Why I Am Not a Christian*:

God and immortality, the central dogmas of the Christian religion, find no support in science. . . . No doubt people will continue to entertain these beliefs, because they are pleasant, just as it is pleasant to think ourselves virtuous and our enemies wicked. But for my part I cannot see any ground for either.⁵⁹⁶

Was Mr. Russell’s failure to “see” any evidence for “God” due to the fact that there is none, or that his “eyes,” and more specifically, his “heart” were dysfunctional? The Apostle would say the latter.

More recently, the Oxford scientist Richard Dawkins, perhaps the most famous atheist living today, has demonstrated both the insanity of spiritually dead humanity and their misplaced arrogance when he writes: “It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid, or insane (or wicked, but I’d rather not consider that).”⁵⁹⁷ His best theory for how life originated on Earth is that aliens planted it here, and this is only because aliens are less threatening to this scientist than God.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁴ Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible* (Moody, 1998), 155.

⁵⁹⁵ See Henry M. Morris, *Miracles* (Master Books, 2004), 133.

⁵⁹⁶ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (Simon and Schuster, 1957), 50-51.

⁵⁹⁷ Robert J. Morgan, *Evidence and Truth* (Crossway, 2003), 35.

⁵⁹⁸ William Hooper at TheOligarch.com writes regarding Dawkins:

Nonetheless, despite the fact that evolution is taught as science in all public education institutions, most humans are not as mentally insane as Dr. Dawkins, even many of the most respected scientists throughout history and the world today.⁵⁹⁹ The fellow atheist and equally insane Sam Harris, in his *Letter to a Christian Nation*, seems confused that others do not share his insanity when he writes:

According to a recent Gallup poll [and in spite of all the public education!], only 12 percent of Americans believe that life on earth has evolved through a natural process, without the interference of deity. . . .

If our worldview were put to a vote, notions of "intelligent design" would defeat the science of biology by nearly three to one. This is troubling, as nature offers no compelling evidence

Intelligent Alien Design? You can't be serious? Well actually I am. Richard Dawkins, one of the world's most famous champions of Darwin's Theory of Evolution and a staunch atheist, has recently been discussing the possibility that life on Earth could be the result of advanced alien engineering!

Dawkins has said that he still believes that life most likely originated on earth, but he has also said than an alien designed start is an "intriguing possibility". Intelligent life, he has explained, could have evolved elsewhere in the universe according to modern Darwinian theory, and this intelligent life could have eventually learned to engineer new life, and an engineered seed could then have ended up on earth and subsequently evolved into all the life found here today.

Dawkins appears quite serious about the possibility of Intelligent Alien Design and has mentioned it on a number of occasions. From a recent documentary called "Expelled" we have:

Ben Stein: What do you think is the possibility that Intelligent Design might turn out to be the answer to some issues in genetics or in evolution.

Dawkins: Well, it could come about in the following way. It could be that at some earlier time, somewhere in the universe, a civilization evolved, probably by some kind of Darwinian means, probably to a very high level of technology, and designed a form of life that they seeded onto perhaps this planet. Now, um, now that is a possibility, and an intriguing possibility. And I suppose it's possible that you might find evidence for that if you look at the details of biochemistry, molecular biology, you might find a signature of some sort of designer. ("Richard Dawkins on Intelligent Alien Design," 2008; online at <http://www.theoligarch.com/richard-dawkins-aliens.htm>).

⁵⁹⁹ For a good start on quotes from respected scientists denouncing evolutionary theory see online at <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/quotes.html>.

for an intelligent designer and countless examples of unintelligent design.⁶⁰⁰

Is Mr. Harris offering himself as a prime example of unintelligence? Not surprisingly, Richard Dawkins endorses the book and writes: "Read it if it is the last thing you do." Such men are not only insane, but they are wicked, and they will meet the Creator they mock someday soon.

Such insanity not only infects science, but philosophy as well. For example, the influential French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) answered the question of "Why are we here?" by claiming that "all of life is an empty bubble on the sea of nothingness."⁶⁰¹ It is the philosophical insanity of *devil-darkened reason* that makes many unbelievers such horrible scientists. Philip Johnson in his critique of evolutionary theories of Creation, quotes the evolutionist Richard C. Lewontin, who explains why Creation Science should be rejected:

We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated [or the reasonable!]. Moreover, [we believe] that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.⁶⁰²

In reality that "Divine Foot" is through the door and in their face, but they refuse to recognize it.

While *devil-darkened reason* certainly has its affects even on scientific reasoning, we would still suggest that they are most related to the spiritual realm instead of the scientific realm. Some have pointed out that the affects of sin on the mind are in direct proportion to the distance of a certain discipline from spiritual or

⁶⁰⁰ Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (Vintage, 2008), forward.

⁶⁰¹ Norman Geisler, *Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (Baker, 1980), 70.

⁶⁰² Lutzer, 156-7.

religious truths. In other words, *devil-darkened reason* will be much more capable of processing mathematical truths, rather than theological ones. Neither the sinful nature, nor the devil cares about discoveries in calculus, but only those truths that threaten to rival their hold on the unregenerate mind.

Finally, unregenerated humanity's suppression of the clear message of Creation has its moral affects. This may be demonstrated in the most graphic way by the fact that we continue to murder millions of babies in their mother's womb. The great Presbyterian preacher D. James Kennedy (1930-2007) illustrated this insanity of humanity when he writes:

Evolution, which simply reduces man to the animal kingdom and ultimately makes him no different from an animal, leads to the kind of thinking today which prompts people to go to enormous lengths to save the eggs of turtles but do nothing to save an unborn human being! We have vastly greater penalties for anybody breaking or touching endangered turtle eggs than we have for killing a fetal human being, who is also in a sense in an egg. I am all in favor of people caring for animals, but the irony [insanity!] is that usually these people care little about the slaughter of millions of unborn children.⁶⁰³

B) The Suppression of the Message of Miracles:

The Insanity of Pharaoh & Pharisees

Creation is not the only miracle of God that *devil-darkened reason* refuses to accept or seeks to redefine. We see this repression of evidence for God by the sinful, unregenerated mind being illustrated throughout Scripture. This explains the otherwise inexplicable insanity of Pharaoh. God's purpose in this is described when we read:

The LORD had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you—so that My wonders may be multiplied in Egypt." Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country. (Exod 11:9; cf. 14:4; esp. 9:15-17; Rom 9:16-18)

Pharaoh's "**hardened . . . heart,**" simply allowed God to be more glorified. Indeed, Pharaoh witnessed perhaps the most

⁶⁰³ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?: The Positive Impact of Christianity in History* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 25.

convincing concentration of divine “**wonders**” in all of history, and yet his unregenerated sinful mind would not allow him to properly process the message of these miracles. His inability to repent is illustrated after the plague of “**the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation**” (Exod 9:24). Pharaoh exhibits some sanity when he responds:

This time I have sinned . . . The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to the LORD, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don't have to stay any longer. (Exod 9:27-28)

Yet, Moses replied, “**I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God**” (v. 30) and sure enough:

When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses. (Exod 9:34-35)

Pharaoh's painful and desperate battle with his spiritually dead, deaf, and blind heart intensified as the plagues worsened, resulting in a repeated cycle of apparent repentance and then insane hardening pride (cf. Exod 10:7-11, 16-20, 24-28; 14:1-6). While God certainly displayed His glory and power in these events, He also revealed how stubborn, destructive, painful, and insane the heart of unregenerated humanity can be.

Yet it was not only God's enemies who displayed such unbelief, but the Israelites themselves did as well. God did among them the most amazing miracles God has ever done. And yet their faith in Him was like wax that melts with the least bit of heat. The Psalmist provides a brief excerpt of the sad spiritual history of ancient Israel when we read:

The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived. Then they believed His promises and sang His praise. But they soon forgot what He had done and did not wait for His counsel. In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test. (Ps 106:11-14; cf. 78:32)

We would suggest that this is a graphic portrayal of the demonic influences against the worship of God, which work unceasingly and uninhibited on the unregenerate mind to suppress and squelch the

retention of any evidence concerning who God really is.⁶⁰⁴ Accordingly, it would seem Moses referred to their unregenerated state in the following passage:

Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them: Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a [regenerated] mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. (Deut 29:2-4)

One is obviously reminded as well of many of those who personally witnessed Christ's miracle working. Along these lines, the Apostle John writes:

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the Prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them." (John 12:37-40)

The Pharisees were the ultimate example of such epistemological blindness. Their sinful nature so twisted and redirected their God-given reason that they concluded that a man with the virtues of Christ was actually performing His miracles, "**by Beelzebub**" (Matt 12:24). Accordingly we read:

The Jews gathered around Him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in My Father's name speak for Me, but you do not believe because you are not My sheep. (John 10:24-6)

It was not because of a lack of evidence that these inquirers did not believe, but the King said it was because they did not belong to Him, and accordingly, were not regenerated.

Likewise, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the King remarks that if the rich man's brothers, "**do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if**

⁶⁰⁴ For further discussion of the affect of spiritual regeneration on the endurance of faith see section 4.16.E.

someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Accordingly, the great Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) wrote:

[T]he miracle alone has no convincing power. The unbeliever begins with denying it. He explains it from natural causes. He neither will nor can see God's hand in it. And when it is so convincing that he can not deny it, he says: "It is of the devil." But he will not acknowledge that it is the power of God.

Therefore to make the miracle effectual, the Holy Spirit must also open the eyes of them that witness it to see the power of God therein. All our reading of the miracles in our Bible is unprofitable unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, and then we see them live, hear their testimony, experience their power, and glorify God for His mighty works.⁶⁰⁵

For the Pharisees to accept the obvious reason for Christ's miracle-working would have led to His recognition as their rightful Lord, and their sinful nature would have none of it. Likewise, they did not deny that Christ had performed the amazing miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead (cf. John 11:46-7). However, their sinful nature would not allow their unregenerated mind to accept the significance and meaning of Christ's deeds and so, "**from that day on they plotted to take His life**" (John 11:53), instead of worship Him.

Imagine not having the least bit of fear or respect for a man able to give life to someone who has been dead for four days (cf. John 11:17). Imagine concluding that a man, who saved the life of another, should be killed. Such is the mental insanity and moral depravity that comes from the devil's domination and oppression of our God-given reasoning faculties.

The Pharisees' insanity is demonstrated every Easter by contemporary humanity as well. Millions celebrate the historical fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead, but its miraculous message is obscured and distorted by *devil-darkened reason* such that it does not result in the reasonable conclusion that Jesus Christ is their Lord.

It is not only *physical miracles* such as healing that the unregenerate will deny, but also the ultimate and *spiritual miracle* of supernatural love.⁶⁰⁶ We have argued elsewhere that only

⁶⁰⁵ Kuyper, 69.

⁶⁰⁶ For further explanation of the important difference between *physical* and *spiritual miracles* see chapter 10.4.

Christians are able to exercise unconditional *agape* love,⁶⁰⁷ and that it is the ultimate supernatural proof of the exclusiveness of Christianity for the salvation of humanity.⁶⁰⁸ Not surprisingly, God-hating humans have attempted to explain this away as well.

For example, Christian apologist Arthur Lindsey notes that Charles Darwin, the father of evolutionary theory, "maintained that any truly other-centered trait 'would annihilate my theory, for such could not have been produced by natural selection.'" Accordingly, atheist Richard Dawkins believes, "Universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts which simply do not make evolutionary sense."⁶⁰⁹ The kind of supernatural, unconditional love that Christians can exhibit even toward their enemies is something mere materialism cannot explain. Nonetheless, Lindsey explains:

Dawkins knows that humans are capable of altruistic love, as we saw earlier. How does he explain his materialism and the "selfish gene"? The professor I spoke with maintains that Dawkins gives up pure genetic materialism. Dawkins postulates that, in addition to genes, there exist *memes*-nonmaterial entities that infect the human mind and make people do what they wouldn't do otherwise. These memes seem to hop from person to person like a virus.

Dawkins makes up this vague, unsubstantiated, unverified *meme* to explain things like religion or *agape* love. The professor raises the somewhat facetious question, "How is a *meme*-something that inhabits human minds and makes people behave in ways their biology can't explain-different from a demon? Or the Holy Spirit?"

In fact, Dawkins calls altruistic actions that are not done to kin or that are not motivated by direct or indirect reciprocal benefits misfires or Darwinian mistakes. It is equivalent, Dawkins says, to this kind of scenario: when a mother bird returns to her nest with food, her instinct tells her to put the food in whatever gaping mouths she sees, without noticing that another species of bird has mistakenly gotten into the nest. Thus, all of the most noble, self-sacrificing deeds of humanity are reduced to dropping worms into the wrong

⁶⁰⁷ For arguments regarding the claim that only born again Christians can exercise supernatural unconditional love see section 5.1.B.1.

⁶⁰⁸ For arguments that supernatural love is the ultimate apologetic for the Christians faith see relevant section of Book 5: *Biblical Apologetics*.

⁶⁰⁹ Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness* (Intervarsity, 2008), 81.

genetic mouths. Agape love is a genetic misfiring or a Darwinian mistake. Is not such an account suspect? ⁶¹⁰

More than suspect, it is insane.

The effects of *devil-darkened reason* is one reason why those who deny the authenticity of the miracles recorded in Scripture are hardly in a position to convincingly claim they are born again Christians. A denial of the biblical miracles normally exposes an spiritually dead mind that, underneath all the religious veneer, is actually **"hostile to God"** (Rom 8:7) and unwilling to give Him the glory He deserves. ⁶¹¹

C) The Suppression of the Message of Conscience

C.1) The "unpardonable sin"

Christ's response to the Pharisees' accusation of demon possession was His opportunity to refer to the "unpardonable sin":

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matt 12:31-2; cf. Mark 3:22-23; Luke 12:9-10)

What then is "the unpardonable sin"? There has been a great deal of thought throughout the history of the Church on this issue.

⁶¹² In our opinion, simply put, the "unpardonable sin" is being exposed to so much clear revelation of who Jesus Christ is, and still

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁶¹¹ For further discussion on an *anti-supernatural* perspective on miracles see chapter 10.12.

⁶¹² John Gerstner relates: "Augustine considered the unpardonable sin the most difficult topic in Scripture . . . The unusually large amount of space devoted to this one topic indicates how important-if not difficult-Edwards considered it to be. (*The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. [Berea, 1991], II.362)

refusing to accept Him for who He is.⁶¹³ Still, it is not so much the particular sin of blaspheming the work of the Holy Spirit like this that is unforgivable. Rather, it is that such sin reveals a conscience that is hardened beyond repentance, and a mind that is so distorted that it will not properly reason. Every sin that is truly repented of will be forgiven, it is just that such people are beyond such repentance, nor have any desire to do so.

Let it be added here that no Christian who is worried about whether or not they have committed this sin should think they have. The kind of person who has committed "the unpardonable sin" doesn't care, and would do it again, given the opportunity. Obviously then, those who would worry that they have committed "the unpardonable sin," haven't, because those who have will not have a troubled conscience.

In addition, a belief that a regenerated Christian could commit an unforgiveable sin is incompatible with Scripture's teaching of the promise of eternal life. Mark records Christ's words as follows: **"Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin"** (Mark 3:29). Whatever such sin is, regenerated Christians, who have already been given eternal life (cf. John 5:24) cannot be **"guilty of an eternal sin"** that will not be forgiven.

This same "point of no return" is described in Hebrews when we read:

⁶¹³ D. A. Carson writes on "the unpardonable sin":

The distinction between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Spirit is not that the Son of Man is less important than the Spirit, or that the first sin is prebaptismal and the second postbaptismal, still less that the first is against the Son of Man and the second rejects the authority of Christian prophets.

Instead, within the context of the larger argument the first sin is rejection of the truth of the gospel (but there may be repentance and forgiveness for that), whereas the second sin is rejection of the same truth in full awareness that that is exactly what one is doing--thoughtfully, willfully, and self-consciously rejecting the work of the Spirit even though there can be no other explanation of Jesus' exorcisms than that. For such a sin there is no forgiveness, "either in this age or the age to come" (cf. 13:22; 25:46)--a dramatic way of saying "never" (as in Mark 3:29). . . .

This provides a clue for understanding how the unforgivable sin of which Jesus here speaks compares with the sins referred to in Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-31; and possibly 1 John 5:16. In each instance there is self-conscious perception of where the truth lies and the light shines--and a willful turning away from it. (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (EBC), Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.], Matt 12:31).

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened [been exposed to saving truth], who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance. (6:4-6) ⁶¹⁴

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) commented on this passage by saying, “Those that the apostle here has respect to, must be such as were guilty of the unpardonable sin.” ⁶¹⁵ Again, we see a description of someone who has been exposed to a great deal of truth, but because their conscience is so dysfunctional, they reject that truth. A person with such a conscience could have never been saved, nor ever will be.

The Apostle John would also seem to be referring to this very kind of sin when he says, “**There is a sin that [certainly] leads to [spiritual] death. I am not saying that he should pray about that**” (1 John 5:16). This is because those with a conscience that will refuse repentance even after significant and clear revelations of God are beyond hope.

This is obviously a grievous spiritual condition, as the conscience is the instrument through which the Holy Spirit, “**will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment**” (John 16:8). Accordingly, it is also the unbeliever’s conscience that is the target of evangelistic preaching (cf. Acts 2:37; 2 Cor 4:2). If then the conscience is hardened to such an extent that spiritual truth will no longer penetrate it, it is “**impossible**” (such a horrible word) for such a person to “**be brought . . . to repentance**” (Heb 6:4).

C.2) Reaching a “Point of No Return”

The Apostle tells us that:

When [unregenerated] Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the [Mosaic] law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences

⁶¹⁴ That the writer of Hebrews 6:4-6 is not describing those who have been saved, is made clear in verse 9 where he says, “**Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany [real] salvation.**”

⁶¹⁵ Gerstner, *Edwards*, I.310.

also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Rom 2:14-15)

As we have discussed at length elsewhere, God has implanted in every human a moral reasoning ability by which we learn right from wrong.⁶¹⁶ However, just like the sinful nature represses logical reasoning concerning Creation and salvation, it obviously does the same for moral reasoning as well. The Apostle describes the insanity that results when he writes:

Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom 1:32)

Because God has ordained that a person's reason will be the first point of contact between Him and humans, a perverted, suppressed reason is a dangerous thing. Apart from God giving us a new mind and restoring our reasoning ability to receive spiritual truth, there is no hope of salvation. It is our reason that is one of the things that makes us human and once a person's moral reasoning has been distorted, they become something less than human. Thus theologian John Gerstner (1914-1996) writes: "Men were made in God's image, rational creatures. . . . Nothing could possibly take that [reasonable]"⁶¹⁷

Therefore, the Apostle writes: "**Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God** [and rejected reason], **He gave them over to a depraved mind**" (Rom 1:28), and the result is that humans become for all practical purposes no better than beasts, "**senseless . . . heartless, ruthless**" (Rom 1:31). Or as we read in 2 Peter, "**like unreasoning animals**" (2:12 NASB). All of this because their God-given ability for moral reasoning is not properly functioning.

The Apostle Paul's teaching on conscience here suggests two additional things. One, he is describing a very close link between logical reasoning and moral reasoning. In other words, in regards to Creation, a depraved reason leads to a depraved conscience and gross immorality. The Apostle speaks synonymously of the corruption of both logical and moral reasoning when he writes:

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds [logical reasoning] **and consciences**

⁶¹⁶ For further discussion on the conscience see chapter 3.2.

⁶¹⁷ John Gerstner, *A Bible Inerrancy Primer* (Baker, 1965), 28-9

[moral reasoning] **are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him.** (Titus 1:15-16)

Secondly, the Apostle suggests a downward spiral of immorality resulting from the improper functioning of moral reason. This is specifically a result of not heeding the conscience which results in a person becoming increasingly **"hardened by sin's deceitfulness"** (Heb 3:13).⁶¹⁸ Eventually, the person's inability to reason, particularly morally, results in a "point of no return" in which God gives **"them over to a depraved mind"** (Rom 1:28). God seems to have this same kind of depraved, dysfunctional moral reasoning in mind when He says:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. (Isa 5:20-21, 24)

At such a point, just as depicted in Romans 1, God is ready to **"give them over to a depraved mind"** (v. 28), and He therefore says through Isaiah:

Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed. (Isa 6:10).

People who have reached such a "point of no return" are both destined and prepared for God's judgment. It would seem the whole world reached this point in Noah's day when we read, **"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the Earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"** (Gen 6:5), and God later adds that this state is even, **"from childhood"** (Gen 8:21).

Christ would seem to describe a state of moral insanity when He uses the imagery of the human eye to depict the place of moral and logical reasoning and says:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes [conscience, reason] are good, your whole body will be full of light [truth]. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light [reasoning faculty] within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt 6:22-23).

⁶¹⁸ The context of Hebrews 3:13 makes it clear that its primary application applies to unbelievers, not believers.

As NT scholar D. A. Carson has commented on this passage: "That person's darkness is greatest who thinks his darkness is light."⁶¹⁹ When a human's conscience, or the "**eyes**" through which moral decisions are evaluated and applied turns bad, rejecting moral truth and not allowing it to enter a person's psyche, there is great moral darkness within such a heart and great evil will proceed from it.⁶²⁰ Pharaoh obviously displayed such a heart when even after having his son miraculously killed, demonstrated both moral depravity and mental insanity when he decided to pursue the Israelites through the parted Red Sea (cf. Exod 14:3-8).

The Prophet Jeremiah describes the same kind of people when God says of the Jews of his day, "**Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush**" (Jer 6:15). The same kind of person is no doubt in mind when the Apostle describes false teachers as, "**hypocritical liars, whose consciences** [moral reasoning] **have been seared** [presumably irreparably] **as with a hot iron**" (1 Tim 4:2). Even God needs a conscience to work with and if someone does not have one they are doomed.

It is this same condition that leads to the most horrific human events including the German Holocaust, the mass Russian executions under Stalin, the African massacres among various tribes, and the cold-blooded murders that occur every day. At this point, a society is in great danger and the "common grace" of a mutual understanding of morality has vanished. It is this type of depraved reasoning that allows the horrible tortures imposed on

⁶¹⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Baker, 1978), 80.

⁶²⁰ Christian philosopher Ronald Nash provides a more technical description of what Christ meant by the "eyes" in Matthew 6:22-3 when he writes:

A conceptual framework is the pattern or arrangement of our concepts (ideas) that enables us to make sense of the world by organizing all that we believe. This framework, or worldview, is a comprehensive, systematic view of life and of the world as a whole . . . Conceptual frameworks function like eyeglasses to bring the world into clearer focus.

Naturally, a realistic view of the world—a view that is true to the way the world is—requires the proper conceptual framework [in Christ's words, "good eyes"]. When someone views the world through the lens of an inaccurate worldview, the world may seem to make sense to that person. But the sense that person makes of the world will be wrong in important and potentially dangerous respects [living in darkness]. ("Miracles & Conceptual Systems" in *In Defense of Miracles*, Douglas Geivett, Gary R. Habermas, eds. [InterVarsity, 1997], 116).

Christians in the first century, today, and in the coming Great Persecution (cf. Matt 24:9, 19-21). It is because of the culminating depravity of *devil-darkened reason* that the Last Days ⁶²¹ will be the real Dark Age.

The Apostle, for example, warns:

Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God--having a form of godliness but denying its power. (2 Tim 3:1-5)

While some may suggest this describes our own day, Christ warned that after the revealing of the antichrist:

Then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened." (Matt 24:21-22)

Notice that it will be a time of "**great distress**" for "**the elect**," or Christians, because the rest of the world will be, "**eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage**" just like the days leading, "**up to the day Noah entered the ark**" (Matt 24:38). If those days of horrible persecution were not stopped by the rescue and return of Christ, none of God's people would be left living (cf. 1 Thess 4:15-17; Matt 24:29-31). ⁶²² The moral reasoning of people

⁶²¹ We recognize that because of the near/far nature of biblical eschatology, that the "Last Days" have, in a sense, already begun (cf. Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2; James 5:3). We realize as well that our Preterist brothers and sisters, in particular, will object to our suggestion that the following verses primarily concern a yet future time that will culminate in the physical and universally visible return of Jesus Christ.

⁶²² We realize as well that this opens a can of worms with our Pretribulation Rapture friends. Hopefully, even a careful and honest comparison of the two passages referenced here will at least give some pause to their confidence in such a position. Regardless, even if one believes that it will be "some other group" of God's people being persecuted in the Great Tribulation, rather than the possibility of any Christians living today, our discussion of the depravity of unregenerated humanity during this time is still valid.

during this time will truly be insane, and this moral insanity will cover the whole Earth.

Accordingly, our King predicted that, **"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of Me"** (Matt 10:21-22; cf. 10:36). Likewise, He warns, **"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold"** (Matt 24:12). The twisted and depraved moral reasoning of these days is illustrated as well when Christ says, **"a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God"** (John 16:2).

The insanity with which people will treat God's people is one thing, but the insanity with which they will treat God is even more sobering. The most graphic portrayal of people who have had their reasoning faculty twisted and perverted by sin and satan is when we read in Revelation that: **"they cursed the name of God, Who [they knew] had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him"** (Rev 16:9). This in spite of the fact that God will apparently send an Angel over the Earth *before* His judgments begin. John reports:

Then I saw another Angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the Earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. (Rev 14:6-7)

Another Angel will warn the whole world, **"in a loud voice"**:

If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name. (Rev 14:9-11)

We are not told if anyone repents as a result of this message. However, only those who would be spiritually insane would refuse such a message. This is especially so after they had experienced some of these judgments with absolutely no doubt God was behind them.

Nonetheless, after describing the five month torture of every person on Earth **"who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads"** (Rev 9:4), with the sting of demonic beings (cf. 9:1-12), and the killing of **"a third of mankind"** by another hoard of supernatural beings, we would expect the rest of humanity to acknowledge the rightful place of God if they had any "freedom of the will" at all. Having absolutely no fear of a Being Who can do such things is insane. Nonetheless, we read at the end of these horrible judgments:

The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts. (Rev 9:20-21)

Out of the millions, if not billions of people remaining after these judgments, *no one* in all **"the rest of mankind"** chose to fear God and try to make amends with Him in order to escape His wrath? And people want to claim that humans always have "free will" to choose? No way. At least these people won't or else some of them surely would choose to repent. One day, all of humanity will be at a "point of no return."

Neither their sinful nature, nor satan will allow unregenerated humanity to either fear Christ, or refuse the antichrist. The whole world will be past the "point of no return" and no evidence, no matter how clear and compelling, will persuade them from their wicked ways. Not even visible Angels. As we noted above, when humans lose their reason, they lose their humanity, and the world will be full of mere beasts, not humans. The hour before the end of this world will be the pinnacle and peak of the insanity of humanity.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, we are again reminded today to thank You for giving us a repenting, God-fearing, God-loving, Spirit-liberated mind and conscience. When we see You divide the sheep from the goats on that Day, we will realize what a horrible thing it is to have a mind that refuses to accept spiritual truth. We look to You to break the

mental bondage that our unsaved friends are in, so that they may truly believe in You for salvation. Amen.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why isn't merely a belief in the existence of God an adequate response to the message of Creation?
- 2) What are at least three reasons that humans are "without excuse" for not believing the message of Creation?
- 3) What is the *psychological* reason the Apostle gives in Romans 1:18 (cf. 8:1-9) for why people do not accept the message of Creation?
- 4) Why are apologetic arguments limited in value in relation to a person with *devil-darkened reason*?
- 5) Why are the affects of the sinful nature on reason greater in the spiritual realm than in the scientific?
- 6) What would be some verses of Scripture that describe the depraved mind of the unregenerate?
- 7) What is "the unpardonable sin"? What are some verses that describe people at such "a point of no return"?
- 8) What are some Scripture passages that would support our claim that it is because of the culminating depravity of *devil-darkened reason* that the Last Days will be the real Dark Age?

Publications & Particulars



Chapter 4.14

The Insanity of Humanity II

The Suppression of the Message of Salvation

Table of Topics

A) The Gospel is Good News

B) Biblical Evidence of the Insanity of Humanity Towards the Gospel

B.1) The insanity of humanity in the OT

B.2) The insanity of humanity according to Christ

B.3) The insanity of humanity according to the Apostle

C) The Insanity of Humanity According to Teachers in the Church

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- The fact that humans do not embrace the good news of the Gospel is a clear and sobering indication of psychological insanity.
- Those who think people have the ability to choose and believe the Gospel have no good explanation for why many, many more don't, and why most even hate the good news.
- **"The Lord" still sees "how great man's wickedness [is] on the Earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil all the time" (Gen 6:5).**
- Christ simply said, **"No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me drags him by His power."**
- The Apostle Paul said: **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"** (1 Cor 2:14).
- Born again Christians are an entirely different species of human being than their unregenerated counterparts. Thus, the Apostle Paul refers to Christians as the **"enlightened"** ones (Eph 1:18).
- Justin Martyr (c. 150): "Being pressed down by our sins, we cannot move upward toward God; we are like birds with wings, but are unable to fly."
- Jerome wrote (c. 400): "See how great is the help of God, and how frail the condition of man that we cannot by any means fulfill this, that we repent, unless the Lord first convert us."
- John Calvin (1509-1564): "Men are blind until Christ enlightens them."
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) wrote: "Natural men are represented in Scripture, as having no spiritual light, no spiritual life, and no spiritual being; and therefore conversion is often compared to opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, and a work of creation."
- Spurgeon (1834-1892): We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so depraved that without the irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will ever be constrained towards Christ.

A) The Gospel is Good News

The psychological difference between born again Christians and the rest of humanity is considerable, though often forgotten or ignored. George Whitefield's (1714-1770) journal entry for January 29, 1739 illustrates his own recognition of the psychological gap between those with the Spirit and those without:

Sat up till near one in the morning, with my honoured brother and fellow-labourer, John Wesley, in conference with two clergymen of the Church of England, and some other strong opposers of the doctrine of the New Birth. God enabled me, with great simplicity, to declare what He had done for my soul, which made them look upon me as a madman . . .

I am fully convinced there is a fundamental difference between us and them. They believe only an outward Christ, we further believe that He must be inwardly formed in our hearts also. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him.⁶²³

Imagine that meeting! Two of the most powerful Evangelists in all the history of humanity urging, pleading, and arguing with these men into the night. And yet it was evidently of no use.

Much of what has been demonstrated concerning the message of Creation and miracles is true of the message of the Gospel as well. It too is a very clear, simple message that even a young child can understand. In fact, many unbelievers can explain the Gospel quite well. But, of course, they do not believe, accept, or trust it, and their actions reveal this.

The question we wish to discuss here is the same one we asked concerning the message of Creation. Why don't people trust, accept, and even welcome the Gospel? God refers to it as *euangelion* or "good news." As Greek scholar William Mounce notes:

The word *euangelion* was not invented by the gospel writers but was already in use in the Roman world. It referred to an announcement of "glad tidings" regarding a birthday, rise to power, or decree of the emperor that was to herald the fulfillment of hopes for peace and wellbeing in all the world. Mark redefines this concept of "glad tidings" by introducing his

⁶²³ *The Journals of George Whitefield* reprint (Banner of Truth, 1960), pp. 203-4. For similar references see pp. 350, 414, 478, 526).

gospel with the phrase, "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ"⁶²⁴

Wouldn't we expect people to be attracted to such good news?

Imagine, for example, that you, and a trusted and respected friend, both have a debilitating and eventually fatal disease. You both are aware that you have the disease, and you wish to be rid of it, because you realize it has brought you so much pain. You recognize that the disease has cost you relationships, self-respect, and inner peace and will eventually one day kill you. You have both tried many cures, but none have worked.

Then one day your friend tells you, "I've found the cure!" and sure enough, the quality of his life dramatically improves. However, even though the cure is simple and immediate, with no side effects that even come close to comparing with its benefits, you refuse it. Would we not be baffled as to why? Wouldn't the word "insanity" again come to mind?

And of course, many people have responded to the Gospel in the very same way. They know there is something wrong with them and they really would like to change, and be relieved of their guilt, fears, and sinful addictions. They've even tried several different religions, but the change and peace they seek has eluded them. They have people in their life that they would actually trust with their physical life, who have clearly demonstrated that Jesus Christ cured them, and who promise that this same Jesus Christ will bring them the transformation and peace they seek if they will truly believe in Him.

Not only that, but their good friend has promised them that if they will simply and truly believe them, they will receive entrance to an eternal paradise upon death, instead of eternal torment, which the friend warns them with tears that they are destined for if they do not believe them. So why won't they believe? A promise of eternal life, escape from Hell, a friendship with God, a release of guilt, a power over sin, a new spiritual family The greatest gifts imaginable just for asking. Why won't they believe?

From a purely human perspective, there is no explanation. Think about how gullible people are to often believe things much harder to accept than the Gospel. Think of the cost many people are willing to pay for other beliefs. People purchase vacuum cleaners from door to door salesmen that promise much less than receiving Christ as their Savior. The decision itself is an easy and obvious one. But most refuse. The fact that humans do not

⁶²⁴ William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Zondervan, 2006), 303.

embrace the good news of the Gospel is a clear and sobering indication of psychological insanity and inability.

John Calvin (1509–1564) put it this way:

There is nothing, therefore that ought more powerfully to excite us to embrace the Gospel; for as it is an inestimable blessing that we are presented to God by the hand of Christ to be preserved from destruction, so we ought justly to love it, and to care for it above all things else.

In this respect the madness of the world is monstrous. All desire salvation; Christ instructs us in a way of obtaining it, from which if any one turn aside, there remains for him no good hope; and yet scarcely one person in a hundred deigns to receive what was so graciously offered.⁶²⁵

Those who think people have the ability to choose and believe the Gospel have no good explanation for why many, many more don't, and why most even hate the good news. Clearly, in itself, the Gospel is one of the most persuasive, inviting messages known to mankind, and if its acceptance were simply a matter of persuasion and the exercise of freewill, many, many more people would choose the King, in the same way they believe a lot of things on a lot less evidence. There is no other explanation than mental/spiritual insanity for anyone refusing it and even being angry with those who communicate it. It is not because "**the message of the cross**" is unreasonable that unregenerate humans think it is "**foolishness**" (1 Cor 1:18), but rather, this is their response because their reason is broken.

Nevertheless, we must note that our knowledge of the insanity of humanity must not hinder us in preaching the Gospel. While God must regenerate people in order for them to believe the Gospel, so too must we preach it (cf. Rom 10:14-15). In fact, God uses the preaching of the Gospel as an opportune time to regenerate them as He did with Lydia. Accordingly, Luke writes:

One of those listening [to Paul communicate the Gospel] was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14).

While the power of God described here encourages us to share the Gospel with spiritually dead humans, it is clear that Luke desires to show here that the saving belief was the work of God and not the

⁶²⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, John 17:20; online at www.ccel.org.

"disciples." A saving response would not have happened in any other way, and never will.

Again, the message of the Gospel is simple and very attractive, but neither the sinful nature, nor ultimately satan, allow a person who does not possess the liberating, enlightening Holy Spirit, to accept or trust it. This is because, like the message of Creation, the message of the Gospel demands a surrender of authority to the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to believe the Gospel, one must **"confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord'"** (Rom. 10:9), something that the sin and satan controlled unregenerate mind will not, and cannot do (cf. Rom 8:5-9) because neither of its masters will allow such freedom for those enslaved to them.⁶²⁶

Accordingly, Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis, Professors of Systematic Theology at Denver Seminary have written:

Although necessary, the truths of the gospel are not sufficient because sinners need not only new light but also new sight. No one except the Holy Spirit can grant sight-the ability to receive redemptive doctrines. Hence the necessary condition of spiritual life is revealed truth, but truth can be "received" only by the enablement of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:14).⁶²⁷

Separately, Dr. Demarest has written:

Thus it seems right to conclude that natural man possesses the intellectual power (illuminated by common grace) to know basic truths about God from His works, but he lacks the moral power to respond in a God-affirming way from the heart. Short of the enablement of special grace, man in his sinful condition does not possess the spiritual strength to choose God and to follow virtue. Guided by an antagonistic heart, man's natural response to the light of God is to quench it and to dismiss it from his life.⁶²⁸

J. I. Packer illustrates the need for a person to be regenerated before the Gospel will be sufficiently believed when he writes:

[S]upposing that God grants a revelation [of the Gospel] (the Bible is one long proclamation that he does), fallen man still needs spiritual enlightenment before he can grasp it;

⁶²⁶ For further discussion of the affect of the Gospel on spiritually unregenerate people see sections 2.2.B-D.

⁶²⁷ Bruce Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Zondervan, 1987, 1990, 1994), I:123.

⁶²⁸ Bruce Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Zondervan, 1982), 245.

otherwise he will pervert it, as he has perverted natural revelation [in Creation]. The Jews had a revelation of mercy in the OT, which pointed them to Christ, but on most of their hearts there was a veil which kept them from understanding it (2 Cor. 3:14ff.), and so they fell victim to a legalistic misconception of it (Rom. 9:31-10:4).

Even Paul, who calls attention to these facts, had himself known the Christian gospel before his conversion-and tried to stamp it out. Not until 'it pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me'-*in*, by inward enlightenment - did Paul recognize it as the word of God.⁶²⁹

B) Biblical Evidence of the Insanity of Humanity Towards the Gospel

B.1) The insanity of humanity in the OT

The Creator described the spiritual state of unregenerated humanity when we read: **"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the Earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"** (Gen 6:5). Notice both the extensiveness and intensiveness of sin in humans.⁶³⁰ It is everyone on Earth, and in their very and every thought. Do we really believe God has ever seen it differently apart from those under His grace? And why would people think that such humans could exercise anything truly virtuous in God's sight?⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ J. I. Packer, "Revelation," in *New Bible Dictionary (NDB)*, J. I. Packer, et al. eds., 3rd ed., (Intervarsity, 1996), 1015.

⁶³⁰ Cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Eerdmans, 1990), 273.

⁶³¹ Accordingly, we note the apparent irrationality of Dave Hunt who writes: [T]he fact that man's thoughts are only evil continually, that his heart is desperately wicked and deceitful and that he neither seeks nor fears God, does not say that he is therefore *unable*, unless first of all regenerated by God, to *believe* the gospel even if convicted and convinced thereof by the Holy Spirit. (*What Love is This?* [Berean Call, 2006], 126-7)

To the contrary, these biblical descriptions do clearly imply that

Accordingly, Calvin commented:

For the language [Moses] employs is very emphatical: it seemed enough to have said, that their heart was corrupt: but not content with this word, he expressly asserts, "every imagination of the thoughts of the heart;" and adds the word "only," as if he would deny that there was a drop of good mixed with it. . . .

[T]hough Moses here speaks of the wickedness which at that time prevailed in the world, the general doctrine is properly and consistently hence elicited. Nor do they rashly distort the passage who extend it to the whole human race. So when David says, 'That all have revolted, that they are become unprofitable, that is, none who does good, no not one; their throat is an open sepulcher; there is no fear of God before their eyes,' (Psalm 5:10;14:3) he deplores, truly, the impiety of his own age; yet Paul (Romans 3:12) does not scruple to extend it to all men of every age: and with justice; for it is not a mere complaint concerning a few men, but a description of the human mind when left to itself, destitute of the Spirit of God.

It is therefore very proper that the obstinacy of the men, who had greatly abused the goodness of God should be condemned in these words; yet, at the same time, the true nature of man, when deprived of the grace of the Spirit, is clearly exhibited.⁶³²

This description of humanity even applied later to the Israelites who had been given a great deal of special revelation from God. Nonetheless, Stephen's commentary on this race was: **"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised [i.e. unregenerated] hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"** (Acts 7:51).

Accordingly, Moses reflected the psychological/spiritual insanity of humanity, and, in part, the reason for it, when he told the unregenerated Israelites:

unregenerated humans are unable to believe the Gospel. This is because, as discussed further elsewhere, Mr. Hunt ignores all the moral acts and attitudes that are involved in **"confessing with your mouth Jesus is Lord"** (Rom 10:9) in order to be saved. (see section 6.3.C).

And neither Scripture nor reason would tell us that the mere conviction of the Holy Spirit that one is a sinner is sufficient to change the sinful nature of an unregenerated human such that they would exercise the humility, repentance, etc. necessary to believe in Christ in a saving way.

⁶³² Calvin, *loc. cit.*

Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. (Deut 29:2-4)

Humans are no longer born, and naturally able to understand spiritual truth. Accordingly, they must be reborn with a new **"mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear."** Which is precisely what Jesus Christ said.

B.2) The insanity of humanity according to Christ

Jesus reflected the depraved and dysfunctional psychological/spiritual state of unregenerated humanity when he told the religious leader Nicodemus: **"I tell you the truth, no one can see [idein: know, perceive, understand] the Kingdom of God unless he is born again"** (John 3:3). Accordingly, noted NT scholar Merrill C. Tenney writes, "The implication in John 3:3 is that without spiritual rebirth one cannot even perceive the reality of the kingdom of God."⁶³³ And we must not miss who Jesus said this to. Nicodemus appears in the NT as a very sincere, humble, God-fearing seeker of spiritual truth. But even for him, Christ said he would perceive nothing of the Kingdom of God around him⁶³⁴ unless God fixed him.

And it is God Who promised the psychological rebirth that is necessary to have a relationship with Him when through the Prophet Jeremiah He said: **"I will give them a heart to know Me"** (Jer 24:7). Humans need a certain kind of "heart," to know

⁶³³ *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM (Zondervan, n.d.). Cf. D. A. Carson who comments: "Nicodemus claims he can 'see' something of who Jesus is in the miracles; Jesus insists no one can 'see' the saving reign of God at all, including the display of miraculous signs, unless born again." (*The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans, 1991], 188). See also discussion of K. Dahn regarding "See" in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown ed., 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), III.516-17.

⁶³⁴ Some conjecture that Jesus was only speaking of seeing Heaven after this age or life when He spoke of seeing the Kingdom of God. But as Dr. Carson rightly points out, the Apostle John especially spoke of the Kingdom of God, and its "saving and transforming reign" as something present and inaugurated. (cf. Carson, 188).

God, a different one than the one they are born with, and only God can give it to them.

Jesus described this state of all unregenerate people when He said:

"For everyone who does evil [the unregenerated] hates the Light [Jesus, the truth, the Gospel], and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (John 3:19–21).

That "**hate**" and "**fear**" of the very things that must be loved and trusted in order to be saved, make it impossible for unregenerated people to "**come to the Light**" unless God changes them. Spiritual life, power, and freedom must come before *saving faith*, because spiritually dead and demonically controlled people are not able to fulfill any requirement of salvation. And if they do "**live by the truth**" and "**come into the light**," Jesus wanted it to be understood that this is only "**done through God**." ⁶³⁵

Jesus illustrates this very idea from John 3 in chapter 6:

No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. . . . The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him. (John 6:44, 63, 65)

Several points can be made about these critical statements of Christ. First, we had better understand them rightly and take them seriously because, "**If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing**" (1 Tim 6:3). The correct meaning of the above verses is among "**the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ**" and to misteach it is to teach "**false doctrines**" and be one who "**is conceited and understands nothing**." ⁶³⁶

⁶³⁵ Dr. Carson comments on John 3:21:

This strange expression makes it clear that the lover of light is not some intrinsically superior person. If he or she enjoys the light, it is because all has been performed . . . has been done 'through God'—'in union with Him, and therefore by His power' (Westcott, 1.124) (208).

⁶³⁶ Such a rebuke regarding the seriousness of misrepresenting the words of Christ would seem to apply to Dave Hunt who ignores what Jesus is really saying here in John 6. He writes:

Secondly, the reference to God “drawing” someone to salvation means much more than merely inviting or coaxing. The Greek word is *elkusē* which the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD) defines as:

To move an object from one area to another in a pulling motion, *draw*, with implication that the object being moved is incapable of propelling itself or in the case of ⁶³⁷pers. is unwilling to do so voluntarily, in either case with implication of exertion on the part of the mover. ⁶³⁸

Accordingly, the Apostle John uses the word elsewhere to describe dragging or hauling in a fishing net (21:6, 11). It is used twice in Acts to describe people grabbing a hold of the Apostle Paul and dragging him off, *against his will*, to court or to be beaten to death (Acts 16:19; 21:30). Lastly, the word that Christ used to describe how people get saved is used in James 2:6, where we read that the rich are having the local authorities “drag” (*helkuo*) the

The Westminster Confession says that the elect come to Christ “most freely, being made willing by his [God’s] grace.” No one, however, is made willing against his will, but must have been willing to be made willing.” (229)

Christ does *not* say that everyone who is drawn will actually come to Him and be saved. . . . There is no question that the Calvinist interpretation of John 6:37-45 is contrary to the entire tenor of Scripture. . . . Christ does not say that the Father forcefully pulls or drags or irresistibly compels anyone to come to Him. . . . Christ’s words, “No man can come to me except the Father draw him,” are not the same as . . . “No man is *able* to come to me.” (419, 433, 435, 436)

Contrary to Mr. Hunt, Christ *did* say that those who are dragged to Him “will be raised up on the last day.” And why would they need to be dragged if they were already “willing to be willing” as Mr. Hunt claims? And why would they need to be dragged if they were able to come to Him? “There is no question that” Mr. Hunt’s “interpretation of John 6:37-45 is contrary to the entire tenor of Scripture.”

And it is contrary to his own writing. Like all *fairists* Mr. Hunt wants to say all the things that historic orthodox Christianity has said about the state of man, but in the process they contradict themselves. Accordingly, read Mr. Hunt’s book and decide for yourself if he can sincerely claim, “The natural man is indeed enslaved by sin and would not of his own initiative seek after God.” (153) Then, Mr. Hunt, he is not able to believe either. Which one is it?

⁶³⁷

⁶³⁸ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), F. W. Danker, ed., 3rd ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 200).

poor people into court, again, against their will. Are the poor going to court because of *their* “**desire or effort**” (Rom. 9:16)? No. This word describes a force that overpowers a person and makes them do what they otherwise would not do.

Therefore, the following insertions are warranted in this text:

No one can come to Me [for salvation] **unless the Father Who sent Me drags him by His power, and I will raise him up at the last day. . . . The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing** [regarding salvation]. . . **This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him**” (John 6:44, 63, 65).

To “**come to**” Christ certainly involves mentally and willingly moving toward Him to savingly believe in Him. And no one can make a step toward believing in Him unless God “**drags**” the person apart from their own natural power or will. For all the talk in Christian theology that claims God never does anything to coerce our will, Jesus says otherwise. He is clearly saying here that if He did not “**drag**” us to Him against our will we would never “**come to**” Him.

This is because the unregenerate do not have the power or desire to “**come to**” Christ for salvation. Everything in their “**flesh counts for nothing**” when it comes to salvation because it is spiritually dead. Only “**the Spirit gives life**” to dead people enabling them to come to Christ. In fact, when “**the Spirit gives life**” to regenerate us, we receive a New Nature which comes with a new will so that ultimately we do come to Christ willingly.

And notice that every person that the Father “**drags**” to Christ is saved. It is not that the Father “**draws**” or “**enable[s]**” people such that they come to Christ and then refuse Him. On the contrary, Jesus says that everyone “**the Father . . . draws . . . will [be] raise[d] up at the last day.**”

Accordingly, Christ’s statement refutes the philosophy about some kind of *prevenient grace*. This is the theory that God enables people to come to Christ, including those who refuse to, by making them something between being spiritually dead and spiritually alive. Perhaps the only necessary argument against it is that it is nowhere mentioned or taught in Scripture. Secondly, proponents of *prevenient grace* still cannot answer the question as to why one person is saved and another is not without adding some sort of virtuous human work as the ultimate, deciding ingredient in their salvation which denies a salvation by God’s grace alone.

In addition, it can be added that Christ’s words here make any affect of a *prevenient grace* worthless. If such grace exists that gives a person the ability to be willing to come to Christ, why must

they be dragged by God to do so? Accordingly, nothing that the *prevenient grace* could produce or enable in a person is sufficient to enable people to come to Christ because His “dragging” is still necessary.

And what could someone who possessed *prevenient grace* do to “trigger” or cause the “dragging” of God that inevitably leads to salvation? Whatever it would be, would necessarily come from “**the flesh**” because the spiritually dead do not have “**the Spirit**” (cf. Rom 8:5-7). But Christ rejects the idea that anything leading to salvation could come from someone who does not have “**the Spirit**” because “**the flesh counts for nothing**” when it comes to getting saved. The NLT makes this even more explicit when it translates: “**It is the Spirit Who gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing**” (John 6:63). This is in perfect accord with what the Apostle Paul wrote of the “**flesh**” in Romans 8:5-8 as described above. To be sure, the Spirit can convict the unregenerate of sin (cf. John 16:8-11; Heb 6:4-9), but unless He gives them spiritual life they cannot respond appropriately.

Luther denounced any merit to the idea of humans possessing something between the God-loving Spirit and a God-hating flesh when he wrote:

I too know of Origen’s fancy about the ‘threefold affection’, one called ‘flesh’, another ‘soul’, and the other ‘spirit, the soul [or human will under *prevenient grace*] being in the middle between the other two, and able to turn either flesh-wards or spirit-wards. But these are just his own dreams; he retails them, but does not prove them. Paul here [Romans 8:5-8] calls everything without the Spirit ‘flesh’, as I have shown.⁶³⁹

Accordingly, the Scriptures are clear that until *God* performs some supernatural acts to enable a human to respond to the Gospel, they are all spiritually dead, deaf, blind, retarded, and impotent. All of this is why *God* must initiate the process of anyone getting saved, and because our salvation is by unearned grace, it is unconditional, and not prompted by anything we do. In fact, we *cannot* do anything that would merit such grace.

The psychological/spiritual difference between regenerate and unregenerated people was a common theme of Christ’s teachings, including when He said:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If

⁶³⁹ Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Revell, 1957), 300.

then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt 6:22-23).

The **"eyes"** here are metaphorical for a capacity to correctly discern spiritual and moral truth. Contrary to postmodern thinking, the King said the psychological **"eyes"** of some **"are bad"** resulting in a **"darkness"** of deception, while some **"eyes are good"** resulting in a fullness of psychological and spiritual **"light."** Accordingly, Christ said elsewhere, **"Whoever follows Me will never walk in [spiritual] darkness"** (John 8:12). He went on to succinctly describe the spiritual capacity of unregenerate humans when He said they, **"have no room for My word"** and therefore do not have the capacity to recognize or receive His truth.

The spiritual blindness that occurs apart from God's grace was likewise described by Christ when He explained why He spoke in parables. For those who think true knowledge of divine things is a matter of human choice, the King said:

The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you [disciples, i.e. Christians], but not to them ["those on the outside" (Mark 4:11), the crowds, i.e. unbelievers]. Whoever has [i.e. the Christians] will be given more [spiritual insight and understanding], and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have [unbelievers], even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing [physically], they do not see [spiritually]; though hearing [physically], they do not hear or understand [spiritually]."

In them [unbelievers] is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. Because this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see [spiritually] with their eyes, hear [spiritually] with their ears, understand [spiritually] with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

But blessed are your eyes [Christians] because they see [spiritually], and your ears because they hear [spiritually]. (Matt 6:22-23; 13:11-16; cf. Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2)

Here is another clear description of two groups of people with very different experiences and abilities regarding spiritual truth, and the difference lies in what God has done (cf. vs. 11, 16) and the

"heart" condition of the people (cf. v. 15).⁶⁴⁰ This is why Christ repeatedly prefaced His statements with **"He who has [physical] ears, let him [spiritually] hear"** (Matt 11:15; cf. 13:9, 43). Mere natural **"ears"** suppressed by an unregenerate **"heart"** are unable to receive, understand, and appreciate divine revelation.⁶⁴¹

Therefore, those indwelt with the Holy Spirit are full of light and truth because their spiritual **"eyes"** and **"ears"** have been fixed. The unregenerate human has spiritually dead **"eyes"** and **"ears"** that cannot receive spiritual truth.

We are reminded here of Christ's psychological description of the Pharisees when He told His disciples, **"Leave them [as opposed to debating with them]; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit"** (Matt 15:14). To suggest, as many do, that all of humanity suffers from similar theological blindness, is to completely disregard the spiritual and psychological rebirth that comes from the Holy Spirit to the believer in the King. There is a world of difference between the abilities of the *Spirit-liberated reason* of the Christian and the *devil-darkened reason* of the pagan.

B.3) The insanity of humanity according to the Apostle

⁶⁴⁰ Accordingly, Leon Morris comments on Matthew 13:11:

The doctrine of election lies behind these words. It is not merit in the disciples that they understand where others do not; their comprehension is due to the fact that God has chosen them and given them the gift of understanding. (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Eerdmans, 1992], 339).

⁶⁴¹ Some modern commentators completely miss the meaning of Christ's words regarding the people's inability to hear Him. John Nolland writes that the need Christ is referring to is "to pay proper attention to what is being said" (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Eerdmans, 2005], 459). Likewise, Davies and Allison write: "What is required is inner attention, concentration, discernment" (*The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* [T & T Clark, 1988-1997], II:259). R. T. France comments that Christ's words are "an invitation to explore the implications of what has been said" (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Eerdmans, 1985, repr. 1999], 196). Finally, Leon Morris says, "The thought . . . is that the physical act of hearing is not sufficient. It is more important to take in what is heard, to comprehend it, and assimilate it" (284). Of course such things are true, but they do not come by merely greater intellectual effort, as these comments suggest. All of them seem to ignore the significance of Christ's reference to something God must do, i.e. divine revelation and spiritual regeneration.

Because the Apostle Paul knew that humans would be prone to exaggerate their spiritual condition and abilities he wrote:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

⁴ But because of His great love for us, God, Who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Eph 2:1-5)

First, we are taught that before salvation we were spiritually **"dead in . . . sins"** **"but"** then **"God . . . made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions"** (vs. 1, 4-5). ⁶⁴² Notice that we had no spark of spiritual life, but it was **"when we were"** still spiritually **"dead"** that **"God . . . made us [spiritually] alive."** All humans, without exception, are born into sin and are therefore born spiritually dead (cf. Rom 5:12) and have to be **"made . . . alive with Christ"** before they are able to respond to Christ in any way.

The best way to understand spiritual death is comparing it with physical death. And, no doubt, this is precisely what the Apostle intended. Just as a physically dead person has absolutely no physical abilities whatsoever, a spiritually dead person has absolutely no spiritual abilities as well.

⁶⁴² Charles Hodge (1797–1878) illustrated the significance of Christ making us alive for salvation when he writes:

There is an intimate connection between this clause [**God . . . made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions"**] and the preceding paragraph. In 1:19 . . . the apostle prays that the Ephesians might duly appreciate the greatness of that power which had been exercised in their conversion. It was to be known from its effects. It was that power which was exercised in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, and which had wrought an analogous change in them. The same power which quickened Christ has quickened you. It serves to connect this clause with what precedes. 'God raised Christ from the dead, and he has given life to you dead in trespasses and sins.' Hodge; See also John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], Eph 2:8-9.

Those who would question this analogy need to answer the question: Why did the Apostle use the word “**dead** [*nekrous*]” to describe the spiritual state of unregenerated people if he only meant their spiritual state was merely impaired or perverted? On the contrary, as NT scholar Francis Foulkes writes in his *Tyndale Commentary* concerning Ephesians 2:1: “This death is . . . the loss of the . . . capacity for spiritual activity,” including *saving faith*.⁶⁴³

Likewise, Albert Barnes commented:

A [physically dead] corpse is insensible. It sees not, and hears not, and feels not. . . . So with the sinner in regard to the spiritual and eternal world. He . . . hears not the call of God; he is unaffected by the dying love of the Saviour . . . [N]o human power can arouse him to act for God, anymore than human power can rouse the sleeping dead, or open the sightless eyeballs on the light of day. The same power is needed in the conversion of a sinner which is needed in raising the dead; and one and the other alike demonstrate the omnipotence of Him Who can do it [and the impotence of the humans who cannot].⁶⁴⁴

Finally, John MacArthur, in his commentary on Ephesians, relates the story of a crying, desperate mother hopelessly trying to rouse her dead infant, and writes: “There was no life there to respond, not even to the powerful love of a mother.”⁶⁴⁵ Dr. MacArthur continues:

That is the way of spiritual death as well. A person who is spiritually dead has no life by which he can respond to spiritual things, much less live a spiritual life. No amount of love, care, and words of affection from God can draw a response. . . .

When Paul counseled Timothy about widows in the church, he said of those who were profligate, “She who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives” (1 Tim. 5:6). [Spiritually] dead while they [physically] live is the sad state of every unredeemed human being. . . .

That all men apart from God are sinful does not mean that every person is equally corrupt and wicked. Twenty corpses on

⁶⁴³ Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, TNTC (Eerdmans, 1989), 77.

⁶⁴⁴ Barnes, Eph 2:8-9.

⁶⁴⁵ MacArthur, Eph 2:8-9.

a battlefield might be in many different stages of decay, but they are uniformly dead.⁶⁴⁶

After saying that unregenerate humans are “**dead in . . . sin**” (v. 2), the Apostles says that, “**the spirit**” “**of the ruler of the kingdom of the air**” who is satan, “**is now at work in**” them (vs. 2-3). Elsewhere we have written regarding Ephesians 2:2-3:

Here, unbelievers are described as being led by the devil’s “**spirit**” which is “**at work in**” them. Before regeneration it was not merely a free *human* spirit at work in us, and certainly not the Holy Spirit, but the “**spirit**” of the *devil*. NT scholar F. F. Bruce (1910–1990) comments that this Greek verb (*energeō*) to describe how satan’s “**spirit**” works in unbelievers is the same word used in Ephesians 3:20 to refer to “**His power that is at work within us**” believers.⁶⁴⁷

In other words, the influence and power that the Holy Spirit exercises in the believer is the same kind of influence and power that the devil’s “**spirit**” exercises in the unbeliever. In addition, however, while the Christian has a choice whether or not to be influenced by the Holy Spirit, the unregenerate do not, because the devil’s “**spirit**” is the only “spirit” the unbeliever possesses.⁶⁴⁸

Accordingly, the Apostle describes this state of spiritual death as being in bondage to “**the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts**” (v. 3). Accordingly, the “**sinful nature**” is the only nature someone has before being indwelt with the Spirit, and its “**cravings . . . desires and thoughts**” are the only options for the source of their attitudes and actions.

Accordingly, Dr. MacArthur summarizes Ephesians 2:5-8:

In the state of spiritual death, the only walking, or living, a person can do is according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. . . .

Sinful men have many different ideas and standards, but they are in total agreement that the network of things in this world is more important than the divine perspective of God. In this most basic world outlook they are of one mind. They

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1984), 283.

⁶⁴⁸ Excerpt from section 4.12.B.1

resolutely work to fulfill the goals and values of their system, though it defies God and always self-destructs. . . .

They are of one mind because they have a common leader and lord, the prince of the power of the air. . . . The power [or authority] of the air probably refers to Satan's host of demons who exist in the heavenly sphere. Paul has this in mind in Ephesians 6:12, where he warns of "the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." During the present age he and his demon host dominate, pressure, and control every person who is unsaved. . . .

Not all unsaved people are necessarily indwelt at all times by Satan or are demon-possessed. But knowingly or unknowingly they are subject to Satan's influence. Because they share his nature of sinfulness and exist in the same sphere of rebellion against God, they respond naturally to his leading and to the influence of his demons. They are on the same spiritual wavelength. . . . Men are not free and independent; they are totally dominated by the hosts of hell. . . .

Because fallen mankind and Satan's hosts exist in the same spiritual realm, it is quite natural that his spirit is the same spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. The prince of disobedience works in . . . those . . . called the sons of disobedience of whom he is the spiritual father (John 8:38-44). Paul makes clear this identifying characteristic of disobedience to God when he states absolutely that "you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness" (Rom. 6:16). . . .

As with trespasses and sins, lusts and desires are . . . used synonymously to represent fallen man's complete orientation to his own selfish way. By nature he is driven to fulfill the lusts and desires of his sinful flesh and . . . mind.⁶⁴⁹

Does this sound like people who are able to humble themselves before Christ to put their faith in Him?⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁹ MacArthur, *in loc.*

⁶⁵⁰ David Hunt is one who attempts to minimize what the Apostle is saying about the spiritual inability of unregenerated humans. Denying the affect of what it means to be "dead in sin" Mr. Hunt writes, "We are just as clearly told that Christians are "dead to sin" (Romans 6:2, 7, 11, etc.), and noting we are still able to "make the first move toward sin" (151).

Mr. Hunt ignores the different prepositions in these statements and the spiritual nature of their objects. We would simply suggest that being a demonically possessed and devil-blinded unbeliever who is dead in sin is

The Apostle Paul describes spiritually dead Gentiles with the same psychological inabilities and notes that it is clearly a spiritual problem, not an intellectual one, when he writes:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. (Eph 4:17-18)

Commenting on this passage, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) wrote:

A man's being enveloped in darkness is the cause of his not seeing . . . The apostle conceives of the heathen as men whose minds are impaired or darkened, and therefore they are ignorant.⁶⁵¹

The unchallenged sinful nature in unregenerated humans will not allow their reason to accept the Gospel. Josh McDowell, a foremost Christian apologist, provides a personal example of how this works when he writes of his own journey to Christ:

evidently different than being a Spirit-indwelted and spiritually alive believer who is dead to sin, and the Bible says so.

How are we to interpret these two phrases? Use Scripture. We do not have the freedom of giving them whatever meaning we want, but must use Scripture to know what the Apostle Paul meant by them. Accordingly, Paul describes what it means for the regenerated Christian to be "dead to sin" in Romans 7:14-23. Indeed, we are capable of sinning even while being dead to sin.

Likewise, Mr. Hunt teaches:

As for sinners, the Bible unquestionably teaches that they are spiritually dead to God. But what does that mean? Adam was spiritually dead from the moment he sinned, but he heard when God spoke to him and told him the consequences of his sin. . . . Was Adam regenerated? Obviously not. (405)

First, remember that it is most likely that God spoke *audibly* to Adam, and that he heard Him with his physical ears. No one is denying that if God or an Angel spoke to an unregenerated person like that, that the person would hear them. The Scriptures that Mr. Hunt is choosing to ignore or misinterpret tell us that spiritual death means the inability to understand or properly appreciate the Gospel. Accordingly, Mr. Hunt's analogy is rather useless.

⁶⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 2003), Eph 4:18.

I left the university and traveled throughout the United States and Europe to gather evidence to prove that Christianity is a sham. . . . I began to realize that I was being intellectually dishonest. My mind told me that the claims of Christ were indeed true, but my will was being pulled another direction. I had placed so much emphasis on finding the truth, but I wasn't willing to follow it once I saw it. . . . [B]ecoming a Christian seemed so ego-shattering to me. I couldn't think of a faster way to ruin all my good times.⁶⁵²

Again, the Apostle Paul distinguished between believers and unbelievers in psychological terms when he wrote:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ **The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;** ⁷ **the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** ⁸ **Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [living in them], he does not belong to Christ." (Rom 8:5-9)

The first thing to notice in this passage is that the Apostle is contrasting believers with unbelievers, not sinful or "carnal" believers with "Spirit-filled" believers. This becomes clear when he emphatically tells the Roman Christians in verse 9 that, **"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [living in them], he does not belong to Christ."** In other words, the Apostle is saying that if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit, and if you have the Holy Spirit then you *are* controlled by Him, not the sinful nature.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵² Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Josh McDowell, 1999), xxv.

⁶⁵³ Most commentators agree on our interpretation here of Roman 8:1-9. For example, Douglas Moo writes concerning verse 9:

So characteristic of these respective "ages" or "realms" are flesh and Spirit that the person belonging to one or the other can be said to be "in" them. In this sense, then, no Christian can be "in the flesh"; and all Christians are, by definition, "in the Spirit." We miss Paul's intention if we think of being "in the flesh" here as the condition of

Let us notice then the spiritual/psychological state of unregenerated humans. They **"live according to the sinful nature"** and **"have their minds set on what that nature desires"** (v. 5). Their **"sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature"** can do nothing that would **"please God."** Does this not describe a person who would need to be made something new before humbling themselves under the saving lordship of Jesus Christ and truly believing and accepting Him for Who He is?

Martin Luther (1483-1546) commented on Romans 8:5-8 as follows:

Let us see what Paul thinks about endeavor and the power of 'free will' in carnal [unregenerated] men. 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' Again: 'The carnal mind is death.' Again: 'The carnal is enmity against God.' Once more: 'It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be'. (Rom. 8:5-8). Let the guardian of 'free will' [or *prevenient grace*] answer the following question: How can endeavors towards good be made by that which is death, and displeases God, and is enmity against God, and disobeys God, and cannot obey Him? . . .

Therefore the highest virtues of the best [spiritually dead] men are 'in the flesh'; that is, they are dead, and at enmity

mortality that continues to characterize even believers (Nygren), or as the moral weakness and proneness to sin that, more lamentably, we still possess (Dunn). For the rest of the verse makes absolutely clear that (1) to be a Christian is to be indwelt by God's Spirit; and (2) to be indwelt by God's Spirit means to be "in the Spirit" and not "in the flesh." (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans, 1996], 489).

Likewise, Thomas Schreiner writes regarding the whole passage:

Rom. 8:5-7 constitutes not an exhortation but a description of the mind-set of those of the flesh and those of the Spirit. . . . An exhortation to live according to the Spirit is not present in Rom. 8:5-8. Paul describes the actual mind-set of those who are according to the flesh and Spirit. This is not to deny that believers battle against the flesh (cf. 8:13), but such a struggle should not be read into verses 5-8. . . . The intention of verses 5-11, then, is scarcely to say that believers are partly dominated by the flesh and partly by the Spirit. Instead, Paul argues that those who have the Spirit manifest the mind-set of the Spirit. (*Romans* [Baker, 1998], 411-12).

Also, NT scholar F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) wrote regarding Romans 8, "To be 'in the Spirit' (*en pneumatic*) is the opposite of being 'in the flesh' (*en sarki*); and all believers are regarded as being 'in the Spirit' (8:9). In practice then, to be 'in the Spirit' is to be 'in Christ'." (*The Letter of Paul to the Romans* TNTC [Eerdmans, 1985, repr. 1999], 47.)

with God, not subject to God's law nor able to do so, and not pleasing God. . . . So also Christ says in Matt. 7: 'An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit' (v. 18) [or anything else that would trigger the grace of God].⁶⁵⁴

The Apostle illustrates this same truth when he writes:

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." (Rom 11:7-8)

What the Israelites sought was the same thing that so many humans seek: an escape from the pain of guilt (cf. Rom 9:31). They, like many humans, sense, "**The wrath of God [that] is being revealed from Heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men**" (Rom 1:18). They seek peace with their conscience, but they will not seek it God's way because they have a "**spirit of stupor**" rather than wisdom, and their spiritual "**eyes**" and "**ears**" are dysfunctional, reflecting their *devil-darkened reason*. Their "spiritual senses" are so corrupt, in fact, that Christ smells like death to them (cf. 2 Cor 4:15-16).

Along the same lines, the Apostle simply says: "**[T]he message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God**" (1 Cor 1:18). Evidently, all of "**Those who are perishing**" think the very Gospel they must embrace to be saved, is "**foolishness**" and "**a stumbling block**" (1:23). But for others, the Gospel is the effective "**power of God**" that will save them. Why the difference? The Apostle explains a few verses later:

We have not received the [blinding demonic⁶⁵⁵] spirit of the world but the Spirit Who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing [things of the Spirit to people of the Spirit⁶⁵⁶]. The man

⁶⁵⁴ Luther, *Bondage*, 300.

⁶⁵⁵ See endnote 34 in chapter 4.12 regarding the meaning of "**the spirit of the world**" in 1 Corinthians 2:12.

⁶⁵⁶ See NIV text note on 1 Corinthians 2:13. Likewise, Anthony Thiselton points out in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* that the dative plural adjective *pneumatikois* here can be in either the neutral sense (i.e. "things"), or masculine sense (i.e. "people"). The context is the best determining factor. Therefore, considering the fact that the

without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor 2:12, 14)

Several points can be made here. First, to have “**received** [*lambanō*: “to take into possession” ⁶⁵⁷]. . . **the Spirit Who is from God**” describes spiritual regeneration, and to be “**without the Spirit**” [*psychikos*: “one who merely functions bodily, without being touched by the Spirit of God” ⁶⁵⁸] clearly refers to unregenerated humans. Secondly, the acceptance and understanding of “**what God has freely given us**” and “**the things that come from the Spirit of God**” clearly include the saving Gospel that Paul has been speaking of throughout the passage (cf. 1:18-2:5).

Notice then what the Apostle is saying about unregenerated humanity: Not only will they not “**accept**” the Gospel, they cannot even “**understand**” the Gospel, and it will be mere unacceptable and unbelievable “**foolishness**” to them as if the Gospel says 1+1=5. This is because the Gospel must be “**spiritually discerned**,” not just mentally, and “**the man without the Spirit**” or the mere naturally born person, is not capable of doing this. They have only sinful reasoning and desires, which will not conclude anything else about “**the message of the cross**” other than it is “**foolishness.**” As NT scholar Leon Morris comments on 1 Corinthians 2:12-14: “Anyone whose equipment is only of this world, who has not received the Holy Spirit, has no ability to make an estimate of things spiritual.” ⁶⁵⁹

Apostle throughout the passage is comparing people of the Spirit with those without the Spirit, the masculine sense seems best. Accordingly, C. K. Barrett writes: “[I]n the context he speaks of the *mature* and of the *spiritual*, and there is thus reason for thinking that his meaning may be ‘interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual persons’” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) [Hendrickson, 2000], 76). For further discussion see Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2000), 224, 264-5. Also see R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina (Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1999), 135.

⁶⁵⁷ BAGD, λαμβάνω, sec. 3.

⁶⁵⁸ BAGD, ψυχικός.

⁶⁵⁹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 59. Likewise, NT scholar Gordon Fee comments: [Paul] now makes a turn in the argument in order to reassert that the gospel he preaches is in fact the wisdom of God. But it cannot be perceived as such by those who are pursuing *sophia* [worldly wisdom]; it is recognized only by those who have the Spirit. . . .

In other words, we see the same exasperating insanity of unregenerated humanity in relation to the Gospel as Creation. The Gospel is clear and promising, and we would suggest that if people's minds really were free to choose it, they would. However, people **"without the Spirit"** do **"not accept"** and **"cannot understand"** anything that needs to be **"spiritually discerned"** and accordingly are absolutely incapable of making any kind of initial, meritorious, decisive step or action for their salvation.

Notice again that the Apostle's words deny the idea of some sort of *prevenient grace* that is short of the indwelling and regeneration of the Holy Spirit and would enable humans to respond in a saving way to God. He makes it clear that we can understand such spiritual things because we have **"received [take into possession]"**. . . **the Spirit Who is from God"** (2:12), meaning much more than some *prevenient grace*. Likewise, Paul describes the unregenerate as *psychikos* ("without being touched by the Spirit of God).⁶⁶⁰ Again, the Apostle's contrast seems to exclude the idea of some kind of person who is something between with or without the Spirit, and it is only those who *possess* the Spirit who will understand spiritual things including the Gospel.

The reason for this "not accepting/rejecting" is that the things of the Spirit "are foolishness to [them]." Because they have not received the Spirit, in the sense of v. 12 [like Christians], their view of everything is from the bottom up, twisted and distorted. This is another sure indication that Paul is still pursuing the argument of 1:18-2:5, where the preaching of Christ crucified, God's wisdom, is rejected as foolishness by those who are perishing. (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Eerdmans, 1987], 98, 116)

Unfortunately, Dave Hunt writes of this verse: "Paul is here speaking of [understanding] more than the simple gospel; he is referring to the deeper understanding of spiritual truth that comes with maturity in Christ" (119). Is Mr. Hunt implying then that the saved but immature Corinthians did not have the Spirit? And while Paul *may* have in mind a spiritual understanding of more than the Gospel, he certainly does not have *less* in mind, and his thoughts do include the Gospel, the very topic that he has been discussing throughout the previous passage (cf. 1 Cor 1:18ff). Mr. Hunt's attempt to exclude the Gospel from what those without the Spirit will not accept and cannot understand is a distortion of the Apostle's intention.

⁶⁶⁰ The Apostle said we must have **"received . . . the Spirit from God [so] that we may understand what God has freely given us** [i.e. the Gospel] (1 Cor 2:12). However, Mr. Hunt seems to claim that something less than the possession of the Spirit is necessary when he writes: "Of course, no one can understand the gospel except by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit." (120). True, but more than enlightenment is needed for

John Calvin commented on 1 Corinthians 2:14:

Having concluded that all men are blind, and having deprived the human mind of the power to rise up to knowledge of God, Paul now shows how the faithful are delivered from this blindness, viz., by the Lord honouring them with a special enlightenment of the Spirit. ⁶⁶¹

Elsewhere, Calvin wrote: "men are blind, until Christ, the light of the world, enlightens them." ⁶⁶² The spiritual blindness, deafness, and foolishness of unregenerated humanity was ultimately demonstrated when **"None of the rulers of this age understood [God's wisdom], for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"** (1 Cor 2:8). There is nothing more insane than concluding *that* was a good and just thing to do.

Accordingly, the Apostle speaks of those who, **"perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved"** (2 Thess 2:10), and also of those who are, **"always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth"** (2 Tim 3:7).

The state of unregenerated humanity in terms of spiritual things is described by Paul when he writes: **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly"** (Rom 5:6). **"Powerless"** to do what? **"Powerless"** to humble ourselves, admitting our sin and our inability to overcome or make up for it. **"Powerless"** to do any of the spiritual things necessary to be saved. ⁶⁶³

Accordingly, we wrote in an earlier chapter:

As a matter of fact, from God's perspective, there are only two kinds of people in the world: those spiritually **"dead in**

spiritually dead people- the Apostle says we must internally *possess* the Spirit, not just be externally enlightened.

Those spoken of in Hebrews 6:4-6 were **"enlightened"** and **"shared in the Holy Spirit"** and were no doubt convicted of their sin by the Spirit as is one of His purposes in the world (cf. John 16:8-11). But, they had not experienced the **"better things . . . that accompany salvation"** (v. 9) which would include being regenerated by and possessing the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁶¹ Calvin, 1 Cor 2:1-11.

⁶⁶² Ibid., Hebrews 6:4.

⁶⁶³ All of the above makes the modern critic of Protestant orthodoxy, Dave Hunt, sound fairly foolish when he writes:

There is not a verse in the Bible that presents Calvinism's radical idea that the sinner is incapable of believing the very gospel that offers him forgiveness and salvation . . . One would never derive from Scripture the idea that the unregenerate are unable to believe.

transgressions" and those He has "**made** [spiritually] **alive**" (Eph 2:5). The King put it this way: there are "**the people of this world**" and then there are "**the people of the light**" (Luke 16:8). He never even hinted at any other category of humanity.

To put it bluntly, and to repeat what we've said throughout the book, born again Christians are an entirely different species of human being than their unregenerated counterparts. So much so that God says our old self died (cf. Rom 6:1-11). Accordingly, all regenerated Christians can say: "**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me**" (Gal 2:20). A human being with Christ living in them is a radically different kind of human being, resulting in differences far greater than merely skin color, gender, or culture. This is because the minds, hearts, natures, desires, perspective, and abilities of spiritually regenerated humans have all been radically re-created. Thus, the Apostle Paul refers to Christians as the "**enlightened**" ones (Eph 1:18).⁶⁶⁴

C) The Insanity of Humanity According to Teachers in the Church

On the very edge of the Apostolic era, Bishop Ignatius wrote around the year 110 A. D. concerning unbelievers:

They . . . cannot do the things that are spiritual. . . . Nor can the unbelievers do the things of belief. . . . Pray for them, if so be they may repent, which is very difficult; but Jesus Christ, our true life, has the power of this.⁶⁶⁵

Likewise, Justin Martyr wrote around 150 A. D.:

No good thing dwells in us. . . . For neither by nature, nor by human understanding is it possible for men to acquire the knowledge of things so great divine, but by the energy of the

⁶⁶⁴ Excerpt from section 4.12.A. Unfortunately, the NIV and many modern translations do not reflect the perfect tense of the Greek here and give the inaccurate impression that Paul is praying that the Ephesians would yet be enlightened. On the contrary, the literal Greek reads, "**the eyes of your heart having been enlightened**" which reflects the fact that Paul sees the Ephesians as already possessing this enlightenment. For further discussion see section 14.18.A.4.

⁶⁶⁵ Ignatius, quoted by Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back Into Grace* (Baker, 1996), 282.

Divine Spirit. . . . Of ourselves it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God. . . . He has convicted us of the impossibility of our nature to obtain life. . . . Free will has destroyed us; we who were free are become slaves and for our sin are sold. . . . Being pressed down by our sins, we cannot move upward toward God; we are like birds who have wings, but are unable to fly.⁶⁶⁶

Bishop Theophilus of Antioch (c. 170) had written: "God is seen by those who are enabled to see Him when they have the eyes of their soul opened."⁶⁶⁷ About A. D. 200 the Church Father Tertullian, representing the view of the Western Church at the time, also wrote to unbelievers regarding *saving faith*, "It is not given to you by God because you do not ascribe it to God alone."⁶⁶⁸

Although the Bible scholar Origen was too often not a faithful interpreter of Scripture, he did write around 220 A. D.: "Our free will . . . or human nature is not sufficient to seek God in any manner."⁶⁶⁹

About the year 300 Bishop Arnobius wrote the heathen, "You place the salvation of your souls in yourselves, and trust you may be made gods by your inward endeavor, yet it is not in our own power to reach things above."⁶⁷⁰

Eusebius, an early Church historian second only to Luke, wrote to unbelievers around A. D. 330: "The liberty of our will in choosing things that are good is destroyed."⁶⁷¹

Around the year 350 the renowned Church Father Athanasius wrote, "To believe [in Christ for salvation] is not ours, or in our power, but the Spirit's who is in us, and abides in us."⁶⁷²

Around 400, the Bible scholar Jerome, wrote:

See how great is the help of God, and how frail the condition of man that we cannot by any means fulfill this, that we repent, unless the Lord first convert us. . . . When He says, "No man can come to Me," He breaks the proud liberty of free

⁶⁶⁶ Justin Martyr, *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷ Theophilus, *To Autolycus*, I.2. Online at www.ccel.org

⁶⁶⁸ Tertullian, *Ibid*, 297

⁶⁶⁹ Origen, *Ibid.*, 282.

⁶⁷⁰ Arnobius, *Ibid.*, 297.

⁶⁷¹ Eusebius, *Ibid*, 282."

⁶⁷² Athanasius, *Ibid.*, 297.

will; for man can desire nothing, and in vain he endeavors. ⁶⁷³
⁶⁷⁴

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the most influential theologian of the Middle Ages, wrote in his *Summa Theologica* that:

[W]e must assert [an] internal cause, which moves man inwardly to assent to matters of faith. The Pelagians held that this cause was nothing else than man's freewill. . . . But this is false, for since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God. Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace. ⁶⁷⁵

Along these lines, Martin Luther wrote:

It is not sufficient to know God . . . as philosophers write of his nature. . . . This is a natural knowledge of the senses, harmful to those who do not understand it. . . . No one understands his commands rightly unless he first be illuminated from above. ⁶⁷⁶

John Calvin wrote a great deal on this subject, succinctly summed up when he commented: "men's minds must of necessity be in blindness until they are enlightened by the Spirit of God." ⁶⁷⁷ In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* he writes:

Augustine so recognizes this inability of the reason to understand the things of God that he deems the grace of

⁶⁷³ Jerome, *Ibid.*, 298.

⁶⁷⁴ All of these quotes from early Church Fathers serve to refute Dave Hunt who claims: "A study of early church history reveals that Calvinistic doctrines were unknown during the church's first three centuries" (19). On the contrary, the inability of humans to seek or obtain salvation apart from regeneration was at the heart of Calvinism and obviously a common and firm belief "during the church's first three centuries."

⁶⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-11, q. 6, art. i, resp.; online at www.newadvent.org/summa

⁶⁷⁶ Martin Luther, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, on Heb 6:13, in *Works*, 29 (Concordia, 1974).

⁶⁷⁷ Calvin, 1 Cor 2:15.

illumination no less necessary for our minds than the light of the sun for our eyes.⁶⁷⁸

The highly respected Puritan theologian John Owen (1616-1683) contended that:

[There] is a natural impotence, through the depravity of the faculties of the mind, or understanding, whereby a natural man is absolutely unable, without a special renovation of the Holy Ghost, to discern spiritual things in a saving manner.⁶⁷⁹

Accordingly, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the authoritative summary of Protestant Reformation theology, in its section on "Free Will" asserted the virtual universal belief of Protestant Christianity:

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.⁶⁸⁰

Jonathan Edwards wrote a great deal about what he called the psychological "new sense" of the Christian and its resulting vast difference between the spiritual perception of those with the Spirit compared to mere natural men:

A natural man has no experience of any of those things that are spiritual; the apostle teaches us, that he is so far from it, that he knows nothing about them, he is a perfect stranger to them, the talk about such things is all foolishness and nonsense to him, he knows not what it means; 1 Cor. 2:14. . . . And to the like purpose Christ teaches us that the world is wholly unacquainted with the Spirit of God, John 14:17. . . .

[N]atural men are represented in Scripture, as having no spiritual light, no spiritual life, and no spiritual being; and therefore conversion is often compared to opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, and a work of creation. . . .

There is such a thing, if the Scriptures are of any use to teach us anything, as a spiritual, supernatural understanding of divine things, that is peculiar to the saints, and which those

⁶⁷⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.html>, 2.2.25.

⁶⁷⁹ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power* (Kregel, 1967), 159.

⁶⁸⁰ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter IX.3; online at <http://www.opc.org/wcf.html>.

who are not saints have nothing of. It is certainly a kind of understanding, apprehending or discerning of divine things, that natural men have nothing of. . . .

[T]here [is] in the saints a kind of apprehension or perception, which is in its nature perfectly diverse from all that natural men have, or that it is possible they should have, until they have a new nature. . . . [There are] the sensations of a new spiritual sense, which the souls of natural men have not; [but] which the saints have given them in regeneration.⁶⁸¹

Edwards' most detailed writing on the epistemological/psychological/spiritual state of unregenerated humanity was entitled *The Freedom of the Will*, published in 1754, in which he desired to prove:

The Calvinist truth as clearly revealed in the holy scriptures . . . [T]he Calvinistic doctrine of the total depravity and corruption of man's nature, whereby his heart is wholly under the power of sin, and he is utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace, savingly to love God, believe in Christ, or do anything that is truly good and acceptable in God's sight.⁶⁸²

Finally, we will quote Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) on the spiritually depraved nature of unregenerated humanity:

Without the Spirit of God, we are like a ship stranded on the beach when the tide has receded--there is no moving her until the flood shall once again lift her from the sands. Until the Spirit of God shall thaw the chilly coldness of our natural estate, and bid the life-floods of our heart flow forth, there we must be-- ...cold, cheerless, lifeless, and powerless.

A man is opposed to Christ, he hates his gospel, does not understand it and will not receive it-- the Holy Spirit comes, puts light into his darkened understanding, takes the chain from his bondage will, gives liberty to his conscience, gives life to his dead soul, ... and the man becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus.

⁶⁸¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, II.2.; III.4.1.; online at www.ccel.org.

⁶⁸² Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, IV.3; online at <http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/edwards/fowindex.htm>.

More specifically in relation to receiving the Gospel Spurgeon preached:

Coming to Christ is so obnoxious to human nature that, although, so far as physical and mental forces are concerned, men could come if they would; it is strictly correct to say that they cannot and will not unless the Father who hath sent Christ doth draw them. . . .

It is strange how people, when talking about free-will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. "Now," says one, "I believe men can be saved if they will." My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the gospel of Christ? We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will ever be constrained towards Christ.

Then I must ask one more question: if [we possessed] all that were needed to make a man willing, do you not at once degrade the Holy Spirit? Are we not in the habit of giving all the glory of salvation wrought in us to God the Spirit? But now, if all that God the Spirit does for me is to make me willing to do these things for myself, am I not in a great measure a sharer with the Holy Spirit in the glory? And may I not boldly stand up and say, "It is true the Spirit gave me the will to do it, but still I did it myself, and therein will I glory; for if I did these things myself without assistance from on high, I will not cast my crown at his feet; it is my own crown, I earned it, and I will keep it." . . . to come to Christ truly is not in your power, until you are renewed by the Holy Ghost.

You reply, that men sometimes are willing, without the help of the Holy Spirit. I answer—Did you ever meet with any person who was? Scores and hundreds, nay, thousands of Christians have I conversed with, of different opinions, young and old, but it has never been my lot to meet with one who could affirm that he came to Christ of himself, without being drawn. The universal confession of all true believers is this—"I know that unless Jesus Christ had sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God, I would to this very hour have been wandering far from him, at a distance from him, and loving that distance well." With common consent, all believers

affirm the truth, that men will not come to Christ till the Father who hath sent Christ doth draw them. ⁶⁸³

Pastoral Practices

- It is important, to the best of our ability, to discern whether or not a person we are counseling or ministering to is a true believer or not. If they are not, they will not be able to fully understand and apply whatever biblical advice you are giving them. One can enquire about their testimony, church background, spiritual journey, etc. Obviously, if it seems they may not know Christ, the most important thing they need is the Gospel and you can explain how that will help them with the problem they came to you with in the first place.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we praise You for giving us spiritual and real life when we spiritually and really dead. We are awed and horrified at what sin against You has done to the human race. Made in Your image, they have become demonic zombies fit for Hell and nothing else. Rebellion against You has such great consequences because You are so great. We humble ourselves before You knowing that the only reason we are not also fit of Hell is because of Your great grace.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do we think it is so amazing that humans do not embrace the Gospel? Why do we feel this demonstrates a mental/spiritual insanity on their part? Do you agree or disagree and why?

⁶⁸³ Charles Spurgeon, Sermon 182; online at <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0182.htm>. For a fuller text of this sermon see chapter 6.5.

- 2) What effect do we think the fact of humanity's insanity should have on those who think people have the ability to choose and believe the Gospel?
- 3) What is an OT passage that describes the spiritual insanity of humanity?
- 4) What is a passage from Christ that describes the spiritual insanity of humanity?
- 5) What is a NT passage that describes the spiritual insanity of humanity?
- 6) What is a quote from an influential Teacher of the Church that describes the spiritual insanity of humanity?
- 7) We state that born again Christians are an entirely different species of human being than their unregenerated counterparts. In what ways does this difference manifest itself?

Recommended Reading

- See chapters 4.1-7 for further study on the psychological aspects of our relationship with God.
- Regarding the spiritual depravity of humanity see also chapter 2.2.
- Regarding the issue of salvation by regeneration and *saving faith* being a gift see chapters 6.2-5.
- For the classic treatise on this subject see Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Revel, 1957). And get the copy with J. I. Packer's introduction. It alone is worth the price of the book.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.15**From Darkness to Light I***Spirit-liberated Reason & Revelation*

Overall Objective

To understand the function of the human mind with spiritual regeneration.

Table of Topics**A) The Spiritual Liberation of Reason**

A.1) The biblical & historical view

A.2) Regenerated Christians & sin

A.3) Christians have the correct bias

B) The Freedom to See the Irresistible Message of Creation**C) The Freedom to Understand & Respond Correctly to Scripture**

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Christ did not come to only save our souls, but our minds as well.
- Human reasoning is like good works. Before regeneration it is practically useless in spiritual matters, but afterwards it is absolutely essential.
- Regenerated humans have been recreated by God into a very different species of human beings with a "**new heart**" and a "**new spirit**" from God.
- While unregenerated humanity continues to sink to the semblance of mere beasts, regenerated humanity continues to rise to the resemblance of their Creator, and to reflect what humans were intended to be.
- There is a sense in which Christians can have *devil-darkened reason* as well when they allow their sinful desires to corrupt their moral and logical reasoning.
- Even though Christians still have the capacity to sin, it is not their real nature, and therefore our reason operates with love for God and His truth instead of hatred for them.
- Not only is regeneration a rescue from the domination of sin, but it is a miraculous healing of our mind.
- All Christians have experienced the greatest miracle of healing, a healing of the heart.
- There is nothing automatically wrong with bias. What matters is having the right bias, and by virtue of spiritual conversion, the Christian does.
- The liberation of our reasoning enables us to observe Creation and rightly, and rather automatically, conclude that the existence of God is the most reasonable thing in the world. Accordingly, there is no such thing as a regenerated atheist.
- Even though we may have understood the *meaning* of the words in Scripture before possessing the Spirit, we only now understand their *significance*.

A) The Spiritual Liberation of Reason

A.1) The biblical & historical view

Jesus Christ the King did not come to only save our souls, but our minds as well. Without the supernatural regeneration He provides we live in the dark insanity described in the previous chapters. Thankfully, the King said, **"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness"** (John 12:46). Indeed, those who believe in Him have their spiritual sanity restored.

Several points regarding the difference between *devil-darkened* and *Spirit-liberated reason* were made in chapters 4.12-14. That difference between the conscience and mind of the regenerated person as opposed to the unregenerate can hardly be exaggerated, especially in regards to processing spiritual truth. Therefore, in regards to spiritual truth, human reasoning is like good works. Before regeneration it is practically useless in spiritual matters, but afterwards it is absolutely essential.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) recognized this when he wrote:

Before faith and the knowledge of God, reason is mere darkness; but in the hands of those who believe, it is an excellent instrument. All faculties and gifts are pernicious, exercised by the impious; but most salutary when possessed by godly persons.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁴ Martin Luther quoted by Donald Bloesch in *The Ground of Certainty* (Eerdmans, 1971), 179. This quote from Luther should be considered by those who imply that Luther was opposed to Christian reason. It was *devil-darkened reason* that he rightly abhorred, not *Spirit-liberated reason*. Along these lines, the Catholic theologian Avery Dulles remarks:

In some of his writings, Luther extols faith as a sacrifice by which believers perform a most pleasing act of worship, "for by this sacrifice they slay reason, which is the greatest and most invincible enemy of God." Yet this and other negative statements about reason do not represent Luther's full position. He made extensive use of reason as the handmaid of faith in interpreting the Scriptures and defending his positions. (*The Assurance of Things Hoped For* [Oxford University Press, 1994], 45).

Likewise, McClintock & Strong report that during the Reformation, Greek philosophy concerning logic was initially condemned. However:

As time passed on, it became apparent that the work of the Reformers had largely to be done through the agency of that same Aristotelian logic. Melancthon was not slow to perceive this, and subsequently became an acknowledged follower of Aristotle as to

Along the same lines, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) wrote:

As the prejudices of the heart, against the truth of divine things, are hereby removed; the mind becomes susceptible to the due force of rational arguments for their truth. The mind of a man is naturally full of prejudices against divine truth. It is full of enmity against the doctrines of the gospel; which is a disadvantage to those arguments that prove their truth, and causes them to lose their force upon the mind. But when a person has discovered to him the divine excellency of Christian doctrines, this destroys the enmity, removes those prejudices, sanctifies the reason, and causes it to lie open to the force of arguments for their truth.⁶⁸⁵

Likewise, Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) wrote:

When God has reasoned with us and changed our minds till our every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, we must use our minds, our intellect, our reason, our consciousness, in order to receive and reinterpret the revelation God has given of himself in Scripture. That is the proper place of reason in theology. There is no conflict between this reason and faith, since faith is the impelling power which urges reason to interpret aright.⁶⁸⁶

The need for humans to be liberated in order to reason properly has been understood by the Church since early times. This is what is behind St. Augustine's famous fifth century dictum: "Believe to understand." Augustine (354-430) coined this phrase from the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 7:9 which reads: "**unless you believe, you will not understand.**"⁶⁸⁷

Likewise, the eleventh century theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) was to promote such phrases as "faith seeking

dialectics, and even influenced Luther to retract some of his severer utterances. (John McClintock and James Strong, "Logos Doctrine" in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* [Harper & Brothers, 1891]).

⁶⁸⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," p. 14; online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works2.iii.i.html>,

⁶⁸⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Unpublished syllabus, 1955), 30-1.

⁶⁸⁷ The LXX translation of Isaiah 7:9 is not accepted in our English translations which favor the Hebrew (Masoretic) text, and which does not have this rendering.

understanding" and "I believe in order that I may understand." Accordingly, the English theologian Alan Richardson notes that:

The classical Christian view of the relation between revelation and reason, faith and philosophy, may be represented in three words, "Believe to understand", and these three words sum up the whole matter. ⁶⁸⁸

As we stated in a previous chapter, the Apostle would seem to summarize the significance of our epistemological/psychological regeneration when he says, "**You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord**" (Eph 5:8). When someone can simply be described as "**darkness**" (not just *in* darkness) and being transformed into being "**light**," we have a graphic description of the "**new creation**" of those who are "**in Christ**" (2 Cor 5:17).

In fact, the Apostle uses a re-creation metaphor to describe regeneration when he writes: "**For God, Who said [at the creation of the Universe], 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts [when we were regenerated] to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ**" (2 Cor 4:6). The physical creation of the Universe is being remarkably compared to our own recreation.

Our spiritual regeneration is simply a fulfillment of a promise God has made in His New Covenant:

[I] will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart with new and right desires, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony heart of sin and give you a new, obedient heart. ²⁷And I will put My Spirit in you so you will obey My laws and do whatever I command. (Ezek 36:25-27 NLT; cf. Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:10-12)

That is our New Nature. Read it again and understand *who* you are. When someone gets a "**new heart**" and a "**new spirit**" from God, they are being recreated into a very different species of human being. While unregenerated humanity continues to sink to the semblance of mere beasts, regenerated humanity continues to rise to the resemblance of their Creator, and to reflect what humans were intended to be. Accordingly, the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) wrote:

The gospel does not abolish [human] nature, but affirms and restores it. . . . For Christ came, not to destroy the works of the Father, but only those of the devil. Grace is the *reparation*

⁶⁸⁸ Alan Richardson, *Christian Apologetics* (Harper, 1948), 233.

[renewal] of a fallen nature. For the *materia* [substance] of all things is and remains the same, but the form given in creation was deformed by sin, to be once again completely reformed by grace.

The result is a tremendous sense of relief, liberation, and responsibility; for if you are a Christian, a Christian in the full sense of the word, then you are not a peculiar, eccentric human being, but you are fully human. To be Christian means to be human. It is man's humanity which is redeemed.⁶⁸⁹

Likewise, Dr. Van Til described our *Spirit-liberated reasoning* as, "the Adamic consciousness restored and supplemented."⁶⁹⁰

Baptist theologian Millard Erickson writes:

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.⁶⁹¹

Along the same lines, J. I. Packer describes what happens psychologically and spiritually in regeneration:

Having disclosed Himself objectively in history in His incarnate Son, and in His written, scriptural Word, God now enlightens men subjectively in experience so that they apprehend His self disclosure for what it is. Thus He causes them to know Him, and His end in revelation is achieved. . . . Historic Protestantism, interpreting the text [1 John 5:6-7] in this sense, has regularly described this part of the Spirit's ministry as His witness to divine truth. It is a healing of spiritual faculties, a restoring to man of a permanent receptiveness towards divine things.⁶⁹²

A.2) Regenerated Christians & sin

⁶⁸⁹ Related by Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Eerdmans, 1992), 70

⁶⁹⁰ Van Til, 28

⁶⁹¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., (Baker, 1998), 957.

⁶⁹² J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God, (Eerdmans, 1958), 118.

Our discussion should take into account the fact that born again Christians still have the capacity to sin, which can affect our reason. The Apostle says even the Christian must make a continual decision to **"put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires"** (Eph 4:22), all of which can certainly affect our reasoning. Accordingly, there is a sense in which Christians can have *devil-darkened reason* as well when they allow their sinful desires to corrupt their moral and logical reasoning.

The Apostle Paul painfully illustrates this when he writes:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do [in my New Nature] I do not do, but what I hate [with my New Nature] I do. . . .¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [old sinful programming of mind]. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I [sometimes] cannot carry it out.¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.²² For in my inner being [New Nature of the Spirit] I delight in God's law;²³ but I see another law [old sinful programming of mind] at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind [New Nature] and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. (Rom 7:15-16, 18-19, 21-23)⁶⁹³

And some claim there is no psychology in the Bible! We see here that even for the Christian, sinful desires stemming from the remaining deception in their mind, can overwhelm our moral reason and affect what we do. But it is vital to note the Apostle's amazing statement that **"it is no longer I"** who sin. Even though Paul was sinning in his body and making sinful choices with his mind, he refuses to admit that it is actually him that is sinning! This is because of how accurately he understood how radically our nature and identity have been changed. The real us hates sin and if our minds had not been programmed with any lies that trick us into

⁶⁹³ There is a great deal of debate regarding whether or not the Apostle is speaking of a regenerated believer in Romans 7:15-23. In the end, identical language in Galatians 5:16-17, which seems most clearly to refer to the internal moral struggle of believers, provides strong evidence for our position that the Apostle is speaking of the same thing in Romans.

sinning, we would not. The real us *is not a sinner*, but a saint trapped in a body with a mind influenced by the world and needing renewal itself.

Nonetheless, the born again Christian can improperly reason to sin.⁶⁹⁴ The difference is that sin is not the true nature of the born again Christian, as it is for the unregenerate. Those without the Spirit of God only have *devil-darkened reason*, while the ability and nature of the regenerated Christian is to operate with *Spirit-liberated reason*.⁶⁹⁵ As the Apostle says above, we have the ability to **"put off [our] old self . . . to be made new in the attitude [*pneuma*: spirit] of [our] minds [*nous*]; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"** (Eph 4:22-24).

While the mind of sinful man **"is hostile to God. . . [and] does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"** (Rom 8:7), the born again Christian has been indwelt with the Holy Spirit, dethroning the sinful nature, and making His fruits the normal operating principles in their life (cf. Gal 5:22-25). Unlike the unregenerated who have only a sinful nature, we are not forced to think rebelliously against God. Instead, we can say with the Psalmist: **"I run in the path of your commands for you have set my heart free"** (Ps 119:32).

In fact, because the sinful nature has been mortally wounded by the Spirit, we are, **"dead to sin but alive to God"** (Rom 6:11) and it can no longer be said that sin is our nature, but rather, an occasional deviation from our real nature. While the unregenerate **"have their minds set on what [the sinful] nature desires,"** the Apostle describes the nature of the regenerated Christian as having, **"minds set on what the Spirit desires"** (Rom 8:5). Such a liberation of our mind obviously does a great deal to return reason to its intended function of thinking after God. Even though Christians still have the ability to sin, it is not their real nature, and therefore our reason operates with love for God and His truth, instead of hatred for them both.

In regeneration, God has put the sinful nature in the backseat, and put us in the driver's seat and we now have a real choice as to where we are going to go. The regenerate are no longer **"hostile to God"** in their thinking. While the sinful nature is the tyrannical and

⁶⁹⁴ For further discussion on the importance of proper reasoning in a life of holiness see section 4.3.B

⁶⁹⁵ For further discussion of the epistemological difference between believers and non-believers see section 2.2.B. Regarding fundamental differences in moral capacity see Book 5: *Biblical Apologetics*.

indomitable repressor of right spiritual thinking in the unregenerate, such psychological bondage has been broken by the Spirit's regeneration and we have been, "**brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God**" (Rom 8:21; cf. 2 Cor 3:14, 17-18; Gal 5:1, 13).

Jesus spoke of this spiritual/mental freedom when He said, "**I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. . . . So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed**" (John 8:34, 36). Sin binds our "heart" to its ways, but Jesus sets it free to understand and obey Him.

The Apostle speaks of this same psychological liberation when he says that the Father, "**has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of . . . light**" (Col 1:12, 13; cf. John 8:12; 12:46; Acts 26:18; 1 Pet 2:9). This transfer "**from the dominion of darkness**" to "**the kingdom of . . . light**" often manifests itself in a very physical and real way with many converts to Christ testifying that the world actually seems brighter to their visual senses.

Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards described his own conversion when he wrote:

The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love seemed to appear in everything, in the sun, moon, and stars, in the clouds and blue sky, in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind.⁶⁹⁶

Not only is regeneration a rescue from the domination of sin, but it is a miraculous healing of our mind. It is not only some Christians who have experienced a supernatural healing of some part of their body, but all Christians have experienced the greatest miracle of healing, a healing of the "heart."⁶⁹⁷

A.3) Christians have the correct bias

⁶⁹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative" in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16 (Yale University Press).

⁶⁹⁷ We demonstrate elsewhere that, contrary to teaching in *charismaticism*, regeneration is precisely what Christ was speaking of when He promised, "**Anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.**" (John 14:12). See section 10.5.B.2.

Additionally, it can be pointed out that our *Spirit-liberated reason* corrects our "vision" in order to interpret a variety of data correctly. This is particularly important to note in regards to the debate with postmodern philosophy. For example, one of the more common attacks leveled on the value of scientific, historical, or biblical research is the fear of a person's predispositions and prejudices skewing the interpretation of the data such that the truth itself is obscured.

Along these lines, James Kelly Clark remarks:

Our believings are inextricably entwined with our passions, emotions, and will. Our fundamental commitments shape our assessment of the evidence. Sometimes our commitments and values help us to see the truth; sometimes they obscure the truth. We are, in every case, epistemically situated-historically, culturally, socially-and we lack a God's eye view of the world. What counts as evidence, the weight that should attach to it, and the inferences that follow from it are conditioned by our commitments. No method exists for rising above our conditions and seeing the world (or the evidence) without the filters of our beliefs and values.⁶⁹⁸

While there is truth here, it should be asked, why would we need a "method . . . for . . . seeing the world (or the evidence) without the filters of our beliefs and values," if our beliefs and values are biblical? What postmoderns and many Christians forget is that there is such a thing as having the *right* and *necessary* predispositions in order to interpret data correctly. Spiritual regeneration and the subsequent increasing understanding of Scripture corrects the "filters of our beliefs and values" that postmoderns think automatically distort the truth. In other words, Christians have a superior bias on truth because of their God-centered worldview.

Accordingly, John Frame writes:

[W]e should not, I think, be biased against bias in some general way. Some biases are good. Doubtless . . . we should be biased in favor of evidence and logic, intellectual honesty, reliable testimony, and so on. . . . So our goal . . . should not be to eliminate bias altogether (which . . . we can never do completely), nor simply to "recognize and thwart" it, or

⁶⁹⁸ James Kelly Clark in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed. (Zondervan, 2000), 85.

"counteract" it, . . . but to substitute good biases for bad ones.
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This is precisely what God has done in the regeneration process, giving us a new "heart" and predisposition that, far from *distorting* the truth, actually brings it into clearer focus, much like getting new eye glasses. Therefore, contrary to popular opinion in and out of the Church, there is nothing automatically wrong with bias. What matters is having the right bias, and by virtue of spiritual conversion, the Christian is in a significantly superior position when it comes to properly assessing data, whether it comes by revelation (i.e. Scripture) or research (i.e. science).

Therefore, only the Christian will properly interpret the spiritual significance of Christ and His deeds. The unregenerated historian may properly interpret the historical evidence of the Gospels and early Church and conclude correctly that the King rose from the dead, and even admit that it was a miracle. Still, without *Spirit-liberated reason* and the dethroning of the sinful nature, the King's resurrection will not be allowed to be interpreted as anything more, while the true children of God will know it means much, much more.

Regeneration gives us a set of "eyes," or a mental capacity that the unregenerate do not have, that enables us to "see," "hear," understand, and believe spiritual truths. The King describes the spiritually dead well when He remarks: **"In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving'"** (Matt 13:14). And it is because our reasoning faculties are fully functioning as intended that we *do* understand and perceive. As Alan Richardson rightly comments: "To the believer himself, who knows the experience from within, conversion does not mean the abandoning of the effort to understand, but a veritable liberation of the reason."⁷⁰⁰

B) The Freedom to See the Irresistible Message of Creation

The liberation of our reasoning enables us to observe Creation and rightly, and rather automatically, conclude that the existence

⁶⁹⁹ John Frame in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed. (Zondervan, 2000), 134.

⁷⁰⁰ Richardson, 236.

and grandeur of God is the most reasonable thing in the world. Accordingly, there is no such thing as a regenerated atheist. As the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga puts it:

If it weren't for sin and its effects, we human beings would believe in God with the same sort of natural spontaneity and to the same degree that we believe in the existence of ourselves, other persons, and the past.⁷⁰¹

Likewise, Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), the seventeenth century Christian genius said: “It is certain that those who have the living faith in their heart see at once that all existence is none other than the work of the God whom they adore.”⁷⁰²

While regenerated Christians may differ on the *method* that God used to create the Universe, it would be impossible to persuade them that God did not create it and thus deserves our worship. This is because the “**plain**” evidence provided by Creation has been “**clearly seen**” and “**understood**,” just like it has by unregenerated minds (Rom 1:19-20). It is a fact that God did create the Universe and there will never be any reasonable, acceptable evidence available to persuade a properly functioning mind that God is not our Creator and rightful Lord. *devil-darkened reason* is forced to accept foolish, empty reasons, such as those espoused by evolutionary theories. But *Spirit-liberated reason* is equally forced to reject foolish reasons against what the clear evidence of Creation says.

For example, no mentally healthy human is going to be able to sincerely deny that $1+1=2$ after it has been demonstrated to be so. It becomes automatic, irresistible, and irreversible for such a person to see the above equation and make the correct conclusion, and it would seem impossible for anyone to sincerely and confidently deny it. There will never be any acceptable, reasonable evidence available to discount such a mathematical equation, and therefore, unless we suffer from insanity, such convictions will endure. Such is the same with the data and conclusions regarding the irresistible message of Creation to liberated, restored human reason.

It can be pointed out here that in the Spirit’s liberation of reason, there is no need for some supernatural revelation that tells us there is a Creator Who deserves our worship. Rather, because our minds have been restored from a debilitating bias against spiritual truth, our reason is enabled to accurately interpret the

⁷⁰¹ Alvin Plantinga, “The Prospects for Natural Theology,” in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Ridgeview, 1991).

⁷⁰² Quoted by James Clark in *Return to Reason* (Eerdmans, 1990), 96.

"natural" revelation of Creation. While the initial regeneration is certainly supernatural, neither the data from Creation, nor the processing of such data is. In fact, after regeneration, such reasoning is no more supernatural than concluding that $1+1=2$. Accordingly, NT scholar Kevin J. Vanhoozer writes:

The Spirit's work is to illumine not the truth but the mind. One who has been illumined [i.e. regenerated] is both passive and active: being [supernaturally] made to understand, one [naturally] understands.⁷⁰³

C) The Freedom to Understand & Respond Correctly to Scripture

Some of us may remember trying to understand the Scriptures before we were born again. Even though the words were in English, the meaning seemed like Mandarin Chinese. Still, even though we may have understood the *meaning* of the words in Scripture, we did not understand their *significance*. Then, after being born again, the Scriptures came alive! The difference was simply that our *devil-darkened reason* was liberated to discern and recognize truth as God intended.⁷⁰⁴

Along these lines, Martin Luther wrote, in a somewhat exaggerated way, "[T]he truth is that nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures."⁷⁰⁵ More descriptive is Jonathan Edwards who wrote:

It is possible that a man might know how to interpret all the types, parables, enigmas, and allegories in the Bible, and not have one beam of spiritual light in his mind; because he may not have the least degree of that spiritual sense of the holy beauty of divine things which has been spoken of, and may see nothing of this kind of glory in anything contained in any of these mysteries, or any other part of the Scripture.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, & Hermeneutics* (Intervarsity, 2002), 121.

⁷⁰⁴ For further discussion of the place of reason concerning Scripture see sections 2.5.E; 3.1.C; and chapter 3.3.

⁷⁰⁵ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Revell, 1957), 71.

⁷⁰⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (online at www.ccel.org), III.4.

Likewise, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) preached:

The Spirit of God must come, and make the letter alive to you, transfer it to your heart, set it on fire and make it burn within you, or else its divine force and majesty will be hid from your eyes.⁷⁰⁷

This is what the Apostle is describing regarding the Jews and their need to be regenerated in order to “see” Christ in Scripture. He writes:

But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant [Scripture] is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses [Scripture] is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is [epistemological] freedom. (2 Cor 3:14-17)

We suggest that the Apostle is pointing out that the Jews were psychologically blind to the Christ revealed in the OT Scriptures. Because of this dullness of mind and their veiled hearts they could not properly interpret Scripture, but with the regenerating work of the **“Spirit of the Lord”** their minds and hearts are freed to do so.⁷⁰⁸

Unregenerated reason in regards to Scripture is well illustrated in the Pharisees. They, of course, had much of God’s word memorized and studied it diligently, yet the King called them **“blind guides”** (Matt 15:14).

The process of being enlightened by the Spirit at the time of conversion such that the meaning of Scripture becomes clear, is vividly illustrated in Martin Luther’s testimony of salvation:

⁷⁰⁷ Charles Spurgeon, quoted online at http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/whatmoner_history.html.

⁷⁰⁸ Admittedly, our interpretation goes against that of most commentators (e. g. Barrett, Kruse, Barclay, Barnett) who claim the Apostle is speaking of a freedom from the law or sin in general as is described in Romans 6-7. But this does not reflect the immediate context in which the Apostle is speaking epistemologically here of dull minds and veiled hearts. The freedom, therefore, is an epistemological freedom reflecting Romans chapter 8 (vs. 5-11) rather than chapters 6-7. And it is this epistemological freedom that would better account for the Apostle’s confidence and boldness in preaching the truth, not a freedom from the Mosaic Law.

I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.⁷⁰⁹

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, thank You again for setting our minds free to know and serve You. We thank You for enabling us to escape the "insanity of humanity" concerning the message of Creation and Scripture. Help us to have compassion on those who do not accept these messages, understanding that it is not because of a mental problem, but a spiritual problem which only God can fix. Amen.

Gauging Your Grasp

⁷⁰⁹ Quoted by Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Abingdon, 1990), 49-50. While Luther's wording may imply to some that he reached his life-changing conclusion with natural reason, and then was reborn, Luther's own theology would flatly deny this.

- 1) How would you describe the differences between regenerated and devil-darkened reason? What are some Scriptures that describe these differences?
- 2) Why is Spirit-liberated reason so different, even though a Christian still has the capacity to sin?
- 3) Why are postmodern philosophers wrong to claim that there is something automatically wrong with human bias in interpreting data?

Recommended Reading

For further discussion on the regeneration of the Spirit see chapters 4.16 and 6.3-5.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 4.16

From Darkness to Light II

Spirit-liberated Reason & Salvation

Primary Points

- Spiritual regeneration is the hinge on which salvation turns because humans “straight from the factory” will not be able or willing to accept the Gospel without supernatural modification.
- The Gospel is irresistible and *saving faith* a gift because a spiritually regenerated mind will naturally and automatically accept the message.
- When a human is truly given free will through regeneration, their mental insanity regarding spiritual truth is healed, and they *will* choose Heaven instead of Hell, hope instead of despair, life instead of death, and forgiveness instead of guilt.
- Spiritual regeneration allows us to maintain our faith in God, and this is the explanation for the exceptional faith of OT heroes.
- The difference between the “Peter of Passover” who denied Christ, and the “Peter of Pentecost” who was eventually crucified for Christ illustrates the difference between *Spirit-liberated* and *devil-darkened reason*

Extras & Endnotes

A) ***Saving Faith***⁷¹⁰ is Supernatural

We have discussed in the previous chapters that the sinful nature in an unregenerated heart will not allow a person to truly accept the full message of Creation or the Gospel. Because **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned,"** (1 Cor 2:14) it is impossible for those not possessing the Spirit to sufficiently accept the truth that would save them. Elsewhere we discuss the fact that mental acceptance is essential to any real faith, and because the unregenerate heart cannot and will not accept the Gospel, they cannot have *saving faith* in it.⁷¹¹

Therefore, it is the regeneration of the Holy Spirit that is the hinge on which spiritual conversion turns. The spiritually dead cannot deny their sinful nature, because *it is* them. Only the entrance of the Holy Spirit can break its bondage, giving the human a New Nature and release their mind so that it will embrace the Gospel as we would expect any right thinking human to do.

Paul reflected this when he wrote that **"God"** must **"grant"** unregenerate unbelievers **"repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth"** so that they **"will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will"** (2 Tim 2:25-26). In other words, the control of the devil is so strong over the unregenerate that if God does not supernaturally give them a change of mind regarding the truth, they will never be able to accept it (cf. 2 Cor 4:3-4).⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ We italicize *saving faith* because we define it rather precisely elsewhere and it needs to be distinguished from the many other kinds of faith. *Saving faith* is simply the faith that saves us. For further discussion of this see section 6.1.D and 6.2.C.1.

⁷¹¹ For further discussion on the mental acceptance involved in faith see section 6.15.A.

⁷¹² Admittedly, there is some disagreement on the identification of "the opponents" being addressed in 2 Timothy 2:23-26. John MacArthur seems to claim they are believers when he writes:

Because the objects of this instruction are those who teach false doctrine and live ungodly lives, this particular instruction is in the form of correction. . . . Consequently, when confronting believers who are teaching falsehood and living sinfully, one must never do so with an attitude of personal superiority. Christians are to have compassion for them in their sin just as the Lord has compassion. (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], 2 Tim 2:23-26)

However, knowing Dr. MacArthur's stand on the need for holiness to prove one's faith (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, etc.), we are surprised to see him assume that "those who teach false doctrine and live ungodly lives" are believers.

Concerning the identification of "the opponents" in this passage, Donald Guthrie writes: "There can be no doubt that the false teachers mentioned elsewhere in the Pastorals are in mind here" (*The Pastoral Epistles* (Eerdmans, 1999), 166). Gordon Fee, however, is not so sure and writes:

The greater difficulty is with the word translated **those who oppose him**, an extremely rare word that can refer either to the opponents themselves or to "those who are adversely affected" (Bernard) by the opponents. Is Timothy to discipline his opponents . . . or is he to instruct or re-educate those who have been "taken in" by the false teachers? This is not easy to determine, since both are elsewhere seen as entrapped by satan (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 3:7; 6:9). It is probably safe to say that it at least includes the people who have been so ensnared and may also include the false teachers themselves. (*1 & 2 Timothy, & Titus* [Hendricksen, 1988], 265).

George W. Knight III is equally ambiguous stating that "those who are in opposition" are either the "false teachers themselves or . . . those influenced by the false teachers. (*Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC) (Eerdmans, 1992), 2 Tim 2:23-26).

John Calvin was clear on his position that "the opponents" were unbelievers, commenting here that:

[T]he conversion of a man is in the hand of God . . . Thus, whoever shall consider that repentance is the gift and work of God, will cherish more earnest hope . . . unbelievers are so intoxicated by satan . . . being asleep . . . drawn by the unseen power of satan. That is what we saw at Ephesians 2:2 that satan exerts his energy in unbelievers. (*Calvin's Bible Commentaries* [online at www.ccel.org], 2 Tim 2:24-26)

We agree with Calvin and believe "the opponents" not only refer to false teachers in the church, but unregenerate false teachers at that.

First, Paul describes the recipients of this ministry as promoting "**foolish and stupid arguments**" and "**quarrels**" (v. 23). We doubt that the Apostle would characterize believers asking doctrinal questions in this way. Secondly, he describes them as "**everyone**" (v. 24) which certainly at least goes beyond just believers. Thirdly, the recipients "**oppose** [*antidiatithemenous*]" "**the Lord's servant**" (v. 25). Literally, the Greek means to "set oneself in opposition" (*NAS Hebrew & Greek Dictionaries*, Robert L. Thomas, gen. ed., Electronic Edition, Parsons Technology [Lockman Foundation, 1998], G475). In other words, these people are doing more than merely disagreeing with "**the Lord's servant**" but they are publicly opposing and even persecuting them.

Which is why the minister needs to be reminded not to be "**resentful** [*anexikakon*]" (v. 24), the Greek literally meaning, "endure evil" (Ibid., G420). or "bearing evil without resentment." (*A Greek-English Lexicon of*

We believe that the Apostle is praying that this very thing would happen for unbelievers in Ephesus when he wrote: **"I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"** (Eph 3:16-17). There is no other way that Christ can dwell in our hearts through faith, except that the Spirit of God supernaturally infuses **"power"** in our **"inner being"** to **"fix"** us and make us able to have a faith that receives Christ.⁷¹³

the New Testament and Early Christian Literature (BDAG), F. W. Danker, ed., 3rd ed. [University Of Chicago Press, 2001], ἀνεξίκακος).

2 Timothy 2:24 is the only place the word *anexikakon* is used in the NT. The *BDAG* is wrong in our opinion to claim the word is being used here to refer to "bearing evil without resentment, patient, tolerant, of Christians." There is nothing in the word itself or its uses in ancient Greek literature to suggest this, so we must infer its meaning from the context. As demonstrated here, the context is rather mean and arrogant unbelievers, not believers. In other words, the recipients being described here are being so evil toward the minister of the Gospel that resentment is tempting and considerable endurance is needed in the face of their personal attacks.

If one still doubts that the passage is referring to ministry to unbelievers, we need to take note of their relationship with satan. John Stott comments on the phrase **"come to their senses"**:

He [satan] also drugs or inebriates them, for the word used of his captives' escape (*ananēphō*) means literally to 'become sober' or 'come to one's senses again' (AG) after a period of diabolical intoxication. (*The Message of 2 Timothy* [Intervarsity, 1973], 2 Tim 2:25)

The Apostle also describes them as **"having been held captive"** [*ezōgrēmēnoi*, lit.: "captured alive" (*NAS Hebrew & Greek Dictionaries*, G2221)] **by** [the devil] **to do his will**" (v. 26 NAS). This is not describing the temporary deception of a believer, but the complete enslavement of the unregenerated under the dominion of satan described elsewhere in Scripture (cf. John 8:44; Rom 6:6, 16; 1 John 5:13). The Greek rendered here as **"held captive"** is used elsewhere in the NT only at Luke 5:10 where it metaphorically refers to catching fish in a net. Again, there is a sense of complete control and helplessness which certainly describes the **"children of the devil"** (1 John 3:10).

⁷¹³ Admittedly, we part with all commentators we know of in interpreting the Apostle's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-17 as concerning unbelievers. Accordingly, Dr. Stott writes:

Some are puzzled by this first petition when they remember [assume?] that Paul is praying for Christians. 'Surely', they say, 'Christ dwells by his Spirit within every believer? So how can Paul ask here that Christ may dwell in their hearts? Was Christ not already within them?' To these questions we begin by replying that

This is why God's promise of the New Covenant included:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. (Ezek 36:26-7)

The reason that the Jewish people as a nation could not savingly believe in God was a "heart" problem (cf. 2 Cor 3:14-17).

Without such a "heart" transplant, we remain spiritually **"dead in [our] sins and in the uncircumcision of [our] sinful nature"** (Col 2:13), unable to overcome the mental insanity that would

indeed every Christian is indwelt by Christ and is the temple of the Holy Spirit.' Nevertheless as Charles Hodge rightly comments, 'The indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees'.¹ (*The Message of Ephesians* [Intervarsity, 1986], 135)

On the contrary, we do not believe that "The indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees," but rather a one-time complete act. Therefore, the popular interpretation of Ephesians 3:16-17 as concerning the need for believers to yet be indwelt with Christ not only seems to ignore the Apostle's statement at face value, but can lead to the erroneous idea that not all of the Person of Christ comes to dwell in us at conversion.

This is a potentially harmful teaching, similar to the Pentecostal doctrine of the "baptism of the Spirit," in which only some Christians have all of the Person of the Spirit. The biblical fact is that all of Christ is in any born again Christian and there are no "degrees" of *indwelling*, although there is certainly degrees of *controlling*. Christ fully indwells all Christians (cf. 2 Cor 13:5; Col 1:27; 1 John 5:12), just as the Holy Spirit does, but He does not equally control all Christians.

The whole difficulty is solved by simply allowing for the fact that the Apostle was concerned that there were still unconverted people in the Ephesian church. Is that so difficult? The Apostle stated clearly that he feared the same thing about the Corinthian church (cf. 2 Cor 13:5).

We agree with most commentators then that the Apostle is praying about a sequence of spiritual growth here. However, we would suggest that such a sequence would need to start with regeneration for some of the people who would hear or read the Apostle's epistle, before they could then be, **"rooted and established in love,"** having **"power . . . to grasp . . . the love of Christ"** so that they **"may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"** (3:17-19).

Those who are Reformed in their theology may have difficulty with the idea of the Apostle praying for what God has already decided to do in terms of who will and will not be saved (cf. Eph 1:4-11; Acts 13:48; 2 Tim 2:10). However, the Apostle was not praying for certain individuals to be saved, but for whatever elect were in the church that had not yet been converted. Therefore, even from a Reformed perspective, this would be a very appropriate prayer.

reject the Gospel because, **"The man without the Spirit does not [and cannot] accept the things that come from the Spirit of God [including the Gospel], for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"** (1 Cor 2:14). However, while the sinful nature prohibits a person from seeing the value of the Gospel, through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, sin is dethroned and **"We have . . . received . . . the Spirit Who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us"** (1 Cor 2:12). The Apostle succinctly describes this supernatural salvation process when he writes: **"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit"** (Tit 3:4-5).

The Apostle demonstrates the different abilities of *darkened* and *liberated reason* as well when he tells the Corinthians that before their conversion he, **"resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"** (1 Cor 2:2), because until they were regenerated and enabled to accept this simple message, they wouldn't understand anything else. But after their conversion, he notes, **"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature,"** (1 Cor 2:6) referring to those who have *Spirit-liberated reason*.

In addition, the Holy Spirit not only liberates our logical reason, but our conscience as well, which results in a proper recognition of our sinfulness. This is what Christ was speaking of when He said, **"When He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment"** (John 16:8). It is in the human preaching of Christ that one hears of their need for a savior because of sin, but it is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that fixes the conscience in order that it may properly produce guilt. The Apostle speaks of this when he writes the Thessalonians: **"We know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you [for salvation], because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction"** (1 Thess 1:4-5; cf. Acts 2:36-37; 2 Cor 4:2-7).

B) Saving Faith is Irresistible

We noted in chapter 4.14 that it is only because of sinfully induced insanity that people do not embrace the promises in the Gospel. With regeneration, a person is free to do what a normal human would do with such a message. But they are more than free; they are compelled to believe the Gospel.

Another way of saying it is that no one whom the Holy Spirit regenerates will refuse the Gospel, because it will be impossible for their new *Spirit-liberated reason* to do so. Believing is a rather automatic human response when exposed to what the mind perceives as facts.

Imagine that you have been color blind your whole life such that a wall in your bedroom looks black. Then through a miracle, your color-blindness is healed and you now see the true color of the wall which is white. You can even look at the wall and try to think of it as black but it is impossible to do so. After seeing it as the white it really is you cannot see it as black again. God made us so that we cannot, and He uses this aspect of our reasoning for His purposes.

Accordingly, James Clark suggests a "thought experiment" to demonstrate the autonomous, automatic, and enduring nature of our believing faculties. He writes:

If you believe in God, stop believing in God for a few seconds. Now believe in Him again. Now stop, now start. We don't just decide what to believe. Belief is, typically, something that happens to us.⁷¹⁴

It is because He has made our minds to function in this way that the Protestant Reformers could say that saving grace was *irresistible*. More specifically, we would say that *saving faith* is irresistible. When God opens the spiritual eyes, ears, and heart of a person, they will see Christ for Who He really is and such belief will be automatic just as anything else we see is. Along these lines, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) preached: "No sooner is the soul quickened, than it at once discovers its lost estate, is horrified thereat, looks for a refuge, and believing Christ to be a suitable one, flies to him and reposes in him."⁷¹⁵

Accordingly, Reformed theologian Robert Reymond can say:

Faith in Christ is the inevitable Spirit-wrought response by the elect to the gospel, an effect of the Holy Spirit's regenerating activity in conjunction with the ministry of the Word.⁷¹⁶

Another way of putting it is to say that when a human is truly given free will through regeneration, their mental insanity regarding

⁷¹⁴ James Clark, in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan ed. (Zondervan, 2000), 139.

⁷¹⁵ Charles Spurgeon, quoted online at

http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/whatmoner_history.html

⁷¹⁶ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson, 1998), 730.

spiritual truth is healed, and they *will* choose Heaven instead of Hell, hope instead of despair, life instead of death, and forgiveness instead of guilt. As Augustine (354-430) put it: "[Saving] grace does not destroy the will but rather restores it."⁷¹⁷ When someone has *Spirit-liberated reason*, believing the Gospel is just as "natural" and certain as believing $1+1=2$. Every person who is regenerated by the Spirit will savingly believe the Gospel, no exceptions.

Accordingly, Alvin Plantinga, in the context of *saving faith*, writes:

For the person with faith, the great things of the gospel seem clearly true, obvious, compelling. She finds herself convinced—just as she does in the case of . . . elementary truths of arithmetic. Phenomenologically, therefore . . . there is no similarity at all to a leap in the dark.⁷¹⁸

While the *content* of *saving faith* is unique, it is remarkably similar to any other real faith in the way it is obtained, and in its certainty. When the truths of the Gospel are presented to a spiritually liberated mind, they are readily understood, much like anyone will respond to a history teacher describing a well documented fact concerning George Washington. In addition, there would be no distinguishable difference in the certainty that one has in the historical facts concerning Christ and those concerning George Washington. Such is the nature of *saving faith*. It is indeed a miracle wrought by the Holy Spirit, but it is processed by our regenerated natural faculty of belief in the same way that all of those things are processed and obtained which we really believe.

Accordingly, J. Oliver Buswell (1895-1977), the noted theologian, wrote:

Religious [*saving*] cognitive belief requires neither a greater degree nor a different kind of faith. Perhaps the reason religious cognition seems to have these greater and different requirements of faith, is that a change of religious belief, aside from the cognitive element, also requires a renovation and reorientation of personal nature and ethical alignments and loyalties, familiarly called "the new birth."⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁷ Augustine of Hippo, quoted online at

http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/whatmoner_history.html.

⁷¹⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 264.

⁷¹⁹ J. Oliver Buswell, *The Philosophies of F. R. Tennant and John Dewey*, (Philosophical Library, 1950), 118

C) *Saving Faith is a Gift*

The process by which we come to *saving faith* makes it obvious why the Scriptures describe it as a gift. Accordingly, the Apostle writes: **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God"** (Eph 2:8), and **"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ . . . to believe on Him"** (Phil 1:29).⁷²⁰

Because of the sinful nature we are born with, we must be born again in order to believe savingly in Christ, and just like our first *physical* birth, we have no power or authority to initiate our second *spiritual* birth. Upon such regeneration and the dethroning of the sinful nature, humans really do have the ability to freely choose Christ.

However, at this point, we must be very careful in how we explain *why* we choose Christ when given the choice. If we claim

⁷²⁰ While the Apostle could hardly be clearer in Ephesian 2:8-9, some wish to claim that he meant to intentionally *exclude* saving **"faith"** from those requirements of salvation that are **"not of yourselves,"** and that he was only generally referring to salvation as that which is a **"gift of God."** This seems unlikely. If the Apostle is teaching that being **"saved"** is **"not from yourselves . . . is the gift of God"** and **"not by works"** then he certainly meant that the **"faith"** through which we are saved is also **"not from yourselves . . . is the gift of God"** and **"not by [our] works."**

The Apostle made it clear elsewhere that saving faith is a gift given by God when he wrote: **"It has been granted [by God] to you . . . to believe on Him"** (Phil 1:29) for salvation. Paul described his own salvation experience as: **"The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the [saving] faith that are in Christ Jesus"** (1 Tim 1:14). Not only the **"grace"** to be saved was **"poured out on"** Paul by the **"Lord,"** but **"the faith"** as well. Likewise, Luke describes **"those who by [God's] grace had believed"** (Acts 18:27).

Normally a different view of Ephesians 2:8-9 is supported by claiming that the differing genders of the Greek words make it impossible for **"this [touto]"** to refer to **"faith [pisteōs]."** According to a personal conversation I had with the foremost Romans scholar Douglas Moo, Professor of NT at Wheaton College, this is not true. The genders of Greek words can differ, and often do in the NT, when referring to ideas, which is a very legitimate view of this text. Accordingly, Abraham Kuyper wrote regarding Ephesians 2:8-9: "Nearly all the church fathers and almost all the theologians eminent for Greek scholarship judged that the words 'it is the gift of God' refer to faith." (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, Eerdmans, 1946, 407). For further comment on the Greek text of Ephesians 2:8-9 see Book 6: *Biblical Believing*, chapter 6.3.

that we choose Christ because of anything dependent on ourselves, it automatically becomes a meritorious act and we are in danger of preaching “**a different Gospel--which is really no Gospel at all**” (Gal 1:6-7). *Saving faith* is “**by grace**” and “**not from [our]selves**” (Eph 2:8) because if anyone hears the Gospel with *Spirit-liberated reason*, they will believe just like we have.⁷²¹

Do we somehow take credit for recognizing that $1+1=2$? No, it is a natural conclusion for anyone with properly functioning reasoning. Likewise, after having our reason supernaturally restored by the Spirit, it is only natural, and rather automatic to believe the Gospel. To *Spirit-liberated reason* it makes perfect sense that the King deserves dominion over our lives and that we cannot save ourselves and must trust Him to do so. And again, anyone who honestly had properly functioning reasoning faculties would immediately believe the same. This is why *saving faith* is the gift of God and not a meritorious work of humans.

Accordingly, Charles Spurgeon said many critical things about *saving faith* in the following:

My dear friends, after all, the kicking against the doctrine of election is a kicking against the Gospel, because this doctrine is a first principle in the divine plan of mercy, and when rightly known, it prepares our minds to receive all the other doctrines. Or on the contrary, misunderstand this, and you are pretty sure to make mistakes about all the rest.

Take for instance final perseverance; some men say, "If we continue in faith, and if we continue in holiness, we shall certainly be saved at last." Do you not see at once that this is legality—that this is hanging our salvation upon our work—that this is making our eternal life to depend on something we do?

Nay, the doctrine of justification itself, as preached by an Arminian, is nothing but the doctrine of salvation by works, lifted up; for he always thinks faith is a work of the creature and a condition of his acceptance. It is as false to say that man is saved by faith as a work, as that he is saved by the deeds of the law. We are saved by faith as the gift of God, and as the first token of his eternal favor to us; but it is not faith as our work that saves, otherwise we are saved by works, and not by grace at all.

If you need any argument upon this point, I refer you to our great apostle Paul, who so constantly combats the idea that works and grace can ever be united together, for he argues, "If it be of grace, then it is no more of works otherwise grace

⁷²¹ For further discussion of Ephesians 2:8-9 see section 6.3.B.

were no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more of grace, otherwise work is no more work." ⁷²²

D) *Saving Faith is Rational*

It should be noted here that, although it is only a spiritually liberated mind that will accept the Gospel, it is still the intellect that receives it. This is why the Gospel must be preached to minds. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, the Apostle's evangelistic strategy was not dependent on *intellectual apologetics* in an attempt to prove the Gospel, but rather a reasoned, understandable, and even persuasive presentation of the Gospel itself. ⁷²³ This is because everything God does to or through us He does to or through our reason, including saving us from Hell.

Accordingly, the renowned NT scholar John Stott, in his book, *Your Mind Matters*, writes at length on the importance of the mind as the place where *saving faith* occurs. First, Dr. Stott discusses the real meaning of the Apostle's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "**For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.**" Some might conclude that there is then no need for an understandable presentation of the Gospel. To the contrary, Dr. Stott explains:

Notice carefully the contrast which the apostle is making. It is not between a rational and an irrational presentation, as if to say that, since human wisdom could not discover God, God has dispensed with a rational message altogether. No. What Paul is contrasting with human wisdom is divine revelation. But it is a rational revelation, "what we preach," the kerygma of Christ crucified and risen.

For, although men's minds are dark and their eyes are blind, although the unregenerate cannot by themselves receive or understand spiritual things "because they are spiritually discerned," nevertheless the gospel is still addressed to their minds, since it is the divinely ordained means of opening their eyes, enlightening their minds and saving them. ⁷²⁴

⁷²² C. H. Spurgeon, "Effects of Sound Doctrine," (online at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols4-6/vols4-6.htm>), # 324.

⁷²³ For a discussion of apologetics in relation to the Apostle's approach to evangelism see section 2.2.C.; and chapters 5.11 and 5.13.

⁷²⁴ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (Intervarsity, 1973), 21-22.

Likewise, Dr. Stott comments on the Apostle's statement in Romans 10:17 that, **"faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ"**:

His argument implies that there must be a solid content in our evangelistic proclamation of Christ. It is our responsibility to set Jesus Christ forth in the fullness of his divine-human person and saving work so that through this "preaching of Christ" God may arouse faith in the hearer. Such evangelistic preaching is far removed from its tragic caricature, all too common today, namely an emotional, anti-intellectual appeal for "decisions" when the hearers have but the haziest notion what they are to decide about or why.⁷²⁵

Dr. Stott offers additional biblical evidence for the place of reason in *saving faith* when he writes:

New Testament evidence that our evangelism should be a reasoned presentation of the gospel is that conversion is not infrequently described in terms of a person's response not to Christ himself but to "the truth." Becoming a Christian is "believing the truth," "obeying the truth" . . . "acknowledging the truth." Paul even describes his Roman readers as having "become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed." [Rom 6:17]. It is plain from these expressions that in preaching Christ the early Christian evangelists were teaching a body of doctrine about Christ.⁷²⁶

Dr. Stott concludes:

Our duty then is to avoid distorting or diluting the gospel, and at the same time to make it plain, to cut the word of truth straight so that people can follow it lest "when any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart." [Matt 13:19] I fear that our clumsy explanations sometimes give the devil this very opportunity which he ought never to be allowed. . . .

What Paul had renounced, he told the Corinthians, was the wisdom of the world (as the substance of his message) and the rhetoric of the Greeks (as his method of presenting it). Instead of worldly wisdom he resolved to preach Christ and him crucified, and instead of rhetoric to rely on the power of the Spirit. But he still used doctrine and arguments. So then

⁷²⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 48-49.

in our evangelistic proclamation we must address the whole person (mind, heart and will) with the whole gospel (Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, reigning, coming again, and much else besides).⁷²⁷

It is *fideism*, the view that real faith is apart from reason, that insists faith is irrational. We have discussed this view thoroughly elsewhere.⁷²⁸

E) Saving Faith is Preserved in Spirit-liberated Reason

Because we obtain salvation through what we believe, salvation is *obtained* through the mind as described above. Likewise, then, *saving faith* is also *preserved* in the mind. We demonstrated in chapter 4.12 that for the unregenerated person, the sinful nature and satan are free to squelch the evidence on which their faith in God is based, and they therefore lose such faith. Such is not the case with the born again Christian.

We believe this is illustrated in ones such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Caleb, Joshua, David, and the Prophets who had such enduring faith in God, but not because of something they could take credit for in and of themselves. Rather, we would suggest that God's Spirit worked in such men in a special and unique way, enabling them to maintain the supernatural faith in God they had. The Holy Spirit did not impart the stories of these great men to glorify *them*, but rather to point again to the God who enabled them.

Accordingly, the Canons of the Council of Orange (529), an early meeting of Church leaders, states:

And thus according to the passages of holy scripture quoted above or the interpretations of the ancient Fathers we must, under the blessing of God, preach and believe as follows. The sin of the first man has so impaired and weakened free will that no one thereafter can either love God as he ought or believe in God or do good for God's sake, unless the grace of divine mercy has preceded him. We therefore believe that the glorious faith which was given to Abel the righteous, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and to all the saints of old, and which the Apostle Paul commends in

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 51-52.

⁷²⁸ *Fideism* is discussed further in chapters 2.10 and 6.12.

extolling them (Heb. 11), was not given through natural goodness as it was before to Adam, but was bestowed by the grace of God.⁷²⁹

The OT heroes seemed to be forerunners of those Israelites, who through the New Covenant, were also to receive the Spirit. In other words, the following promise from Ezekiel was fulfilled for such men long before it would be realized for the Jewish nation in general:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. (Ezek 36:26-7)

The faith of Noah (cf. Gen 6:5-14), contrasted with the other estimated 10 billion people in the world;⁷³⁰ the faith of Abraham (cf. Gen 15:6), contrasted with Lot; the faith of Moses (cf. Num 11:17), Joshua (cf. Num 27:18), Caleb (cf. Num 14:24), and the Prophets (cf. 1 Pet 1:11) contrasted with the rest of the Jewish nation; the faith and character of David (cf. 1 Sam 16:13-14; Ps 51:11), contrasted with Saul; all reflect, as the verses referenced indicate, a special work of the Spirit in their lives, and demonstrate even in the OT the vast difference between regenerated and unregenerated hearts in relation to faith.

There would seem to be good evidence that such men were not under the control of a sinful nature that is "**hostile to God [and] does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so**" (Rom 8:7). All men born since Adam have been in bondage to the sinful nature, and if these men were not, it was undoubtedly because some action of the Spirit had transformed them so that the sinful nature was dethroned, enabling them to love, obey, and believe God as they uniquely did. Any real virtue in humanity is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.⁷³¹

⁷²⁹ Council of Orange; online at http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/canons_of_orange.html

⁷³⁰ Henry Morris, the recognized founder of modern creation science, calculated that in the estimated 1700 years between Adam and Noah, with people having multiple children until very old age, that around 10 billion people were on the Earth at the time of the flood. See calculations online at www.redeemerfw.org/resources/prefloodpop.html.

⁷³¹ For further discussion on the source of any virtue in humanity see chapters 5.1; 5.7-8.

We are therefore inclined to agree with theologian Wayne Grudem when he writes: “[T]he fact that there was any saving faith at all in old covenant believers requires us to think that there was some kind of regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in them, enabling them to believe.”⁷³² Likewise, Millard Erickson writes, “There are several biblical considerations that argue for the occurrence of regeneration in the Old Testament (or pre-Pentecost) period.”⁷³³ While we would stop short of calling it regeneration, there was no doubt a special operation of the Spirit in the lives of OT heroes, and it was His enablement that made them heroes.⁷³⁴

⁷³² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 769-70.

⁷³³ *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., (Baker, 1998), 993. However, as noted below, we feel the term OT “regeneration” is too strong.

⁷³⁴ The case of King Saul requires special comment. In 1 Samuel 10 God tells Saul that:

The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. . . . As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. (vs. 6-7,9)

The language certainly suggests a supernatural experience of the Holy Spirit. However, Saul demonstrates a significant difference between spiritual “anointing” in the OT and regeneration in the NT. In the former, you could lose the Spirit. Later, after Saul’s disobedience, we read “**Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him**” (1 Sam 16:14). This is precisely what King David feared when he prayed after his sin of adultery: “**Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me**” (Ps 51:11).

However, we do not believe this is a possibility under the New Covenant. We receive eternal life (and regeneration) when we believe on Christ (cf. John 3:16), and something eternal cannot be temporary. Accordingly, the Apostle said:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:13-14)

The case of King Saul described above reflects a great difference in how the Spirit worked in OT believers and how He does so today under the New Covenant. Because we believe being born again by the Holy Spirit is an irreversible process just like physical birth, we reserve the word “regeneration” for NT believers, while recognizing that the Spirit did transforming, enlightening work in the lives of OT believers as well.

David clearly implies a special possession of the Holy Spirit when he prays, **"Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me"** (Ps 51:11). OT scholars Keil and Delitzsch comment on David's statement:

David's prayer has reference to the very same thing that is promised by the prophets as a future work of salvation wrought by God the Redeemer on His people (Jer 24:7; Ezek 11:19; 36:26); it has reference to those spiritual facts of experience which, it is true, could be experienced even under the Old Testament relatively and anticipatively.⁷³⁵

As we turn to the NT, we would suggest that the difference between the "Peter of Passover" and the "Peter of Pentecost" illustrates the difference between *Spirit-liberated* and *devil-darkened reason* in regards to faith as well. Because of a supernatural, direct revelation from God, the Apostle Peter sincerely and confidently believed that the King was, **"the Christ, the Son of the living God."** (cf. Matt 16:15-17). In fact, he was so confident of Who Christ was that he said just as sincerely and confidently: **"Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You"** (Matt 26:35).

Yet, that **"very night,"** Peter did **"disown"** Christ, not once or twice, but **"three times"** (Matt 26:34); and not before angry crowds of politicians or priests, but before a lone **"servant girl"** (Matt 26:69) and then **"another girl"** (Matt 26:71). We would suggest, as described in chapter 4.12, that both sin and satan (cf. Luke 22:31-2) took advantage of the free reign they have to oppress, confuse, and deceive the unregenerated mind, resulting in Peter losing the faith he had in Christ.

Accordingly, after discussing the work of the Spirit in the OT Dr. Grudem comments:

I do not mean to say that believers' experience of regeneration in the old covenant was exactly the same as that of new covenant believers. While considerations listed in the following discussion indicate a less-powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the old covenant, defining the nature of the differences is difficult, since Scripture gives us little explicit information about it. (769-70)

Likewise, after making a case for the regeneration of OT believers much like that which occurs under the New Covenant, Dr. Erickson notes that, "The Holy Spirit did not dwell within, but exerted an external influence" (994). Accordingly, it is difficult to conceive of OT believers being born again in the NT sense if the Spirit did not actually indwell them.

⁷³⁵ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000), *in loc.*

Fast-forwarding a mere fifty some days,⁷³⁶ we see the Apostle Peter preaching the present salvation and coming condemnation of the King fearlessly to a crowd of thousands. A few days later we find him defiantly standing before the Sanhedrin, in the face of “threats” (Acts 4:21) and commands, “**not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus**” (4:18). Nonetheless the Apostle declares: “**Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard**” (4:19-20). Finally, early Church history tells us that Peter was willingly crucified upside down for his faith in Jesus Christ.⁷³⁷

What was the difference? Was Peter's indomitable faith a result of seeing Christ resurrected? Hardly, as he had seen resurrections before (cf. John 11:44ff) and still denied Christ. The answer is Pentecost! Peter had been regenerated on that glorious day, as was every believer to be afterwards. This is substantiated in John when we read:

Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit, Whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:38-9)⁷³⁸

⁷³⁶ This is based on the fact that the Jewish festival of Pentecost (during which Peter preached) was the fiftieth day after the Jewish Passover (when Christ was tried and crucified).

⁷³⁷ Eusebius quotes Origen (c. 200) as saying: “Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, III.1; online at www.ccel.org).

⁷³⁸ Some may interpret John 7:39 as evidence against our view that some OT believers were regenerated by the Holy Spirit. However, this statement would not necessarily negate the fact that limited and nature-changing operations of the Holy Spirit occurred before Pentecost (cf. previous footnote concerning King Saul and the difference between OT and NT work of the Spirit).

Also, the question arises as to when the promise of John 7:39 was fulfilled. John speaks of Christ giving the Spirit to the Apostles before Pentecost (cf. 20:22; Acts 1:7-8; 2:1-4). How do we reconcile these accounts? First, let us note that none of this changes our claim that the Apostle Peter was not regenerated by the Spirit during his denials of Christ, for these occurred before even the event described in John 20:22.

Secondly, it is best to interpret John 20:22 as a separate and different operation of the Spirit than the one recorded at Pentecost. Accordingly, NT scholar Leon Morris writes at John 20:22:

Like the OT Jews, Peter's faith wavered as his unregenerated mind was filled with doubts by his self-preserving, self-centered, and uninhibited sinful nature. But with regeneration, he was liberated from such insanity, and his reason was enabled to think rightly, being unable to deny what he knew, even at the threat of death. Accordingly, we suggest that NT believers who now enjoy the same supernatural regeneration will no longer be susceptible to the actual denial of Christ like the pre-Pentecost Peter, but will rather willingly die for such faith like the post-Pentecost Peter.

The relation of this gift to that made on the day of Pentecost is obscure. Some scholars maintain that the two are incompatible. They hold that Luke thought that the Spirit was not bestowed until ten days after the ascension, whereas John thought of this gift as taking place on the evening of the day of resurrection. But this may be going too far too fast. The circumstances of the two gifts are completely different. And, whereas that in Acts 2 is followed immediately by some very effective preaching, no sequel to this gift is narrated [in John 20].

It is the teaching of the New Testament that "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4), and the problem is probably to be solved along these lines. It is false alike to the New Testament and to Christian experience to maintain that there is but one gift of the Spirit. Rather the Spirit continually manifests himself in new ways.

Subsequent to the gift at Pentecost the Spirit fell on all who heard the word in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44), just as "on us at the beginning" (Acts 11: 15). On several occasions believers are said to have been "filled with the Holy Spirit" (e.g., Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9; cf. Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:12, etc.), where the aorists indicate new activities of the Spirit, rather than a reference to what had always been the case. John tells of one gift of the Spirit and Luke of another.

...

Hoskyns sees in the predictions of [John] 14:16, 26; 16:7, 13, evidence that John thought of a gift of the Spirit that would be given after Jesus' return to the Father. "There is therefore a distinction between the two gifts of the Spirit. The Resurrection scenes in the Fourth Gospel are all preparatory scenes, preparatory for the mission. What the Lord will do invisibly from heaven He here does visibly on earth. The mission is inaugurated, but not actually begun. The disciples still remain in secret, behind closed doors. The actual beginning of the mission lies outside the scope of the Fourth Gospel. There remains, therefore, room for the Pentecostal outpouring. (*The Gospel According to John*, [Eerdmans, 1995], 747-8).

NT scholar D. A. Carson lists John Calvin, B. F. Westcott, and F. F. Bruce as additional supporters of this view (*The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans, 1991], 650).

It is because the truth of our *saving faith* resides and is preserved in our *Spirit-liberated reason*, that the believer's mind will be the target of the antichrist's attacks in the last days. Christ says: **"false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even [the mind of] the elect--if that were possible"** (Matt 24:24). And while the whole rest of the world will be persuaded by such evidence (cf. Rev 13:3), those with *Spirit-liberated reason* will **"hold to the testimony of Jesus"** (Rev 12:17).

At least part of the reason will be the fact that satan will not be able to produce greater evidence for a belief in him, as opposed to the King. Nor will satan have evidence or arguments sufficient to rival all the evidence that God has provided for His rightful worship, including that which He has provided in the past, and that which He will no doubt be providing in abundance even in those trying Last Days.

F) *Saving Faith* is a Result of Regeneration, not Revelation

One point that can be made here is that while our regeneration is supernatural, we would argue that the rest of the salvation experience is rather "natural." In other words, the truths of the Gospel do not come to us by way of supernatural revelation as they did to the Apostle Paul (cf. Gal 1:11-12), but rather the "natural" preaching of the Gospel through humans. Likewise, it seems misplaced to claim that the Spirit in some way supernaturally applies or communicates the truths of the Gospel to our minds. Rather, He simply "fixes" our reason, which then accepts the facts and evidence of the Gospel, just like it accepts any other facts or evidence.

However, some would suggest otherwise. For example, Geoffrey Bromiley in an entry to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* on "Faith," seems to describe the "illumination" of the Spirit as something more than just restoring reason, but as also containing revelation apart from, and in addition to, the preached Gospel:

Even to understand the facts and truths [of the Gospel] in their real significance, an illumination is required that goes beyond ordinary comprehension (1 Cor. 2). This is the illumination that is effected by the Holy Spirit bearing His own witness [revelation?] along with that of the written and spoken word. Again, this illumination carries with it more than

intellectual perception. It is a disclosure [revelation?] not only of facts and truths, but of the true nature of God in Jesus Christ and of the true nature of man as the lost sinner who has no hope of salvation except in God.⁷³⁹

The work of the Spirit seems to be confused here with what the message of the Gospel alone is sufficient to convey to spiritually *liberated reason*.

Imagine, for example, that you are standing in a room that is completely dark, with another person whose presence you are not aware of. If someone comes and turns on the light, you will automatically and naturally see the person. It is not that the light in the room somehow subliminally communicates that there is a person in the room, which is the way the "testimony" or "illumination" of the Spirit is often described by theologians. Rather, the light (i.e. Spirit) simply enables your natural reasoning faculties to function, thus producing a belief in the same way God made us to obtain other beliefs.

Without the sinful nature, our moral reason (i.e. conscience) will "naturally" produce the guilt that Dr. Bromiley speaks of, and likewise, our logical reasoning (i.e. mind) will "naturally" produce a belief in the King based on the testimony and evidence that can be "naturally" provided in the preaching and explanation of the Gospel.

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Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, thank You again for setting our minds free to know and serve You. We thank You for enabling us to escape the "insanity of humanity" concerning the message of Creation and the Gospel. Help us to have compassion on those who do not accept these messages, understanding that it is not because of a mental problem, but a spiritual problem which only God can fix. Amen.

⁷³⁹ "Faith" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), II:271.

⁷⁴⁰ For further discussion of the "testimony" and "illumination" of the Spirit see chapters 3.4 and 3.5 respectively.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do we claim that the regeneration of the Holy Spirit is the hinge on which spiritual conversion turns? Why would you agree or disagree?
- 2) Why do we claim that the Gospel message is irresistible and that saving faith is a gift in regards to Spirit-liberated reason? Why would you agree or disagree?
- 3) What is our explanation for the exceptional faith of OT heroes? Why would you agree or disagree?
- 4) What is one suggested explanation for why the Antichrist will not be able to deceive Christians during his reign on earth?

Recommended Reading

- For more detailed discussion of the nature of *saving faith* see chapters 6.2-6.

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